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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive framework for examining book use in early childhood settings, including the following dimensions: the book area; the amount of time provided for book reading; integration of books into the broader curriculum; the nature of the book reading events; and the nature of the home-school connection with respect to book use. Data from four studies conducted in New England are used to assess the quality of book use; each dimension shows significant evidence of the need for improvement in how books are used in preschool classrooms. (Contains 4 tables of data and 41 references.) (PM)

A Framework For Examining Book Reading in Early Childhood Classrooms

CIERA REPORT #1-014

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CIERA Inquiry 1: Readers and Text How are books being used in early childhood classrooms that serve low-income children?

This paper present a comprehensive framework for examining book use in early childhood settings, including the following dimensions: the book area, the amount of time provided for book reading, integration of books into the broader curriculum, the nature of the book reading events, and the nature of the home-school connection with respect to book use. Data from four studies conducted in New England are used to assess the quality of book use; each dimension shows significant evidence of the need for improvement in how books are used in preschool classrooms.

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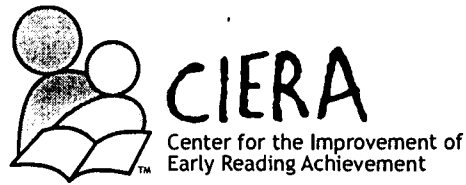


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A Framework For Examining Book Reading in Early Childhood Classrooms

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A quick tour of prior research on book reading

Book reading in the home

The impact of book reading in the home on children's language and literacy development has been a topic of active interest since at least the 1960s. While there is some disagreement about the exact amount of impact (Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994; Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995), it is clear that children benefit from living in homes where they are read to with some regularity. Early work established with some certainty that parent-child book reading plays a contributive role in the development of children who read at an early age (Clark 1975; Durkin, 1966, 1974–75). The specific contribution of book reading to language development was subsequently identified by cross-sectional correlational research (Chomsky, 1972; Lonigan, Dyer, & Anthony, 1996; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998); longitudinal research (Wells, 1985); and experimental intervention studies (Whitehurst et al., 1987).

The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (HSLLD), a longitudinal study of the development of language and literacy skills of children from low-income homes, recently provided further evidence of the long-term impact of book reading practices (DeTemple, 2001; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). Parental reports on children's book-related experiences (e.g., frequency of book reading, library use, book ownership) accounted for significant variance in regression models that controlled for demographic factors and predicted end-of-kindergarten status. Reports of book reading and literacy support accounted for 23% of the variance in children's emergent literacy and 31% of the variance in their receptive vocabulary. Growth

models from kindergarten through fourth grade indicate that the impact of these early experiences continued to be significant four years later (Roach & Snow, 2000).

The preponderance of evidence suggests that book reading influences language growth, but there is some reason to believe that phonological awareness may also be affected. First, there is growing theoretical and empirical support for the hypothesis that phonological awareness is spurred by language development (Goswami, 2001; Metsala, 1999). In addition, while several studies failed to find a link between reading and growth in phonological skills (Lonigan, Dyer, & Anthony, 1996; Raz & Bryant, 1990; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 2001), we recently found evidence that book reading had some impact on phonological awareness. Using a large sample ($n = 761$) drawn from Boston and various North Carolina and Georgia communities, we found that parental reports of book reading helped account for significant variance in phonological awareness after we controlled for home demographics (Dickinson et al., 1999). Our data, drawn from an entirely low-income sample, suggest that for some populations book reading may spur phonological awareness as well as more general language growth.

While it is valuable to know that book reading in the home can have such an impact, it also is true that many families have difficulty providing children the book experiences they need. Most parents are busy; low-income parents commonly have limited access to appropriate books, and some have limited literacy skills themselves. Given these constraints, it is important that preschools do as much as possible to provide all children with varied and engaging opportunities to hear and discuss books.

Book reading in classrooms

Research has also been conducted on book reading in classrooms, with the bulk of this work focusing on the reading event itself. Detailed study of book reading conversations has demonstrated the complexity of the discourse that teachers can construct as they discuss books with children (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Studies of naturally-occurring book reading in preschool classrooms have demonstrated that teachers spontaneously adopt different reading styles (Dickinson, 2001a; Dickinson & Keebler, 1989; Dickinson, Hao, & He, 1995; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Martinez & Teale, 1993; Teale & Martinez, 1986). These analyses reveal that teachers differ on when and to what extent they engage children in conversations as they read, in the nature of questions they ask, and in the extent to which their reading includes dramatic qualities that help hold children's attention. All of these factors have an impact on children's engagement and many may affect their learning.

