

Young Children's Spontaneous Participation during Classroom Book Reading: Differences According to Various Types of Books

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Abstract

This study examined young children's spontaneous participation during classroom book reading in response to different types of books. Twenty kindergarten teachers read four books—two fiction (familiar/unfamiliar story format) and two information books (expository/narrative text). The majority of children's spontaneous participation was related to the book illustrations and the children's personal experiences. Information books elicited more comments about personal experiences, while fiction books elicited more predictions, personal responses, chiming, recall, clarifying, and evaluation comments. The minimal expository text prompted more personal experiences and analytical comments compared to the narrative text of the information book. The familiar story form provoked more predictive and analytical comments. Finally, the quality of illustrations instigated an increased proportion of children's labeling comments.

Introduction

Book reading with young children has been the focus of much research. The majority of such research has focused on the development of early literacy concepts, mainly related to the decoding aspect of print and the development of oral language skills (see reviews in Scarborough & Dorbich, 1994; Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Blok, 1999). However, little research exists on book-reading interaction in relation to the cognitive engagement of the participants. Cognitive engagement refers to the thinking skills that a participant activates in order to understand the text and successfully participate during group discussion.

In this article, we focus on young children's spontaneous behavior and how that varies in response to different types of books. Children's spontaneous comments and questions indicate their focus of attention during book reading and reveal the thinking skills that children apply during text comprehension. A detailed analysis of their spontaneous participation can shed light on features of the book that have attracted children's attention; it can also reveal how such features assist their ability to comprehend the text. Children's spontaneous questions can also throw light on the way they try to fill their knowledge gap by eliciting information from the adult who is reading.

Research on children's language, cognitive, and literacy development (Wells, 1985, 1986; Tizard & Hughes, 1986; Pappas, 1991; Pappas & Brown, 1988) has revealed the picture of a child as an active meaning maker who strives to make sense of the surrounding world. Young children's concentration span is limited when they have to attend to language alone, and usually the nonverbal context assists them in interpreting the situation at hand (Donaldson, 1978). If children do not have access to the book illustrations during the reading of the text, the degree of difficulty of the task increases, because children have to concentrate on language alone for prolonged periods of time. Thus, book illustrations facilitate text comprehension.

Research on fiction books has indicated that as children become older, there is a shift in their comments from focusing on the illustrations to inferences, predictions, interpretations, personal experiences (Yaden & McGee, 1984; Hayden & Fagan, 1987; Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990), and comments related to the print (Morrow, 1988). In addition, there is an increase in spontaneous comments as children become more familiar with the book

(Beals, DeTemple, & Dickinson, 1994).

Shine and Roser (1999) have investigated children's spontaneous responses during the reading of fiction books (fantasy and realistic), information, and poetry books. Children participated in a small-group situation (nine children) in which the adult refrained from directing the conversation. In response to the information books, children adopted an information stance, sharing their knowledge about the topic and associating texts with their own lives. With fantasy fiction books, children were more engaged; they tried to interpret the characters' emotions and understand the whole story line. Interestingly, the information and the fantasy fiction books prompted children to go beyond the text and to try to find solutions to problems or imagine the consequences of various events. In the realistic fiction books, children focused on details and discrete events with little attempt to achieve a coherent understanding of the whole story. They used the illustrations to reconstruct the story. Overall, more predictions took place when discussing the fiction books. With poetry books, children focused on the rhyming pattern of the language, which they chimed (e.g., rhyming, singing, or engaging in language play). Thus, apart from book genre (information-fiction), the particularities of the text (realistic-fantasy-poetic) also seem to have an impact on children's spontaneous behavior.

