INTERACTIVE READ ALOUDS: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR
IMPROVING VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION IN PRESCHOOLERS

by

Priscilla Steinert

A Master's Project

Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education

Literacy Education: Birth through Grade 6

Department of Language, Learning, and Leadership

State University of New York at Fredonia

Fredonia, New York

May 12, 2012

State University of New York at Fredonia
Department of Language, Learning, and Leadership

CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK
We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled INTERACTIVE READ ALOUDS: A
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR IMPROVING VOCABULARY AND
COMPREHENSION IN PRESCHOOLERS by Priscilla L. Steinert, Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education, Literacy Birth through Grade 6, is acceptable in form and
content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

███████████████████████   _5-8-12_
Master's Project Advisor EDU 659   Date
Dr. Clara Beier
Department of Language, Learning, and Leadership

███████████████████████   _5-11-12_
Department Chair   Date
Dr. Anna Thibodeau
Department of Language, Learning, and Leadership

███████████████████████   _5/24/12_
Dean Christine Givner   Date
College of Education
At SUNY Fredonia

i

Abstract

     This Master's Thesis project focused on interactive read-alouds as a strategy to increase preschooler's vocabulary and comprehension skills. The findings from the literature review suggested that reading aloud provided a means of engaging students as they constructed meaning and explored the reading process. Findings further indicated that reading aloud to children provided them with opportunities to discuss the text and explore language usage by verbalizing their own interpretations. This resulted in a professional development project for prekindergarten teachers on interactive read-alouds and ways in which this strategy can increase vocabulary and comprehension in preschoolers.

Contents

Chapter 1

        "Why do you ask so many questions when you read aloud, I thought the point of reading

aloud to the kids was just for them to listen and enjoy the story?" This question was asked of me

by a teacher aide who was visiting my classroom. When I asked if the teacher she worked with

asked questions when they read she answered "no, the kids are just suppose sit and listen."

Blachowicz and Fisher (2007) stated "Children do not benefit from being talked at or read to, but

from being talked with and read with in ways requiring their response and activity" (p. 182).

Why do I ask so many questions when I read aloud to the students? I ask questions while

reading to the students because interacting with the students while reading aloud gives me the

opportunity to teach vocabulary and comprehension skills.

        Understanding that not all of my colleagues interact with their student's during their read

alouds, I decided to create a professional development project on interactive read-alouds. With

my own interest in the topic along with the development of the New York State prekindergarten

standards, I planned the professional development workshop *Interactive Read-Alouds:*

Increasing Comprehension and Vocabulary in Preschoolers, which can be located in chapter 4

of this Master's Project.

        Hargrave and Senechal (2000) explained most children acquire vocabulary at a striking

rate during the preschool years. For some children, however, vocabulary acquisition is more

demanding. They further explain that these early individual differences in vocabulary may have

long term consequences. Students who have poor vocabulary skills in preschool are more likely

to have poor reading skills throughout their education. Hart and Risley (1995) conducted a study

on 42 families over the course of two and a half years. During this study the researchers

observed the families for an hour each month in their home to learn what typically went on with

1 and 2- year olds learning to talk.   Hart and Risley (1995) concluded that conversations between children and parents were the most influential contributors to vocabulary before the start of school. Therefore I feel it is even more essential for preschoolers to increase their vocabulary skills in order to become stronger readers in their later years.

According to Biemiller (2001), reading aloud and facilitating text-based discussions about words provide contexts and opportunities for children to learn more words before they have the reading skills necessary to acquire vocabulary independently. This is similar to what Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) stated about how it is important for children to develop word meaning knowledge from a young age because vocabulary development impacts their reading comprehension and academic success as they get older. Preschool is a crucial time to build and enhance student's vocabulary and comprehension skills. Interactive read-alouds allow students to be active and engaged with the teacher as they read.   The teacher models book handling skills, points out punctuations, text patterns, and words students may not know. The teacher asks "WH" (who, what, when, where, why) questions and allows the children to answer freely and make spontaneous comments as the story unfolds.

An interactive read-aloud is storybook reading in which children are actively involved, asking and answering questions and are making predictions rather than passively listening. Interactive read-alouds help increase student's receptive vocabulary or words they know when they hear or read them and expressive vocabulary or words they use to express themselves, orally and in writing (Ouellette, 2006). According to Collins (2005) inserting short definitions for some words while reading aloud and encouraging children to use these same words when they answer questions, discuss book events and/or describe illustrations boost students receptive and expressive vocabulary skills.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and International Reading Associations (IRA) position statement, *Learning to Read and Write* states that literacy is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. The NAEYC is committed not only to helping young children become literate but also to fostering their motivation to read and write for enjoyment, information, and communication. The NAEYC and the IRA believe that in order for this to happen teachers must be prepared to implement varied, research-based teaching methods that will help all young children gain competence in language and literacy. However the NAEYC and the IRA feel that if these results are to be achieved, policies and resources must provide essential supports. New York State is now providing prekindergarten teachers with standards in hopes to achieve such results.

The newly instituted New York State prekindergarten standards and other policies will be explained in the rationale section of this master's project. To provide a clearer understanding the terminology used throughout this mater's project will be explained in the following paragraph.

Terminology

The following is a list of terms that will be used throughout:

Interactive Read aloud: Storybook reading in which children are actively involved asking and answering questions and making predictions rather than passively listening.

Receptive Vocabulary: words children know when they hear or read them.

Expressive Vocabulary: words children use to express themselves, orally and in writing.

Rationale

In my role as a preschool teacher I know how essential interactive read-alouds can be when used effectively. Preschool has never really been high on the educational list of importance until now. As of January 10, 2011, the Board of Regents approved the recommended

additions to the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, plus

a new set of prekindergarten standards. According to the Department of Education the New

York State prekindergarten Learning Standards have been revised in order to fully encompass

the prekindergarten sections of the New York State Common Core Learning Standard in

Language, Literacy, and Mathematics. The New York State Education Department (2011)

explains: "The document reflects the "fewer, higher, clearer" structure of the Common Core and

provides a clear, comprehensive, and consolidated resource for early childhood professionals"

(retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov, 2011, ¶ 1).

These new policies are requiring preschool teachers and schools to take a hard look at the

programs they use to make sure they meet the required standards. Many preschools use read-

alouds as part of their curriculum however my concerns are whether they are being done

effectively enough to help students prepare for the higher demands of kindergarten. In New

York State we have also instituted Race to the Top, which is an assessment program that

provides funding to a group of States. According to the New York State Department of

Education:

> These assessments are to be as follows: valid, support and inform instruction,
>
> provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure
>
> student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the
>
> knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace (retrieved
>
> from website: http:/www.nysed.gov/rttt/, 2009,¶ 2).

I feel interactive read-alouds can engage students in the reading process and enhance

their vocabulary and comprehension skills along the way. This topic is important to the field of

literacy and education because preschool literacy practices are not looked at as being a very important topic and they should be.

      The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) which was established for the express purpose of summarizing scientific evidence on early literacy development and on home and family influences in regards to early literacy development; examined the effects of interventions that primarily or entirely focused on shared reading. These shared-reading interventions included the involvement of parents, teachers, or the combination of parents and teachers implementing some form of shared reading with children individually or in groups. To be included in the study that examined the effects of shared reading they had to use a group design or quasiexperimental design [QED] that was not seriously confounded, and it had to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention with outcome measures of conventional literacy skills (i.e., decoding, reading comprehension, or spelling) or skills that NELP identified as predictors of later conventional literacy skills. Children, in most of these studies, were exposed to some kind of a short-term shared-reading intervention that either represented a substantial increase in frequency of shared-reading activities or a change in the style of shared-reading activities, such as engaging the children actively in telling the story rather than being passive listeners. Both teachers and parents were used as experimental readers. Socioeconomic status was also taken into consideration as an impact on the students learning. Based on available studies selected by the NELP, it appears that shared-reading interventions are equally effective for children who are at risk of later academic difficulties and for children who are not at risk. Also, shared-reading interventions appear to be equally effective for older and younger children.

      Due to the new standards implemented for preschool, teachers are forced to reach benchmarks. Instead of teachers observing and evaluating on their own how well their students

comprehend, they are now asked to show how their preschoolers "demonstrate background knowledge and vocabulary skills" (New York State Prekindergarten Standards, 2011, ¶1). With these new policies in place it is important that education take a look at developing a curriculum for preschool, which includes interactive read-alouds. Interactive read-alouds can increase student's vocabulary and comprehension skills when done effectively. It is important that preschool teachers know how to implement them and know how to build their curriculum around them. I have gathered research that indicates the importance of vocabulary and comprehension skills, how to conduct an interactive read-aloud and how interactive read-alouds can increase vocabulary and comprehension.