A growing body of evidence is suggesting that the quality of children's book experiences may have important effects. A correlational study of teacher-child interaction during book reading with four-year-old low-income children found measurable effects on children's language learning a year later (Dickinson, 2001a; Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Research carried out using special interventions in preschool programs has shown that increased

access to books and improved interactions as books are read can have at least short-term beneficial effects on children's language development (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Duke, 2000; Karweit, 1989, 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, 2001).

While the actual book reading experience is clearly important, the benefits of books may extend beyond those times when teachers are reading them to children. Children may read and re-read books on their own, for example, and children's use of books throughout the day varies with the organization of the room and the manner in which books are made available. These differences in availability have their own impact on children's development (Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Neuman, 1999; Shimron, 1994). We also know that children can benefit from books as they re-enact the stories they have heard—dramatic play and use of a story's language both support children's developing capacities to understand books (Rowes, 1998).

A framework for examining book reading in classrooms

Given the demonstrated importance of book reading and its natural place in early childhood classrooms, it is important that we have an appropriate framework to guide us as we examine book reading. Such a framework can help researchers clearly distinguish the specific aspect of book reading that they are examining, relative to the full range of classroom practices. It can also help us develop a theoretical understanding of the organization and function of preschool classrooms. Equally important, a well-supported framework could guide practitioners as they consider the place of books in their classrooms. We propose that a full examination of the place of books and book reading in preschool classrooms should include the following elements:

1. *Book area.* Issues to consider include whether or not there is a book area, the quality of the area, and the quantity and quality of books provided. Other factors include the extent to which the area is discrete and appropriate in size (a space accommodating 4–6 children is optimal), comfortable, neat and inviting. Books can be judged in terms of their numbers, as well as the variety of genres, difficulty levels, and languages represented (i.e., are there books in the languages of the children in the room?).
2. *Time for adult-child book reading.* Time is a critical ingredient, and consideration should be given to the frequency and duration of adult-mediated reading experiences, including one-to-one, small group and large group readings, as well as the number of books read during these sessions.
3. *Curricular integration.* Integration refers to the nature of connection between the ongoing curriculum and the use of books, both during full group times and throughout the day. Important issues include whether books related to the current theme are read and made available for independent use, as well as whether varied kinds of books and other print (e.g., charts with words from songs and poems) are provided through-

out the classroom. A complete examination of curriculum integration must also look at the amount of time provided for children to read books on their own, and the availability of a listening center.

4. *Nature of the book reading event.* When considering the nature of the book reading event one should examine the teacher's reading and discussion styles and the nature of children's engagement. Other issues include the timing, amount, and kind of questions asked about the book, the teacher's approach to group management, and the children's attentiveness.
5. *Connections between the home and classroom.* The impact of a classroom's book program is not restricted to the time when the children are in the classroom; the most effective teachers and programs also strive to support reading at home through parent education, lending libraries, circulation of books made by the class, and efforts to encourage better use of community libraries.

Prior research has touched on all of these elements of book reading practice in one way or another, but comprehensive examinations of the place of books in the classroom have been rare. In our own work over the past fifteen years we have addressed all five of these elements at one time or another. After briefly describing the sources for our data, we will report descriptive results from past and ongoing studies in order to provide an overview of the nature of book reading practices in classrooms serving low-income children. We conclude by discussing issues that should be considered by those seeking to improve the use of books and book reading in classrooms.

Data sources

The data we are using come from four distinct studies. The HSLLD was a longitudinal study that examined the home and classroom language environments of low-income children and related their experiences during the preschool years to later language and literacy growth. We visited the classrooms of 3- and 4- year-old children, videotaped large group reading times, interviewed teachers, carried out observations of the curriculum, and audiotaped teacher-child conversations. These data provided a rich description of the language experiences of 85 children (Dickinson, 2001a) from the time when they were 3 or 4 years old (in 49 and 79 classrooms, respectively).