Various studies on book-reading interaction have also revealed differences in young children's cognitive engagement according to text genre and story format. Research on home book reading with preschool-age children (Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brody, 1990; Sulzby & Teale, 1987) has revealed that when parents are using narrative texts (fiction books), interaction is limited (mothers wished to present the whole story), while in expository texts, interaction is accentuated. In particular, Pellegrini et al. (1990) observed mothers using more strategies to ensure their children's participation in expository texts (both books were collections of pictures and labels with a minimal underlying text structure), and the discussion was of high cognitive demand in contrast to the lower cognitive demand discussion of fiction books. However, no differences were found between familiar texts (comics, toy advertisements) and traditional stories in the cognitive demand of discussion. Bus and Van Ijzendoorn (1988) found more reading instruction focusing on letters and sounds with an ABC book, while picture books (*Where Is Spot?*) emphasized a question-answer pattern of interaction. Mason, Peterman, and Kerr (1989) reported differences in teachers' presentation styles according to the type of book; however, these differences were not examined in a systematic way. They mention that during the reading of storybooks, teachers elaborated on the story line, and reading was usually followed by retelling of the story. With information books, the teachers mainly focused on the children's vocabulary and concept building by discussing children's experiences related to the topic. When reading picture phrase books (with three or four words on each page), the teachers focused on children's own bedtime events, and more emphasis was given to print. Thus, both parents and teachers adopt different interactive styles according to book and text genre. Undoubtedly, such experiences influence or even shape children's interpretive strategies during the reading aloud of picture books.

Although a body of evidence attests that even young children are sensitive to differences in types of texts, we still do not have a clear picture of how variations in the text of information (expository-narrative) and fiction books (familiar-unfamiliar format) influence the way children think about and respond to picture books. In particular, we are interested in the thinking skills that young children spontaneously activate during book reading. This study addressed the following research questions:

- What type of thinking skills do young children apply (cognitive engagement) during the reading aloud of picture books?
- Are there significant differences in children's spontaneous cognitive engagement between information and fiction books?
- Are there significant differences in children's spontaneous cognitive engagement between the expository and narrative text of information books?

- Are there significant differences in children's spontaneous cognitive engagement between the familiar and unfamiliar format of fiction books?

Methods

Participants

The data collection took place in Greek kindergarten schools. Twenty teachers participated from two Greek islands, and the children in all classes were of mixed ages from 3.5 up to 5.5 years. Teachers volunteered to participate, and the sample consisted mainly of experienced teachers (mean teaching experience = 12.6 years, range 3-20). Each class had from 10 to 20 children, all of whom attended the book session. Teachers read children's books inside the class, usually three times per week.

Materials

Given that the choice of book has considerable impact on the presentation style and the discussion between adults and young children, it was important to give the same books to all teachers. Research on the books that Greek children of preschool age have at home revealed that they mainly have cheap editions of traditional fairy tales (Kitsaras, 1993). The lack of children's access to other types of children's literature can be attributed to the fact that public libraries in Greece are rare, and there is no campaign publicizing the impact of book reading on young children's development.

All teachers read the same four books, including a variety of story and text genres to the students: *The Four Elements: Fire* by Rius and Parramon (1992), *Life under Earth* by Rius and Parramon (1994), *Winnie the Witch* by Paul and Thomas (1990), and *The Three Little Wolves* by Trivizas (1993).

The Four Elements: Fire is an information book with limited expository text. It describes features of fire, such as its color, and gives examples of when fire is good or bad, useful or dangerous. The pictures are rather static, showing the different uses of fire (e.g., a fireplace, a forest blaze, the candles of a birthday cake, and Indians dancing around the fire) and complement the text. *Life under Earth* is an information book with a more extended narrative type of text. A little rabbit describes different events of its life, such as how its parents made their burrow, what kind of food it eats, and so forth. The illustrations present life under earth (roots, animals, bulbs) in great detail and either complement or follow the text at each page. *Winnie the Witch* is a contemporary fiction book. The book presents an eccentric witch who lives in a black house with a black cat. The good witch prefers to change her house to make her cat happy. The text has no dialogue between the characters. The illustrations are very impressive and complement the text. The house, the objects, and the heroes are presented with great detail and artistry. This particular book is considered to have an unfamiliar format because it does not follow the conventions of the fairy tales that are familiar to most children. For example, there is no dialogue; there are no familiar expressions such as "once upon a time" and "they lived happily ever after"; and a lot of information is implicit and complemented by the book illustrations. *The Three Little Wolves* is a fiction book that follows the traditional style of "The Three Little Pigs," a popular fairy tale well known to children. All teachers had either read or told this traditional fairy tale in their class. The text in *The Three Little Wolves* has a lot of repetition, dialogue, and rhyming—all features of traditional fairy tales. The illustrations are also impressive and either follow or complement the text.

