

How Picture Books Support Pre-Literate Children's Responses During Post-Reading Discussions

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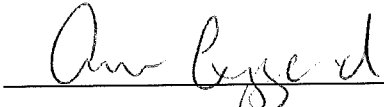
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Abstract

In order to foster a love for reading, children must be able to comprehend the stories they are reading. Picture books are important in the lives of pre-literate children's beginning reading. The illustrations in picture books allow readers to interact with the texts and have a meaningful experience with literature. Understanding the relationship between picture book illustrations and reading comprehension, educators may enhance their students' reading comprehension to an ever greater extent. The goal of this study is to investigate how picture books support the extent of pre-literate children's responses during post-reading discussions.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Importance of Study

Children's books are often illustrated. Illustrations can be found in all types of children's literature genres. However, of all children's literature genres, books from the picture book genre are best known for their vivid, colorful, and lavish cover to cover illustrations. Picture books are books that combine visual and verbal narratives in a book format for children to enjoy. This genre is crucial to the literacy development of beginning readers.

Pictures books played an important role in my early reading years. Till this day I still enjoy and am always fascinated by the illustrations found in picture books. As an elementary teacher and a future literacy coach to children, I have realized the importance of picture book illustrations to children's reading experiences. I have also come to know the importance of an illustrator's job in these children's lives; which is to make the words in picture books come alive for them. Images found in picture books are often high quality art for children to appreciate during their reading. These images use a range of media such as oil paints, acrylics, watercolor and pencil. I believe illustrations found in picture books are as much a part of a reader's reading experience as the written text.

There are several subgenres among picture books, such as: concept books, nursery rhymes, toy books, alphabet books, early readers, board books, and pop-up books. Illustrations

found in each of one of these subgenres all serve the same purpose; and that is to make a connection between written words and illustrations found in the texts. Today, there are countless picture books available to children. Being an educator, it is my hope to make every child's picture book reading experiences as meaningful and memorable as mine.

I believe children in all different literacy development stages can benefit from the illustrations found in picture books. However, I strongly believe that pre-literate children benefit the most from these illustrations. These are children that depend on literate adults to guide them in their early readings. Without visual images it would be hard for these children to grasp the meaning of each text read to them. Therefore, it is easy to understand that picture books are aimed at young children during their beginning reading years. It is said that picture books are meant first for adults to read to their children. Once these children obtain certain reading skills, they can enjoy these books by themselves.

Statement of the Problem

With the realization of the importance of picture book illustrations for pre-literate children, I have come to wonder exactly how important they are. I am sure they are important in many ways but I would like to know specifically how much of a difference illustrations make in the reading comprehension of these children. To understand the impact of illustrations, I would need to examine how well they have comprehended after reading. It is important to remember that these children are illiterate; therefore, they cannot read the words in story books. They rely heavily on the illustrations in these books in order to make sense of what is in the text. It follows, then, that for me to understand their comprehension, I would need to listen to their post-

reading discussions on the books they read. From the discussions I will be looking for a few key measures of comprehension to determine if books with illustrations or books without illustrations produce fuller discussions. In particular, I will be looking for: vocabulary, number of words, level of interest/enthusiasm, references to illustrations, understanding of the story, main idea, text-to-text/text-to-self/text-to-world connections, volunteered talk/self-initiated talk/uninvited talk. For the purpose of this research, books with illustrations and books without illustrations would have to be presented to the students in order to measure the difference between post-reading discussions based on illustrated books and discussions emerging from non-illustrated books. This research would allow me and other educators to understand how illustrations may or may not support post-reading discussions. By examining the responses from pre-literate children's post reading discussions, educators can determine if illustrations do benefit their reading comprehension or not.

This leads me to my research question: How do picture books support the extent of pre-literate children's responses during post-reading discussions?

Definition

Literacy: Any form of communication that includes but is not limited to proficiency in reading, speaking, and writing.

Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World Connections: Behaviors prompted by instructors and texts that allow students to make a variety of meaningful connections with the books that they read.

Volunteered Talk, Self-Initiated Talk, Uninvited Talk: All forms of participation in discussion in which what students say occurs without prompting from the instructor.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Reading Development in Preliterate Readers

Young children were first exposed to books at the very beginning of their lives. They were exposed to books that were in their homes or books handed to them by adults. These early exposures to books are all very important to these preliterate children. These children's early experiences with books play a critical role in their approaches to books. There is a developmental progress to how preliterate children approach books.