We also have correlational data collected as part of the New England Quality Research Center (NEQRC).¹ This project was designed to examine the impact of various aspects of classroom quality on children's language and literacy development. During the fourth year of this project we used a set of research tools that provide information about book reading practices. Using these tools we collected data in 30 classrooms.

1. The NEQRC included researchers from the Education Development Center, Inc., Harvard Graduate School of Education, Boston College, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

We also have data from our ongoing evaluation of the Literacy Environment Enrichment Program (LEEP), a professional development program that is designed to help preschool teachers become more skilled at supporting children's early literacy development. LEEP is provided to programs across New England by Head Start training and technical assistance personnel. Data on classroom quality and children were collected in the late fall of 1999 and 2000 prior to the course and in the spring of 2000 and 2001 after the course was over. In some cases, classrooms were visited for a day each fall and spring. We now have evaluation data from two years. Our sample includes classroom observational data from a no-treatment comparison group ($n = 40$) and teachers participating in LEEP ($n = 30$).

Describing book use in preschool classrooms

We draw on all of these data sources in the following portrait of book reading practices, as found in New England early childhood classrooms in the 1990s. It should be noted that the bulk of our data (i.e., all but about 25 classrooms) comes from Head Start classrooms. Based on Susan Neuman's work in community child care settings (Neuman & Celano, 2001), we suspect that what we found reflects considerably stronger use of books than one might expect to find in community child care classrooms. While we have no systematic data from classrooms serving higher-income children, our informal observations and data from primary-grade public school classrooms (Duke, 2000) suggest that these practices are likely to be somewhat more common in such settings than what we report here.

Research tools

We have employed several different tools for collecting data. Data that we will report from HSLLD come from our coding of audiotaped book reading sessions (see Dickinson, 2001a; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Dickinson, Hao, & He, 1995). These reading sessions were videotaped and transcribed, and the transcripts were checked by a second viewer. Transcripts were then coded for the content and function of utterances. In addition, an automated analysis of patterns of vocabulary use was done using CHILDES software (MacWhinney, 1991). Analyses of book reading styles were conducted by viewing the videotapes and coding aspects of the mode of book presentation and child engagement. When we discuss details of teacher-child interaction here, the data that we are drawing on come from the HSLLD.

In addition to the audiotaped data, we interviewed teachers, asking questions about their book reading practices (e.g., length and frequency of book reading sessions, number of books read). Any teacher-reported data of book reading frequency also come from the HSLLD data.

The NEQRC and LEEP evaluation data were collected using three tools that comprise the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) Toolkit* (Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge & Anastasopoulos, 2002).

This kit include three tools that have been designed to be used together, to supply a broad portrait of support for literacy in classrooms:

1. The classroom observation portion of the ELLCO focuses on two distinct aspects of instruction: the Language, Literacy, & Curriculum score, and the General Classroom Environment score. The tool is designed for use by both teachers and researchers, and consists of a 45-minute classroom visit during prime literacy instruction time and a brief followup interview with the teachers. Psychometric properties were assessed in 125 classrooms. The overall alpha is .90 for the entire tool. The General Classroom Environment subscale alpha is .83, while the Language, Literacy subscale alpha is .87.
2. The Literacy Environment Checklist examines classroom equipment and organization. This tool is used to score classrooms for the presence or absence of literacy-related spaces and materials. The overall alpha is .77 ($n = 84$) for the entire tool. The alpha for the Books subtotal is .69 ($n = 90$) and for Writing is .66 ($n = 87$), showing acceptable internal consistency for both composites.
3. The Literacy Activity Rating Scale measure asks observers to report information about literacy activities during each day spent observing the classroom, including the number of book reading sessions, the length of these sessions, and whether books were read with individual children or small groups. It also includes the number of books available and whether time is set aside during which children are asked to look at books alone or with a friend. Cronbach's Alpha is .92 for the Full Group Book Reading subtotal, showing excellent internal consistency for this composite. Cronbach's Alpha for the Writing subtotal is .70, showing acceptable internal consistency.