When teachers presented the books, they asked whether any child had the specific book at home or whether someone had read it to them. No child from all 20 classes knew the books, apart from one who owned a copy of the *The Three Little Wolves*.

Procedures

Each session was tape recorded, because teachers did not feel comfortable with the idea of being filmed. Books were given to the teachers the day prior to the recording, and they were first read during our visit. Teachers were instructed not to read the text to the children in advance because research has shown that familiarity with the book changes the interaction patterns of book reading, with children participating more actively (Goodsitt, Raitan, & Perlmutter, 1988; Beals, DeTemple, & Dickinson, 1994). Additionally, we asked teachers to present the book in their usual way and try to ignore the researchers' presence in the classroom. The teachers were told that the purpose of the study was to look at children's reactions when different types of books were presented to them.

Most teachers adopted an interactive style in the presentation of information books (read each page, showing the picture and discussing it). In presenting fiction books, they adopted a performance-oriented style (read first the whole story, then presented the pictures followed by discussion). The order of presentation of the four books was randomized to assure that there would be no differences between books caused by children's increasing experience of being read to. From each class, we recorded four different book readings; each session took place on a different day. In total, we have collected 80 sessions. The mean durations of the sessions for each book follow: *The Four Elements: Fire*: $M = 22$, $SD = 6.22$; *Life under Earth*: $M = 22$, $SD = 7.7$; *Winnie the Witch*: $M = 22$, $SD = 7.1$; and *The Three Little Wolves*: $M = 33.5$, $SD = 12.8$.

Measures: Developing a Coding System

Unit of Analysis. The unit of analysis for the reading of the text by the teacher was the sentence; for the discussion for both teacher and children, the unit of analysis was the utterance. Utterances are defined as phrases that are distinctive in content and include intonation and turn taking between the teacher and the children (Wells, 1975).

During the coding of children's behavior, all their spontaneous comments were counted as separate utterances. More than one reply to a teacher's question counted if the teacher accepted the child's comment. If the teacher acknowledged more than one reply, then all replies counted as separate utterances.

Coding of the Participants' Behavior. To code the data, we adopted four different categories of features used by Wells (1975); Blank, Rose, and Berlin (1978); and Dickinson and Smith (1994). We adapted these categories for the needs of this study. The first category refers to the speaker (the teacher or child). The second codes open or closed question or response or provision of information. The third category specifies spontaneity or responsiveness. Spontaneous utterances include all questions and statements that initiate discussion. Responsive utterances include all responses to questions, statements that are prompted from another statement, and repetitions of questions for a correct answer.

The fourth refers to the cognitive engagement of the participants. The categories follow:

- *Predictions*-of coming events, changes in structure (e.g., Child: If a baby fall in the fire it will be burnt); formulating alternative solutions, hypotheses.
- *Analysis*-demonstrating their knowledge of the world; explaining incidents not stated in the text; making comparisons without the assistance of pictures; assuming the role of another person (e.g., Teacher: How did he feel?); identifying the causes of an event (e.g., Teacher: How can a fire be set?); explaining an inference drawn from an observation (e.g., Teacher: How did you understand that it is a carrot?).
- *Reasoning*-interpreting characters' actions or feelings (e.g., Child: Because he is bad); justifying personal preferences (e.g., Teacher: Why do you like it?); explaining the logic of

compound words (e.g., Teacher: Why is it called a mole? in Greek, blind mouse¹).