According to Dooley (2010), between the ages of two through five there are four phases characterizing children's approaches to books in chronological order: book as prop, book as invitation, book as script, and then book as text. It is important for early childhood educators to understand that these phases are not isolated individually. They overlap and are often an indication of familiarity with books as they are an indication of the developmental progress of preliterate children. Preliterate children's familiarity with books grows from multiple interactions with being read to routinely handling books, and having access to books. Dooley (2010) states, "During *Book as Prop* stage, books are treated similarly to other play things such as plastic figures, dolls, and vehicles" (p. 124). To young children, books act as toy objects. They do not treat books as books instead to them a book could be a train. Dooley (2010) also states, "During *Book as Invitation* stage, preliterate children pay attention to images of books" (p. 125). During this stage, preliterate children start to pay attention to the images in books. However, they have limited recognition of print. Dooley (2010) continue to state, "During *Book*

as Script stage, preliterate children echo and mimic read-aloud gestures, intonations, and inflections” (p. 125). When young children see adults or their teachers read to them, they also want to act and read like them. They pretend to be teachers and read like the way adults or teachers read to them. These children would use images in books as prompts for guessing the texts while pretend reading. Lastly, Dooley (2010) states “During *Book as Text* stage, preliterate children start to have a concept of print” (p. 125). Preliterate children during this stage have evidences of word-by-word pointing.

Reading is needed in every person’s life. In order to gain this fundamental skill it starts in the lives of preliterate children. In the early years of learning, children learn to read so that they may read to learn in later years. Children go through reading development to become independent readers. In order to be fluent readers it is important for educators to foster children’s reading growth.

According to Juel (1991), children have to go through three reading stages as they learn to read: emergent, beginning, and fluent. The emergent stage is the first stage preliterate children find themselves in as they start their reading development journey. This stage is the most important stage in every preliterate child’s life. It is the emergent reading stage that will set each child off into becoming beginning reader and then fluent reader. According to Tompkins (2010), in the emergent stage, preliterate children understand that print is for communicative purpose and they transfer from pretend reading to reading predictable books. When a preliterate child masters the emergent stage, it will allow him or her to move on to future reading development stages. In the emergent reading stage, these children become interested in reading because they have an understanding of the purpose of print. When preliterate children have the knowledge of the purpose of print, they move from pretend reading to share to read books that are predictable.

They want to be a part of the communicative purpose. These children notice the environmental print in the world they live in. The environmental print stirs their curiosities to explore the world of reading. Their curiosities help motivate them to move along their reading development stages. Tompkins (2010) states, "Pre-literate children develop concepts about print as teachers read to them" (p. 117). Pre-literate children benefit a lot from teachers modeling reading for their students. There are so many things pre-literate children can learn just from observing and listening to their teachers read. One of these things is that they are learning what good readers do during reading.

Literacy is a complex skill. It includes all the skills that a human being would need to function in everyday life. At a school setting, it is one of the most important foundations to be a successful student. For early childhood teachers, they teach their pre-literate students to focus on learning pre-literacy skills. It is important for these teachers to provide rich literacy learning experiences to help these pre-literate students learn essential pre-literacy skills.

According to Lawson and Williams (2011), Literacy rich experiences such as music, movement, dance, speaking, listening, storytelling and song provide children with opportunity to express literacy ideas and practice their emerging skills in an interesting and meaningful way. Educators understand that young children learn best when they are actively engaged. They also know that the acquisition of literacy skills is a lifelong journey that begins from birth. Consequently, knowing that pre-literate children will each have such a long literacy learning journey ahead of them, educators should provide fun and rich literacy learning experiences for their students. This way it prevents turning off students from learning all the important pre-literacy skills. There are numerous ways to promote pre-literacy skills in the classroom. Looking for materials to provide good learning should not be the fear of teachers. Materials that

encourage young children's literacy skill development can be found in everyday life. Teachers should be able to look around their classrooms and find things they could use. Lawson and Williams (2011) states, "Educators can promote rich literacy learning by providing experiences stemming from a high quality picture book" (p. 43). Therefore, it is easy to see that it could start off simply with just a picture book. For early childhood educators, they could make good use of all the appropriate and high quality picture books in their classrooms. Just by using picture books, teachers can provide rich literacy learning experiences for their preliterate children.

It is the job of teachers to guide preliterate children with their reading development. One of the early tools teachers could use to educate their preliterate children about reading is to read to them. These children need opportunities to hear stories. Listening to stories allows these children to explore the world of reading. Preliterate children are unable to read for themselves therefore readings from adults and teachers are crucial.