As a teacher my thoughts and perspectives are centered on my theoretical stance. My research for this Master's Project is viewed from a Social Constructivist theoretical stance, as I believe in actively involving my students in the learning process and scaffolding their learning.

Theoretical Stance:

According to Powell and Kalina (2009) "In cognitive constructivism, ideas are constructed in individuals through a personal, process, as opposed to social constructivism where ideas are constructed through interaction with the teacher and other students" (p241). From a constructivist view point, learning occurs when individuals integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge and the integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge can only occur when the learner is actively engaged in the learning process. Social Constructivism focuses primarily on social interactions. Within Social Constructivism is the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the level a child can be successful at with appropriate support. Scaffolding is another key idea within Vygotsky's Social Constructivist

theory, which refers to the assistance that adults and more competent peers provide during learning episodes (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

As a teacher and for the purpose of this proposal I feel the Social Constructivist best suites my views and personal way of teaching. Interactive read-alouds require interaction between the teacher and the students; therefore theoretically speaking interactive read-alouds align with Vygotskian views that social interaction is an integral part of learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009). According to Vygotsky (1978 as cited in Maloch & Beutel, 2009), "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). In this view, skills and understandings are appropriated through guided participation in cultural activities. Interactive read-alouds are all about scaffolding, teachers ask questions before reading to see how much prior-knowledge students have about the thoughts and ideas expressed in the text. Maloch and Beutel (2009), explained:

> Researchers suggest that students' initiations provide insights into their interests and meaning-making as they engage with text; students should have opportunities to engage in discussions in which they can share their experiences and thoughts. These kinds of apprenticeship opportunities can happen within interactive discussions during which the teacher plays an active role in scaffolding students' responses to the literature and their interactions with others (p.21).

Gromley and Ruhl (2005) explained that interactive read-alouds align with social constructivist views because teachers help students scaffold their vocabulary knowledge before, during and after reading. Students learn from their teachers, their peers, and the text as they are able not only to listen to the story but to actively participate in the learning process by asking

questions and answering questions posed to them. At the same time they are helping their peers

by providing them with answers and learning from their peers by listening to their questions and

answers as well. "Vocabulary acquisition is a socially mediated process (Rogoff, 2003;

Vygotsky, 1934/1986 as cited in Silverman & Crandell, 2010, p319)."

Research Questions

Therefore, the questions that guide this Master's Project, and professional development

project, include:

1. Why is vocabulary development important?

2. What are interactive read-alouds?

3. How can interactive read-alouds increase vocabulary and comprehension skills in

   preschoolers?

The question asked of me by the teacher aide, which was shared at the beginning of this

master's project made me wonder if my colleagues know what an interactive read-aloud is and if

they know how to conduct one effectively. The following section will discuss researched-based

literature addressing how vocabulary and comprehension can increase in preschoolers using

interactive read-alouds and will be perceived from a social constructivist view point.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review addresses how interactive read-alouds can increase student's vocabulary and comprehension skills and provides answers to the questions stated above. First is the importance of vocabulary in preschool, next is the relationship between vocabulary and comprehension, then interactive read- alouds will be explained and finally how interactive read-alouds increase vocabulary and comprehension will be addressed.

Importance of Vocabulary

Early vocabulary consistently predicts children's later reading achievement. Young children mainly acquire vocabulary by hearing new words used in their environment such as through conversations with family and friends, television, and by being read to aloud (Christ & Wang, 2010; Kindle, 2009; Biemiller & Boote, 2006).   Several studies have expressed the importance for children to develop knowledge of word meaning at a young age because of the major impact vocabulary development has on their reading comprehension and academic success as they get older.

Silverman and Crandell (2010) conducted such a study on the importance of vocabulary development in preschoolers, specifically looking at the relationship between teachers' vocabulary instruction practices in prekindergarten and kindergarten children's vocabulary. Participants in the study consisted of 244 children ages 4-, 5-, and 6-years old who attended one of 16 participating prekindergarten or kindergarten classrooms in an urban school district in the northeastern United States.   The racial compositions of the children participating were Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian. To measure the socioeconomic status of this study Silverman and Crandell (2010) considered that 47% of the children participated in the

federal school lunch program. The school district in this particular study focused on promoting

vocabulary in all early childhood classrooms. In fact, it had received a grant to purchase books

and materials and to provide professional development for prekindergarten and kindergarten

teachers in order to support this goal. The district also required all prekindergarten and

kindergarten teachers to hold a ninety minute language arts block each day which included such

activities as morning meeting, read-alouds, center times and writing. At the beginning of the

school year the researchers conducted professional development seminars/workshops for the

teachers in the study on research-based practices for teaching vocabulary during read alouds in

prekindergarten and kindergarten. The authors also worked with the district to select thirty

books for each of the teachers whom were selected to volunteer in the study.

Silverman and Crandell (2010) observed the teachers during three sessions, the first in the

fall, the second in the winter and the third in the spring. During the observations to code field

notes a three step approach was used. First was to identify the instances when teacher explicitly

taught the meaning of a word. Second was coding for the instances for the practice or practices

that the teacher used to teach the word.   The third step was to identify the practices

substantively. They also coded for when teachers used act or illustration to relate to the word

they were teaching. The 16 participating classrooms were assessed on two vocabulary measures

in a quiet room at the beginning of the year and at the end. The PPVT was administered to the

children in both the fall and spring to measure student's receptive vocabulary. To assess

children's knowledge of the target words provided to teachers at the beginning of the study, the

authors designed a target vocabulary assessment (TVA) modeled after the PPVT. Results

indicated that the main effect of word study was positive. Every time teachers used word-study

practices with vocabulary words during read-aloud time it associated with an additional 1.25

standard points on the posttest PPVT. Posttest indicated that word study is significant and positive such that every time teachers used this practice when teaching vocabulary during read-aloud time it associated with an additional 1.03 points on the posttest designed by Silverman and Crandell (2010).

Basically, when children do not understand the meaning of important words in a text, they are less likely to understand the text. Therefore, vocabulary instruction is a critical aspect of early literacy instruction (Christ & Wang, 2010).   As Silverman and Crandell (2010) explain from their findings "As educators develop innovative vocabulary curricula for the future, they need more information about which practices seem most promising for supporting the vocabulary development of all children and especially children with limited vocabulary knowledge" (p.336).

Although it is impossible to teach children all of the words they need to know, it is reasonable to teach some of the words in early childhood classrooms (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). As children encounter words in more and more situations, they learn to generalize words across context. Research has shown that young children obtain new vocabulary through interactions with adults as well as through direct instruction of vocabulary words (Silverman & Crandell, 2010). Coyne, Simmons, Kame'euin, and Stoolmiller,(2004) indicated "Explicit vocabulary instruction should directly teach the meanings of words that are important for understanding the text and words that children will encounter often" (p 148). According to Penno, Moore, and Wilkinson (2002) there are essentially three ways in which children's school experiences may contribute to growth in their vocabularies. The first is through direct instruction in individual word meanings, the second is through incidental learning from verbal contexts and the third is through some combination of direct instruction in word meanings and learning from context.

Research has showed that the best ways for students to obtain new vocabulary is through indirect instruction or everyday interactions and through direct instruction or explicit teaching of vocabulary.

The New York State Department of Education (2010) separates how vocabulary is learned into two categories, the first being indirectly through everyday experiences with oral and written language such as through conversations with adults, through being read to, and through reading extensively on their own. The second category is directly, or when they are explicitly taught both individual words and word-learning strategies. Christ and Wang (2010) explain how these two categories can be taught by teachers. They state, "there are four ways teachers can support young children's vocabulary learning: (1) provide purposeful exposure to new words, (2) intentionally teach word meaning, (3) teach word-learning strategies, and (4) offer opportunities to use newly learned words" (p.86).

Preschool provides a great opportunity for children to support children's vocabulary learning. As O'Leary, Cockburn, Powell, and Diamond (2010), explained "Preschool children's ability to identify and manipulate the sound structure of words is strongly predictive of conventional literacy skills in kindergarten and elementary school" (p.187). Preschoolers build onto their vocabulary by interacting with their peers in the classroom during free play, center activities, circle time and meal time. Pantaleo (2007) addressed the fact that teachers need to become critically aware of how they use language in the classroom and how they encourage (or discourage) children to use language. Ruston and Schwanenflugel (2010) found linguistically and cognitively complex conversation to be a valuable strategy available to teachers for enhancing young children's vocabulary skills, especially children with poor vocabulary skills.