- *Clarification of Comments*-making clearer what was stated, asking questions in order to clarify pictures.
- *Vocabulary Analysis*-when the explanation of the word is extended and further information is being given, then it is coded as analysis.
- *Text Reader Links*-personal experiences.
- *Evaluating*-personal preferences; simile (e.g., Child: Like jelly); making inferences from pictures; moralizing; rephrasing.
- *Book-Focused Comments*-presenting a book; discussing writer, illustrator, front-back page, position of pictures, print.
- *Chiming*-rhyming, singing, language play (e.g., Child: She made him greenish).
- *Labeling*-naming objects, describing pictures, identifying features, abstractions of physical properties such as color and size.
- *Recall*-of story text, summarizing immediately after reading the text.
- *Personal Responses to the Text* (e.g., Child: That is funny!).
- *Dramatization* (e.g., utterances in which children are reenacting with sounds).

Because we were interested in an exhaustive description of the discussion, all comments relating to the management of interaction were also included as a separate group of utterances, which was not taken into account in this particular study.

After the coding of the transcripts, all the measures of oral language were calculated in relation to the total number of utterances for each session. In order to achieve reliability in the coding of the data, two persons were employed. Eight transcribed stories were coded in order to calculate the interobserver reliability. The Cohen Kappa for the participants ranged from 0.99 to 1; for information, 0.97 to 0.99; for spontaneous or responsive behavior, 0.92 to 0.99; and for cognitive engagement 0.90 to 0.97, reflecting "very substantial" agreement (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986).

Results

Children's Spontaneous Behavior during the Story Sessions

Table 1 indicates that, overall, children take the initiative to participate when they make comments or ask questions related to the illustrations of the story (labeling-30.8%; evaluating-10.7%) and when they share personal experiences during group discussion (text reader-21.2%). They also make spontaneous predictions (8.6%); analyze (7.1%); respond to funny, interesting, or exciting episodes (personal responses-5.7%); engage in reasoning (4.5%); recall (4.1); and seek clarifications (3.7%). Very few spontaneous comments were related to chiming (1.7%), to the title or author of the book (book focus 1.3%), or to text vocabulary (0.5%).

Table 1
Children's Spontaneous Participation during Book Reading

Variables	Utterances	
	<i>n</i>	%
Book Focus	19	1.3
Chiming	25	1.7

Labeling	463	30.8
Recall	62	4.1
Clarify	56	3.7
Prediction	129	8.6
Vocabulary	8	0.5
Text Reader	319	21.2
Evaluate	161	10.7
Personal Response	86	5.7
Analysis	106	7.1
Reasoning	67	4.5
Dramatization	1	0.1
Total	1502	100

When variations in children's spontaneous participation were explored according to different type of books, interesting differences were found (Fig. 1). With *The Four Elements: Fire*, the proportion of children's spontaneous participation was much higher for children's personal experiences (text reader-45.9%), labeling (22.2%), and analysis (13.1%). For the other three books, the highest proportion concerns comments related to the book illustrations (labeling: *Life*-36.3%, *Witch*-36.7%, *Wolf*-27%). With *Life under Earth*, the second most frequent category was related again to children's personal experiences (27.4%), and the third in rank was related to evaluations (11.2%). (It includes what children liked most about the story and inferences prompted by the illustrations.) With *Winnie the Witch*, evaluations (14.8%) and personal experiences (text reader-11.1%) ranked second and third in frequency, while with *The Three Little Wolves*, the second most frequent category was predictions (16.7%), followed by evaluative comments (10.8%).