According to Teale (1984), reading aloud to children appears to be the single most important factor for building critical concepts about reading. Prior to being read to, preliterate children have zero concepts about reading. The first way to introduce concepts about reading to children that cannot read and have no knowledge about reading at all is to read to them. Everything one does while reading to preliterate children are all important reading concepts these children can learn from about reading. Preliterate children need to be exposed to book experiences in interactive literacy settings in their classrooms. Preliterate children develop attitudes, concepts, and skills for reading from readings they hear and see. All these are the foundation of reading which are good for not yet readers. According to Dorn, French, and Jones (1998), reading to children introduces them the language of books; they acquire knowledge about book concepts, story structures, literary language, and specialized vocabulary and begin to

anticipate that particular structures will occur within written language. From listening to teachers reading stories, preliterate children learn the language of books which is different from speech and conversation. They are listening to complex language patterns. At the same time, preliterate children are acquiring knowledge of text-structure vocabulary and concepts from books above instructional reading level. With all the knowledge preliterate children will acquire from being read to they discover recurring relationships between various texts. This kind of knowledge gives children a personal foundation for making meaningful predictions as they read stories on their own in the future.

Preliterate children are incapable of reading on their own. However, preliterate children still enjoy reading. The thing preliterate children enjoy about reading is being read to. When reading to preliterate children, teachers are modeling good reading. These children learn from their teachers what good readers do. When teachers read stories to preliterate children, their students are listening attentively to every single word that is coming out of their mouths. These children will absorb the information they are hearing by carrying them into their brains.

According to Strickland and Snow (2002), when students are aware of their intellectual processes, they are metacognitive. Every time students listen to the stories read to them, they are busy processing their understanding of those stories. Comprehension is not a dull process. Comprehending equals understanding and understanding is a very active and busy process. Preliterate children are not simply listening and remembering what they have heard or receiving the information from the stories. There are a lot students must do in order to remember anything and receive anything. Strickland and Snow (2002) states, "Metacognition means that students are thinking about their thinking" (p. 67). When students comprehend new information or ideas, metacognition stretches them and makes room for improvement. Therefore, metacognition is a

very important and useful skill for preliterate children. It involves many elements. Elements such as drawing background knowledge and ideas to begin making sense of all the new ideas introduce from readings. Students must reshape their old ideas together with their new ones. Everyone interprets things differently; therefore every person will come up with his or her own interpretation of what he or she had learned. Students have certain purpose that makes some parts of what they hear more important than others. Comprehension is about creating and recreating until students get an understanding that works.

The Use of Pictures to Comprehend Texts in Preliterate Readers

Picture books provide powerful reading experiences for children. They are well illustrated books that children respond well to. There are a lot of potentials for educators to use picture books in their classrooms. The potentials that educators can provide to their students will in return become benefits for their students. Children, such as those that cannot read or write yet, also benefit from picture books.

According to Bearne and Wolstencroft (2007), children today live in an image dominated world and they are expected to read images as well as print. Everywhere children turn they see images of the world they live in. Every day they need to interpret these images they see. Illustrations in picture books act the same way. When preliterate children see the illustrations in picture books, they interpret what the stories are about based on what they see and the words they hear from people that read to them. Their interpretations become their comprehension of the stories. According to Ghosh and Laird (2011), authors and illustrators leave deliberate gaps between the images and the words, encouraging the reader to make connections between the stories. This is done so that both preliterate children and literate children may have opportunities

to interpret these stories on their own. Children get to infer their own meanings when there are gaps to fill between texts and illustrations. Reading becomes more fun and satisfying when children have to actively involved and participate. According to Hunt and Sainsbury (2009), illustrations in books enhance the enjoyment of reading and it is only through the enjoyment of reading that we will create true readers. Illustrations in picture books help children enjoy reading. It is only when children are enjoying reading that they have become true readers. True readers are readers that love and enjoy books.

Preliterate children cannot read or write. Daily they depend on reading other people's faces and actions to understand the world around them. Just like reading the world around them, these children read the illustrations in picture books. Reading pictures is an essential skill for children that cannot read the texts in story books. Preliterate children develop visual literacy in order to help themselves with greater comprehension of stories.

