

**Effects of Read-Alouds
On Kindergarten Children**

by

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a thesis submitted

to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

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in the Department of Educational Psychology

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EFFECTS OF READ-ALOUDS ON KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

BY

VERONICA HOI-YEE YEUNG

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find out how kindergarten students respond to a teacher's story-reading (read-alouds). The focus of this research was to find out, from the children's perspectives, how meaningful read-alouds were. Four students from a suburban elementary school were nominated by the teacher to be participants in this research which was done over a period of six weeks. Data were collected through participant observation in the classroom, and through interactions with the participants, their parents and their teacher. Findings suggest that children want an active role in read-alouds. They desire more control in their response to literature as well as in other literacy activities. Children do not connect with books simply by being read to regularly, they need to see that books are meaningful before they can build an emotional bond with books.

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My thanks to the principal of the school who gave me permission to carry out this study. I am grateful to the kindergarten teacher who welcomed me into her classroom and was supportive of my efforts. Warm appreciation goes to the students who participated in this research. I also wish to thank their parents for taking the time to talk with me.

*To my husband, Judah,
and my three children,
Myra, Evelyn, and Natalie,
whose love supported me
every step of the way*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Last year I had the chance to work with a kindergarten student who not only had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, but who also had very little experience with books. I found that one of the ways that I could offset his behavioral problems was to promise to read him a storybook. Reading became almost like a reward - "You do this and I'll read you a book". It was heartwarming to see how he fell in love with books. Here was someone who couldn't name any letters of the alphabet, who never had anyone read to him before entering kindergarten, who experienced little love in his young life (his father was in jail for child abuse, and his mother was an alcoholic who had had her children taken away from her), and he fell in love with books as soon as there was someone to read to him. What was it that attracted this boy to books? I thought it was the intrinsic power of the story (Meek, 1991) that cast a magic spell on him.

My interest in the power of the story began more than a decade ago when I first started reading to my oldest child while she was a preschooler. At that time her younger sister was about 15 months old. I thought I might read to her as well,

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even though I doubted if she would understand anything. One day, I picked a wordless picture book, and told her the story of the dog that lost its bone while crossing a river because it barked at its own reflection. When I finished, my daughter pointed to the beginning of the book, meaning she wanted me to read it again. I did. Once more, she turned to the beginning of the book, and so I read it for the third time. When we came to the part of the story where the dog saw there was another dog with a bone, I noticed that my daughter's facial expression changed. When I finished telling the story, she burst into tears. I was stunned. It was then that I realized she not only understood, she was also moved. I quickly grabbed another book, let her look at the pictures without telling her another story, for fear that it would make her cry again. I read to her, not knowing if she could understand on an intellectual level, and she showed me that she could understand on an emotional level as well. On that day, I learned that books could stir the emotions of the very young.

A few years later, when my third child was entering kindergarten, I found I had this problem of having to literally take books out of my daughter's hands because she was spending over two hours everyday reading. I thought she was ruining her eye sight, and that it was not normal for a 5 year-old to read for such a

long time. Once again, I witnessed the powerful hold of books over the mind of the young.

As a result of the above experiences, my assumption was that it is natural for children to be attracted to books. I also believed that as long as there is an adult to read with them, and as long as they can understand that books are meaningful and that stories are relevant to their lives, children will develop a love for reading. My assumption was also that if children are interested in reading, then they will do well in school.

In this study, I wanted to look at how kindergarten students, who had been identified as having difficulty in school, respond to story-reading sessions (read-alouds). I wanted to find out if they would fall in love with books as a result of teacher's story-reading. If not, what were the reasons for their not connecting? My goal was to find out, from the children's perspectives, how meaningful story-reading sessions were for them, and whether story-reading had a positive impact on their performance in school. I believed that when educators considered the effects of read-alouds "through the eyes of a child", they could truly connect with, and help, the children whom they regard as having difficulty in school.

Literature Review

Reading has to do with meaning. Smith (1977) argued that in order for children to learn to read, they must realize that print is meaningful and that they must bring meaning to print. He gave an example of how a three-and-a-half year old boy could bring meaning to print long before he could read the actual words, and he argued that, in reading, "if there is no meaning, there can be no prediction, no comprehension, and no learning" (p. 388). In their research, Harste, Woodward, & Burke (1984) also found that children as young as 3 expected print to be meaningful and to sound like language. Socio-psycholinguistic researchers believe that reading is "a transactional process in which readers bring meaning *to* as well as take meaning *from* a text" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990, p. 6; Smith, 1977; Harste et al., 1984; Weaver, 1994). Children are regarded as "meaning-makers" when they construct meaning from print (Wells, 1986). Peterson & Eeds (1990) refer to children as "born makers of meaning" (p. 6).

Numbers of studies have pointed out that reading to children is not simply a matter of reading the text on the printed page. Rather, it is the language and the social interaction, plus the text itself, that constitute the story reading event (Flood, 1977; Teale & Martinez, 1986; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Weaver, 1994).

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Researchers have portrayed adults who read to children as "mediating" the text when they read (Teale & Martinez, 1986). For example, we see adults simplifying or modifying the text to suit the linguistic developmental level of the children, and Altwerger, Diehl-Faxon & Dockstader-Anderson (1985) refer to an adult engaged in such an activity as a "broker between the print and the child" (p. 477). Another term for this process is "scaffolding" - the adult structuring dialogue, constructing prereading, reading, and postreading questions to facilitate the meaning of the printed word for the child. Snow (1983) explained that this scaffolding, which occurs in the social interaction between adult and child, is one of the procedures which accounted for the heightened language development of early readers. This is reiterated in a study by Thomas (1985) who argued that early readers do not "naturally" learn reading through their interactions with print, but that reading is learned through the teaching that occurs as adults "construct" social read-aloud interactions and provide ways for children to think about texts.

Wells (1986) pointed out that "meaning making in conversation should be a collaborative activity", but because of the difference in mental resources between the adult and the child, "the more mature participant" has "to make adjustments" so that children "should come to see the world from a similarly mature

perspective" (p. 89). Wells portrayed the role of the adult as that of a "master" of the literacy craft and the child was seen as the master's "apprentice" (Woodward & Serebrin, 1989, p. 395). The following researchers, however, see it differently.

Tchudi (1985) maintained that as teachers and parents read to young children, they not only consciously and unconsciously teach their values, they also model ways of responding to literature. One would assume then, that in a reading event, it is the adult who is in control, leading and guiding. However, in examining the relationship with her own children in parent-child reading events, Tchudi found that this was not always the case. She noticed that with her one-and-a-half year old, she did most of the talking. With her four-and-a-half year old, there was much greater interaction with both of them answering questions, making observations and expressing opinions. She then realised that, as children mature, the parent's role as teacher gradually shifts and their values and interests no longer dominate because children begin to take over the commentary. Tchudi found that first commentaries were likely to be in response to pictures: what was going on in a picture; the look on the characters' faces; what the motives and intentions of the characters were. It was in later commentaries that children began to focus on language.

Similarly, in their observations of the storytime of preschool children at home and in school, Roser & Martinez (1985) commented on how the cooperative nature of the read-aloud time made it difficult to determine who was assuming the leadership. The parents and teachers initiated topics of discussion, shared their personal reactions to stories, and invited the children to share their responses. They described the role of the teachers and the parents as being "co-responders," drawing from the children responses to literature, and "the diversity and richness in these responses was sometimes astonishing" (p. 487). The researchers found that it was through this role as "co-responders" that the adults not only modelled the way mature readers interacted with text, they also signalled to the children that many types of responses were possible and appropriate.

It now appears that, in a reading event, the adult and the child are "equals", and there is no indication of one participant leading the other. This is the view expressed in the study by Woodward & Serebrin (1989), who described the adult and the child as "collaborators - supporting each other as learners" (p. 394).

This idea of the adult as a co-learner was echoed in White's study (1990) where she went so far as to say that the child who failed kindergarten was her teacher because "he made a tremendous impact" on her teaching and her classroom

"became very different because of the understandings left to (her) by that one child" (p. 36). There were many occasions when she had to refrain from talking and expressing her own views, in order to listen to what the children had to say. "I had to be silent and let the children voice their understandings and experiences. I watched stories take on new depths as the children shared and explored, negotiating understandings of what they heard and saw in the books" (p. 38).

In the study by Roser & Martinez (1985), it was found that children "tended to respond to literature more like the adult in the situation than they did like other children" (p. 487). For example, if a parent tended to muse over the illustrations, that particular child would comment more on the details of the pictures. If a teacher made predictions aloud, children in that class tended to give the same type of response. Woodward & Serebrin (1989), on the other hand, found that the child's responses were often at odds with those made by the adult. The two-year-old boy in the study was taking a critical perspective and challenging his father's explanations. The boy's confidence in maintaining his own interpretations, in spite of contradictory explanations from the father, resulted in both the child and father generating new knowledge. The researchers found that such "nonconsensual interpretations" were useful resources for future learning (p.

407). Here, the child's interpretations and perspectives were validated even though they ran counter to those offered by the adult. White (1990) referred to this as giving children "a voice" (p. 23) - letting them express and maintain their own explanations and perspectives. She pointed out that the children realized that they had a voice in the stories she read to them, and it was this realization that helped them make meaning during story-reading sessions.

White (1990) learned that children will only be interested in books when stories hold personal meaning for them. She described how one of her kindergarten students, who had to repeat kindergarten for the second time, consistently failed to show any interest in books despite her numerous attempts to entice him. One day the boy asked White to read a book which he thought was about a horse. From then on, his interest in books grew. White then realized that it was because of the shortage of stories written for rural children, that this boy - who grew up on a farm - was staying away from books. She saw that "his entire being radiated 'farm', and there hadn't been a lot for him to connect to in the Story Corner - or anywhere else in the classroom, for that matter!" (p. 23) White found that, for this boy, "literacy began when he first heard language in a way that connected him and his experience to it; it began when language first took on

personal meaning" (p. 31). She came to realize "how vital connections are to learning. Home life and school life need to be connected for children, not two separate existences" (p. 37). Fox (1985) also noted that children frequently referred to personal experiences while listening to stories. Similarly, Tchudi (1985) explained that "children operate most effectively in situations that make human sense to them" (p. 463).

Weaver (1994) talked about the sense of community that is created when the teacher reads to the whole class and that reading and talking about books "creates a bond" among the children (p. 428). Similarly, Smith (1988) argued that when children learn to read and write, they become members of the community of written language users. He named this community the "literacy club" and he pointed out that children who have not become members before they get to school should find the classroom "the place where they are immediately admitted to the club" (p. 11). The idea of a community of learners signifies that learning is a collaborative enterprise, that each member's understanding is shaped by his or her contact with other people's interpretations (Newman, 1990). White (1990) noticed that when the boy who had to repeat kindergarten for another year saw that his knowledge was valued in the Story Corner, he "began to consider himself a

member of the classroom of literates" (p. 33). He realized that he belonged and that he had a contribution to make.

What determines a teacher's choice for read-aloud material? To what extent is her choice influenced by her own preferences? Tchudi (1985) pointed out that adults often assume that children's response to literature will be the same as their own. The fact is that very often the responses of the adult and the child are at odds. A child's "literary taste" is not necessarily the same as that of the adult who reads to him (p. 467). She related how her son had to beg somebody in the family to read him his favorite book because no one else in the family could "stand it" (p. 467). It is important for the children to be able to choose the books they like. Fox (1985) noted that children could predict the meaning of unfamiliar words "if the story itself is one the child likes and wants to hear" (p. 381). In White's study (1990), it was because the boy requested a certain book be read that it became possible for him to make connections. As a result, one of the changes she made in her classroom was that "a bucket that holds (students') individual choices sits in the Story Corner now" (p. 38).