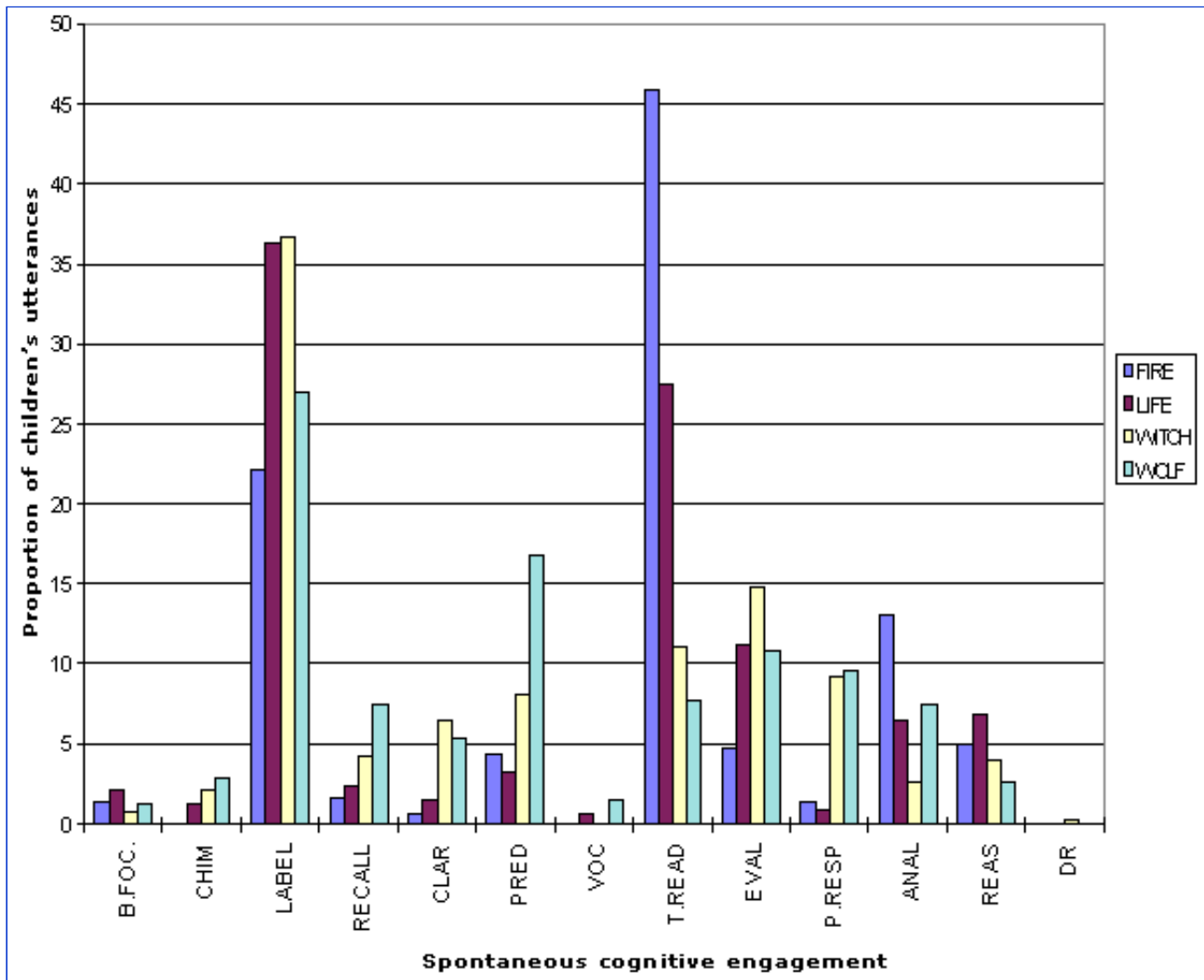


Figure 1. Children's spontaneous engagement across the four books.

When information books (*The Four Elements: Fire, Life under Earth*) and fiction books (*Winnie the Witch, The Three Little Wolves*) were compared, significant differences were found in children's spontaneous chiming, recall, clarifying, prediction, text reader, evaluations, and personal response comments. Table 2 points out that in response to fiction books there is considerably more spontaneous chiming, recall, clarifying, evaluations, prediction, and personal response comments. In contrast, information books elicit considerably more comments related to personal experiences (text reader).