Preschool children are continuously exposed to vocabulary rich conversations throughout their day. Students have the opportunity to learn new vocabulary from their teachers, peers, and from direct vocabulary instruction in large and small groups, such as read alouds. As Leung (2008) indicated "Young children's active participation in read-aloud events, even for a short period of time, has been found to increase expressive vocabulary development" (p.167). As stated above, all of these interactions help increase preschool students vocabulary which will in turn help boost their later reading achievement. Comprehension is the ability a student has to grasp the meaning of something, if students do not have vocabulary knowledge before reading they are less likely to comprehend what they are reading.

The National Reading Panel (2000) presented two points regarding comprehension. First, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read. Second, comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text and third, the preparation of teachers to better equip students to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students' achievement in this area. Therefore as stated throughout, children's understanding of word meanings is a significant predictor of later reading comprehension and achievement. If children do not understand the words they are reading they will be unable to comprehend what it is they are reading about.

The ability to provide oral definitions is the vocabulary skill most associated with literacy acquisition. Comprehending written text places more demands on vocabulary knowledge; therefore, children who have more word knowledge should be at an advantage (Ouellette, 2006). The best way, according to Gambrell, Morrow, and Pressley (2007), to help students

comprehend written text is to provide them with direct instruction in vocabulary. When students

have at least 6 multiple exposures to a word in a variety of contexts, they develop significantly

higher levels of comprehension (Block, Hansi, & Margieri, 2005; Block, 2005b; Carlo et al.,

2004; National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Stahl & Kapinus,

2001 as cited in Gambrell, Morrow, and Pressley 2007). Gambrell, Morrow, and Pressley (2007)

went on to explain how the comprehension process is needed to understand words, interpret

sentences and paragraphs, to understand text well and to shape and use the knowledge gained.

Students need to first have comprehension of words in order to fully comprehend text. This

correlates with what Rupley and Nichols (2005) indicated about the importance of vocabulary

and comprehension,

> Children's acquisition of vocabulary is essential for gains in reading
>
> comprehension and reading development. Struggling readers often do not make
>
> gains in their reading comprehension because they have a limited reading
>
> vocabulary. Enhancing the vocabulary development and growth for children who
>
> are experiencing reading difficulties enables them to better identify key concepts
>
> in text that they read, make inferences within and between texts, and increase
>
> their abilities to comprehend (p.239).

Interactive Read-Aloud

Read-aloud times are a great opportunity for teachers and children to interact. While

reading a story, teachers should stop to ask questions or make comments that help children

remember what happened in the story, predict what might happen next, or recall a time that

something similar happened to them (Paul, 2011). An interactive read-aloud is storybook

reading in which children are actively involved by asking and answering questions and making

predictions rather than passively listening. Encouraging children to verbally interact with the

story, peers, and their teacher is what interactive read-alouds are all about. Barrentine (1996)

explains, "This approach to reading aloud provides a means of engaging students as they

construct meaning and explore the reading process" (p.36). Whitehurst and his colleagues

developed an intervention program, called *Dialogic or Interactive Reading,* designed to involve

children actively during shared reading and to enhance language development. The program is

based on three broad principals, first to encourage the children to participate, second to provide

feedback to the child, and third to adapt your reading style to the child's growing linguistic

abilities (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994). During interactive read-

alouds, teachers pose questions throughout the reading in order to enhance meaning construction

and to show *how* one makes sense of the text. In return, students offer spontaneous comments as

the story unfolds. Students are also engaged in the reading process, how stories work, how to

monitor one's comprehension, as well as what to think about as the story unfolds.

One such study, conducted in New Zealand by Reese and Cox (1999), in which 48 four-

year-olds were randomly assigned to receive one of the three reading styles over a six-week

period. Reese and Cox (1999) had researched other studies conducted on different styles of

reading, focusing specifically on the potential benefits of children's interactions with an adult

reader during book reading. One in particular was Whitehurst's (1994) dialogical reading study,

in a dialogic style of reading; adults increase their rates of open-ended questions and elicit

children's responding during book reading. Next was a study conducted by Haden, Reese, and

Fivush (1996 cited in Reese & Cox, 1999) in which they examined the demand level of middle-

class North American mothers' styles during book reading with their children age 3 to 5 years.

The first was a lower demand *describer* style, where mothers focused on describing and labeling

pictures. Next a higher demand *comprehender* style, where mothers focused more on story meaning and making inferences and predictions about story events. Finally they looked at a high demand *performance-oriented* style, in which teachers read the story uninterrupted and confined discussion to before and after the story readings.

In the present experiment, Reese and Cox (1999) manipulated the describer (low demand and interrupting), comprehender (high-demand and interrupting),and performance-oriented (high-demand and noninterrupting) styles in their effects on emergent literacy because they represented the main styles of book reading found at that time in naturally occurring interactions between adults and children. They did not include a low-demand, noninterrupting style in the design because such a style had not emerged in the research on naturally occurring book reading. The researcher's primary goal was to assess experimentally the relative benefits of these naturally occurring reading styles. In the process, they hoped to resolve some of the discrepant findings between past experimental and correlational research. English was the primary language in all the families' homes. Families' socioeconomic status (SES) was predominantly working class, with 60% of the children's fathers working in a technical, sales, or trade occupation. Ten percent of children's mothers held a university degree. In all, 36 books were used in the study and were selected as representative of storybooks widely available to New Zealand preschoolers. Narrative rather than expository books were chosen.

The study consisted of three phases: pretest, intervention, and posttest. After obtaining informed consent from the parents, one of three trained female researchers visited children in their own homes for pretest and posttest, with a different researcher at each test. At each assessment, children's receptive vocabulary, print skills, and story comprehension skills were measured. Two posttest researchers and coders were unaware of children's reading style

assignment and pretest performance. Overall findings indicated that a describer style of book

reading with children appeared to provide general benefits for their receptive vocabulary and

print skills in comparison with the two other reading styles. These findings were in line with

past experimental research demonstrating the benefits similar to that of Whitehurst's dialogical

style of reading.

These interactions provide children with strategies for composing meaning and to

facilitate their ability to respond to stories (Barrentine, 1996). The following explains how an

interactive read-aloud is effectively conducted to help improve student's comprehension and

vocabulary.

McGee and Schickendanz (2007) explained when conducting interactive read-alouds

teachers should start out by introducing the book. While giving the introduction the teacher is

showing the students the front cover and sometimes the back cover. This is after they have

already had several lessons on book handling concepts. While showing the students the cover

and giving them an introduction to the book students can be spontaneously asking questions and/

or make predictions about the story. Before reading the book aloud, teachers should select five

to ten vocabulary words or phrases from the book that they will highlight or define during

reading. These words are critical to understanding the story and are likely to be encountered in

other books or useful in non-book contexts (McGee & Schickendanz, 2007). While reading, the

teacher makes comments that demonstrate analytic thinking at three or four occasions in which

ideal readers would make inferences about a character's thoughts, feelings, or motivations, or

teachers predict upcoming events. McGee and Schickendanz explained when the teacher

comments about the story; they should use language to signal when to use mental activity by

using the phrase such as "I'm thinking." After reading the entire book, teachers should ask a

"why" question requiring children to make inferences about and explain several story events.

Then they should use follow-up probing questions to support children's ability to answer broader

explanation questions. Teachers also contemplate questions by using the illustrations from the

story to support their thinking.

Santoro, Chad, Howard and Baker (2008) conducted a study using interactive read-alouds

in a similar manner to that of McGee and Schickendaz, (2007). They found that making the very

most of read-aloud time required teaching students to recognize the differences between

narrative and informational text, to know the meanings of target vocabulary, and to become

active participants in purposeful discussions about texts. They went on to explain that interactive

read-alouds needed to be carefully planned if they are to affect student's comprehension and

vocabulary skills. The following explains how interactive read-alouds increase vocabulary and

comprehension skills.

Increasing Vocabulary and Comprehension with Interactive Read-alouds

Press, Henenbers, and Getman, (2011) discussed the widely held belief that conducting

read-alouds to children build knowledge required for reading success, develop vocabulary and

comprehension and provide models of good behaviors and found that research conducted on

interactive fiction and non-fiction read alouds documented this success. Fisher, Flood, Lapp,

and Frey (2004), explained many researchers have demonstrated that interactive read-alouds are

an effective way to introduce students to the joy of reading and the art of listening while

developing their vocabularies, experiential backgrounds, and their concepts of print and story.

Hedrick and Pearish (2003 as cited in Fisher et al., 2004), stated that through interactive read-

alouds, teachers can model reading strategies and demonstrate the ways in which the language of

the book is different from spoken language. Children are able to understand the patterns and

structure of written language and are able to build on to their early reading skills. Through

interactive read-alouds teachers are helping to set the tone for their student's future reading

achievements through scaffolding.