A quantitative portrait of real classrooms

Before we begin our focus on book reading, we must point out that classrooms which follow what is commonly viewed as "developmentally appropriate practice" may in fact be shortchanging language and literacy instruction (Dickinson, 2002). Traditionally, early childhood teachers have been encouraged to focus heavily on the emotional climate, management issues, and the organization of the environment; literacy instruction, the use of books, and support for literacy in the home have been of secondary importance. These differential emphases are borne out in results that we obtained using two subscales in the ELLCO. In 133 New England classrooms we found that scores for items assessing the traditionally valued features of classrooms were far stronger than the scores for items that assessed language, literacy, and curriculum strength (Smith, Dickinson, Sangeorge, & Anastasopoulos, 2002). Indeed, 41% of the classrooms were rated as having a "strong" emotional and physical environment, while only 11% were rated as being of "low quality." We see a mirror image of those results when considering a composite score that includes language, literacy and curriculum support in the classroom and teacher support of parental efforts at home: only

13% of the classrooms were rated “strong,” whereas 44% were rated as being of “low quality.” These data can be viewed as cause for hope: many teachers have learned to create classrooms that provide the type of organization and emotional support that children need. Now these teachers also need to learn how to provide children with more intentional instruction in language and literacy.

Book area

To a moderate degree, current practice supports literacy acquisition in terms of the design of the classroom (see Table 1). Data collected as part of our NEQRC study and the LEEP evaluation reveal that roughly half (56%) of the classrooms had a separate book area, which also means that half did not. Seventy-one percent of the classrooms included soft materials in their book-reading areas. Almost all classrooms offered books with a range of difficulty. A mean score of 1.73 on the Literacy Checklist item regarding the number of factual books present means that the typical classroom included two or three factual books somewhere, which is far from the ideal of including many such books. The mean score of 2.45 on the Literacy Checklist indicates that most classrooms had about 25 books available for children, which is reasonably good and reflects the fact that Head Start provides funds for the purchase of educational materials.

Table 1: Mean Scores Assigned to Preschool Classrooms for the Quality of Their Book Areas

	<i>N</i>	MEAN	<i>SD</i>	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM (MEANING)
ELLCO					
Presence of books	92	3.63	1.26	1	5
Literacy Checklist					
Separate book area	97	.56	.50	0	1
Soft materials	97	.71	.46	0	1
Range of difficulty	97	.92	.28	0	1
Factual books	97	1.73	.87	0	3 (>5)
Number of books available	95	2.45	.74	0	3 (>26)
Listening center	97	.35	.48	0	1

Ambiguous evidence on the place of books in classrooms comes from the ELLCO scale that examines the presence of books in the classroom. Classrooms received an average rating of 3.63, meaning that there was some evidence that books were systematically used to support children’s learning and development. This finding indicates that the settings and displays of books were approached in a thoughtful, organized manner, and that there may have been a separate book area. There were also sufficient numbers of books, in good condition, with some variety in genre and topic. The content and levels of available books were appropriate for the children in these classrooms.

This same rating signals that the classrooms were not ideal. The typical classroom did *not* necessarily include a distinct book area. Rather, the books were often stored in a multi-purpose meeting area, providing no distinct,

cozy space in which children could read books alone or in a small group. Another important shortcoming was that the typical classroom's books did not necessarily represent varied racial and cultural groups, or non-stereotypical themes and characters.

Time for adult-child book reading

When we consider the extent to which classrooms provide adequate time for book reading, a sobering picture emerges (see Table 2). The Literacy Activity Rating Scale asks observers who spent at least one full day in a classroom to record the following: How many sessions of book-reading did you observe during each day that you were in the classroom? How many books were read by an adult to the children each day? How much time did the class spend reading books as a group? Were there individual or small group book readings with an adult? Was time set aside for children to look at books alone or with a friend?

Table 2: Time for Adult-Child Book Reading Observed in Preschool Classrooms

	<i>N</i>	MEAN	<i>SD</i>	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Literacy Activities Rating					
Number of book-reading sessions/day	98	1.16	.42	1	3
Number of books read	96	1.26	.51	1	3
Amount reading time	96	9.56	4.17	1	25 minutes
Individual/small group book read w/adult	161	.36	.48	0	1
Kids look at books alone	166	.35	.48	0	1

1. Note that discrepancy in *N* is due to the fact that the first 3 variables are based only on those occasions when book reading occurred, whereas the last 2 are relevant to all observations.