Peterson & Eeds (1990) argued that all children come to school with a rich sense of story, whether it is from the books that have been read to them or from

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the stories that have been told to them by the adults in their family. In her study of preschoolers' oral stories, Fox (1985) found that the children had "internalized elements of the language, style and discourse modes of the authors of children's books" (p. 375). She also found that in their retellings of known stories, children did not parrot the texts, they reconstructed them. Fox therefore believed that these children, who had extensive and regular early experience of hearing stories read aloud, had been "taught by the writers of children's books a great deal about the conventions of writing and of literature", and that "in their heads at least, these children were already writing" (p. 380).

In her book Wally's stories, Paley (1981) described how the children in her kindergarten class read, reread, and acted out stories. Some of these stories were made up by the children, some were picture books and fairy tales. Other stories were observations of children's conversations and discussions. Her book described her search for the child's point of view. For Paley, understanding the child's point of view enabled her to help the child to take a step further. "The teacher must help the child see how one thing he knows relates to other things he knows" (p. 213). Paley ended her book by showing us her "contract" with her class that read: "if you will keep trying to explain yourselves I will keep showing you how to think about

the problems you need to solve" (p. 223). In other words, understanding the child's perspective helps the teacher to help the child make connections, and accomplish problem-solving tasks.

According to Taylor (1993), in order to understand literacy from the perspective of the child, we need to ask the question, "How does this child become a member of a community of learners?" (p. 58) We can find out by observing how he or she collaborates with others to accomplish literacy tasks and problem-solving activities. We also need to observe the child's "literacy behaviors" (p. 60), focusing on what the child can do instead of what he or she cannot do. Teale & Martinez (1988) and Elster (1994) have pointed out that children who have been read to regularly will sometimes "read" to themselves or to others. This is an example of a literacy behavior. Taylor (1993) maintains that through systematic observations and detailed documentations, a child's "descriptive biographic literacy profile" can be made (p. 79). It is also important to find out "*how* their texts were written and *how* they accomplish the task" (p. 191).

While most of the literature on read-alouds is written about children who function normally, Cushla and Her Books (Butler, 1979) documents the effects of book-reading on a child who has been handicapped by physical and developmental

disabilities. "By three months, Cushla was well behind the normal baby in most aspects of her development" (p. 17). Books were introduced to Cushla for the first time at the age of four months, when her parents realized that Cushla could see clearly only if an object was held close to her face. Butler credits the learning of rote material, as a result of repeated reading of books, for making a tremendous contribution to the language and cognitive development of her granddaughter Cushla. In assessing the contribution of books to Cushla's quality of life, Butler points out that "Cushla's books have surrounded her with friends" and that "it was the characters themselves who went with her into the dark and lonely places that only she knew" (p. 102). Butler implies that it was this emotional bond, not the tremendous growth in cognitive and language development which Cushla experienced, that was the greatest gift that books could offer to her granddaughter. Trelease (1989) also points out that a favorite book can act as a "paper security blanket" (p. 49). He believes that "a child hears a story on at least three different levels: intellectual, emotional and social" (p. 68). It is the emotional level of connecting with books that constitutes the essence of read-alouds, because a teacher's ultimate goal in reading is for the students to develop a lifelong love of books.

Reading aloud is a cultural activity because it involves shared ways of valuing, feeling and thinking (Bloome, 1985). When children enter kindergarten, they become insiders to "kindergarten culture" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 36). Since a qualitative research focuses on investigating the shared meaning of a particular culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), the goal of this study is to gain an insider's view of kindergartners' reactions to story-reading sessions: their negotiations for entering the culture of the kindergarten classroom, and their handling of the social, cognitive, and cultural demands made on them during storytime.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the following assumptions.

1. Children will be interested in books if they can see them as being meaningful and relevant to their experiences.
2. In story-reading, children are not passive learners guided only by the adult's interpretations. They are able to negotiate meaning and generate their own learning.
3. The stories children tell, together with their observable literacy behaviors, enable us to see the world from their perspectives, to understand their

thinking and how they make connections.

This study tried to answer the following questions.

1. Are the children connecting with books? If not, what are the reasons?
2. Looking at the descriptive literacy profiles of the participants, what can we understand about the way children construct meaning; and how would story-reading support their learning?

CHAPTER II

PROCEDURES

This study was a qualitative case study. Data were collected through participant observation of story-reading sessions and through conversations with the participants. The study was conducted in an elementary school in a suburban area of Winnipeg, Manitoba. There were a little over 300 students in the school. The children came from a variety of backgrounds. Many were from middle income homes, however, a few were from families who were on social assistance. There were 26 students in the kindergarten class. A teacher assistant had been assigned to help in the class because of its size, and another assistant worked with a student who had a hearing impairment.

The kindergarten teacher had nominated four students whom she had identified as having medium to low academic abilities and who in her opinion would benefit from this research.

In this afternoon kindergarten class, story-reading took place twice a day (first thing in the afternoon and before the children got ready to go home). By the time I began my study (which was at the beginning of May), the teacher had read over 200 books to the students.

I observed 54 story-reading sessions within a period of 6 weeks.

Following each session, when the students were free to choose their own activities, I talked with each of the participants individually for about 20 minutes. I asked their opinions about the particular book that had been read to the class. I asked if they would like me to read them a book. I asked also if they would like to tell me a story (either one they made up or a retelling of a known story). I asked them to show me samples of their work, and tell me how these were done. With the participants' consent, our conversations were audiotaped. Some of the questions which I asked them included the following.

1. Did you like the story the teacher read today? What did you like about it?
What didn't you like about it?
2. Was there something you wanted to say (or a question you wanted to ask) about the story?
3. Did you get a chance to say what you wanted to say during storytime?
4. What did the story mean to you? Was there anything in the story that reminded you of something that happened to you?
5. Do you sometimes read to yourself or to someone else? What books can you read?

6. Do you have a favorite story? Have you ever asked the teacher to read it to you? Does she sometimes say yes when you ask her to? How often?
7. Would you like to tell me a story?
8. Would you like me to read you a story?
9. Tell me about this picture/craft/journal entry that you made. How did you know how to do it? Did someone else help you?

A descriptive biographic literacy profile of each participant was made by gathering samples of their work, transcribing their oral stories, writing field notes about their observable literacy behaviors, as well as by making observations of how they collaborated with others in problem-solving activities and literacy tasks.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand in qualitative research (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984), I reflected on the following questions as I reviewed the transcripts of my conversations with the participants, their work samples, and my field notes.

1. How did the participant construct meaning?
 - Used the illustrations to interpret story meaning?
 - Commented on the pictures and facial expression and motives of

the characters?

- **Commented on the language?**
 - **Drew on personal experiences to construct meaning?**
 - **Drew on earlier reading experiences to make meaning?**
 - **Made reasonable predictions about what would happen in the story?**
2. **How did the teacher help students make meaning?**
- **Did she do it by "scaffolding" and/or by "mediating the text"?**
3. **How did the teacher view herself in relation to the students?**
- **Could the teacher be described as a "master of the literacy craft" and the students as "apprentices"?**
 - **Could the teacher be described as a "co-responder" or a "co-learner"?**
4. **Were the students' responses similar to those of the teacher's?**
- **Did the students challenge the teacher's interpretations?**
 - **How did the teacher handle nonconsensual interpretations?**
5. **Did the children have "a voice"?**
- **How often did the teacher remain silent and encourage the children**

to voice their understandings and experiences?

6. Did the children take over the commentary?
 - Did their commentaries focus on pictures?
 - Did their commentaries focus on language?
7. What kind of books were chosen for read-alouds? To what extent were children's individual choices honored?

I kept track of emerging themes and patterns as I compared specific incidents in the data.

As I reviewed the transcripts of my conversations with the participants, and when I examined their literacy profiles, I reflected on the following questions:

1. Was the participant connecting with books? If not, why might this be so?
2. Did the participant demonstrate a "love" of books?
 - Responded with emotion to text: laughs, cries, smiles?
 - Enjoyed looking at pictures in picture story books?
 - Could get "lost" in a book?
 - Chose to read during free time?
 - Wanted to continue reading when time was up?
3. How did the participant construct or use written language?

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- Did journal entries reflect knowledge of the conventions of stories (e.g. "once upon a time")?
 - Did oral stories show he/she had internalized elements of the style and discourse modes of the authors?
4. How did the participant become a member of the community of learners?
- Shared reading experiences with classmates?
 - Felt he/she had a contribution to make? Felt his/her knowledge was valued?
 - Asked questions and sought help from others to clarify meaning?
 - Was his/her understanding shaped by other people's interpretations?
 - How did he/she work with others to accomplish literacy tasks?
 - How does he/she accomplish or collaborate in problem-solving activities?
 - Was there a bond among the students as a result of reading and talking about books?

These reflections generated new questions about what I had learned. The new questions led to further observations, data collection, and reflection. This continuous process of inquiry and reflection led to new insights into the way

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kindergartners responded to a teacher's story-reading.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

I observed four participants, one girl and three boys. I decided to write about the girl as a case study on her own and about the three boys as a group since the boys interacted together. Observations and anecdotes of each case study were followed by discussions of the links to research literature and of the research questions.

Katie

First Impressions

Katie was 5 minutes late.

Everyone was sitting on the carpet in the discussion area. They sat in four rows, facing the teacher. Each had a book in hand. The afternoon kindergarten began with a time for silent reading, when everyone was supposed to browse through a book he or she had picked from the reading corner or from the small bin in the discussion area.

When Katie walked in, the teacher assistant remarked, "You look cold!" Even though it was May, the temperature was below normal. Snow was in the forecast. Katie was wearing a flimsy sleeveless blouse, blue jeans, and navy blue

canvas runners. The shoelaces were undone. On her bare arms were 2 tattoos, one on each arm (washable tattoos that a child could easily put on by herself).

Katie sat down in the second last row. The children were told to put away the books they were reading. It was time for "hide-and-tell". A student held up a bag in which an object had been placed and the class was supposed to guess what was inside the bag by asking that student questions. The hidden object turned out to be a soccer uniform. When the teacher asked who was on a soccer team, most of the children raised their hands. So did Katie.

"Who is on the green team?" the teacher asked.

Katie said to the boy sitting beside her, "I am on the green team."

"You are on the green team?" the boy sounded incredulous.

Katie nodded. Then she added, "I am green if I want to be green."

Katie was right in that she could let her imagination run wild. Did her not being dressed for the weather indicate that there was no adult supervision before she left home? Or did she choose to wear a sleeveless blouse to show off her tattoos?

Katie was outgoing and she seemed to enjoy school. On my first day in the classroom she asked me, "Can you paint with me?" and she was persistent in her

request. Her painting had a good sense of balance and design. When she finished painting, she invited me to play with her in the house corner. I noticed that she loved to laugh, even though most of the time I did not understand why she was laughing. Katie was also the only one who sang in class (and till the end of the school year, I had not heard anyone else sing while he or she was working or playing). When she was in the craft corner, she sang a song from "The Wizard of Oz" and all the children at her table joined her in singing. (A few days ago the school had put on a play about "The Wizard of Oz"). A little while later Katie sang "O come all ye faithful" when she was playing house.

Christmas in May? I thought that was a little odd. Little did I know that a few weeks later another student would mention the same play and talk about Christmas as well.

Towards the end of my first day in the classroom, Miss B. read two stories to the children. When she had finished, Katie raised her hand. Miss B. said, "No, we don't have time for any questions." It was not clear whether Katie had a comment or a question, or whether what she wanted to say had anything to do with the stories that were read. There was no time for questions because Miss B. was busy getting the children ready for home.

* * * *

Centre Time

"What does that say again?" Katie asked the girl sitting beside her.

"Piglets," the girl replied.

"Oh. Piglets. Now, what does a piglet look like..."

"It has a round face," the teacher assistant prompted.

Katie scribbled and counted the correct number of piglets and then turned to the next page. Not knowing what she was expected to draw, Katie asked once more, "What does that say again?"

Today the children were working on "My counting book". They had to number the pages from zero to ten, and then draw the corresponding number of baby animals on each page. The teacher assistant sat at the table to help the children write down the names of the baby animals that they could think of.