According to O'Neil (2011), there are four basic modes of picture/text interaction-reinforcing, description, reciprocal, and establishing. These four interactions allow preliterate children to build a greater understanding of the stories they hear. O'Neil states, "Reinforcing is a common mode of picture/text interaction that occurs in picture books in which the pictures support the text and at most provide greater detail or description for the reader" (p. 215). This kind of interaction happens when students hear the words in stories and by looking at the illustrations in picture books they can comprehend what is going on. O'Neil also states, "Picture books that use the expressive elements of art such as color, line, shape, and composition can enhance the reader's understanding of the story told in words by providing supplementary description of setting, character, and tone" (p. 216). Sometimes the expressive elements of art in picture book illustrations such as color, line, shape and composition can create an interaction

between the words in a story book and pictures to help preliterate children comprehend. Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) states, "Moving along the range of picture/text interaction, illustrations increasingly tend to take on more weight in the telling of the story through enhancement or counterpoint" (p. 14). In some stories, the details from the illustrations give off more information on what is going on in the stories than the texts do. Therefore, allowing children that can't read yet a good comprehension of these stories just by looking at the illustrations carefully for details. O'Neil states, "Sometimes pictures carry a parallel story that expands or contradicts the one told in words alone" (p. 216). In some picture books, the illustrations in them can tell more of stories than words in them could. According to O'Neil (2011), when this happens it is called the pictures have established the story.

When preliterate children seek to become beginning readers they long for comprehension from books. Having books in front of them, they struggle with comprehending the words in the books and the stories they hear. The illustrations found in picture books can help young readers comprehend what they are reading. They allow these children to read with understanding. Picture book illustrations play an important role in helping preliterate children comprehend texts.

According to Christen (2002), picture books such as those by Eric Carle have illustrated playful elements in them that help preliterate children comprehend the stories they read. These illustrated playful elements can be found between covers. An example of a picture book by Eric Carle's that has illustrated playful elements in them is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Christen states, "this book can be given to two-year-old children" (p. 46). What he means is that, because of the illustrated playful elements in the book even children that cannot read, can comprehend the story. In *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* preliterate children can poke through the illustrated holes in the book and begin to understand the idea of the book. Also in the book, it has the

unusual illustrated shortened pages that diminish in size as the caterpillar eats through different foods. Other illustrated playful elements that can be found in picture books include flaps, die-cuts, and things to fold out or touch. These playful illustrated elements such as the shortened pages that diminish in size help preliterate children comprehend stories. These children are not passive listeners or viewers; they need to use their own hands to let him or her comprehend stories. Therefore, illustrated play elements help sparkle preliterate children's curiosity but most importantly at the same time aid them in their reading comprehension.

An illustrator's job plays an important role in preliterate children's comprehension of picture book stories. It is his or her illustrations that will convey the meaning of the words in the stories. Each illustrator has his or her unique technique of illustrating for their young readers. Every technique has its own way of telling the story that an illustrator wants to share. Therefore, based on the technique an illustrator chooses to illustrate it can influence preliterate children's comprehension deeply.

According to Evans (2008), illustrator such as Hilary Knight uses his illustrating techniques to create pictures that can communicate to his readers. One of Hilary Knight most well-known books is *ELOISE*. *ELOISE* is a picture book full of high quality illustrations. All the illustrations are meant to stir up feelings in preliterate children that could help them understand the storyline. In order to stir up feelings that help young readers comprehend, Hilary Knight used his favorite illustrating technique in this book known as the black line. This technique uses black ink with pen to create drawings that are strong and energetic. Throughout the book readers see the importance of the black line. It provokes feelings from those reading the book. The line curves to suggest coziness or femininity; it becomes angular to convey motion or danger. Hilary Knight creates drawings that capture the personalities that are crucial to creating believable

characters. Therefore, it is good to have a good understanding of different illustration techniques but most importantly for educators it is important to understand how each specific technique could help children that can't read yet understand the stories in picture books. Evans states, "Hilary Knight doesn't merely create pictures, he presents them to us" (p. 10). An illustrator like Hilary Knight does not just draw pictures but instead he draws pictures that would come alive for preliterate children by carefully choosing his drawing techniques so that when these children see his pictures, they could understand the stories.

Every illustrator also has his or her own style of illustrating. Illustrators' styles can be seen by the way they draw their pictures. Each illustrator chooses to interpret their own stories differently. However, all illustrators serve one common goal. Their goals are all to aid preliterate children understand the books they pick up.

According to Sendak (2007), as an aspiring artist, one should strive for originality of vision. This originality of vision comes in the form of an illustrator's style for illustrating. Styles allow illustrators to say things to their readers. It is their way of communicating. They are able to have a fresh way of saying these things through their styles. Illustrators use their imaginations to create their styles. Sendak states, "No picture is worth the making if it is not work of the imagination" (p. 74). Imaginations allow creativities to be seen in illustrators' styles. Styles allow illustrators to create the illustrations they want their readers to see and understand. An illustrator's style is a part of the pictures he or she creates. Therefore, an illustrator's style can be seen through their illustrations. These illustrations are meant to be enlargements of the texts in picture book stories. They help interpret the texts so that readers like preliterate children can comprehend better. An illustrator uses his or her style to create illustrations that serve words in books. It would benefit illustrators a lot by having different styles. It is important for

illustrators to be flexible with their styles. When trapped in one kind of illustrating style, flexibility is lost. Having one style would make preliterate children bored after looking at them over and over again. If these children get bored then they won't have their thinking brains on to figure out the contents of stories. Having multiple styles allow illustrators to interpret texts in many different ways. In return, it provides preliterate children different opportunities to understand texts.