Blewitt, Rump, Shealy, and Cook (2009), conducted two experiments to see if

scaffolding would help increase students vocabulary. In the two studies they conducted they

tested the scaffolding hypothesis in a two-step process, evaluating preschoolers' word learning

when extratextual questions were about unfamiliar words in storybook text. Experiment one

assessed whether low or high demand questions are more effective for learning new words from

stories. Experiment two explicitly addressed the value of a scaffolding-like approach to asking

questions: Is shifting from less to more demanding questions as children become more familiar

with new words more valuable than asking only one kind of question?

In experiment one demand level (low vs. high demand) was crossed with placement

(interrupting vs. noninterrupting) of extratextual questions,creating four intervention conditions.

These were compared with a control condition with no vocabulary-relevant extratextual

questions. They also included placement of questions and children's general vocabulary

knowledge as independent variables. No scaffolding condition was included in this experiment.

Children were pretested for general vocabulary knowledge so that they could assess whether

demand level and/or placement effects would depend on children's general vocabulary

knowledge. The 60 participants (21 boys and 30 girls) ranged in age from 2 years, 10 months to

4 years, 1 month. Target words, three storybooks, The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—III

(Dunn & Dunn, 1997), and The Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test—III (Brownell,

2000) were used. In all sessions, children met individually with an experimenter in a quiet area

of their preschool. First pretest using the two vocabulary test were given. Next four reading

sessions were conducted in which an experimenter read two of the three books, and in the fourth

session, the experimenter read all three books so that children heard each book three times over

the four sessions. Within these constraints, the order of storybooks was varied randomly. With

each reading of a book, the experimenter made four comments and asked six questions, with

different comments and questions for each reading.

In experiment two, Blewitt et al. assessed the impact of questions'demand level on target

word learning in three question conditions: low demand only, high demand only, and a

scaffolding-like condition that began with low demand questions and later introduced high

demand questions. Fifty native speakers of English (26 boys and 24 girls) were recruited from

the preschools used in experiment one. Children ranged in age from 3 years, 0 months to 3

years, 11 months. All storybooks were the same as those used in experiment one and all

mateirals were the same excexpt The Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test—III

(Brownell, 2000) was eliminated from the pretest.

Blewitt et al.'s two experiments overall found that by having the teachers ask both low

and high demand extra-textual questions helped students build their vocabulary and expressive

vocabulary. This is similar to the results Hargrave and Senechal (2000) gathered when they

tested whether the beneficial effects of storybook reading would be greater when children

interacted with the story or when the children participated in regular story reading. In the study

conducted on the effects of storybook reading on the acquisition of vocabulary of 36 preschool

children who had poor expressive vocabulary skills, averaging 13 months behind chronological

age results showed that students who actively participated increased their vocabulary and

expressive language skills. Hargrave and Senechal researched Whitehurst's dialogical reading

study and decided to conduct a study of their own where the objective of the study was to assess

whether children with poor vocabulary skills learned new words from listening to book readings

in the day-care they attend.   Hargrave and Senechal included two reading conditions: a regular-

reading condition in which teachers were asked to read in their customary manner, and a dialogic

reading condition in which teachers were trained to read in a dialogic manner. The design of the

study was such that children in the two conditions were exposed to the same books over the four-

week intervention where each book was read twice.

Participants in the study were recruited from two day-care centers in Ottawa, Canada.

The day-care center in which the regular-reading condition was implemented was situated in a

public high school and was primarily for students and staff of the school. The day-care center in

which the dialogic-reading condition was implemented was geared towards providing care for

the children of young mothers completing their high school diplomas. The two centers catered

primarily to low-income families. English was the only language spoken in the homes of 24

children, whereas English and another language were spoken in the homes of 11 children. No

English was spoken in the home of one child at the dialogic-reading center. English was the

language spoken in both day-care centers. Receptive vocabulary was measured using the

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Revised (PPVT-R; Dunn & Dunn, 1981).

For the daycare intervention, teachers read ten books provided by the experimenter. Five

of the books were provided to each day-care center for use during the first two weeks and were

exchanged between centers for the last two weeks. For teachers at the dialogic-reading center

training in dialogic reading was given in a one-hour group session at the day-care during the

week prior to the intervention. The sessions consisted of an introduction to dialogic reading and

the presentation of a 30-minute training video on dialogic reading, as well as role-playing and

discussions. Home intervention was also part of the overall study however not all the parents

who agreed to participate in the home intervention did.   A selection of 18 books was selected to be available for the parents and dialogic training was also provided at the day care. Because it was not feasible to observe parents reading with their children, parents were given a list of all the books available at their children's day-care for the home condition. At the end of the study, parents were requested to indicate the books they received and whether or not their child had enjoyed them.

Pretests were conducted two weeks before the intervention and the posttest were conducted two week prior. Overall results showed that children with poor vocabulary skills learned new vocabulary from shared book-reading episodes. Children in the dialogic-reading condition made significantly greater gains in language than did children in the regular-reading condition. Hargrave and Senechal's finding were consistent with the studies researched by Whitehurst.

According to Christ and Wang (2010), engaging children in interactive read-alouds and cognitively challenging discussions about books enhances children's vocabulary learning. When teachers embed definitions during an interactive read-aloud they support children's vocabulary learning and this leads to greater understanding of a word's meaning than just using picture clues alone. Hargrave and Senechal (2000) also found that children in interactive-read aloud conditions made significantly greater gains in language (vocabulary) than did children in regular read aloud conditions. In the study conducted on dialogical or in another word interactive read-alouds; Blewitt et al. (2009) found that the conversations involved during the read aloud facilitated young children's vocabulary growth. Asking questions about target words improved children's comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Robbins and Ehri (1994 as cited in Gormley & Ruhl, 2005) described how interactive read alouds could also provide exposure to novel events and ideas as well as repeated exposure to words, a necessary feature in both acquisition and production of new vocabulary. Interactive read-alouds provide opportunities to give direct vocabulary instruction as well as indirect vocabulary instruction, providing students with the opportunity to make connections and comprehend text. Justice (2002) explains "Analysis of adult-child shared book reading interactions have provided a particularly powerful means by which to investigate young children's incidental learning of novel words" (p. 88).

Justice conducted her own experiment on children's exposure to novel words. In the experiment 23 preschoolers participated in two adult-child shared storybook reading sessions over a one week period. Materials included a parent questionnaire, a bilateral hearing screening, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III, Dunn & Dunn, 1997), and two subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language-Fundamentals-Preschool (EVLF-P, Wiig, Secord, and Semel, 1992). All 23 of the preschoolers who participated attended a private preschool and were a mix of Caucasian, African American and Hispanic. The socioeconomic status was determined by the majority of the mothers and fathers only having a high school diploma and a couple having bachelor degrees.

During the experiment a single target storybook was used and target words were selected to measure novel receptive vocabulary and novel expressive vocabulary. For each child, a novel word set comprising of ten items was identified through pretesting. Each of these 10 words was randomly assigned to one of two conditions; labeling or questioning. Two adult readers were assigned to read the stories, the first a graduate of Speech-Language Pathology and the other a certified Speech-Language Pathologist. The reading sessions were conducted in a private room

at the day care center. Each reading lasted seven minutes and the entire session was videotaped. During each session the adult reader read a single storybook in its entirety. The adult reader did deviate from the story to focus on target words and to answer spontaneous questions and comments. After the second reading of the story the student's novel word learning was tested and posttesting was conducted by the author in a twenty-minute individualized session. Results indicated that only minimal novel word learning occurred over the course of the two reading exposures, however in terms of receptive vocabulary, children's performance were considerably higher than that observed for expressive word learning.

Kleeck (2008) explained the importance of how students already interact and make inferences with their families. Helping students make inferences during book sharing and other kinds of classroom or home activities will help bridge parents and teachers and it will also help build preschool students comprehension and vocabulary skills. Kleeck states that this will certainly help support preschool students later reading comprehension skills. Interactive read-alouds build off of student's prior knowledge and help them make connections not only with the text but with everyday interactions as well.

Coyne, Simmons, Kame'enui, and Stoolmiller (2004) emphasized, "Researchers have begun to isolate factors that increase the likelihood that children will learn new vocabulary from listening to storybooks" (p.147). Coyne et al. went on to explain that these factors are largely focused on the interaction or dialog that occurs during shared story reading. Dickinson and Smith (1994) found,

> Regular participation in discussion that involves analysis may have effects that
>
> reach beyond the book-reading event. Such discussions may help children
>
> develop a more analytical stance towards text and language, enabling them to

distance themselves from the story and become aware of their own mental

activity. As a result of talking about language, children may be quicker to notice

words whose meanings they do not know, more prone to search for those

meanings and more able to make use of available information to figure out

meanings for themselves (p.118).