This centre activity was designed with the intention that the children would make use of their knowledge of words for baby animals which had been mentioned in the books the teacher had read to them during storytime. Some of the words that the children were expected to have learned from the read-alouds included "kits", "cubs", and "goslings". All Katie could think of to put in her counting book

was teddy bears and dinosaurs -- not exactly the "right" kind of animals that the teacher had in mind when she designed the activity.

Not being able to read what the T.A. had written in her book, Katie kept asking the children sitting at her table, "What does that say again?" and then she would forget what she was told a few minutes later. She was also distracted by what was happening around her. After working on her booklet for less than ten minutes, Katie put down her pencil and picked up the number "2" that was placed on their table.

"Table 2, stand up," Katie announced. Several children stood up.

"Table 2, sit down." Laughing, the children did as they were told. This little game went on for a while until one girl interrupted, "If we keep doing this, we'll never finish our book."

"You can just ignore me then," Katie retorted as she resumed scribbling and counting.

One minute later Katie talked to her friends while she held a pencil in each hand.

"We are trying to work," Katie said, and she laughed hilariously.

"I know how to draw a baby kangaroo," said Katie. Then she kissed the

boy sitting beside her on the cheek.

"What does that say again?" Katie asked for the fifth time since they started working on the booklet.

"Elephant calves," answered the T.A.

Katie daydreamed in the middle of drawing pictures of baby elephants. For each kind of baby animal, she would try to depict the first one with some resemblance. For the second and subsequent ones she just used circles to depict the correct number required for that page. This was not typical of Katie who loved to draw and paint, and whose drawings in her journal were artistically done with a maturity that was not common among six-year-olds.

Katie broke her pencil in half. She did not complete all the pages in the booklet.

How meaningful was this activity to Katie? Was there anything that she had learned from the read-alouds that she could have used to help her complete the booklet?

* * * *

Katie was the one student who was noticeably restless and off-task during

storytime. When it was time to gather around the teacher for read-aloud, she usually sat in the first or second row, but then she would constantly fidget and try to move farther and farther to the back. Sometimes she would end up in the last row when the teacher finished reading. She would play with her sneakers, tying and untying the shoelaces. She would talk to her neighbours or bother someone who was trying to listen. When she did choose to pay attention, she was able to answer straightforward questions and make reasonable predictions about the stories. However, her interest usually did not last for more than 5 minutes. It was the same during library. Katie would sit in the last row, look around at the other classes, and not pay any attention to the teacher-librarian from beginning to end.

Why was Katie not engaged during storytime?

* * * *

The children were busy working on their journals. Katie saw me writing and asked to see what I had written.

"Did you do all *that*?" she asked, her eyes wide with surprise when she saw my tiny handwriting scrawled all over the page.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Holy!" Katie smiled, showing a big gap where her front teeth were

missing.

It was my turn to be surprised by her choice of words.

Why was Katie surprised? Did she not expect anyone to be able to write that much? She had probably never seen so much handwriting on one page. What did that tell me about her ideas and assumptions regarding the use of print?

* * * *

Journal Writing

"What else can we write in our journals?" asked Miss B.

"Penguins," Katie raised her hand and suggested.

"You have to write about something that you know really well. Do you know a lot about penguins?"

"It can splash in water," Katie replied.

"You have to write about something that you know well," Miss B. repeated. Earlier she had explained to the children that for journal writing, they could write about something that had taken place in school. She gave an example on the board and asked the students to read the words aloud as she wrote. Even though Katie was saying the words with the rest of the class, her eyes were not on the board. She was playing with the ring on her finger.

Miss B. asked if they could think of other topics for writing. The children suggested “a birthday party” and “soccer” (Katie did not have a birthday party and she was not on a soccer team). Someone suggested writing about the flood water going down because one of the students’ homes was flooded. In the middle of the discussion, Katie raised her hand and said,

“My brother has a kitten. It’s black and white.”

Miss B. did not make any comments on her remark. Katie turned around and talked to the boy sitting behind her.

Katie’s journal entry for that day was:

KATIEMOMDADILOVEYO

It *was* something she knew really well. She knew the words so well that she could look around and talk to her neighbours while she was writing. She was not aware that she had missed out the final letter in the last word when I asked her to read what she had written. In fact those were almost the exact words that she had put down in her first journal entry a few months ago which read:

I LOVE

YOU

KATIE

MOM

DAD

Katie's comments about the penguins and her brother's kitten were not validated by the teacher. The kitten was something that she obviously cared for and knew a lot about because it was her playmate when she stayed home in the mornings. She was mostly by herself if her teenaged brother was not there to babysit while her mother went to work. As it turned out, the kitten was never mentioned in her journal.

The teacher wanted the children to write about what they knew well, and yet Katie was not given the encouragement to pursue that goal. Did the teacher think that Katie's comment was not contributing to the discussion and so she did not acknowledge it? Katie had lost her "voice" (White, 1990, p.23) when her idea of what to write ran counter to that of the teacher's.

When I first saw Katie's journal, I was struck by the mature way she had of drawing pictures of hearts. She had this particular way of drawing a smiling face inside a heart that I asked Miss B. if an adult had helped her draw them. I was told

she did all the drawings on her own. I was also impressed by her fine motor skills evident in the way she printed her letters. However, she could not recall why she had made those pictures nor could she tell me any of the stories behind her drawings. Despite two attempts, I still could not get Katie to become interested in talking about her journal. Her drawings appeared to be carefully constructed, and there was one entry in particular that caught my eye. She had divided the whole page into four sections and the drawing in each section seemed to be part of a continuous story. However, when I asked her about it, she was not able to recall what prompted her to construct those images. Besides writing the same words (which her teenaged brother had taught her at home) repeatedly in her journal, Katie had also copied the names of some of her classmates. When I asked her about those names at the end of June, she was able to identify them. I remembered on the first day I met her, she showed me the list of people responsible for bringing show-and-tell, and she did not seem to be able to identify any of the names on the list.

* * * *

At the end of my first week in the classroom, I invited Katie to choose a book from the book corner so that I could read with her. Katie was reluctant. She

said, "Miss B. has to read them to me." Puzzled by her answer, I repeated my offer once more. Again she gave me the same reply. When I assured her for the third time that it was all right for her to choose a book, she finally went and picked a large one. It was a book of three short stories called More, More, More, said the Baby. She turned the pages while I read. But she kept turning too fast. Several times I had to turn back to the previous page in order to be able to read the story coherently. While we were reading, Katie looked around a few times to see what the other people were doing. At the end of each short story, the baby was supposed to say, "More, More, More." Katie caught on to the idea and smiled as she chimed in. When we finished reading, she went and chose two more for me to read. This time she did not turn the pages. She just looked at the pictures while I read.

The way Katie turned the pages reminded me of the time when I started reading with my toddlers. They also kept turning the pages too fast. My first reaction to Katie's page turning was that she was too old for such behavior because I had always associated this kind of page-turning with the very young. Then I thought perhaps she was not interested since she kept glancing at what the others were doing. But I was gratified to see the smile on her face when she

chimed in at the end of the story. *Could Katie's page-turning be an indication of her lack of experience with books and reading?*

Later that day I related to the teacher Katie's remark, "Miss B. has to read them to me". Her response was, "Katie's just lazy. She doesn't want to read on her own."

Whether or not Katie was lazy was debatable, but she certainly did not assume an active role when the invitation to read was initially given. However, she did enjoy being read to .

* * * *

The kindergarten classroom was not only the biggest one I had been to (2 or 3 times bigger than a regular classroom), the book corner also contained the largest selection of books that I had come across in a kindergarten classroom. The teacher was teaching a unit on the farm, and there were about 20 books on display on top of the shelves that had to do with the farm.

The unit on the farm had been completed. I had not seen one student take any of the books on display down for his or her own browsing. For the six weeks that I had been in the classroom, there was only one student who chose to read a book from the book corner during free activity time.

Often students would bring books for show-and-tell and ask the teacher to read them to the whole class. After reading these books, Miss B. usually put them on a shelf where the rest of the class could look at them more closely if they wanted to. None of the four participants had taken the initiative to look at these books or any of the books which the teacher had used for her read-alouds.

* * * *

Katie was in the craft corner.

"What are you making?" I asked her.

"A shaker." She was stuffing short drinking straws in between two paper plates that had been taped closed at one end.

"Let's hear it," she muttered.

But there was no noise. I asked her if putting more straws would make her shaker have more sound, she nodded. She then proceeded to cut out scraps from toilet paper rolls. I gave her some pasta shells which I saw lying on the shelf and asked her to see if that would make more sound.

"Amazing!" Katie said when she heard the rattle of the shells. Then she took out all the straws and sponges in her shaker and only put in pasta shells.

Once again I was surprised by her choice of words. I thought it sounded

sophisticated, not a typical expression that a kindergartner would normally use.

* * * *

Even though Katie never brought anything for "hide-and-tell", she was usually very attentive when other students were giving out clues about the objects that they were hiding. The person doing "hide-and-tell" would tell the class what the first letter in the name of the object was. Katie was eager to make guesses, but most of the time her guesses turned out to be wrong because they were not related to the letter given.

Today Miss B. read Hutchins' Rosie's Walk. Katie had her head down all the time. As most children enjoyed watching videos, I was surprised that when the video based on the book was being shown, Katie still would not look up. Instead, she sat under a table and played with a piece of yarn which she had fashioned into a bracelet. Later I chose that book to read to Katie, and I read it to her twice at her request.

When I read with Katie, I would choose books that had been read to the whole class during storytime. Katie did not seem to remember much about any of the stories.

* * * *

Playing Teacher

On the last day of May, when it was time for free activity, I suggested to Katie that we play teacher - that she read to me just like a teacher would read to her class. Katie's face lit up at the idea of being a teacher. She quickly grabbed two books and waited for me to go to a quiet corner. We sat opposite each other on our little chairs. Beside her was a chair on which a recorder had been placed. She made up the titles of the books by looking at the illustrations on the cover. When she read, she started from the last page and worked her way to the front. I had brought along some books which I knew the teacher had used for her read-alouds. Katie decided that she would read all of them. The first one she picked was Bill Martin's Brown Bear Brown Bear which she read almost without any error (Miss B. had read this book "many times since the beginning of the year until the whole class could say it"). Then she read Rosie's Walk. Again she started from the last page and worked her way to the front without realizing anything was wrong. She started by saying, "Chicken got back for supper the right time" (the original text read, "And just in time for supper"). When she came to the page which showed the flour bag was leaking, she said, "Flour, flour." (I had explained to her on the previous day what the word was and she remembered.) For one of

the pages, she read, "Fox, fox...", reminiscent of Brown Bear Brown Bear.

The next book she read was Little Red Hen. She started by saying, "I got to do everything in the house." She recognized the passages where the text said, "Not I..." She used different voice inflections for the different animals, and she used phrases based on Brown Bear Brown Bear to fit into the story.

Katie read with enthusiasm. The books that Katie read were the ones that I had read to her earlier. From time to time I would raise my hand and she would call on me to ask a question. Some of the other children would stop and watch us. When she finished reading, we rewound the tape and she listened with glee to her own voice. A few children crowded around to listen as well.

The next day while John and I were reading, Katie came running towards me and said, "Can you read me a book?" Before I could answer, she added, "I'll read Brown Bear Brown Bear first." So away we went to our little corner.

Katie read with as much enthusiasm as she did the day before. I purposely chose books which the teacher had used for her read-alouds, and some of these books she had read more than once. Katie read Brown Bear Brown Bear twice without a mistake. In the middle of her reading, Katie asked, "Is that the way it

goes?" She was beginning to notice the way she handled reading as she remembered that on the previous day she had read several books backwards whereas today she had started reading from the first page. *Was this an indication that Katie was not used to handling or touching books?* When she read Brown Bear for the third time, Katie used some of the familiar words from the story of The Gingerbread Man and made up her own version of Brown Bear. I asked Katie if she liked the book. "My favorite," she replied.