How Pictures Can Help Very Young Readers Read With Greater Understanding and With Greater Ability to Recount What Has Been Read With Detail and Clarity

Talking should be encouraged in classrooms. Learning can go on only when teachers and students are all communicating to one another. Talks that encourage learning should not be blocked. Teachers should feel optimistic about talks such as post-reading discussions. Post-reading discussions give preliterate students the opportunity to learn about the stories they have heard.

According to Barnes (1992), students learn by talking and through talking. It is important for students to have opportunities to talk about their readings. Every time a teacher reads to the class a picture book, there should be time set aside to talk about the reading. These talks should be guided by critical questions from the teacher. When preliterate students talk collaboratively with others about what they have learned from their readings they are developing cognitively. These students can understand their ideas when they orally share their thoughts with others. They are learning the things that they are saying aloud to others in the discussion group. When preliterate children listen to what others have to say about what they have learned and their ideas, they all end up learning from each other. By having post-reading discussions, students that

cannot read or write yet can understand that texts can be talked about. By talking about texts, students will learn about the texts after hearing them. Teachers should let their students see that they valued conversations about books. By allowing students to see that teacher value book conversations students will also value and enjoy these book conversations. Teachers need to guide their students during talks about books so that students can share their thoughts and teachers can understand their learning. According to Calkins (2001), as children learn to talk well about texts, they are also learning to think well about texts. Before a preliterate child can tell his or her teacher about a text, he or she needs to think about what he or she has seen from the illustrations in the book. He or she would also have to think about what to say such as the words he or she would like to use. This is a good practice to teach students; to think before talk. Therefore, it is important for educators to implement accountable book talks into their lesson plans. Giving preliterate children a chance to talk about books they have heard or seen is a daily essential.

Whenever teachers read picture books with students, teachers should always lead students in talking about the books after. It is a good follow up after reading books together. Post-reading discussions not only allow teachers to hear what students have to say. It also allows teachers to know what students have comprehended. Once hearing whether students have comprehended the stories or not, teachers can make future lesson adjustments and plannings.

According to Torr (2007), when children engage in conversations with more mature readers about texts, they are learning that knowledge is gained through a collaborative process of discussion about our experiences, including our experiences of written texts. Teachers are the mature readers in their classrooms. After reading picture books to preliterate students, teachers should always engage these students in post-reading discussions. During these discussions,

students can gain more comprehension about the texts. Students will learn that comprehension of texts can be learned by talking about them with fellow readers. Post-reading discussions allow students to share their personal experiences. This allows students a chance to make connections with the stories they hear. Students will be making text-to-self connections. When students are making text-to-self connections, they are making reading experiences more personal to themselves. Learning will become more meaningful when students relate to the stories they hear. Also, preliterate children will have the opportunity to share their experiences from during the readings. Such as how they felt during a particular part of the story.

It is important that children read books. However, it is also important or even more important for students to talk about books. Talking about books allows children to share their thoughts on books they have heard or read. For preliterate children, educators should encourage them to have conversations about books they have heard. When children have book conversations, they are supporting their comprehension of the books they have heard or read. Based on what children are saying, educators can determine if they have comprehend the stories or not. Knowing what each student has comprehended would allow teachers to understand the progress of all students in the classroom.

According to Calkins (2001), children at first make “book comments,” often based on the illustrations. Preliterate children cannot read or write. Therefore, the only way to get them to talk about stories is the illustrations they have seen and the stories they have heard. They are both good ways to measure their comprehension of stories. Illustrations play a center role in getting young readers that are illiterate to converse back and forth in response to books. They might talk about how a character look by what they have seen. They could also give description details on the illustrations in the story books.

When preliterate children talk during post-reading discussions, they are learning. They are learning from themselves and from others participating in the discussions. They learn from themselves when they are speaking their thoughts. They learn from their own thoughts when listening to what they are saying. They also learn from others when they hear what other students have to say.