Table 2

Results from Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Tests, Comparing Children's Spontaneous Comments between Information and Fiction Books

Variables	Groups*			Wilcoxon Test
	<i>I</i> > <i>F</i>	<i>F</i> > <i>I</i>	<i>I</i> = <i>F</i>	Two-Tailed
Book Focus	7	5	8	$z = -.50$
Chiming	2	11	7	$z = -2.62$ ***
Labeling	9	11		$z = -1.49$
Recall	2	16	2	$z = -3.04$ ***
Clarify	2	13	5	$z = -2.92$ ***
Prediction	2	18		$z = -3.78$ ****
Vocabulary	1	3	16	$z = -.36$

Text Reader	17	2	1	$z = -3.66$ ****
Evaluate	4	16		$z = -2.22$ **
Personal Responses	2	16	2	$z = -3.48$ ****
Analysis	12	8		$z = -1.90$
Reasoning	8	9	3	$z = -.49$

* $I > F$: groups with more comments in information than fiction books; $F > I$: groups with more comments in fiction than information books; $F = I$: groups with equal comments in fiction and information books.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

**** $p < .0001$.

When the expository (*The Four Elements: Fire*) and the narrative (*Life under Earth*) texts were compared, significant differences were found in children's spontaneous comments related to labeling, personal experiences (text reader), evaluation, and analysis (Table 3). In particular, more personal experiences (text reader) and analytical comments were found with regard to *The Four Elements: Fire*, while more labeling and evaluating comments were made with regard to *Life under Earth*.

Table 3

Results from Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Tests, Comparing Children's Spontaneous Comments between Expository and Narrative Texts

Variables	Groups*			Wilcoxon Test
	$E > N$	$N > E$	$E = N$	Two-Tailed
Book-Focused Comments	2	5	13	$z = -1.09$
Chiming	0	4	16	$z = -1.82$
Labeling	7	13		$z = -2.20$ ***
Recall	5	6	9	$z = -.44$
Clarifying	1	4	15	$z = -.94$
Prediction	7	8	5	$z = -.22$
Vocabulary	0	1	19	$z = -1.00$
Text Reader	15	5		$z = -2.16$ **
Evaluating	3	13	4	$z = -2.37$ ***
Personal Responses	2	3	15	$z = -.13$
Analysis	15	4	1	$z = -2.37$ ***
Reasoning	4	9	7	$z = -1.67$

* $E > N$: groups with more comments in expository than narrative texts; $N > E$: groups with more comments in narrative than expository texts; $E = N$: groups with equal comments in expository and narrative texts.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

When the familiar story format (*The Three Little Wolves*) was compared to an unfamiliar one (*Winnie the Witch*), significant differences were found only for the labeling, predictive, and analytical spontaneous comments (Table 4). In particular, *Winnie the Witch* elicited considerably more labeling, while *The Three Little Wolves* elicited more predictive and analytic comments.

Table 4

Results from Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed Ranks Tests, Comparing Children's Spontaneous Comments between Familiar and Unfamiliar Story Format

Variables	Groups*			Wilcoxon Test
	$U > F$	$F > U$	$U = F$	Two-Tailed
Book-Focused Comments	3	4	13	$z = -.16$
Chiming	6	5	9	$z = -.48$
Labeling	14	6		$z = -2.22^{**}$
Recall	9	8	3	$z = -.66$
Clarifying	8	6	6	$z = -.03$
Prediction	5	13	2	$z = -2.19^{**}$
Vocabulary		3	17	$z = -1.60$
Text Reader	13	5	2	$z = -1.72$
Evaluating	12	6	2	$z = -1.52$
Personal Responses	9	6	5	$z = -.00$
Analysis	3	12	5	$z = -2.27^{**}$
Reasoning	9	3	8	$z = -1.21$

* $U > F$: groups with more comments in unfamiliar than familiar texts; $F > U$: groups with more comments in familiar than unfamiliar texts; $F = U$: groups with equal comments in familiar and unfamiliar texts.