When children "become fluent on a known text, (they) experience what reading success is like, and what real readers actually do" (Meek, 1982, p. 81)

Then Katie read (or sang) The Wheels on the Bus. In the middle of her reading, she stopped for a long time and did not know how to continue. Afraid that she would abandon the idea of playing teacher, I finished the song for her. Katie was not pleased. "Let *me* do it!" she said. She finished the song on that page. When she saw that the subsequent pages had so much writing, she abandoned the idea of reading the rest of the book. *Could it be that my finishing the song for her had dampened her enthusiasm? Or was she intimidated by the length of the text?*

According to Fox (1985), children who had extensive experience of being

read to viewed their oral story-telling as "uninterrupted performances" (p. 376). Likewise Katie wanted an uninterrupted performance in her role as a teacher and as a reader.

Katie played teacher for three days in a row. She wanted to read all the books which I had brought along. The peek-a-boo book had some words which were quite difficult, and when Katie paused for what seemed like a long time, I tried to help her out. Again Katie insisted, "Let *me* do it", and she made up her version of that page. She did not continue reading the rest of the book. Was it because the pictures did not give her sufficient clues to figure out what the words meant?

I did not learn from my mistake yesterday when she insisted on singing "the wheels on the bus" in her own way. She was making her own decisions as a language user and I needed to wait and let her assume ownership. I did not give her room to make her own connections, room to let her grow as a learner. Instead of jumping in to help her out, I might have asked, "How can I help?"

"As children practise reading, first as play, and then as a thing on its own, [they] adopt the behavior of a reader" (Meek, 1982, p. 84). Katie had come to

regard herself as being a reader.

* * * *

The children had been working on their yearbooks (booklets in which they wrote down the names of some of the teachers and their favorite activities in school.) Today they had to read their yearbooks together, pointing to the words as they read. Katie paid close attention and watched the teacher as she learned to point to the right words. She was so attentive that Miss B. commended her, "I like the way you are watching, Katie." Reading the yearbook became the only class activity in which Katie was totally on-task. *Did this have anything to do with how Katie felt about herself as a reader?*

In her yearbook, Katie listed craft, music and library as her favorite activities. I was surprised to see the mention of library since she did not seem to pay any attention to the librarian's story-reading. She did, however, show eagerness when it was time for book exchange. Normally she would not let herself be distracted from her craft-making. But when it was announced that it was time for book exchange, she dropped everything and went straight to the library to borrow a new book. She might not be attentive during read-alouds, but she did

enjoy browsing through books which she had chosen.

* * * *

"What are your favorite books?" I asked Katie when we were in the library.

She looked at the shelves near where we were sitting and picked out 2 large books. "These are my favorites. Can you read them to me?" They were hard-cover books with attractive watercolor paintings on the book jackets. I could tell she had not read them before, and she chose them because the artwork appealed to her. I remembered on my second day in the classroom, when it was time for book exchange, she picked one that had a colourful cover. She said to me, "Wow! Look at the design. I'm lucky I got this one" then she showed me the drawings of dragons and fantasy animals in the endpapers. Beautifully illustrated books held an attraction for Katie.

Sometimes Miss B. would draw the children's attention to the artwork or give background information about the illustrator as she read. At that point I would check to see if Katie was paying attention to the drawings. She did not appear to be particularly interested, and often she did not even look at the book. Was she not listening to the teacher, or did she not understand the aesthetic appeal

that the teacher was referring to? Could it be that she had to handle and touch the book before she could feel any appreciation of the artwork?

* * * *

A week before the end of the school year, I folded several sheets of white paper and handed them to Katie. "Would you like to make a book?" I asked.

Without saying anything, Katie sat down and started to draw. When she finished the illustrations, she wrote her story on the opposite page, using words that she knew, and asking me to spell out the words she did not know. Her ideas just flowed. She knew exactly what she was going to write about and she had complete control as a writer. Without being asked, Katie began telling me about her family and the trouble her brother was in. "Don't tell anyone," she confided.

Three quarters of her book was about her brother's kitten. Writing the book enabled Katie to make connections between her home life and school life. She was drawing on her personal experiences to accomplish this literacy task. The book meant so much to her that she kept reminding me, "I want to bring it home today". When I finally handed the book to her, she went straight to her locker and put it in her knapsack. I couldn't help but be reminded of the time when I returned her counting book (the one about the baby animals). "You can have it," she said

casually, handing the book back to me.

* * * *

I asked Miss B. if the children had tried writing their own stories. Miss B. told me that for the unit on fairy tales, the students had to create a wall mural - each student would draw his or her favorite part of a fairy tale and a parent volunteer would transcribe the student's retelling of that part of the story. That sounded like a wonderful activity that integrated story-reading and story-writing. I could visualize Katie being engaged in activities such as this one.

When Miss B. was teaching a unit on camping, she set up a centre activity by erecting a tent in the classroom and the children were allowed to play inside. One day I heard someone telling a story in the tent, and as I tried to get closer, the children were ordered out of the tent because they were making too much noise. Later I tried to find out who was telling the story and the children told me, "Nobody was telling a story." Could it be that they only conceived it to be story if it were told by an adult, whereas the narration by one of their peers would not be regarded as a story?

* * * *

Knowing that the class had recently finished a unit on fairy tales, I asked Katie if she would like to tell me a story. She just shrugged her shoulders. So I put a copy of Goldilocks and the Three Bears before her and asked if she could tell me the story. She turned to the first page and asked, "Does that say 'Once upon a time'?" Katie was aware of the conventions of writing. However, she did not show much interest in finishing the story.

When I suggested that she write her own version of Goldilocks, Katie responded with enthusiasm. She painstakingly drew the three bears. As she started working on the second page she said to me, "I want to do the whole book." However, the recess bell rang and the second page was half finished.

That turned out to be the last time I met with her individually before school ended for the summer.

Links to Research Literature

Katie appeared to be a student who was constantly trying to make sense of the literacy tasks that were set before her. When she was working on her counting book, the recurring question "What does that say again?" epitomized her attempts at meaning-making. The turning point in Katie's attitude towards books came

when she discovered the magic of playing teacher. When Katie read, she brought meaning to print as she tried to create or recreate a story that made sense to her. This confirmed what has been put forward in the literature, reviewed earlier, that reading has to do with meaning and that children expect print to be meaningful (Smith, 1977; Harste et al., 1984). This was also in keeping with the view that reading is a transactional process in which the reader brings meaning *to* print as well as obtaining meaning *from* print (Smith, 1977; Harste et al., 1984; Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Weaver, 1994). Katie's attempts at meaning-making confirmed what has been said about children being born meaning-makers (Wells, 1986) and about the way children learn - "if there is no meaning, there can be no prediction, no comprehension, and no learning" (Smith, 1977, p. 388).

Katie enjoyed rereading Brown Bear Brown Bear numerous times. She was "behaving like a reader, discovering the satisfaction of a *known* text" (Meek, 1982, p.25). Being able to read those familiar passages gave Katie the realization that she was in control of the reading process. She was no longer dependent or passive as she had been when she first responded to my invitation to read.

When Katie substituted phrases from one story to fit into another, as when she used parts of The Gingerbread Man to fit into Brown Bear Brown Bear, she

was actually doing what some writers have done when they combine several fairy tales and make them into a new story. Jean Little, for example, has written Once Upon a Golden Apple (1991) using familiar phrases from popular fairy tales and putting them together into a new story. What Katie was doing demonstrated that she was drawing on her past experiences in reading to help her make connections from one story to another.

In the act of reading...we enter into a kind of social relationship with the writer who has something to tell us...The reader... recreates the meaning by processing the text at his own speed and in his own way. As he bring the text to life, he casts back and forth in his head for connections between what he is reading and what he already knows (Meek, 1982, pp. 20-21).

The way Katie reconstructed the texts in her oral reading confirmed what Fox (1985) found about children who had extensive early experience of books. These children did not parrot the texts in their story retellings, they reconstructed them and their reconstructions retained the texts' characteristics.

When Katie played teacher, her literacy behavior resembled what Meek described in her book dealing with how children learn to read (1982):

...reading is learned by reading...Right from the start the learner has to

behave as if he meant to become a reader. The helping adult must confirm him in this role by treating the beginner as a serious apprentice...

... what the beginning reader reads makes all the difference to his view of reading. For very young beginners, reading is a kind of play, something you do because you like it. Gradually you discover it's a specially good kind of play, less trouble than dressing up, but just as exciting for imagining you are someone else and somewhere else (p. 11).

The child who plays at reading by imitating what readers seem to do is in a better position to begin to read than those whose first step is instruction in the alphabet. He is discovering what is in this activity that attracts and pleases him, and he is showing that he is prepared to try it for himself (p. 23).

Katie showed her annoyance when I tried to help her out in her reading. She did not want any interruptions in her performance as a teacher and as a reader. Katie's behavior was similar to what Fox (1985) found about children who had extensive experience of being read to. She found that these children perceived their narrations as uninterrupted performances.

"Let me do it!" also signified Katie's insistence on assuming ownership.

She wanted to read the books her own way, to construct her own meaning.

Not only did Katie assume ownership, she also assumed leadership. She decided on which books to read, how many books to read, as well as how many times she would read those books. She expected me to sit there and follow her lead. It was interesting to note that in her study of early readers, Thomas (1985) found that early readers made up games that centred around literacy episodes and their parents always followed their lead in these games and word plays. Did this suggest that when children take an active role in their learning, they sometimes want to be the leader and expect to be followed?

Katie assumed ownership when she was making her book. As an author she did not need any help in searching for a topic to write about. It was in writing her book that she demonstrated another one of her meaning-making strategies - she brought her personal experiences to the stories she wrote. Writing about what was significant in her personal life became a meaningful literacy experience in school. She had made the connection between her home life and her school life. She gave me the impression that she was very efficient in the way she went about making her book. She knew exactly what she wanted to do. Her book-making was a demonstration that “children operate most effectively in situations that make

human sense to them” (Tchudi, 1985, p. 463).

How meaningful was storytime for Katie? I tried to answer this question in terms of the research questions raised earlier.

The Research Questions

The first research question was: **Were the children connecting with books? If not, why might this have been so?**

Was Katie connecting with books? Judging from the observational data which showed that Katie was constantly fidgeting and moving around while the story was being read, it did not appear that she was. Would the fact that she seldom showed interest for more than 5 consecutive minutes suggest that she had problems concentrating or sitting still? This did not seem to be true because when she was working on her crafts, I noticed that she was very persistent in finishing what she had started. When she was playing teacher, she was not distracted by the other children and she insisted on reading all the books that were available for that purpose. When she was making her book, she was on-task for thirty minutes. This suggested that Katie could concentrate and could show engagement when it was something that she wanted to do.

When Katie chose to listen, she could answer questions regarding story content and vocabulary, as well as make reasonably accurate predictions. So it was not for lack of understanding that Katie failed to show an interest in books.

Katie's lack of book handling experience as indicated by her not knowing where to start reading could imply that she did not have a lot of opportunities to listen to the language of books before entering kindergarten. Butler (1979) listed the acquisition of book language and literary conventions as one of the characteristics of children who would develop an interest in reading. She indicated that it was the language in books which helped her developmentally delayed granddaughter, Cushla, make tremendous gains in her language and cognitive developments. "It seems clear that access to such a wealth of words and pictures...has contributed enormously to her cognitive development in general and her language in particular" (p. 102). Butler also listed the ability to identify with the characters in the stories as another quality of a reader. One of the reasons why Cushla was able to establish an emotional bond with books was because she identified with the characters in the stories so that "it was the characters themselves who went with her into the dark and lonely places that only she knew" (p. 102). Could it be that Katie's lack of book language and her inability to identify

with the characters in the stories hindered her from connecting with books?