According to Pantaleo (2007), children use oral language to think collectively; their oral exchanges served a multitude of functions including scaffolding interpretations, extending understandings, exploring significances, and constructing storylines. During post-reading discussions, preliterate students have opportunities to try out, think through, and reflect on their ideas of the readings they have heard. Preliterate students are a part of post-reading discussions. They gain many benefits. One of these benefits is that they can build up their interpretations of the stories. By building their interpretations of the stories, they are also expanding their understandings of the stories. Another benefit for students that cannot read and write can gain when participating in post-reading discussions is that they are able to find out things that are significant in the readings by listening to themselves and others. Lastly, these students are able to construct the storylines of the stories by talking to others during post reading discussions.

Post-reading discussions allow preliterate students to mature the way they comprehend the stories they hear. These discussions allow them to mature their comprehension strategies when they share during book talks. When they are talking during post-reading discussions, preliterate children are processing thoughts using their comprehension strategies. Post-reading discussions provide good opportunities for not yet readers to nurture their comprehension strategy growth.

According to Berne and Clark (2008), small group book discussion groups can be productive forums for students to develop their comprehension strategies. When preliterate students have book discussions led by their teachers after readings these students get a chance to develop their comprehension strategies. They are using their comprehension strategies when they construct meanings when they talk about texts following readings. Students increase their abilities to think metacognitively about their comprehension processes while sharing during post-reading discussions. At the same time, these students are sharing their comprehension strategies on how they use to construct meanings during post-reading discussions. Their thinking can serve as cognitive modeling in the use of comprehension processes for their fellow students. When this happens everyone in the group can benefit from everyone's thinking. Even though students are in a range of reading levels and from a range of backgrounds. Everyone in the discussion group can become familiar in the use of comprehension strategies.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of four preliterate pre-school students from a private early childhood school in Staten Island. There were two males and two females in the study. The participants were randomly selected by the classroom teacher. All four students provided signed consent forms from parents.

Setting

The setting for this study was in a private early childhood school located in Staten Island. The population within the school was predominately of middle class white ethnicity. About 96% of the students identified as Caucasian. About 2% were Hispanic, 1% was Black, and 1% was Asian. The research was conducted in Wagner College's education department's lounge due to its proximity to the classroom and was the most quiet and available environment to hold the study. The lounge consisted of tables and chairs and contained minimal distractions. Students sat in the lounge's chairs during the read aloud and post-reading discussion.

Instrumentation

➤ **Letter of Consent (Parents)**

In order to gain permission, a cover letter was sent home to the parents of the potential participants. The letter explained that the study was being conducted to obtain research for a thesis study in order to gain a master's degree. The letter also provided detailed information of the study being done and the potential significance of the outcome results.

➤ **Informed Parent Consent Form (Parents)**

An informed consent form was sent home with each student to obtain parental permission to begin conducting the study. The consent form stated the reason for conducting the study and the significance of the research and results. The letter informed parents that students will participate only upon receiving parental permission and that children may withdraw from the study at any time.

➤ **Read-Aloud Story Books**

Non-fiction story books were used as tools to obtain knowledge for later comprehension assessment. The book *apple* by a, *banana* by b, *cat* by c, *dog* by d, *elephant* by e, *fly* by f, and *grapefruit* by g were read aloud to each group of students prior to the assessment. After the read aloud of each book, each student was asked five discussion questions. No student participants had heard or read the books prior to the study.

➤ **Student Informed Assent Form**

A child friendly version of the informed consent was given specifically to students prior to the activities to receive permission from them directly for their participation in the study.

➤ **Thank-You Letter**

On the final day of the study, the participants received a thank you letter to show appreciation for the parents' permission and students overall participation in the study.

➤ **Comprehension Questions**

A set of five questions was asked to each participant at the end of each story book. The questions were meant to measure their reading comprehension.

Procedure

A letter was given to the classroom teacher prior to the study asking permission to carry out this study with the students in his/her class. Consent forms were given to the parents of the children chosen as potential participants and returned to the researcher with parent signatures. Each participating child also signed an assent form. This study took place over a twelve day period during school days for a half hour each day at the same time the students received regular

reading instruction. Over the course of these twelve days, the researcher read each of six books two times to each of the four students individually. On the first day, the first book was read with pictures and on the second day the same book was read without pictures. The third day a second book was introduced to the students and read for the first time to each of them without pictures. On the fourth day the same book was read with pictures. Throughout the twelve day period, the books were rotated in this way in order to avoid bias toward either picture books or books without pictures. At the beginning of each of the twelve reading sessions, the researcher guided the first child toward a designated reading area and began reading the book for that day out loud. At the conclusion of this reading, the researcher involved the child in a discussion about the book by asking five prepared comprehension questions. The researcher recorded the child's answers for all of the questions. At the conclusion of this discussion, the researcher returned the child to his or her regular classroom routines and then escorted the next child to the specially designated reading area and began the same process all over again. When all data were collected, the researcher analyzed the results to assess the impact of the picture books on the children's emerging reading comprehension.