** $p < .01$.

Discussion

A significant finding of this study concerned children's spontaneous comments. The majority of these comments were related to the book illustrations (labeling) and to their personal experiences (text reader comments). The fact that labeling occupied the highest proportion of children's initiated comments is consistent with Donaldson's argument (1978) that young children tend to rely on the nonverbal context when trying to make sense of a situation. The frequent mention of personal experiences during the discussion of the stories indicates that children are actively involved in relating what they hear and see to what they already know. Such comments assist children to assimilate new knowledge to their preexisting conceptual structures.

We found significant differences between information and fiction books with regard to children's spontaneous chiming, recall, clarifying, predicting, personal experiences (text reader), evaluation, and personal response comments. In particular, it was found that information books elicited more text reader spontaneous comments, while all the other types of comments were more prominent with fiction books. This finding indicates that the affective dimension of fiction books may have considerable impact on the type of cognitive engagement children seem to opt for. For example, children's chiming, predictions, and personal responses suggest that they are actively engaged during the reading of fiction books, whereas recall marks their need to re-experience the pleasure they felt when listening to the story by retelling it. Clarifying comments mark children's need to understand the story events, while evaluating comments point out their urge to share what they liked most from the story with their peers. Such evaluating comments reflect the type of discussion that teachers tend to encourage after reading books to children. The following examples provide an idea of what exactly children say during the reading and discussion of fiction books:

Child: Nothing can break this one! Steel is iron (child's comment during the reading of the *The Three Little Wolves*).

Child: Were they [the little wolves] crying? (child's question when the bad pig destroyed the house of the three little wolves).

Child: But why don't they go to their mummy? (child's question when the bad pig

destroyed the cement house).

Child: He is like a rainbow! (child's comment when the teacher shows the colorful cat in *Winnie the Witch*).

Child: Mrs., she has a white skull! (child's comment when the teacher shows an illustration from *Winnie the Witch*).

Child: Serve her right! (child's comment when the witch tumbles down the stairs).

Since the main purpose of information books is to inform, children's use of their personal experiences functions as a cognitive strategy, helping them to understand the ideas projected by the text. Thus, children seem to complement the information given by both the expository and narrative text by spontaneously instantiating background knowledge related to their personal experiences. The following excerpt illustrates such a discussion during the reading of *The Four Elements: Fire*.

Teacher: This fire is destructive; it can destroy a house.

Child: Mrs.?

Teacher: Yes, dear?

Child: The summer we went to my grandmother and we saw a fire.

Teacher: Where did you see it?

Child: Because up on the top, there are houses, and they were burnt, and the people were out in the cold.

Teacher: What was burnt?

Child: Houses?

Teacher: Houses. Anything else?

Child: Trees.

Teacher: Trees.

Child: It is not good to burn them, because they give us fruits.

Teacher: Yes, the big forest of Plomari.

Child: Yes, in there, and we went and we saw a lot of fire, and we went to see our house.

The following examples also illustrate various personal experiences that children spontaneously shared during the discussion of *Life under Earth*:

Child: In our village, we have a big well, and it's full with water.

Child: My grandfather grows onions and potatoes.

Child: My younger sister has eaten a red mushroom, and afterwards her tongue was hot.

Similar to our findings, Shine and Roser (1999) found that with information books, children linked text with their own lives while producing more predictions in fiction books compared to the information and poetry books. Yet the analysis of children's spontaneous comments in this study did not reveal significantly more reasoning or analysis in the fiction books compared to the other two books. However, in our study, teachers had a more active role and revolved discussions around recall, analysis, and reasoning in contrast to the Shine and Roser study, where teachers intentionally avoided directing the discussion.