Butler also described how Cushla connected her everyday experiences with what happened in the stories that she read. It was this ability to see the connection between the world as depicted in books and the experiences in the real world that made books interesting and relevant. Butler noted that children who had managed to build an emotional bond with books seemed to share this characteristics of being able to experience what White (1956) referred to as the "backward and forward flow between books and life" (p. 64). Both Butler and White noted that it was this interaction with stories which enriched the lives of young readers, and it was this interaction which enabled readers to see the relevance and meaningfulness of books to their lives.

It would seem appropriate to suggest then that Katie's lack of engagement during storytime could be due to the fact that the books that were read aloud did not hold any personal meaning for her and so failed to arouse her interest. It could be that the materials for read-aloud were not meaningful in terms of their subject matter. The units that dealt with camping and the farm meant little to Katie personally because she had never gone camping and neither had she been to a farm. Not only had Katie been missing out on hearing the language of books

before entering kindergarten, she had not lived many of the experiences that the authors of children's books had described.

White (1990) noted that it was the inability to see the connection between books and his life experiences that prevented her student, Jevon, from being interested in the read-alouds which occurred in her classroom. She had come to realize that merely exposing her students to books would not cause them to fall in love with stories.

I usually silenced the students' interruptions to get on with the reading. I wanted to expose the children to as many books and authors as possible, but in doing so, I often left them no opportunity to make connections (p. 20).

Katie, like Jevon, had not made the connections between the books that were read aloud and her own personal life. Indeed, there seemed to be a few similarities between Katie and Jevon. Both children were considered to be "at risk" students, Jevon had to repeat kindergarten and Katie was identified as one of the "lowest" in her class in terms of academic performance. However, on closer examination, White was able to look for evidences of Jevon's learning. Likewise, Katie appeared to be a different kind of learner when she interacted with me individually,

and I was able to see evidences of her learning. What kind of a learner was Katie?

The answer to this question would be related to the second research question:

Looking at the descriptive literacy profiles of the participants, what can we understand about the way children construct meaning; and how would story-reading support their learning?

There appeared to be two different profiles of Katie. When seen as part of a large group during read-alouds, Katie seemed to be fidgety, immature, unable to concentrate or sit still. Sometimes she was even disruptive when she bothered other students around her. During centre time, she was constantly off-task and she was unable to complete her booklet. This deficient profile seemed to suggest that she was a student who was not functioning to her full potential.

However, there was another profile of Katie which suggested that she was a learner who was constantly trying to make use of her meaning-making strategies and who was constantly trying to problem solve. For instance, when Katie was trying to craft the noise-maker ("a shaker" as she called it), she did not have to take out all the straws when she found that it was the pasta shells that made the noise. The fact that Katie took out everything that did not make a noise showed

she was able to recognize that, given the limited space in the shaker, anything extraneous would affect the effectiveness of her shaker. Katie had taught me that children could self-correct and could arrive at their own solutions when they were engaged in problem-solving activities.

What kind of a learner was Katie? She was imaginative and creative. She was able to think of a game just by looking at a piece of paper with the number "2" on it. She was artistic. Her aesthetic appreciation was mature for her age, and she had very good artistic abilities and fine motor skills. Katie was persistent. Even though it was the first time I met her, she managed to get me to paint just by being persistent in her request. Her persistence helped her to accomplish her tasks. When she made her bracelets and other crafts, she knew what she wanted to do and she would not change her mind even though someone suggested something else.

How did Katie construct meaning? She asked questions. She queried the meanings of words when she was working on her counting book. She asked how things were done. One time when Miss B. was handing back some artwork, she noticed a painting done by one of the students, and she asked that student, "How did you do that?" Katie was willing to look to her peers for help.

When Katie was playing teacher, her meaning-making strategies included making use of the illustrations and contextual cues to help her create a story as she attempted to read. She also used her past experiences in reading to help her make connections from one story to another. She demonstrated that she could do many of the things that a reader would do. She was also willing to take risks. Her readiness to tackle the task of reading aloud a book she had not seen before meant that she was not afraid to take risks. Why did Katie show engagement when she was playing teacher? It was something she wanted to do. It gave her a sense of empowerment, of being in control of the situation. She wanted to make all the decisions: what to read, how to read, how many times to read. There was also intrinsic motivation for Katie to play teacher because it was a fun thing to do. Playing teacher was a game. Katie had taught me that for children to enjoy learning, learning had to be fun. She had taught me that children needed to have some, if not all, control of the learning situation. She wanted to be involved in the decision making and the design of the learning experience. What was Katie able to do when she was engaged in playing teacher? She was able to pick up a brand new book and tell a story by looking at the pictures. She was also able to retell known stories in her own unique style.

Why did Katie show engagement when she was making her own book? It was an open-ended literacy invitation. There were no restrictions or requirements. What was Katie able to do when she was engaged? She managed to turn it into a meaningful literacy experience. She wrote about things that were of personal significance. She was able to make connections between her home life and her school life. Katie had taught me that children needed to have ownership of their writing. They needed to be able to decide on what to write and how to write it.

In contrast, Katie was not engaged when I first saw her do her journal writing. She was writing down words without looking at what she was doing. She was more interested in talking with her neighbor than in her writing. Even when I asked her to read what she had written, she was not paying attention and failed to recognize she had left out the final letter in a word. Katie was not engaged in journal writing when it was something she had to do in order to satisfy the teacher's demands. Her heart was not in it.

Neither did Katie show engagement when she was working on her counting book. She did not have a clear idea of what she was expected to do as she had to keep asking the question, "What does that say again?" many times. Katie was having so much difficulty with the booklet because it was a

decontextualized literacy experience. There were no contextual clues to help her make sense of the activity. Katie did not have the incentive to finish drawing the pictures because those were not the pictures that she wanted to do. She had to draw piglets when she did not know what a piglet looked like. She had expressed interest in baby dinosaurs, baby teddy bears and baby kangaroos, but these were not the "right" kinds of animals for the booklet. She demonstrated disengagement when she scribbled, daydreamed, broke her pencil in two, and when she had to think of a new game to amuse herself. She was disengaged because what she was doing was done to meet the teacher's requirements. It was not something she was interested in doing. Katie did not have ownership of this literacy experience and she demonstrated that one of the conditions for engagement was ownership.

My last interaction with Katie was when I asked her to tell me a story orally. She did not show much excitement in her retelling. But when she was asked to produce the story in book form, she jumped at the idea and painstakingly produced the first page of the book. Why was there a difference in Katie's response? Oral storytelling was not something that Katie was used to doing whereas drawing was her favorite activity. Katie wanted "to do the whole book" because drawing was her area of strength. She could utilize her artistic abilities to

express what she could not do through her oral language. Katie chose her preferred mode of expression to portray the story of Goldilocks. Katie had taught me that one of the ways to help children become engaged was to find out what their areas of strength were and to build on them.

How would story-reading support Katie's learning? Katie made use of her meaning-making strategies when she read. Story-reading allowed her the opportunity to be an active constructor of knowledge. Reading the stories also gave her a sense of success as a reader and the confidence to stay on-task when the whole class practised reading their yearbooks. Trelease (1989) pointed out that story-reading, especially the rereading of familiar texts, would improve the children's vocabulary, sequencing and memory skills. Having Katie make her own version of familiar stories not only built on her artistic abilities and printing skills, it also allowed her freedom and control as an author and illustrator. It was a meaningful way to utilize the knowledge of book language which she had gained from the read-alouds as well. "The best - perhaps the only - way to assure optimum development for all students is to build on their language and literacy abilities." (Goodman, 1996, p. 146).

Benny and His Friends

"Would you like me to read you this story?" I held out a copy of a Berenstain Bears book about baseball to Benny, hoping that the illustrations on the cover would entice him.

"No, thanks," Benny replied, backing away.

"But yesterday you dressed up as a baseball player. You want to play baseball when you grow up," I reminded him.

"Josh dressed up as a baseball player too."

"Then I will read the book to Josh and to Paul as well," I persisted. Paul was Benny's best friend. They did everything together. I touched Benny's arm as I spoke, hoping that he would change his mind. *Or was I trying to prevent him from running away?*

"No. I don't want to read it today."

This had to be the fifth time that I had invited Benny to read with me. He was the only student who turned down my offer every time, and he literally tried to escape.

Why had Benny been refusing my offers to read with him?

* * * *

Effects of Read-Alouds

Benny was a good student, cooperative and well-behaved. I noticed that Benny enjoyed bringing objects to school for "hide-and-tell". During storytime, he would sit quietly in the front row beside his best friend Paul. Though his eyes were fixed on the book that the teacher was reading, I could not tell if he was following the story because he seldom volunteered to answer the teacher's questions or offer any comments. I did not see any excitement or a glint in his eyes as the stories were being read. Benny did not show much engagement during silent reading. When the class was listening to stories in the library, Benny would sit quietly in the last row, but he did not pay much attention to what was being read as he kept looking around at the other activities that were taking place in the library.

* * * *

Benny's mother, Mrs. K., volunteered in the classroom once a week. Mrs. K. was friendly and helpful. When I asked if it was all right to record my conversations with Benny, she did not object but cautioned that "Benny is a man of few words. You might not be able to get anything out of him". When I asked if she read with Benny at home, she explained that her husband did most of the reading with Benny while she was responsible for helping their older daughter who

had problem with her reading a few years ago. "Now she is doing O.K. and since we let her go last time, we certainly don't want to let Benny go this time. So his Dad is working with him. He gets frustrated because Benny doesn't remember his alphabet..."

Mrs. K. was aware that the kindergarten children's report cards would contain an assessment of their knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, shapes and their ability to count. Getting Benny to learn the alphabet was a cause of frustration for both parents and child. I asked if Benny showed any resistance when they tried to read with him.

"There's resistance only when Benny has to learn the alphabet."

Mrs. K. could not tell me what Benny's favorite books were. Nor could she remember the names of some of the books in her house. She knew, though, that there were alphabet books as well as books on shapes and numbers. There appeared to be an absence of "real" books - books with stories that could fire the imagination of the reader, stories that had heroes with whom the reader could build an emotional bond.

Why are there children who do not want to read?...If, for instance, we

insist that he has to get every word right, sound out letter by letter or remembered exactly, then reading becomes for him the performance of these rituals...until it becomes meaningless (Meek, 1982, p. 84).

* * * *

I asked Benny what his favorite books were. "Chipmunks. Dinosaurs," he replied. I noticed there were dinosaur books in the reading corner. But my offer to read them with Benny was once again politely refused.

At the end of the day, after Miss B. had finished reading several books that had to do with the farm, Benny raised his hand. But he was not called on to ask a question or make a comment because it was time to get ready for home. Benny was usually very quiet and he seldom volunteered to say anything without being asked. Today when he did want to speak up, he did not get a chance to.

* * * *

When the children were getting ready to read their yearbooks, Benny looked around and spotted Jane sitting in the last row. He moved from where he was sitting (in the first row right in front of the teacher) to where Jane was and sat down beside her. He watched Jane closely as she pointed to every word and he followed her. Benny certainly used a good strategy in dealing with the demands of

this literacy task, and he knew exactly who the strong reader was that could give him the support he needed.

* * * *

A Big Surprise

I asked Benny to tell me the story of The Three Little Pigs as I put a copy of the book before him.

"Once upon a time," Benny began as he pointed to the tiny print on the first page (information regarding copyright). Then he got stuck because there were no illustrations to help him continue. So he turned to the second page and started again, "Once upon a time..." When he came to the part where the wolf huffed and puffed, Benny took a deep breath and re-enacted the scene. He used different tones of voice for the three pigs. He ended his story with "and he lived happily ever after".

I was amazed by Benny's dramatic performance, with its actions and sound effects. He had certainly internalized elements of the style and discourse modes of the authors of fairy tales (Fox, 1985).

When Benny's mother came to volunteer, I told her how impressed I was with Benny's retelling of the story. Her reply was, "He certainly knows more than

what he lets on. He should let Miss B. know what he knows." I presumed she was thinking about Benny's report card. What I was excited about was Benny's ability as a storyteller.