Through interactive read-aloud discussions students learn new words, are able to make

connections on their own and draw meaning from the text and real life as well.

Beck and McKeown (2001) reported that there is a large gap in young students'

comprehension skill levels when they first enter elementary school. Due to the fact that children

can comprehend more complex texts when they are listening, teacher interactive read-alouds

provide a stimulating way to model reader comprehension. Barrentine (1996) suggests that

children do not learn by mere observation alone but rather through opportunities to make

personal connections. To promote students comprehension skills, Beck and McKeown (2001)

recommended reading aloud to children while providing them with opportunities to discuss the

text and explore language usage by verbalizing their own interpretations. Teachers should

develop questions that encourage children to make meaningful connections and judgments. As

stated throughout, interactive read-alouds provide students with the opportunity to increase their

vocabulary skills; make connections to the words, text, and self and therefore increase their

overall comprehension skills.

The following methods section of this proposal will explain methods used in locating

research-based materials, types of data collected and used, as well as an analysis of the data

found.

Chapter 3

Methods

Data Collection

Researched-based resources for this master's project were collected from electronic

databases which included Eric, Education Research Complete and Psych Info. Websites that

included information on policies and professional organizations included:

www.nationalreadingpanel.org, www.engageny.org, www.nysed.gov, www.ed.gov and

www.naeyc.org.   Terms used to search for material included "interactive read-alouds", "read-

alouds", "preschool", "vocabulary", "comprehension", "social constructivism", and "Vygotsky."

I narrowed the searches by choosing peer reviewed articles and scholarly books.

Data Analysis

Articles and scholarly books were reviewed and chosen for this Master's Thesis Project.

Articles based on the importance of vocabulary and comprehension were collected and selected.

I read through and highlighted those I felt to be the most useful in supporting the professional

development project presented in Chapter 4. I separated them by categories which included:

vocabulary, comprehension, and interactive-read alouds. While reading through the articles I

used the following criteria:

1. The articles needed to be on the importance of vocabulary to establish a base for
    my project.

2. The article needed to address how I plan to show that interactive read-alouds can
    increase preschooler's vocabulary skills.

3. The articles not only needed to be on vocabulary and preschoolers or young
    children.

4. The articles needed to pertain to the importance of comprehension skills in

preschoolers or young children.

Once I found articles that I felt met my needs for this master's thesis project, I researched

articles specifically on interactive read-alouds. Many of the articles I reviewed and selected

described how interactive read-alouds increased vocabulary and comprehension skills in

preschoolers. I made sure to choose an article that I felt best described how to conduct an

interactive read-aloud. I wanted to give a clear understanding of what an interactive read-alouds

is and how it is performed in the classroom. I also chose scholarly books, which were books I

used in the past and had extensive knowledge of, as well as books I found to best support my

research on vocabulary and comprehension skills in young children. Finally, I wanted to show

how all of these terms were connected and answer the main question I have "How can interactive

read-alouds increase vocabulary and comprehension skills in preschoolers?

Overview of Final Product

Chapter 4 will be an explanation of my professional development workshop that I plan to

conduct for my colleagues on how interactive read-alouds can increase comprehension and

vocabulary skills in preschool students. This workshop will be based on the research used in the

Literature Review.

Chapter 4

Professional Development Project

For the purpose of this Master's thesis, I planned a professional development project titled *Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers*. During the professional development project, I plan to address a group of my colleagues in one of our prekindergarten classroom settings. I plan to discuss the research I found and explained in my literature review, and I plan not only to demonstrate an effective interactive read-aloud but to have my colleagues plan and demonstrate one.

From a constructivist view point, as pointed out in the theoretical stance section of this master's thesis, learning occurs when individuals integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge and the integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge can only occur when the learner is actively engaged in the learning process. Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, and Fergus (2010) explain that Vygotsky's social constructivist theory "provides educators with an alternate approach to knowledge construction" (p.173). Therefore the best way for teachers' to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge is through active learning. Professional development workshops provide opportunities for teachers to acquire new knowledge and integrate it with their prior knowledge through activities that engage teachers in active learning.

In order to help prekindergarten teachers that I work with I have decided to conduct a workshop on interactive read-alouds. The purpose of the workshop will be to teach my colleagues how to conduct an interactive read-aloud and how doing so will help increase student's vocabulary and comprehension skills.

New York State implemented Prekindergarten Learning Standards in January 2011; therefore, prekindergarten teachers are now required to integrate these standards into their

curriculum. In order to "transform" our way of teaching, I plan to provide prekindergarten

teachers that I work with, with the knowledge and understanding of how to implement

interactive read-alouds in order to meet such requirements. For example the Communication,

Language, and Literacy Standards PreK Speaking Benchmarks indicate: *Children demonstrate*

that they speak for a variety of purposes, using appropriate content and mechanics of spoken

language (New York State Prekindergarten Learning Standard, 2011, p. 39). Some Benchmark

indicators for this specific standard are:

- Child verbally participates in small or large group activities for storytelling,

   singing or fingerplays.

- Child chooses a variety of descriptive words to tell a story.

- Child demonstrates an expressive vocabulary.

- Child dictates simple stories and descriptions that express his/her intended

   meanings.

Through this professional development project, prekindergarten teachers will be equipped

with a strategy that will help them meet standards such as the one indicated above.

 As Klentschy (2005) explains "The standards movement across the United States has

created a real need for teacher learning" (p.1). This is true more than ever for prekindergarten

teachers in New York State with the implementation of the prekindergarten standards this year.

Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) explain that "students' learning will be transformed

only if teachers' classroom practices reflect high standards" (p. 28).

Birman et al (200), Klentschy (2005) and Wasik (2010) all discussed the importance of

professional developments being "long-term, school or site-based, collaborative, focused on

student learning, and linked to curricula" (p.1). To make sure that all of these areas are being

met my workshop will be based on the following criteria as shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Criteria	Implementation
Site-Based	• Workshop will be held in prekindergarten classroom
Long-Term	• Workshop will be split into two sessions • Several meetings will be held to review, make suggestions, discuss evaluations and answer any questions
Collaborative	• Workshop will require that all the teachers work together, observe and evaluate one another including presenter or coach
Focus on Student Learning	• Workshop will engage teachers and provide them with new content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and student learning knowledge • Workshop will connect new content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and student learning knowledge to teachers prior knowledge
Curriculum based	• Workshop will review current prekindergarten curriculum used • A unit from the curriculum will be chosen to be used as an example for the workshop

Site Based

Klentschy (2005) explained that working in a school-based setting allows teachers the

opportunity to collaborate with one another. Bull and Buechler (1995) explained, "One of the

advantages of this approach is that it gets teachers involved in the design and implementation of

their own professional development activities" (p. 3).

To keep with the idea of having teachers involved in the design and implementation of this professional development, *Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers* will be conducted on site in a prekindergarten classroom. The professional development will be attended by prekindergarten teachers only, this will allow the teachers to focus on their specific goals and improvement plans.

Long-Term

Birman et. al. (2000) indicated that long term activities contain more subject area, content focus, as well as more opportunities for active learning and more coherence with teachers' other experiences. Bull and Buechler (1995) described single training sessions with no follow up as ineffective.   The authors go on to explain, "If training is to have any lasting effect on teachers' behavior in the classroom, however, follow-up procedures, especially coaching, are critical" (p. 3). Therefore this professional development project will be broken up in to two, two and a half hour sessions and will include peer coaching throughout the course of the school year both in the classroom and through required curriculum meetings.

Collaboration

Birman et. al. (2000) found that professional development activities that included collaboration among teachers from the same department, subject, or grade, were more likely to provide opportunities for active learning as well as be coherent with teachers' other experiences. As Bull and Buechler (1995) explained, "schools need to become a *community* in which teachers routinely have opportunities to participate in decision making, observe each other, identify and solve problems together, and share ideas in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect" (p. 4).

Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers professional development will be conducted in a prekindergarten classroom, with

prekindergarten teachers. After the first two and a half hour session, teachers will be required to

try out new strategies learned and be observed by their peers before and after each session of the

professional development project. This allows teachers not only to work together, but to learn

from one another. To help teachers evaluate one another in regards to their oral language skills,

which are a key part of interactive read-alouds, Wasik (2010) developed the *Oral Language*

Observation Checklist of Coach or Teacher (p.627*).* Teachers will be given this as part of the

collaboration and evaluation process. See Appendix A for a copy of the checklist.

Evaluation of Presentation

Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) state "professional development plays a key

role in addressing the gap between teacher preparation and standards based reform" (p. 28).   Yet

there is often little or no follow up after a professional development activity has been presented.