We made a total of 166 observations in 100 classrooms (in 69 cases classrooms were visited twice). In one outstanding classroom, a teacher spent 45 minutes reading to students. In another, a teacher read 8 books. These unusual cases distorted the average picture, and so were dropped from further analysis. No book reading was observed at all in 66 cases. Of the 100 observations where book reading did occur, an average of 1.26 books was read per day in 1.16 sessions, and the average amount of time spent reading books was 9.56 minutes (*SD* = 4.17). Adults only read to children individually or in small groups in 36% of the observations. Only 35% of the observations found time scheduled for children to look at books by themselves.

Data collected by the HSSLD provide further indication of the limited amount of time allocated to book reading in many classrooms. In this study we visited the classrooms of children whom we were studying when they were 3 and 4 years old. When the children in the study were 3 we obtained information from 61 teachers about their plans for book reading, and when the children were 4 we collected data from 70 teachers (Dickinson, 2001a). During both years we found that roughly 45% of the teachers planned to spend 1.5% or less of their weekly class time on book reading. When we visited these classrooms (3-year-olds *n* = 54; 4-year-olds *n* = 74) we audiotaped interactions throughout the morning, excluding the times when children

were outside or leaving at the end of the day. These data provided us with a record of the amount of time children spent in different activities. Each year we found that 7–8% of the day was spent reading books in any setting—a figure roughly 5% lower than the amount of time spent in transitions between activities.

In conclusion, data from separate studies throughout New England collected over the span of a decade clearly indicate that book reading is not a vital daily ingredient in many classrooms. Group book reading often occurs only on selected days of the week, and is often used as a transitional activity—a means to “hold” children while another activity is being prepared—with the content of the reading being determined by the vagaries of the moment. Book reading may even be dropped from the school day if the children are too energetic or the weather is too inviting.

Integration into the curriculum

Our evidence on the extent to which books were integrated into the curriculum came from NEQRC and LEEP evaluation data. These data suggest that there is considerable room for improvement (see Table 3). Important information about the allocation of time for book use comes from the ELLCO item assessing the approach to book reading. The average score of 3.19 indicates that there was some, but not strong, evidence of an intentional approach to book reading that coordinated book choice and related classroom activities with explicit goals for children’s language and literacy development. A typical shortcoming was that teachers did not coordinate book reading experiences with ongoing curriculum themes and learning goals. Such “average rooms” also showed no evidence that a variety of books was being used throughout the day for instruction and enjoyment. The displays of books were not coordinated with ongoing classroom activities and learning goals.

Table 3: Curricular Integration

	<i>N</i>	MEAN	<i>SD</i>	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM (MEANING)
ELLCO					
Approaches to book reading	91	3.19	1.37	1	5
Literacy Checklist					
3+ books related to theme	94	.19	.40	0	1
Books in science area	97	.37	.68	0	2 (4+)
Books in dramatic play area	97	.32	.65	0	2 (4+)
Books in block area	97	.31	.64	0	2 (4+)
Books in other areas	95	.42	.77	0	2 (4+)
Evidence of full group literacy ^a	97	1.33	1.17	0	3 (>5)

^a Full group literacy referred to presence of print that could be read by groups of children (e.g., big books, charts):
1 = 1–2 examples; 2 = 3–5 examples.

Further evidence of the limited extent to which book use was linked to a theme and current curriculum comes from Literacy Checklist data, which reveal that only 19% of the classrooms had three or more books related to a current curricular theme. Another indication of limitations in the linkages between classroom activities and books was the fact that books were rarely found in varied activity areas (e.g., science, dramatic play, blocks). In roughly two-thirds of all classrooms, no books were to be found in such areas at all, despite the fact that ready access would be one easy means of encouraging children to pursue literacy in the context of developmentally appropriate practice. Another way that teachers could have linked curriculum to reading would have been to use print with large groups of children. For example, classrooms could have charts with the words from songs, group discussions, or big books. An average of only one or two examples of such text were found in each classroom. Finally, only 35% of the classrooms had listening centers.

As a whole, these data suggest that books tend to be seen as objects to be kept neatly organized in the library area and used by children who are particularly interested in reading books during choice time. Such teachers treat books as setting-specific options that children can use if they are interested.