Benny's sense of story was evident in his journal. Besides the letters of the alphabet, the only words written there were the colour words which he copied from the poster on the wall. Benny could not identify any of the words he had written. However, he could remember all the details in his drawings as he gave me a commentary on his journal.

"These are 2-headed and 3-headed monsters. I saw them in a book..."

"See these teepees? There's this Indian store that we went to..."

"Do you see the Easter bunny? That's the Easter basket in my hand..."

All children come to school with a rich sense of story (Peterson & Eeds, 1990). *If Benny could dictate his stories to an adult, wouldn't his journal be a delight to read?*

* * * *

"I Like This Book!"

Just as I was about to give up any hopes of getting Benny interested in

reading with me, something exciting happened.

Nine days before the end of the school year, armed with 3 books that centered on hockey, I invited Benny, along with his best friend Paul, and John, to read with me in the library. We read Carrier's The Hockey Sweater. There were big smiles on all of their faces as we read. Paul kept pointing to the details in the illustrations and sharing with us how he enjoyed the humour. There were times when they all talked at the same time and I had to ask them to take turns. They had certainly taken over the commentary! Since the story ended with the hero saying a prayer in a church, we wondered if his prayer had been answered. The boys decided they would each write their own version of the ending to the story.

The next day as we were trying to decide which of the two remaining books to read first, Benny announced, "This is a Canadian book!" pointing to the maple leaf sticker on the spine of the book. Paul quickly checked the other one and said, "This one is also a Canadian book." The boys decided to read Morgan's The Magic Hockey Skates first. Again, everyone was eager to express their reactions to the story. They shared what their wishes would be if they had three wishes.

"I want to be the best player in the Jets," Benny declared.

"You have to pay to play on the Jets team," Paul was quick to respond.

Then it was Paul's turn to say what his wish would be.

"I want to be the best player," he said.

It turned out all three boys wanted to be the best player.

When we came to the part where Joey told his brother he had magic skates, they decided that "it's real magic".

Then someone hesitantly whispered, "It's fiction."

"There can still be magic," John insisted.

"Yeah. It's real magic," the other two happily agreed.

Yes, they knew it was not a true story but they also believed in magic. The appeal of the magical - wasn't that what fairy tales were all about? I was reminded of the children in Paley's (1981) kindergarten class who could reconcile apparent contradictions because of their belief in magic. From the child's perspective, "the real power is in the wish" (p. 29).

"I like this book!" Benny smiled when we finished reading, and he rubbed his hand back and forth on the cover of the book.

"I like this book!" he repeated. For the first time I saw pleasure and delight

as he fondly patted the book.

It was exhilarating to see how Benny could finally "find himself in a book" (Moss, 1977, p. 140) as he identified with the hero. He had experienced what it was like to "make a bond with the author in a special way which contributes to his affective growth and to the way he feels about himself" (Barton, 1977, p. 358).

Magic weaves in and out of everything the children say and do. The boundaries between what the child thinks and what the adult sees are never clear to the adult, but the child does not expect compatibility. The child himself is the ultimate magician. He credits God and lesser powers, but it is the child who confirms the probability of events. If he can imagine something, it exists (Paley, 1981, pp. 29-30).

The boys behaved differently than when they were in the classroom during storytime. There, the children were not supposed to interrupt the reading without first raising their hands. They were not supposed to be talking with each other. Here, the dynamics were different. The boys felt free to interrupt and they took their time studying the illustrations. Just being able to handle the pages made a difference to how they would respond to the story.

"I want to see that book again," Paul said as I was about to put it away.

He told me he had a copy of the book at home, but he still wanted to look at the pictures one more time.

Then we read The Moccasin Goalie. John kept pointing out the details in the illustrations which the rest of us tended to overlook. Ever since the time he showed me the details in The Piggybook, John never ceased to impress me with his keen observational skills. No details seemed to escape his notice.

"Can you give me your books when they are old?" he asked me when we had finished reading the hockey books.

John's request reflected a real need in the reading corner - there were no books that dealt with sports. Quite a few of the kindergartners had soccer, baseball, or swimming as extra-curricular activities. Children interested in sports would be hard-pressed to find material in the reading corner that would entice them to read. It could be that there were sports-related books in the reading corner, but during the weeks that I was in the classroom, I did not notice any. Benny's love of books would not have been evident if I had not brought in those three books.

Ever since the day we read The Hockey Sweater, whenever I extended an

invitation to read, Benny would gladly accept.

* * * *

Interestingly enough, Benny's best friend Paul was someone whose mother had regularly read to him "from the cradle onwards" (Fox, 1985, p. 374). He had heard most of the stories which the teacher read to the class and he owned many of the books which she had used for her read-alouds. I asked him what he thought about storytime in kindergarten.

"It's boring," he replied.

"Why?"

"You just sit there and there's nothing to do."

"What do you think would make it more interesting?"

Paul thought for a while. "Put on a play. There are only two times when we have a play. One is Christmas and one is the Wizard of Oz." He was referring to the play which the school had put on a few weeks ago.

The students in Paley's (1981) kindergarten class read and acted out stories from picture books and fairy tales, as well as stories which the children had made up. Paley found that dramatizing those stories helped her to understand the children's point of view, and understanding the children's perspectives enabled the

teacher to help them make connections.

Paul's comment about sitting there with nothing to do reflected how the children were passive listeners during storytime. He wanted a more active role in the story-reading event, more involvement with the stories.

* * * *

Someone brought a book for show-and-tell and asked the teacher to read it to the whole class. After reading the first few pages, Miss B. asked, "Does the story remind you of something?" Paul raised his hand and said, "It reminds me of Babe". ("Babe" was the name of a movie that had been released recently.) Paul was making connections between the stories that he knew.

* * * *

Paul's mother, Mrs. T., came to volunteer in the classroom once a week. She told me about the story-reading that occurred in her house, thereby giving me a portrayal of Paul's literacy behavior at home. She had an intuitive understanding of the importance of reading real books to her three children. She started reading to them when they were toddlers. As soon as Paul could sit still, not even a year old, Mrs. T. started reading with him.

"Paul likes stories about sports, action stories," she said. "A few

books he can read by himself. There are little lines that he knows by heart. Occasionally, he pretends he's reading. I've noticed it recently. Paul likes to look at books even after I've read to him. Paul tells me which one he's not interested in. Some books not as action-related he doesn't seem to be as interested. His "desert island" books are the Berenstain Bears and the Franklin books. These two he reads over and over."

"Does Paul tell you a story?" I asked her.

"I'm not sure. He's not really a storyteller."

"Does he write?"

"I don't expect him to write. He likes to draw."

Did the parents assume that Paul was too young to be able to tell or write a story?

Could it be that Paul found it difficult to make up a story because of the lack of opportunity to practise telling and writing one?

"Paul spends about 10 minutes or so reading everyday," said Mrs.

K. "Paul's energetic, unless the book captivates him, he would rather be outside playing ball than be sitting indoors reading a book. He gets to read one story before going to bed."

"Does Paul ever get 'lost' in a book?" I asked his mother.

"Sometimes," she said. "Sometimes he's very interested, very focused."

"How do you suppose children can develop a love for reading?" I asked.

"Whenever they are ready, developmentally ready. They have to be ready for it. Take my oldest daughter. She wasn't interested. Then all of a sudden she's grasped the concept. It was like over-night. She's made the connection. It took her a long time to grasp the concept. My middle daughter loved to read since she was grade one. She caught on right away."

"Why is it that some children manage to build a bond with books whereas others merely show interest?" I asked her.

"I'm sure we didn't do anything different with the three children," Mrs. T. reflected. "I have to confess I don't read. I read magazines and newspapers. But I don't like reading books. I'm not sure why my middle daughter is so much more interested in reading than her siblings. Maybe it had to do with her personality. She likes her own time alone. It was the 'Little House on the Prairie' series that got her interested in books. She

read the whole series in a matter of days. She was even dressing like a pioneer. She put herself into it. She became part of the story."

Mrs. T. had just described what Meek (1982) was talking about when she wrote that "literacy has powerful consequences; not the least is that it changes one's view of oneself and the world" (p. 21). Mrs. T. thought she had treated all her children the same way, and yet only her middle daughter showed an intense interest in books. Was she saying that some children were born with a predisposition to develop a life-long love of reading?

* * * *

John was the only student who chose to read during free time (and it happened only once). When I asked him about the book, he said, "I found it." It turned out that the librarian had read the same book to the whole class a few weeks ago. "It's a funny book. Can you read it to me?" It was called The Piggybook. As I was reading, John kept interrupting me by commenting on the details in the illustrations and explaining how these details would change in the pages ahead. I could hardly finish a single page without being interrupted by his commentaries. I waited for him to finish talking before I went on, but as soon as I began, he would interrupt me again. It seemed as if I was fighting for my chance

to read and he was fighting for his chance to tell me about the illustrations. I was tempted to remain quiet had it not been for the fact that he kept asking me to read the words.

"I found it" implied that John had been searching for the book. He was eager to read it again.

* * * *

John gladly accepted my offers to read with him. Each time he picked out a book, I wanted to know if he had read it before. He would invariably say no. And yet while we were reading, he would tell me all the details in the story even before we got to the right page. He obviously had read the book before. When he said he had not read it, did he mean he could not read the words? Did he think he had to decipher all the words before he could read? Did it mean that for John, looking at the pictures did not count as reading? Did Katie think that Miss B. had to read to her because she could not read the words herself? Yet at the beginning of each afternoon, the children had to choose a book from the book corner for silent reading. They would read for about five minutes until everyone had settled down. I found the children's perception of reading intriguing.

When I first offered to read with John, his reply was, "Are you going to

read it to me now?" I wondered why he was so surprised that I would be willing to read to him then. *Was it something that was too good to be true?*

John quickly went to the book corner.

"What kind of book would you like to read?" I asked him.

"A dinosaur book." There were 3 or 4 dinosaur books on the racks, but he did not pick them. He chose The Dressed Up Book.

"Don't you want these dinosaur books?" I pointed to the ones on display.

"I want to read this one," he insisted, holding on to the one he picked.

I thought perhaps he chose that one because he could not read it on his own whereas he could read the dinosaur books by himself. It turned out I was wrong because he knew the details in that book just as he had known the details in The Piggybook. What impressed me most was that The Dressed Up Book had references to other stories, and a child needed to be familiar with these other stories before he could understand and appreciate what the author was referring to. John was a reader who could make use of his past reading experiences to help him connect with what he was reading. Somehow John gave me the impression that he had read almost all the books in the book corner.

Familiarity and love of reading. Do they go hand in hand?

* * * *

I was hoping John would be able to tell me a story since he was so familiar with the books in the reading corner. However, I was disappointed. John, like the other three participants, was not interested in telling any story. But as I asked about the pictures in his journal, he explained what some of the images meant. In one of the entries he talked about a poisonous sun and magic fish. What he told me was really an imaginative story. John went on to say that his mother would take him and his brother to the cottage on the weekends. The beach was very close by. He and his brother could just walk there and they would go swimming and fishing. Without being aware of it, John was letting me know that the inspiration for this journal entry came from his personal experiences.

Once again there was this sense of story in John's journal writing, just as there was a rich sense of story in Benny's journal entries.

* * * *

John was a persistent child. One day Miss B. was completing a list of words for things that were found on the farm. The children were eager to contribute their suggestions. After calling on several students, Miss B. announced that it was time to do a different activity. When John raised his hand, Miss B. said,

"We are not doing any more words. We don't have time."

"I'm going to say something else," John protested.

"We are not doing any more words," Miss B. repeated.

"I'm going to say something else," John insisted.

"What were you going to say?"

"My grandpa has a farm, but he doesn't have any animals."

"What kind of a farm does he have?"

"I don't know."

Miss B. then explained to the children the different types of farms. But John was not paying attention.