Data Collection

Data were collected using students' answer responses from post-reading discussion questions.

Results

The results show that students who participated in post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations go into greater depth when discussing the reading compared to post-reading discussions after reading story books without illustrations. The data collected indicate the following: For the most part, students used a broader selection of vocabulary words during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations compared to post-reading discussions after reading story books without illustrations. For example, one of the questions asked during post-reading discussion was “Do you like this book? Why or why not?” After reading the book *The Rainbow Fish* without illustrations, one of the students’ responses to the question was: “Yes.” When the same book was read again with illustrations, the same student’s response to the question was: “Yes. I like this book because there are animals.” The number of words used during post-reading discussions is about equally the same for both post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations and post-reading discussions after reading story books without illustrations. The number of words responded for every question asked during post-reading discussion after reading story books with illustrations and story books without illustrations were counted. Students’ level of interest/enthusiasm is higher during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations compared to post-reading discussions after reading story books without illustrations. Anecdotal notes were written on students’ facial expressions and body gestures. For example, one of the comments written was how the students’ eyes wandered about the classroom during reading of a story book without illustrations. The data indicates students made more detailed references to the story book illustrations during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations. For example, one of the questions asked during post-reading discussion was “What do you like about your favorite character” After reading the book *The Very Busy Spider* without illustrations, one

of the students' responses to the question was: "Because the owl liked the web." When the same book was read again with illustrations, the same student's response to the question was: "I like the owl because the owl helped the spider made the web." During post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations and without illustrations, students were unable to make text-to-text/text-to-self/text-to-world connections. Volunteered talk, self-initiated talk, or uninvited talk was not witnessed during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations and post-reading discussions after reading story books without illustrations.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Limitations of Study

Although the current study supports the claim that story book illustrations help students' post-reading discussions and therefore help them read with greater comprehension, there were some limitations with the study. One limitation was attendance. Attendance was inconsistent across the twelve sessions they were expected to attend. Specific to this study, the participants needed to be in school every other day in order to be accurately assessed. For one of the sessions, two of the participants were absent. Another limitation was that they were subject to a distracting environment. Due to both expected and unexpected school activities and events there were a few times when the location of where the sessions were to be conducted was changed. Participants found it difficult to concentrate because of these changes in the environment. Another limitation regarding the study was the delay in getting permissions. After the permission forms were sent home, one participant did not return the permission form on time. While another participant was out sick for over a week. These two participants prevented the study from starting on time. The last limitation was the limited ethnic mix of participants. All of the participants were ethnically White.

Conclusion/Discussions

The results of the present study agree with the findings of prior studies regarding the benefits of story book illustrations on students' post-reading discussions. The data support the

conclusion that reading story books with illustrations does result in students engaging in better informed post-reading discussions. There were some unanticipated findings to the study. One of them was the number of words used and the difference in vocabulary usage during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations compared to reading story books without illustrations. It was unanticipated to find out that the number of words used during discussions for both reading illustrated story books and non-illustrated story books was the same. What was different was the vocabulary words used. The vocabulary words used during post-reading discussions after reading story books with illustrations are much richer due to the fact that students were able to make specific references to the illustration details in the story books. This is an indication that story book illustrations help broaden students' vocabulary word usage. Another unanticipated finding was how students failed to make any text-to-text/text-to-self/text-to-world connections during any of the post-reading discussions. One of the questions asked during every post-reading discussion was "What happens in this story that has also happened to you?" Maybe the students' young age had to do with the reason why none of the connections were made. At such a young age, students have not come to realize that they could make text connections with the stories that emerge from their own lives. There is one more unanticipated finding in the study. Volunteered talk, self-initiated talk, or uninvited talk was not witnessed during the study. Participants were responsive with most of the other questions asked during post-reading discussions. However, none of the participants went above and beyond what was asked of them. They all simply answered the questions that were asked. Opportunities were given to the participants during every post-reading discussion in the hope of participants initiating and engaging in volunteered talk, self-initiated talk, or uninvited talk. However participants turned down all such opportunities. This could be because of the personalities of the

participants. It could also be because these participants became less verbal when put in a situation they were not completely in control of.