To make sure there is follow through and to ensure a professional development is deemed

high-quality, Gaytan and McEwen (2010) developed a model for the evaluation of professional

development activities as shown in Appendix B.   Each level of the evaluation builds on the

previous level and no level can be skipped. The authors indicate that the use of this model will

allow for improvements with student outcome and develop a positive view of professional

development on teachers.

For the purpose of this professional development workshop, a feedback questionnaire

will be handed out to the teachers based on level 1, located in Appendix C. Level 2 will be

achieved after the presenter reads and takes into consideration the feedback from the participants.

In order to reach level 3, the teachers will be provided with continued support throughout the

school year and will continue to be provided with resources such as books or articles researched

by the coach and/or through curriculum meetings. Level 4 and level 5 will be reached by making interactive read-alouds part of our curriculum and the daily lives of the teachers in the classroom.

Outline of Professional Development: Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers

The purpose of this section is to give a detailed description of the workshop presentation on *Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers*.

Session 1: Two and a half hours in prekindergarten classroom

The first session will take place in the presenter's prekindergarten classroom. All five prekindergarten teachers from the district will attend. Each teacher will be asked to bring their curriculum book with them. Paper, pens, story books and additional materials will be provided. The teachers will be asked to sit in chairs arranged at the front of the room where group time is held during regular class time. This way teachers will be able to participate as if they were the student's themselves. A fifteen minute break will be provided midway through the presentation. Snacks and drinks will also be provided by the presenter.

The session will begin with the presenter reading a story picked from a unit of the prekindergarten curriculum to the teachers. The presenter will be asking questions the whole time she is reading, asking them if they have questions, pointing out vocabulary words and referring to the pictures on the page. The point of reading the story first is to give the teachers an idea of what an interactive read-aloud looks like and to help them relate to the students. After reading the story the presenter will ask the teachers if they know why she asked so many questions while reading. Many teachers ask some questions while reading however, to address the main question presented in this Master's Project, why I ask so many question while reading, I will make sure the teachers understand the importance of asking several questions and of allowing the children time to respond and to ask questions on their own.

Purpose

The presenter will conduct a short PowerPoint presentation explaining why interactive read-alouds are beneficial to the prekindergarten curriculum. The reasons are listed as follows:

- *Implementation of New York State prekindergarten standards-* This is important because we as prekindergarten teachers need strategies to help us meet benchmark requirements. With the implementation of New York State Standards for prekindergarten in 2011, we will now be required to align our lessons and curriculum to standards and benchmark, something many of us have never had to do before.

- *Prekindergarten provides students with vocabulary rich environments-* Hart and Risley (1995) found in a study conducted on 42 families over a two and a half year period, conversations between children and parents were the most influential contributors to vocabulary before the start of school. For families with low socioeconomic status, there proved to be a significant lag in the amount of vocabulary used by the families, making the amount of vocabulary learned by the children very low.

- *Interactive read-alouds provide opportunities for children to acquire vocabulary and improve comprehension skills-* In two studies conducted on evaluating preschoolers' word learning through interactive read-alouds; Blewitt, Rump, Shealy, and Cook (2009) found that the conversations involved during a read aloud facilitated young children's vocabulary growth. Asking questions about target words improved children's comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Santoro, Chad, Howard and Baker (2008) explained, as indicted in the literature review section of this master's thesis; that interactive read-alouds need to be carefully planned. To help teachers with the planning and understanding of how to conduct an interactive read-aloud, the

presenter provides each of the teachers with a sheet of the following activity and explains the

process in further detail.

Interactive Read-Aloud

For the purpose of this activity we will be using the book *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle

from our *Gardening* Unit of the curriculum. According to McGee and Schickedanz (2007, p.

744-745) effective read-aloud techniques take place as follows:

1. **Book introduction:** "Because young children are not likely to focus on the story

   problem, we craft book introductions to make the problem explicit" (p.744).

   As the introduction is given it is important to show the front cover, back cover, or

   end papers and the title page rather than all the illustrations as in a picture walk.

   For example: To introduce *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle we might say, this story

   is called *The Tiny Seed* and there is a picture of a flower on the front cover. In this

   story we follow some seeds on their journey through different areas of the world.

   Let's see what happens to them along their journey.

2. **Vocabulary Support:** Before reading the book aloud 5 to 10 vocabulary words

   or as we call them "amazing words" should be selected. Some are already

   selected in our curriculum. Once vocabulary words are selected, highlight or

   enhance the words and phrase meanings in one or more of the following ways:

   - Insert short phrase or sentence that defines or explains the word, such as

     saying "*Drift* that means to float."

   - Point to salient parts of the illustrations that help clarify the word or

     phrase meaning, such as pointing to the illustration of the roots as you read

     the story.

- Use dramatic gestures, such as demonstrating the meaning of *looms* by standing over top of student.

- Use voice, such as making it clear that the weed kills the flower by reading the text with a crude voice when describing the weed and a melancholy voice when describing what happens to the flower.

- Vary the pace in which you read words or phrases, such as reading slowly as the seed floats along to demonstrate how slowly the action is.

3. **Comments and Questions to support comprehension:** While reading it is important to make comments that demonstrate analytical thinking. This should be done about three or four times in which readers would make inferences about character's thoughts, feelings, or motivations, or predict upcoming events. When commenting it is best to use language that signals our mental activity by using phrases such as "I'm thinking" . For example: "I'm thinking that the fish will eat the seed when it lands in the water." "What do you think will happen to the seed when it lands in the cold mountain area?"

4. **After-reading Questions:** After reading the book, it is important to ask a "why" question requiring the children to make inferences about and explain several story events. Follow-up questions can be used to support children's ability to answer broader explanation questions. For example: "Why didn't the seed in the mountain area grow?"

Each step will be thoroughly discussed by the presenter and time will be made for questions and demonstrations. Once everyone feels they have a clear understanding of the steps, the presenter will explain the follow-up activity, which should occur the next day.

Follow-up to interactive read-aloud

The next day it is important to discuss the story read on the previous day. McGee and Schickedanz (2007) called this guided reconstruction. During guided reconstruction the following takes place:

1. **Book introduction:**

   - Invite children to identify the problem and describe the solution.

   - Have children recall the title of the book.

2. **Book rereading:**

   - Before rereading, conduct a picture walk and ask, "What is happening here?"

   - Follow up children's comments by extending comments or asking for clarification.

   - Read some of the pages of the text. Before turning the page ask, "Who remembers what will happen next?"

   - Call attention to vocabulary discussed and used in different contexts.

3. **After-reading discussion:**

   - Ask another "why" question or ask, "What would have happened if…" For example: "What would have happened if the weed did not loom over the flower?"

Session one Conclusion

Once interactive read-aloud strategies are discussed, and the purpose behind the workshop explained, the prekindergarten teachers will be asked to pick a book from a table of books provided. Each book selected will be one chosen from the curriculum; therefore it will be familiar to the teachers. The teachers will then be asked to form pairs and to practice reading

their book as if they were conducting an interactive read-aloud, using what they have learned.

Once everyone has had a turn the presenter, will then handout a copy of the *Oral Language Observation Checklist of Coach or Teacher*, which can be located in the Appendix A, to each of the teachers. At this point the presenter will discuss how the checklist works and explain that before the next professional development workshop session, each pair will have to observe and evaluate one another during classroom time. The teachers will be asked to bring their observation checklist and any questions they may come up with to the next session.

Session 2: Two and a half hours in a prekindergarten classroom

For this session the prekindergarten teachers will be bringing back their *Oral Language Observation Checklist of Coach or Teacher*. Each teacher will have been given time to plan and conduct an interactive read-aloud and to have been observed by a peer. Teachers will also have met with their observer and discussed what was observed of them, what worked well, and what could improve. This would also give the teachers time to collaborate with one another, and provide them with the opportunity to develop ways to enhance the activity or to come up with questions. During the next two and a half hour session, teachers will once again get a fifteen minute break. Materials, pens, pencils, books and snacks will be provided by the presenter.   All of this will be discussed during this session, as will a summary of the literature review section of this master's thesis.