It seemed as though John *had* to say what he wanted to say, otherwise he would not rest. Thinking about the things that were on the farm led John to think about the things that were missing on his grandpa's farm. John was relating his personal experience (the farm that he knew about) to the word picture that was being painted by the other students. Here John appeared to be the kind of learner who could compare and connect what he had already known to what was being taught.

* * * *

"Which do you like better, the teacher reading to you in a small group, or reading to the whole class?" I posed this question to each of the 3 boys as well as to Katie on different occasions.

"To the whole class," was the unanimous reply I received.

"Why?"

"So everybody can listen to it."

There was a sense of community that existed when the teacher read to the whole class and, as Weaver (1994) had pointed out, reading and talking about books created a bond among the children. Yet it was interaction in a small group that led Katie and Benny to become interested in books. For Katie, the turning point came when she had my undivided attention as she played teacher. Likewise Benny discovered his emotional attachment to books when he was part of a small group. The idea of reading to children in small groups did not appeal to Miss B. either, even though she recognized that Katie would benefit more on a "one-on-one" basis.

* * * *

On the last day of school, I learned that Miss B. had bought 50 new books.

Anxious to find out if she had bought any books on sports, I rushed to the book corner. There on display were beautifully illustrated books, mostly in watercolor, and judging by adult standards, their aesthetic appeal was obvious. I was disappointed, however, that there was not a single copy of the three books which I had read to the boys.

I had shared with Miss B. how the boys enjoyed the three hockey books. The teacher assistant was also present and she made a remark which I thought was pertinent, "My three older children are girls and I find that the books I have at home are for girls. So when I read to my son, I don't have too many books for boys, especially books about sports and cars."

What is a good book? The adult's idea of a good book is very often at odds with that of a child's. Barton (1977) had pointed out that there was no narrowing of the gap between what the adult saw as desirable and what the children chose to enjoy, so that there appeared to be "a crucial mismatch between the adult's expectation of the impact of books upon the child and the child's actual response" (p. 357). Moss (1977) had told the story of how for years she couldn't understand why an unappealing, artistically worthless book could hold such an attraction for her adopted daughter. It was years later that it suddenly dawned on

her that her daughter had identified herself with the lost kitten which was taken home and cared for the same way her adopted daughter had been taken home and cared for. The "lesson" Moss had learned was that "for a book by itself is nothing - a film shown in an empty cinema: one can only assess its value by the light it brings to a child's eye" (p. 142).

Links to Research Literature

That learning is a collaborative enterprise could be seen in the spontaneous discussions that occurred when the boys were reading the hockey books. The way the boys shared their reactions to the books confirmed what had been pointed out by Wells (1986), that meaning making in conversation is a collaborative activity. When the boys were wondering about the possible conclusion to The Hockey Sweater, their understandings and predictions were shaped by each other's interpretations (Newman, 1990).

In their eagerness to express their opinions, the boys took over the commentary. This confirmed what Tchudi (1985) had written about children gradually taking over the commentary in the story-reading event. How the boys reacted to the illustrations also confirmed what Tchudi had found about children's

first commentaries - that they tended to respond first to pictures, what was going on in the illustrations, the looks on the characters' faces, their motives, and their intentions. The boys did not comment on the language in the text. This, as Tchudi had pointed out, would come in later commentaries as children became more mature.

It was interesting to note that none of the participants brought books from home to share with the rest of the class. It was not clear if the literary tastes of the participants were made known to the teacher. The dramatic change in Benny's attitude towards books after he had read The Hockey Sweater demonstrated how crucial the choice of read-aloud materials was in children's response to reading. As reported in the literature review, White (1990) pointed out that her student Jevon (who grew up on a farm) failed to show an interest in books because there was a shortage of books written for rural children in her classroom. Likewise there was a shortage of sports-related books in Benny's classroom. For Jevon, "literacy began when he first heard language in a way that connected him and his experience to it; it began when language first took on personal meaning" (p. 31). The same could be said for Benny as well.

Looking at the way the boys responded to reading, one could see evidence

of the love of reading and the emotional bond with books described in Butler's study (1979). John in particular demonstrated his love of books by his eagerness to tell me about the details in the stories and by the fact that he had "found" the book which had been read to the class earlier. Paul's mother was able to identify what his "desert island" books were, those were the books he would read over and over again. Even Benny expressed his emotional attachment when he repeatedly said, "I like this book!" The enthusiasm shown by the boys when they read and talked about the hockey books was consistent with the idea expressed by Trelease (1989) in the literature reviewed earlier that "a child hears a story on at least three different levels: intellectual, emotional and social" (p. 68). They were responding to the stories on the emotional and social levels. The fact that the boys (and Katie too) knew what fiction was and that they were familiar with the literary conventions such as "once upon a time" showed that they were hearing stories on an intellectual level as well.

Paul's mother had the assumption that children needed to be "ready" in order for them to be interested in books. However, it was not clear what this "readiness" consisted of and what precipitated its development. In the literature reviewed earlier, there was no indication that children needed to be "ready" in

order to be attracted to books. Paul's mother was right, though, that a child would develop an interest in books as soon as he or she had "grasped the concept" or "made the connection". In other words, making the connection involved a child taking an active role to construct meaning before he or she could see the relevance of books.

There also seemed to be the assumption that when reading to kindergarten children, the size of the group did not matter. Both Paul's mother and Benny's mother thought that a smaller size group would be more suitable for students in higher grades because they would benefit from the group discussions. Was this because parents thought kindergartners were too young to have much ideas to contribute as far as discussions were concerned?

Writing about the different approaches to read-alouds, Barrentine (1996) had pointed out that children do not learn by passively absorbing information, and she had suggested ways whereby teachers could conduct interactive read-alouds so that students could become engaged to interact with each other and with the teacher in response to the text. However, she had not mentioned whether the size of the class would have an effect on such interactive read-alouds. It would appear from this study that small size reading groups such as the one the three boys were

in would be more suitable for interactive read-alouds.

Since the focus of this study was to examine the effects of read-alouds from the children's perspectives, some of the questions raised in Chapter II concerning the teacher will not be dealt with here. Questions such as how the teacher handled the read-alouds, whether she could be described as a "co-responder" or as a "master of the literacy craft", and how she handled nonconsensual interpretations will not be addressed in this study.

The Research Questions

Were the children connecting with books? If not, why might this have been so?

At the beginning of this study, Benny appeared to be a quiet and passive listener during storytime. There was no indication of any excitement over the stories that had been read. Not only was Benny not interested in reading with me in school, he showed resistance to having to read the alphabet books at home. Why was I unsuccessful in my initial attempts to entice Benny to read with me? Could it be that his past experiences with books had given him the impression that books were boring and meaningless? Benny's attitude towards books changed after he had read the hockey books. All of a sudden Benny realized that he could

identify with the heroes in the stories. There was a magical appeal in the stories. Books began to hold personal meaning and relevance to his everyday experience. Prior to this, Benny had not been connecting with books because he had not come into contact with stories which could cause his imagination to soar, stories which had characters with whom he could identify.

Paul was always glad to accept my offers to read with him. From talking with him, I knew what his favorite books were and how he enjoyed his reading time with mom at the end of each day. He seemed to give me the impression that some of the excitement in the stories that were read aloud in class had been diminished because he had already heard those stories before.

John was the one who demonstrated his love of books most clearly by his eagerness to have me read to him, by his familiarity with the books, and by the fact that he had been looking for the book which had been read to the whole class. From my conversations with him, it appeared that he did not have someone to read with him at home. Could that be another reason why he was so familiar with the details in the books from the reading corner - those were the books that he could get his hands on? The way he moved from the back of the room to right in front of the librarian was a powerful demonstration of his engagement and of the appeal

of stories.

Looking at the descriptive literacy profiles of the participants, what can we understand about the way children construct meaning; and how would story-reading support their learning?

What kind of a learner was Benny? Instead of showing his boredom by being disruptive, Benny sat quietly and was able to hide behind the facade of being a good student even though his mind was not on the books that were read aloud. Benny had good strategies when he had to deal with the task of reading the yearbook. He knew who the strong reader was that could give him the support he needed and he chose to sit beside Jane and watched how she tackled the task of reading. Another one of Benny's meaning-making strategies was to make use of the illustrations to help him retell the story of The Three Little Pigs. Benny was an accomplished storyteller. He showed a strong sense of drama when he re-enacted the scene where the wolf blew down the house of the little pig. His knowledge of the conventions of stories added to the effectiveness of his storytelling. When Benny talked about his journal entries, the fact that he could remember why he drew those pictures (some of them were done four months earlier) showed that he had put careful thought into his journal writing. He had expressed, through the

use of pictures, what was significant in his daily experiences. On the other hand, he could no longer identify any of the words which he had copied from the board or from the posters on the walls because he had not learned to read those words and because those words did not signify anything special to him. Benny had taught me that children would remember images that had significance to them, regardless of whether those images were pictures or words.

Why did Benny show engagement when he read the hockey books? Apart from the fact that the books had to do with one of Benny's favorite sports, the appeal of the magical played an important part in winning Benny's affection. The informal and relaxed atmosphere of this little reading group also helped Benny to freely express his reactions to the stories. When Benny wrote his own ending to The Hockey Sweater, the opinions of his two friends helped him to arrive at his own conclusion about the outcome of the story. There was this feeling of being part of a group of boys with similar interests that facilitated Benny's engagement.

Looking at John's journal, I had the impression that he was not someone who liked to draw. Most of the entries had only a single tiny drawing in a corner or in the middle of the page. On some of the pages, John wrote down the date, but left the rest of the page blank. However, there was one entry that stood out. It

had dark pencil marks all over the bottom of the page. That was John's elaborate rendition of the waves. Swimming on top of the waves were four fish. He referred to them as the "magic fish". At the top of the corner was the poisonous sun, personified with arms and legs. John was able to weave a story out of his experiences down at the cottage. The drawing came alive because he put his feelings into it. John had taught me that he could do an outstanding job in his journal writing if he could tell stories based on his everyday experiences.

Paul derived a great deal of pleasure from studying the facial expressions of the characters and laughing at the implicit humour of The Hockey Sweater. He pointed out the humour in the illustrations of The Magic Hockey Skates and asked to look at the book again even though he had a copy of it at home. He had shown me that children need time to absorb what is in the illustrations, to enjoy the pleasure of looking at the pictures. They need to touch the pages and examine the pictures closely. Illustrations not only help children to make meaning, they sustain the children's interest.

Paul was someone who could make connections between the stories he had heard because listening to one story reminded him of another one that he had come across.

Similarly, John was able to connect what he had known from one story to another one that he was reading. It was his knowledge of the references to other books that helped him to understand and appreciate The Dressed Up Book. John was also able to compare what he had already known to what was being taught because he noticed that his grandpa's farm was different from the farm that the class had been talking about.

It appeared then that Paul, John and Katie could all make use of their past experiences in reading to help them make meaning and to make connections. Story-reading supported their learning by helping them to connect what they had known to what they were learning. The boys constructed meaning with help from their peers. It was the discussion among the boys that helped shape their understanding and interpretation of the hockey books. Story-reading became a collaborative learning activity as they shared their reading experiences.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

It was not possible for me to find out the effects of read-alouds just by observing the participants in a group setting. It was only when I interacted with each of them individually that I began to see what they are able to do as a result of the read-alouds. The children in this study had shown that they would not fall in love with books simply by being read to regularly. Children needed to see that stories were meaningful and relevant before they could build an emotional bond with books. Simply delivering the text was not enough, the role of the teacher should be to support and facilitate the meaning-making strategies that children were capable of using. When the children decided to take an active role in the story-reading event, they became engaged and interacted personally and interpersonally in response to the text. When they were engaged, they became fluent on a known text and experienced what reading success was like. They adopted the behavior of a reader and made their own decisions as language users. They drew on their past experiences in reading to help them make connections from one story to another. They were able to retell stories in their own unique styles. When they were engaged, they took over the commentary. They built on

each other's ideas so that story-reading became a collaborative learning experience.