Nature of the book reading event

The Home School Study provides the strongest information about the nature of the book reading event itself. We examined stylistic issues related to the animation and energy of teachers' reading, including dimensions such as variability in pitch, volume, and pacing, and facial expressiveness. As is shown in Table 4, the typical teacher reads in a manner that we would rate as being of moderate quality. That is, while there is evidence of some effort to employ dramatic qualities, there is also room for improvement on all dimensions of dramatic quality, particularly facial expressiveness.

Teachers might be helped to realize the importance of increasing the dramatic quality of their readings if they were made aware of the linkage between behavior management and reading style. Teacher concern for management was eminently clear, as most teachers were rated as being aware of children's attentiveness. For some teachers management issues tended to dominate the event, in what we have called an "explicit management" style. These teachers directly called for children's attention, demanded that children raise hands to contribute to the conversation, talked about the rules of participation, and then continued to make explicit references to these rules. Given that these data were collected in the spring, one would assume that the rules would already have been internalized by that time. The continued explicit attention to rules suggests that some teachers continue to focus on them to the detriment of discussion quality.

In contrast, many other teachers adopted a more implicit management style. These teachers used children's names, looked at the children, and asked questions about the story to control the group; "implicit" managers focused on the story, as opposed to organization of the activity. The implicit style is one that teachers would do well to practice more frequently, because implicit management techniques were found to be related to child attentive-

ness (Dickinson, Hao, & He, 1995). Such techniques not only accomplish crowd control, but also further the goals of literacy instruction, because the more children actually attend to a book reading, the more engaged they are, and the less they act out.

Table 4: Nature of Book Reading Event (HSLLS)

	3 YEARS OLD (<i>N</i> = 49) MEAN ^a (<i>SD</i>) OR %	4 YEARS OLD (<i>N</i> = 79) MEAN (<i>SD</i>) OR %
Dramatic Quality (Style):		
Pitch/tone variation	2.18 (.74)	2.41 (.66)
Climax marked	1.91 (.64)	1.93 (.79)
Facial Expression	1.66 (.70)	2.00 (.75)
Character Voices Used	2.13 (.71)	2.14 (.71)
Content of Talk During Book Reading^b		
Limited Cognitive Demands:		
Task Organization	35%	27%
Chiming	2%	2%
Book Focus	2%	5%
Feedback	20%	23%
Naming	18%	12%
Immediate Recall	2%	3%
Higher Cognitive Demands:		
Extended recall	1%	.6%
Text-reader connect	5%	9%
Text analysis	7%	12%
Text vocabulary	1%	3%
Text prediction	3%	2%
Teacher Management Style:		
Explicit	2.21 (.70)	2.12 (.83)
Implicit	1.76 (.71)	1.74 (.93)
Awareness of child attentiveness	2.55 (.56)	2.55 (.60)
Child Involvement:		
General Interest	2.39 (.60)	2.47 (.60)
Appr. Responses	2.15 (.71)	2.40 (.68)
Excitement	2.18 (.63)	2.26 (.69)

^a Means on a scale of 1 to 3.

^b Percentages reflect the percentage of all comments that were coded as being of a given type.

Of course the ultimate goal of effective management is to provide a setting in which the story can be experienced without interruption, and during which thoughtful discussion can occur. In our analyses we have found that thoughtful, analytical conversations during book reading play an important role in supporting children's literacy development. We also found that the frequency of such conversations among 4-year-olds was related to children's vocabulary development at the end of kindergarten, even after controlling for other aspects of classroom quality (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Dickinson,

2001a). Unfortunately, our evidence suggests that the type of conversation that fosters language growth is not common. The vast majority of teacher talk during book reading (79% of such talk directed at 3-year-olds, 72% of that directed at 4-year-olds) is devoted to issues that make few cognitive demands of the children. Teachers mostly focus on organization of the task, simple feedback, and naming activities. Relatively little of the teachers' talk, then, makes higher cognitive demands of children (17% at age 3, 26.6% at age 4). Teachers need to be made aware of the importance of engaging in discussions that link stories to children's experiences, analyze the meanings of words, probe characters' motivations, and examine the reasons why one event followed another. They also need to recognize that such conversations are most effective when they involve multiple, connected conversational turns.