The next finding concerned differences in children's spontaneous comments between expository and narrative texts in information books and between familiar and unfamiliar fiction books. With regard to the expository text in *The Four Elements: Fire*, there were more personal experiences (text reader) and analytical comments compared to the children's response to the narrative text in *Life under the Earth*. *The Four Elements: Fire* created the opportunity for children to engage in such discussion mainly because the text was so limited that they had to complement it with their personal experiences and background knowledge in order to make sense of it. Therefore, the use of an expository text as well as the particularities of the specific text elicited such a discussion. In a more detailed expository text with a lot of information provided by the text, the proportion of such comments might decrease significantly. Thus, children seem to complement the information given by the expository text by spontaneously instantiating background knowledge and personal experiences. It seems that in group book reading, children are also acting as active meaning makers. This result is consistent with research findings on children's language, cognitive, and literacy development (Wells, 1985, 1986; Tizard & Hughes, 1986; Pappas, 1991; Pappas & Brown, 1988).

Compared to *The Four Elements: Fire*, *Life under Earth* incited considerably more labeling and evaluating (inferences by pictures)-not because of the text genre but because of the book's illustrations. The beautiful depictions of *Life under Earth* became the resource material that complemented the text, and children's attention was immediately attracted. Similar results were found with *Winnie the Witch*, which elicited the highest proportion of spontaneous labeling. The impressive and elaborate illustrations of this book piqued children's curiosity. On the other hand, the familiar story format of *The Three Little Wolves* prompted considerably more predictive and analytic comments, indicating that familiarity enables one to engage more easily in prediction but also in analysis. These results are consistent with findings from other studies (Hayden & Fagan, 1987; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). This finding is important given that research on text comprehension has shown that good readers constantly imagine what they will read next, and within that frame, they try to comprehend the text (Heath, 1986; Oakhill & Garnham, 1988). It also suggests that familiarity with text genre is an important variable for successful comprehension.

Overall, the evidence suggests that even young children respond to books in fundamentally different ways according to book genre, the type of text, and story format. Recognizing that the adult reader may direct the discussion, we took into consideration only comments initiated by children. Thus, both responses to questions and comments prompted by the readers' statements and remarks were excluded. Children adopted an aesthetic stance toward fiction books. Their emotional engagement was evident through their personal responses, reliving the story through recall, and savoring the pleasures of language through chiming. With information books, they adopted an efferent stance focusing on topic knowledge (Rosenblatt, 1989).

Because of its minimal length, the expository text elicited more personal experiences and analytical comments, while the narrative text in information books elicited more labeling and evaluative comments. On the other hand, the familiar fiction book prompted more predictive and analytical comments, in contrast to the unfamiliar one, which encouraged more labeling. Given that the outcomes were replicated across most groups, the evidence strongly suggests that there is a text genre and story format effect on children's spontaneous cognitive engagement. Although we recognize that children's responses are influenced by their home and school literacy practices, the outcomes of this study also attest to an effect of particular text features.

However, labeling and evaluative comments (inferences based on book illustrations) were not due to the particular text genre and story format, but rather to the fascinating illustrations that accompanied the text. Thus, other parameters should be taken into account when explaining what motivates children to participate within a group situation. Factors such as the quality of illustrations and the text (implicit or explicit, minimal or extended, etc.) have to be taken into consideration in future studies. It is also possible that, apart from the particular type of text, other factors such as content, vocabulary, and imagination are responsible for the differences we

found. We need more examples from each type of text if we are to find conclusive evidence. Future research can control such factors and test our hypothesis further.

Finally, there is a bias in favor of the story form, which seems to influence teachers' choice of books (Duke, 2000). During data collection, it was observed that children were equally interested and very enthusiastic about information books with both narrative and expository texts. Therefore, teachers should become aware of the need to select a wide range of books embracing a variety of story, text genre, and topics if book reading is to offer the utmost for young children's cognitive development.

Note

1. In Greek, the mole is called "tyflopodikas." It is a compound word where "tyflos" means blind and "podiki" means mouse. Teachers explained that moles are almost blind because they live under the earth where there is no light. Based on such information, they justified the name of the particular animal.

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