Major Themes that Emerged

1. Oral story-telling

I posed the question, "Would you like to tell me a story?" to all four of the participants and none of them seemed to be willing or able to do so. (The only exception was Benny who could retell a known story only when he had the book in front of him.) All of the participants gave me the impression that they could not make up a story or they did not know how to tell a story from scratch. They could only tell me a story when they had a book in front of them, and even then some of them had difficulty narrating a story from beginning to end without help. Their reluctance did not appear to be due to the lack of exposure to stories since Miss B. had regularly read to them. Even Paul, who had extensive and early experience of hearing stories read aloud, was unwilling or unable to tell a story of his own. His mother had thought that "he's not really a story-teller". It was not clear whether the participants' difficulty in oral story-telling was due to the lack of know-how or the lack of practice or both. It could be that the children in this study had never been given the invitation to relate a known story or create a new one orally. On

the other hand, Fox (1985) found that in her study of children who had extensive experience of being read to, the participants did not seem to show any hesitation or difficulty in their oral monologue when they responded to the request, "Would you like to tell me a story?" Did these children have plenty of previous experience in story-making? Paley (1990) wrote of the stories told by the children in her kindergarten class. Her students did not seem to have any difficulty telling or making-up their own stories either. What was it that made it easy for these children to tell their stories? Occasionally Paley herself would make up stories to tell to her class. Did it mean that the teacher had to model story-making in order for the children to be able to do the same?

When the participants were asked to explain what some of the drawings in their journals meant, their explanations were actually imaginative stories based on their everyday experiences. The drawings were demonstrations of the rich sense of story that each of the participants had. These children were trying to tell stories through their drawings. Their sense of story was also evident when the boys created their individual versions of the ending to The Hockey Sweater and when Katie made her own version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. It may well be that children need props to tell oral-stories. They need to read or respond to a

book, or use their journal drawings, or other props such as a tent (there was a tent erected in the classroom when the teacher taught a unit on camping) to help them tell their stories.

2. Knowledge of literary conventions

All the participants knew what was the term "fiction" meant. They knew that fairy tales start with "Once upon a time" and end with "They lived happily ever after". They learned also that the illustrations support the stories, and they frequently referred to the illustrations as a way to construct meaning.

3. Rereading of favorite stories

The kindergarten teacher did repeated readings of fairy tales and favorite texts. For instance, Gingerbread Man had been read twice and Brown Bear Brown Bear had been read "many times". When Katie played teacher, she wanted to read some of the books over and over again. Trelease (1989) explained why children enjoyed rereading familiar books.

rereadings of the familiar coincide with the way children learn... they are most comfortable with the familiar...the repetition improves their vocabulary, sequencing, and memory skills. Research shows that preschoolers often ask as many questions and sometimes the *same*

questions, after a dozen readings of the same book because they're learning language in increments - not all at once. Each reading often brings an inch or two of new meaning to the story (p. 48).

Meek (1982) pointed out that children experience a feeling of success through repeated readings of the same books. "Reading familiar books and stories bring fluency, which is a feeling of knowing oneself to be a reader, and not simply freedom from error" (p. 43). Children come to identify themselves as readers because of their ability to read familiar texts. All four participants had learned the text of Brown Bear Brown Bear. In fact, the teacher said that the whole class had learned to read it. The impact of this community of readers was that the children felt a sense of belonging and acceptance. There was also a sense of loyalty because all four participants wanted the whole class, not just a few selected students, to have a chance to hear and enjoy the stories. The children wanted read-alouds to be done as a whole class event because this was how it had always been - it had become a habitual routine.

4. Familiarity with the text

John was familiar with the details in most of the books in the reading corner, so much so that he kept interrupting me with his commentaries when I was

reading with him. The spontaneous discussion that occurred when the boys read the hockey books showed that when children are familiar with the topic, they take over the commentary in their response to literature. Paul knew his stories well, and his mother mentioned that “there were little lines that Paul knew by heart”. She noticed also that occasionally Paul “pretended to read”. She did not mention if Paul insisted on having an “uninterrupted performance” the same way Katie did. Familiarity with the text gives children the confidence to attempt to read. Katie had shown me how important it is for children to have uninterrupted performances in order for them to grow as language users. When children can read without interruption, they sense a feeling of being the leader, of being in control of the reading process.

5. Choice of favorite books

All four participants had definite ideas about the kind of books they liked and disliked. Katie chose her books when she played teacher. John knew which ones to pick from the reading corner. Benny's attitude towards books changed when we read the books that he liked. Paul's mother reported that he let her know which books he preferred. There were some books which she would have liked to read to him, but she knew that he would not show any interest because he was

interested in sports and action-related books.

Fox (1985) highlighted *familiarity with certain texts* and *choice* as the two major factors that accounted for the fact that children with extensive book experience had internalized the elements of the language, style, and discourse modes of the authors of children's books. She believed that these two important aspects of learning played a crucial part in teaching the children what authors do to make stories.

6. Active role and control

The participants wanted an active role in the story-reading event. To make story-time more interesting, Paul suggested putting on a play which was a creative response to literature. The boys demonstrated their desire to have more control when they took over the commentaries. All four participants wanted to have a say in the choice of books. Katie showed us that children need more control over their learning. She enjoyed playing teaching because it let her have control over her reading. Katie operated efficiently when she wrote her own book, and she demonstrated that children need to have ownership of their literacy experiences when they do their journal writing and centre activities.

7. The issue of time

There was not enough time for the children to make comments or ask questions at the end of the read-alouds, especially when these were done right before the end of the school day. On different occasions both Katie and Benny had raised their hands after the read-alouds, but they did not get a chance to speak up because of the lack of time. After-reading discussions could not be fully developed due to time constraints.

Implications

Before undertaking this study, I had the assumption that it was natural for children to be attracted to books. It was my assumption that as long as there was an adult to read with them, and as long as children could understand what the stories were all about, then they would enjoy being read to. I had assumed that it did not matter what kind of stories were being read. However, Katie and Benny had shown me that some children had to come into contact with the "right" kind of books before they would show an interest in reading.

Instructional Implications

It was only when I talked with each of the participants that I began to see what they could do as a result of the read-alouds. I came to realize that one of the

most important things a teacher can do is taking the time to talk with each student and getting to know him or her on a more personal level. Knowing the children and nurturing their needs as well as building on their strengths are more important than merely teaching them skills. I will plan the school day in such a way that will allow me to spend at least five minutes talking and getting to know one student. I will find out what the children's interests are and draw their attention to books that are related to their interests. Through meaningful conversations with the students, I will come to appreciate how stories are seen from their perspectives.

As the children in this study had indicated that they wanted a more active role in the story-reading event, I will capitalize on students' active participation. This can be in terms of the choice of reading-materials - letting them have the freedom to choose books for read-alouds. As Paul had suggested, I will give students opportunities to role play themes from their favorite stories, or pursue other follow-up activities that allow students to explore stories in personal and exciting ways.

Since the turning point for Katie came when she decided to play teacher, I will give each student an opportunity to be the teacher, a chance to read to the whole class. The fact that playing teacher appealed to Katie implies that teaching

Effects of Read-Alouds

is most effective when it is done as a game. I will integrate word games, riddles, and other non-competitive games that require team effort and cooperation into the curriculum. As Katie enjoyed being able to read familiar passages, I will help students discover the satisfaction of being a reader by having them learn to read favorite texts. Katie was able to make all the decisions regarding what books to read and how often to read them while she was playing teacher. This implies that students should be able to make choices and decisions when they take part in literacy experiences.

Some of the books Katie read when she was playing teacher were new to both of us. The fact that she could make up the story by looking at the illustrations showed that she had narrative competences. To build on this area of her strength, I could audiotape her reading, transcribe it, and then ask her to read her own story. One of the ways to help children develop their narrative competences is to let them listen to the audiotape of their own reading and storytelling.

Katie showed me that she needed more time to make sense of the text and she wanted to create her own version of the text as she read. The implication is that when children read, I have to wait and let them show me how they make use

of the illustrations and contextual clues to help them construct meaning. Instead of jumping in to help them out when they are stuck on certain words, I will give them enough time to process the information available and I will be listening for understanding and meaning-construction rather than solely for accurate word identification.

Another reason for Katie's engagement was the fact that she could have my undivided attention. Some children find interaction with a helping adult on an one-on-one basis more beneficial than working in a group situation. I will plan the school day so that I can read with at least one child. Another way to cater to the literary tastes of each child is to bring in students from higher grades to be "book buddies" who can read with my students individually.

Katie knew exactly what she wanted to do when she was asked the question, "Would you like to make a book?" because it was an open-ended literacy invitation. On the other hand, Katie had great difficulty figuring out what to do in her counting book because it was a decontextualized literacy exercise. The implication is that the design of literacy activities should be open-ended, and that children be given the freedom to make decisions and choices, and be able to have ownership of their work.

When Katie was given the opportunity to write her own version of Goldilocks, she responded with enthusiasm. She had heard the story more than once, and having a copy of the book in front of her also helped. Asking students to write their own versions of familiar stories helps to demonstrate to them the interrelatedness of reading and writing.

For students like Katie who are interested in art, I can build on their aesthetic engagement by drawing their attention to the different styles of popular illustrators. I can also introduce them to wordless picture books written by authors such as Peter Spier and encourage these students to make their own picture books.

Benny was able to connect with books when he saw himself having the same aspirations as the heroes in the stories and when he took part in the spontaneous discussions of our little reading group. I will form small-size reading groups, let the students choose their partners and reading materials. Groups can be made up of students with similar interests. A small group makes it easier for children to handle the book and study the illustrations more closely. It provides opportunities for more interaction which in turn helps to support richer individual responses to stories. Children who are shy will feel more at ease to speak up in a

small group. Furthermore, the fact that the boys took over the commentary implies that children are capable of conducting their own after-reading discussions without direct intervention on my part. These discussions not only help students to personalize story meaning, they also help me to explore the connections that the students have made.

There were occasions when students wanted to ask questions or make comments at the end of the read-alouds, but they were unable to do so because of the lack of time. This implies that adequate time should be set aside for read-alouds so as to fully develop during-reading and after-reading discussions. In order to facilitate discussions, read-alouds which had normally been done as a whole class activity can be conducted also as a centre activity.

It is through observing the literacy behaviors of the students closely that I can identify their meaning-making strategies. Keeping a journal of my observations will help me create the context whereby students can learn.

Implications for Parents

Paul's mother should be commended for her intuitive understanding of the importance of reading to her children, all the more so since she herself was not an avid reader. More often than not, it is the parents rather than the teacher who play

a key role in children's literacy development because they know their children well and are in a better position to help them make connections between books and their personal experiences. Parents can cultivate a life-long love of books in their children by reading to them and by modeling the use of oral and written language at home. For those parents who are not aware of the importance of reading real books to their children, information can be sent home in the form of monthly newsletters giving suggestions of appropriate titles of books for parents to read with their children at home. Parents can be made aware of resources available in books such as Trelease's The New Read-Aloud Handbook, Meek's Learning to Read, and White's Books Before Five. Parents can volunteer in the classroom and read with individual students. They can participate in small reading groups. To build on the sense of story that is evident in children, parent volunteers can be enlisted to help transcribe students' journal entries, or students can dictate their stories to parent volunteers.

Questions for Future Research

Several new questions can be raised as a result of this study.

1. Should read-alouds be conducted as a whole class event, should they be done in small groups, or both? Does class size have an effect on the

responses of individual children to read-alouds?

- 2. How can active participation and engagement in read-alouds be encouraged for students in small and large groups?**
- 3. What can we find out about children's meaning-making strategies as a result of hearing stories read aloud?**

There is also a need for longitudinal studies of the effects of read-alouds on a larger number of children. Further studies can also be done on each of the major themes mentioned earlier in the conclusions.

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