Overall this session provides the teachers with opportunities to learn from one another, the coach, and to enhance the activity. By working together and focusing on a specific content area the prekindergarten teachers will not only learn a valuable strategy to help them implement the New York State Prekindergarten Standards but they will have also learned how to implement

interactive read-alouds effectively, therefore as the summary of the literature view displays, increasing preschoolers' vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Teachers will be required to continue their use of interactive read-alouds throughout the school year and will continue to observe one teacher a month. During mandatory curriculum meetings every month interactive read-aloud lessons will be developed, observations will be discussed and improvements implemented. At the end of session two, the prekindergarten teachers will be asked to fill out a feedback questionnaire, which can be located in Appendix C. *Interactive Read-Alouds: Improving Vocabulary and Comprehension in Preschoolers* will be embedded in the daily lives of the prekindergarten teachers, providing them with the opportunity for continuous growth.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In Chapter 1 I explained that I was asked by a teacher aide "Why do I ask so many questions when I read"? I was told that their teacher did not ask many questions and saw read-alouds as a time for students to "sit and listen". From a social constructivist view point, children learn by being actively engaged. Sitting and listening does not benefit them or provide them with the necessary skills needed to succeed. This Master's Thesis Project discussed the importance of interacting with students, and how doing so can increase their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Based on the research questions and the resulting literature review, a professional development project were developed. This Master's Project is very beneficial to prekindergarten teachers because it provides them with several findings on interactive read-alouds, vocabulary and comprehension.

Findings

A professional development project was created to provide prekindergarten teachers with a strategy to help them meet benchmark requirements embedded in the newly implemented New York State Standards for prekindergarten. The professional development project included several findings on interactive read-alouds which proved to be beneficial to prekindergarten teachers and students. These finding were the result of the following questions explored in research:

1. Why is vocabulary development important?

2. What are interactive read-alouds?

3. How can interactive read-alouds increase vocabulary and comprehension skills in preschoolers?

The implementation of the New York State Learning Standards for prekindergarten have forced prekindergarten teachers to take a hard look at the types of strategies they use to teach vocabulary skills. As a result of this finding, a professional development project was developed to provide prekindergarten teachers with effective strategy. During the first session, teachers where given a demonstration of an interactive read-aloud, then shown step by step how to implement one on their own. This helped teachers to see how effective interactive read-alouds can be and to understand how using the right language when interacting with students can increase their vocabulary skills as well. Teachers were also provided with evaluation materials to help one another implement an interactive read-aloud effectively and to be aware of the language they use in their interactions with students during the read-aloud.

Another significant finding with the implementation of the New York State Standards was teachers needed to be sure that the strategies they used helped increase student's comprehension skills. To help build their students comprehension skills, the professional development workshop project provided teachers with effective questions to ask during the read-aloud. Teachers were provided not only with a presentation but with a handout of the questions to ask while conducting an effective interactive read-aloud.

As a result of these findings, the prekindergarten teachers will be equipped with a strategy to help them build their student's vocabulary and comprehension skills. The professional workshop project will provide prekindergarten teachers with:

- A better understanding of interactive read-alouds.
- An effective strategy to help them meet New York State Learning Standard requirements.

- A better understanding of how to provide prekindergarten students with stronger vocabulary skills.

- A better understanding of how to provide prekindergarten students with stronger comprehension skills.

- Materials needed to implement interactive read-alouds and create lessons.

Overall, the findings of this Master's Thesis Project provided prekindergarten teachers with several benefits. However, several limitations were discovered as well, which will be discussed in the next section.

Limitations

This Master's Thesis Project focused primarily on research of literature on interactive read-alouds, the importance of vocabulary and comprehension and effective professional development projects. A major limitation was the lack of primary resources. There was also a limit on the amount of articles that focused primarily on preschool and interactive read-alouds.

When considering the limitations of interactive read-alouds in a preschool classroom one also has to consider the length of the program. Most preschools are two and an half hours long, which leaves a limited amount of time to complete everything. Interactive read-alouds take time and for some teachers they may feel that there just aren't enough hours in a day to conduct an interactive read-aloud effectively in a preschool classroom.

The students themselves need to be taken into consideration. Children enjoy being actively involved in the learning process, however not all children can take part in the lesson as it is simply displayed in this master's thesis project. Some children with special needs will require the teacher to make adjustments to their lessons and to provide the necessary materials needed to help children with special needs participate in the learning process.

The professional development project planned in Chapter 4 has never been implemented. Therefore, limitations could arise when actually implemented. Time, budget, and support from administration and staff need to be considered. If administration and colleagues do not see this type of professional development as a strong need, it may not be considered.

Future Research

Suggestions for future research were developed, as a result of the limitations. First, if actually implemented, the professional development project presented in Chapter 4 would be a great starting place for prekindergarten teachers. Once teachers have learned the strategy and implemented interactive read-alouds into their curriculum, a research study could be conducted to see if vocabulary and comprehension skills of preschoolers increased over time. Vocabulary pretest and posttest of practiced vocabulary terms could be used throughout the school year. Illustrations of story events could be used to determine comprehension growth after conducting an interactive read-aloud.

Another suggestion for future research could be conducted by prekindergarten teachers working with students with special needs. Teachers could research ways to use interactive read-alouds with special education students and they could put together a professional development workshop for other prekindergarten teachers. This would help provide materials and more strategies for prekindergarten teachers working with students with special needs.

Overall this Master's Project evolved from the question the teacher aide originally asked me, *Why I ask so many questions when I read to my students*? Children do not benefit from a lesson unless they are actively engaged in the learning process, which is why interactive read-alouds are so beneficial. Interactive read-alouds provide children with the opportunity to be actively engaged with the teacher as he/she reads the story aloud. Referring back to Chapter 1,

Blachowicz and Fisher (2007) stated "Children do not benefit from being talked at or read to, but

from being talked with and read with in ways requiring their response and activity" (p. 182).

References

Barrentine, S. (1996). Engaging with reading through interactive read-alouds. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(1), 36-43.

Barrett-Mynes, J., Moran, M.J., & Tegano, D. (2010). Supporting struggling readers using interactive read-alouds and graphic organizers. *Voices of Practitioners*, 5(2), 1-12.

Beck, I., & McKeown, G. (2001). Text talk: capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *Reading Teacher,* 55 (1), 10-13.

Biemiller, A. (2001). Teacher vocabulary: Early, direct, and sequential. American Educator, 24(1), 24–28.

Biemiller, A., & Boote, C. (2006). An effective method for building meaning vocabulary in primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 98(1), 44-62. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.44

Birman, B.F., Desimone, L., Porter, A.C., & Garet, M.S. (2000). Designing professional development that works. *Educational leadership*, 28-33.

Blewitt,P., Rump, K. M., Shealy, S.E. & Cook, S.A. (2009). Shared book reading: When and how questions affect young children's word learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101, 2; 294-304. doi: 10.1037/a0013844

Block, C.C. (2005b, December). *Effects of 8 weeks of direct vocabulary instruction on students achievement.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Miami.

Block, C.C., Hansi, J., & Mangieri, J.N. (2005, December). Effects of direct vocabulary instruction on students' vocabulary, comprehension and affective development. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Miami, FL.

Brownell, R. (2000). *Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test—Third Edition*. Novato,

CA: Academic Therapy Publications.

Bull, B.,& Buechler, M. (1995). Time for professional development: Ideas for Indiana. *Indiana*

Edcuation Policy Center, 2-9.

Carlo, M. S., August, D., McLaughlin, B., Snow, C.E., Dressler, C., Lippman, et al. (2004).

Closing the gap: Addressing the vocabulary needs of English language learners in

bilingual and mainstream classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly, 39(3)*, 188-215.

Christ, T, & Wang, X. C. (2010). Bridging the vocabulary gap: What the research tells us about

vocabulary instruction in early childhood. *The Young Child*, 84-91.

Coyne, M.D., Simmons, D.C., Kame'euin, E.J., & Stoolmiller, M. (2004). Teaching vocabulary

during shared story reading: An examination of differential effects. *Exceptionality*, 12(3),

145-162.

Chall, J., V. Jacobs, & L. Baldwin. 1990. *The reading crisis: Why poor children fall behind.*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dickinson, D.K., & Smith, M.W. (1994). Long term effects of preschool teachers' book readings

on low-income children's vocabulary and comprehension. *International reading*

association, 104-122. doi:1O.1598/RT.58.l.l

Dunn, L. M., & Dunn, L.M. (1997). *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (3rd ed.). Circle Pines,

MN: American Guidance Service.

Dunn, L. M., & Dunn, L. M. (1981). *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised.* Circle Pines,

MN: American Guidance Service.

Fisher, D., Flood, J., Lapp, D., & Frey, N. (2004). Interactive read-alouds: Is there a common

implementation practices. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(1), 8-17.

Gambrell, L.B., Morrow, L.M, & Pressley, M. (2007). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New
        York: The Guilford Press.

Gaytan, J.A., & McEwen, B.C. (2010). Instructional technology professional development
        evaluation: Developing a high quality model. *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, LII (2), 77-
        94.