Connections between the home and classroom

Teachers need to take responsibility for teaching their students; paradoxically, one of the most important ways they can accomplish this is by enlisting the help of parents. Numerous aspects of our prior research (see Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) point to parents' critical role in ensuring their children's successful acquisition of literacy. One ELLCO item measures this important aspect of book use: of 91 classrooms assessed, the mean rating on a scale from 1 (minimal evidence of home support) to 5 (strong evidence) was 2.78 ($SD = 1.39$). This rating indicates that in most of the classrooms observed there was only moderate evidence that teachers considered home support integral to classroom-based programs and goals. That is, interactions between home and school included *some* information about ways to support children's language, literacy, and learning. Families were provided with materials and assignments that supported children's practice of literacy skills and could be understood and used by families. However, there was no evidence of regular interaction between home and school about children's first and second language learning or literacy acquisition. There was also no evidence that teachers were building on families' social/cultural experiences to develop meaningful assignments that supported children's practice and parent's facilitation of their children's learning. Nor was there any evidence that teachers encouraged families to seek out and use community resources in ways that contributed to their children's language and literacy learning.

Toward a dimensional view of classroom quality

The framework presented here may help advance the broader effort to develop a theoretically-grounded understanding of how early childhood classrooms support children's literacy development. While there has been considerable research into the impact of early childhood programs on children's development (e.g., Barnett, 2001; Burchinal et al., 2000), relatively little attention has been focused on language and literacy; hence we have only a limited understanding of how to conceptualize those dimensions of class-

room quality that affect children's literacy development, or how to situate literacy support with respect to other aspects of the classroom. At present, classroom dimensions tend to be broadly conceptualized (e.g., teacher-child interaction, classroom environment), but more fine-grained categories certainly exist. For example, with respect to literacy, it may be useful to look at the dimensions proposed above, in addition to conversational dimensions (e.g., teacher use of varied vocabulary, nature of child-child interactions) and the intellectual caliber of the curriculum. Such dimensions could then be juxtaposed with other, more generally acknowledged features of effective early childhood teaching, such as the extent of program individualization and the emotional warmth of the teacher. The identification of such discrete categories would help researchers better study the impact of distinct classroom features on children, and would enable teacher educators to guide prospective and practicing teachers to improve specific aspects of their practice.

We can provide two examples. First, HSSLD results were based on the analysis of data by classroom context (e.g., book reading, meal time, large group time, free play); this situation-specificity proved to be quite important. We found that the conversations which teachers have while reading books and their use of varied vocabulary at various times of the day have beneficial effects on children's language development (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Dickinson, 2001a). But it appears that teachers do not consistently adopt effective practices throughout the day (Dickinson, 2001b). Teachers who engaged children in analytic conversations during book reading did not necessarily engage in high-level conversations at other times of the day; nor were teachers who used a broad variety of vocabulary during book reading inclined to do so at other times of the day. These findings suggest that teachers who adopt effective practices may not be consciously aware of what they are doing; rather, they may employ situation-specific strategies. Knowing this, teacher educators could strive to raise teachers' awareness of their own practices, extending their strengths into a variety of settings.

Our second example comes from the NEQRC and LEEP evaluation data, which revealed that there is no consistent relationship between our rating of the amount of time teachers spent reading books and the extent to which they integrated books into their curriculum. Here again we see an indication that literacy-related practices in many classrooms are governed more by standing patterns of classroom behavior than by a well-thought-out philosophy of literacy instruction.

The dimensional approach to language and literacy can also be employed to examine patterns of classroom change that result from program improvement efforts. Such research may shed light on the dynamics of program improvement. For example, in our intervention work we have seen that the ease with which teachers make improvements in their classrooms seems to vary by dimension: teachers quickly learn to distribute books around the classroom, but seem to have a harder time changing their allocation of time for books. Indeed, the adoption of new book reading and discussion methods may be the hardest change to implement, even though it is the one that may have the greatest impact on children.

In conclusion, we can now build on half a century of data pointing to the importance of book reading for children's literacy development. Unfortunately, despite this well-established idea, both early childhood classroom

practices related to books and researchers' efforts to study these practices leave considerable room for improvement. One way to improve research and practice is for researchers and practitioners to conceptualize the many dimensions of book use in classrooms. Ideally, such a dimensional approach to book reading can be linked with other, traditionally valued aspects of early childhood teaching, thereby creating a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of early childhood teaching.

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