Overall, the study went well and smoothly. The study worked as well as it did for three main reasons. The first reason why the study worked well was because of the careful way in which selection of books was made. The theme of every story book chosen correlates with the questions asked during post-reading discussions. In addition, the books selected were all well illustrated. The illustrations were easy to grasp; allowing participants to comprehend the storylines. The second reason why the study worked well was because of the questions asked during post-reading discussions. These questions were carefully prepared prior to the start of the study. All the questions asked during post-reading discussions were open-ended questions. They were meant to elicit responses that can be measureable in determining whether the thesis question of the study was answered. The types of questions ranged widely from asking about favorite character to asking about the favorite part of the story. These questions were open enough and interesting enough to the students to determine their level of engagement and to give them an opportunity to speak fairly extensively about the stories. The third reason why the study worked well was due to the fact there was an equal balance of male and female students

There were things to think about and consider regarding the study that led to new learning. The first point that is worth mentioning is confusion on the part of the participants. When the study first started, the participants were engaging in reading a story book with illustrations and then participating in post-reading discussion. However, when the same book was read to them again without illustrations they hesitated and frowned, unsure how to proceed. As a result, this may or may not have affected the participants' responses. The cause of this could be that these illiterate readers are so young of age that they did not fully grasp the

procedure of the study. This may have caused them initially to do poorly in answering the questions. Another point is the level of interest/enthusiasm of the participants. At times, participants seemed to have high interest/enthusiasm during the study and then at other times interest and enthusiasm declined. One of the factors that may have affected participants' level of interest/enthusiasm was pulling them out from their regular classroom routines. The participants are at an age where they are comfortable with structured routines. When pulling them out from their structured routines and their other classmates, they felt pulled away from their comfort zone which may have affected them negatively during the study. Their level of interest/enthusiasm may or may not have affected their responses during the discussions, but if it did, then the results would have been different. The third point about the study that led to new learning was when the sessions for the study were conducted. There were a total of twelve sessions for this study. Due to the participants' classroom schedule, the sessions for the study were held every other day and at times a few days apart. The uneven distribution of when the sessions were conducted served as a disadvantage to the study. Sessions that were one day apart allowed the participants to remember the first time a story was read whether with or without illustrations. The participants may have had a recollection of previous responses discussed during post-reading discussions which they could build on. Those sessions that were days apart prevented participants from fully remembering a story that was first read. This situation may also have had an adverse effect on the results.

Implications for future practice

Although the study faced limitations, the results clearly demonstrate the benefits of story book illustrations for preliterate children during post-reading discussions, which are opportunities to store what they have learned. Story book illustrations help students comprehend

the stories read to them. Teachers of preliterate children should carefully select the books for their read alouds. Teachers should select books that are well illustrated. The illustrations should be easy to see and understand for children that cannot read on their own. Also, the illustrations should serve the purpose of advancing the story line. These story books should be relatable to students so they can build more meaningful relationships with what they are learning. When students can relate or make a connection to the information they are receiving there is a better chance that what they are learning is also successfully comprehended. When reading these books to preliterate children it is also important to keep in mind that all illustrations must be visible to every child. These illustrations will assist preliterate children in having a good post-reading discussion. During post-reading discussions, teachers must be well prepared with good questions that will spark high levels of thinking. The questions asked should allow students to draw references from the illustrations in the story books. The goal for all teachers is to have a good exchange of information and discussion on the books they read. This study reaffirmed the importance of story book illustrations in the lives of preliterate children.

Implications for future research

Results of the current study demonstrate the benefits of using story book illustrations on post-reading discussions with preliterate children. To further this study, researchers can look into other various tools in getting preliterate children engaged in good post-reading discussions. Education researchers should think more deeply about ways of getting preliterate children to have a good conversation or talk after reading books. For instance, researchers should consider the effects of moving gradually from richly illustrated and simple stories to more complex stories with progressively fewer illustrations. For example, preliterate children can learn to look at individual pictures more closely, showing how to identify key details. They can also create their

own narratives by drawing their own pictures that correspond to the beginning, the middle, and the end of a story.

A future study should include a larger participant pool with a variety of student groups to get more varied and valid results. For example future researchers could recreate this study with a participant pool of only English Language Learners to compare if story book illustrations can improve their post-reading discussions. Future research can also build on the current study by using different age groups. Using different preliterate age groups, researchers exhibit whether story book illustrations have a different effect on higher or lower age groups of preliterate children. Another recommendation would be having the study carried out over a longer time period. The current study took place over the course of several weeks; however more valid and reliable data could be collected if the study were to be conducted the entire school year.

Such factors and modifications could help improve the structure of the current study while also providing more support for the use of authentic learning experiences in the literacy classroom.

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