Gromley, S, & Ruhl, K.L. (2005). Dialogic shared storybook reading: An instructional technique
        for use with young students in inclusive settings. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 21, 307-
        313.   doi: 10.1080/10573560591007353

Hanna, M.B., Salzman, J.A., Reynolds, S.L., & Fergus, K.B. (2010). Engaging teachers as
        learners: Modeling professional development for adult literacy providers. *Adult Basic
        Education and Literacy Journal*, 4(3), 173-177.

Hargrave, A.C., & Senechal, M. (2000). A book reading intervention with preschool children
        who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading.
        Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15, 75-90.

Joshias, R. M. (2005). Vocabulary: A critical component of comprehension. *Reading and
        Writing Quarterly*, v21, 209-219.doi: 10.1080/10573560590949278

Justice, L. M. (2002). Word exposure conditions and preschoolers' novel word learning during
        shared storybook reading. *Reading Psychology, 23,* 87–106.

Kindle, K. (2009). Vocabulary development during read-alouds: Primary practices. *The Reading
        Teacher*, 63(3), 202-211. doi:10.1598/RT.63.3.3

Kleeck, A.V. (2008) Proving preschool foundations for later reading comprehension: The
        importance of and ideas for targeting ingerence in storybook-sharing interventions.
        Psychololgy in the Schools, 45(7), 627-643.

Klentschy, M.P. (2005). Designing professional development opportunities for teachers that

 foster collaboration, capacity building and reflective practice. *Science Educator*, 14(1),

 1-8.

Leung, C. (2008). Preschoolers' acquisitions of scientific vocabulary through repeated read-aloud

 events, retellings, and hands-on science activities. *Reading Psychology*, 29, 165-193.

 doi: 10.1080/02702710801964090

Maloch, B., & Beutel, D. D. (2010). "Big loud voice. You have important things to say": The

 nature of student initiations during one teacher's interactive read-alouds. *Journal of

 classroom interaction*, 44(2), 20-29.

McGee, L.M., & Schickedanz J. A. (2007). Repeated interactice read-alouds in preschool and

 kindergarten. *International Reading Association*, 742-751. doi:10.1598/RT.60.8.4

Monroe, E. E., & Pendergrass, M. R. (1997). Effects of mathematical instruction on fourth grade

 students. *Reading Improvement*, 1-23.

National Association for the Education of Young Children and International Reading

 Association (2009) Position Statement: on learning to read and write. Retrieved from:

 http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/WWSSLearningToReadAndWriteEnglish

 .pdf

 National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidencebased assessment of the

 scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.*

 Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

New York State Department of Education, (2011). Engage NY: Prekindergarten Standards.

 Retrieved from: http://engageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/common-core-

 shifts.pdf

Ouellette, G. (2006). What's meaning got to do with it: The role of vocabulary word reading and

    reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(3), 554-566. doi:

    10.1037/0022-0663.98.3.554

Pantaleo, S. (2007). Interthinking: Young children using language to think collectively during

    interactive read-alouds. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34(6), 439- 447. doi:

    10.1007/s10643-007-0154-y

Paul, R. (2011). Eight simple rules for talking with preschoolers. *Teaching Young Children*, 4(2).

Penno, J.F., Wilkinson, I. A. G., & Moore, D.W. (2002). Vocabulary acquisition from teacher

    explanation and repeated listening to stories: Do they overcome the Matthew Effect?

    Journal of Educational Psychology, 94(1), 23-33. doi: 10.1037//0022-0663.94.1.23

Powell, K. C., & Kalina, C.J.(2009). Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing Tools for

    an effective classroom. *Education,* 130(2), 241-250.

Press, M., Henenbers, E., & Getman, D. (2011). Nonfiction read-alouds: The why of and how to.

    The California Reader, 45(1), 36-43.

Price, L. H., Kleek, A. V., & Huberty, C.J. (2009). Talk during book sharing between parents

    and preschool children: A comparison between storybook and expository book

    conditions. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(2), 171-194. doi:/10.1598/RRQ.44.2.4

Reese, E. & Cox, A. (1999). Quality of adult book reading affects children's emergent literacy.

    Developmental psychology, 35(1), 20-28.

Rupley, W.H., & Nichols, W.D. (2005). Vocabulary instruction for the struggling reader.

    Reading and Writing Quarterly, 21, 239-260. doi: 10.1080/10573560590949368

Ruston, H.P., & Shwanenflugel, P.J. (2010). Effects of a conversation intervention on the

      expressive vocabulary development of Prekindergarten children. *Language, Speech, and*

      Hearing Services in Schools, 41, 303-313.

Stahl, S., & Kapinus, B. (2001). Word power: What every educator needs to know about

      vocabulary. Washington, D.C: NEA Professional Library.

Silverman, R, & Crandell, J.D. (2010). Vocabulary Practices in Prekindergarten and

      Kindergarten Classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(3), 318-340. doi:

      10.1598.RRQ.45.3.3

Tracey, D.H., & Morrow, L.M. (2006). *Lenses on reading.* New York: The Guilford Press.

United States Department of Education (2011). Race to the Top. Retrieved from:

      http://www.ed.gov

Wasik, B.A. (2010). What teachers can do to promote preschoolers' vocabulary development:

      Strategies from an effective language and literacy professional development coaching

      model. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(8), 62ed1-633. doi: 10.1598/RT.63.8.1

Wiig, E. H., Secord, W., & Semel, E. (1992). *The Clinical Evaluation of Lanugage*

      Fundamentals-Preschool. New York: The Psychological Corporation.

Appendix A

Oral Language Observation Checklist of Coach or Teacher

Criteria	Circle either: Coach or teacher	Examples
Frequency of Conversation	☐ Talks regularly with children and appears to be genuinely engaged and interested in what they say ☐ Invites extended conversation with statements such as, "Tell me more"	
Asks open-ended questions	☐ Asks open-ended questions (ones that require more than a one word response) ☐ Allows child to answer questions and encourages extended language	
Child-initiated language	☐ There is a mix of teacher/child talk (not teacher controlled) ☐ Intentional effort by teacher to promote children's language use through the use of open-ended questions	
Quality of language	☐ Teacher talk is often rich and varied, utilizing a variety of descriptive vocabulary, nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives ☐ Connects new words to concepts children already understand ☐ Often repeats and extends children's responses, introducing more complex language	

Wasik (2010, p.627)

Appendix B
Gaytan and McEwen (2010, p.90)

Five Evaluation Levels

Each level is critical and must not be skipped (e.g., Level 5 can't be achieved without having achieved levels 1-4). Each level must have a rubric that includes indicators of quality to ensure it has been achieved.

LEVEL 1. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS
- Was the presenter effective?
- What is the quality of the information received?
- What is the overall perception of training received, including basic human needs such as room temperature, equipment, and refreshments?

Each level builds   *on previous level*

LEVEL 2. PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING
- What did the participants learn?
- Is there evidence that indicates whether the professional development activities had a positive effect on the participants' knowledge-base related to technology integration into teaching practices?
- Are participants able to do instructional things that were unable to do before?

LEVEL 3. ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
- Once trained, are participants being supported by their organizations (e.g., being provided with additional time, resources, technology) to do the new things learned?

LEVEL 4. CHANGED INSRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
- Did participants actually use the new knowledge and skills acquired?
- If so, are they implementing them well? If not, who ensures that participants will implement them?

LEVEL 5. STUDENT IMPACT
- Is there evidence to support the contention that, as a result of participants' professional development training, student learning improved and that more students are achieving learning outcomes?

How is Level 5 (Left) Achieved?

When *planning*, educators must *reverse* the order of the five levels drawn on the left side of this figure.

LEVEL 5. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
- What student learning outcomes would instructors and educational stakeholders like to achieve?
- Instructors and educational stakeholders must ensure that these outcomes are derived from State, institutional and professional organization standards.

LEVEL 4. DESIRED CHANGES IN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
- What technology-based instructional practices will lead to the achievement of those student learning outcomes?
- What evidence will the instructors and educational stakeholders need to make the claim that those instructional practices will be effective in achieving the student learning outcomes?

LEVEL 3. ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
- What does the organization need to do to effectively support such technology-based instructional practices (e.g., additional time, resources, technology)?

LEVEL 2. PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING GOALS
- What technology-based knowledge and skills do instructors have to acquire and develop to achieve the student learning outcomes?

LEVEL 1. LOGISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- Instructors and educational stakeholders must plan the types of professional development activities that will provide instructors with that type of technology-based knowledge and skills, including such things as who will provide the training, when, where, and how long.

Appendix C

Feedback Questionnaire- Name optional

1. Was the presenter effective?

2. What is the quality of the information received?

3. What is the overall perception of training received?

Comments: