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## Fathers' and Mothers' Book Selection Preferences for Their Four Year Old Children Abstract

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## **Fathers' and Mothers' Book Selection Preferences for Their Four Year Old Children Abstract**

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### **Abstract**

Twelve fathers and 12 mothers of four year olds were presented with 14 children's books representing various genres and were asked to select the five books they would read to their children in the coming week and to give reasons for their selections. They were then asked to identify those books they would not select and to provide reasons. There were some differences between mothers'/fathers' book selection and some differences between selecting for sons/daughters. Similar differences were noted in terms of those books which parents would not select.

It's a Thursday afternoon at the local library and I'm browsing in the children's area. I hear a voice whisper, "Honey we can't take ALL of these home! Let's choose a few of them." I follow the voice to see a young child, arms full of books he has pulled from the surrounding shelves. The young boy and his mother find a quiet spot on the carpet and proceed to look through the pile of books. I can't help but eavesdrop as the mother negotiates, "That one looks interesting. This one's too long for you. Oh that's one of your favorites."

Almost forty years of research findings tell us that reading to young children on a regular basis has a positive effect on their development as readers (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Adams, 1990). Aside from the affective benefits of reading to children to foster positive feelings toward literacy, storybook reading focuses the young child on many of the conventions of print literacy such as directionality, the construction of meaning, and letter/word recognition. However, most of the studies have been retrospective accounts by "parent academics" (Heath & Thomas, 1984) and therefore generalizing from the results of these studies could be questioned. While it is believed that "storied environments" (Lancy, 1994) are common to middle-class homes, we have previously argued that in reality little is known about storybook interactions and, in fact, there is a great deal of diversity in the way middle-class parents read to their young children (Shapiro, Anderson & Anderson, 1997). If storybook reading is, as Pelligrini (1991) contends, "the literacy event par excellence" (p. 380), then surely book selection is an important consideration. We know (e.g., Jipson & Paley, 1991) that in the area of formal schooling, teachers' book selection is guided by their own knowledge of children's books, by teacher-librarians, through the special projects of organizations such as the International Reading Association's and Children's Book Council's *Children's Choices* and through journals that highlight children's book reviews. However, while there are some guides available to parents (e.g., McGovern, 1994; Thomas, 1992), surprisingly little is known about what types of books parents purchase or borrow and their reasons for doing so despite the fact that many parents purchase books or borrow them from libraries on a regular basis (Shapiro et. al., 1996).

### **Previous Research**

Limited research examining the types of books parents choose to share with their children has shown a tendency for parents to select narratives with 4-year-olds. Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith (1992) found that about one-third of the books read to 4-year-olds were children's narratives (a fictional story for children). Twenty-six percent of the parents in that study used didactic non-narratives or information books with their 4-year-olds. Other books shared less often by mothers in their study included didactic narratives (designed to entertain as well as instruct), fairy/folk tales, nursery rhymes, and rhyming/predictable narratives. To reiterate, children's narratives were the dominant choice of parents in this study. In a study of first graders and their parents, Owens (1992) found that 97.9 percent of parents reported they read narratives compared to only fifty-eight percent of parents saying that they used nonfiction. In that study, there appeared to be a relationship to parents' level of education in that the use of non-fiction was more common with the mothers having a higher level of education.

There has also been limited research completed on parents' reasons for selecting a book to read to their child. Robinson (1983) found that parents most often select a book for their young children based on the needs and interests of the children. The second most frequent reason parents gave for selecting a book for their child was based on the book's complexity (i.e., some challenge in vocabulary). Owens (1992) reported that most of the parents in his study had high school education and half had at least a college degree. When these parents were asked what they looked for when choosing a book for their children, the predominant response was children's interest in or understanding of topics. Other important reasons given by these parents involved the illustrations of the book and the specific values that the book presented. In another study by Dzama & Gilstrap (1985), parents who were asked how they prepare their children for a formal reading program reported being influenced by pictures and illustrations as well as their own childhood favorites when selecting a book for their child.

The studies reported above tended to show that children's interests, parents' own favorite stories, and the illustrations of a book are the main

reasons why parents select a particular book for their child. However, most of this limited research is more than a decade old and society has continued to change in its complexity since then. Further, little interest has been seen regarding the influence of gender on book selection. In this report, we focus on the role of gender in book selection in addition to examining the types of books middle class parents choose for their four-year-old children and their explanations for their choices. Furthermore, we also asked parents to identify books they would not select and their explanations for doing so.

### **Method**

The parents of four-year-old children attending day cares or preschools in a large metropolitan area who were also participating in a large study of parent/child storybook reading were asked to assist us in this study. The sample was primarily middle-class. While we would have preferred a more diverse sample, our efforts to secure a wider range of subjects were not successful. However, we concluded from our previous research (Shapiro et. al., 1997) that there is sufficient diversity amongst middle-class parents that generalizing one method of storybook reading is inappropriate. Also since storybook reading is often a predominant feature of many middle-class homes we were encouraged to proceed.

Immediately after 12 mothers and 12 fathers representing 24 families shared two books (a narrative and an informational book) with their children, they were asked to select books they would choose for their child and those that they would not choose. Each parent viewed the same array of 14 children's books that were selected by the researchers in consultation with an expert in children's literature as being appropriate for four-year-olds (neither of the two books they had just read were included in the 14 books presented to them). The books represented various genres including informational books, narratives, poetry, rhymes, instruction (e.g., alphabet and counting), and a fairy tale (see Appendix for the complete list). In addition, we asked an assistant manager of a local children's bookstore if our selection represented books that were being purchased by parents. These books represented a minimum number that would provide some choice of each genre. We also tried to ensure that male and female characters were equally represented. They were

arranged in alphabetical order by author's last name. Parents had an opportunity to leaf through each of the books and then we asked each of them individually to "Please choose the five books you would read to your child over the next week or so if you had these books in your home." They were provided with as much time as they needed to make their selection and our observations suggested that what parents did was similar to what they would do in selecting books in a bookstore or at the library. Parents were then asked, "Why did you select these books?" After they provided this information they were asked if there were any books they would not choose to read and why they would not read them to their children. The responses were examined for book selection preferences of parents, including the relationship of parents and children's gender, and the reasons related to choosing or not choosing a particular book.

## **Results**

In this section, we first report some general trends in book selection. We then examine book selection (and non-selection) in terms of parent's and children's gender. To conclude this section, we share the reasons, grouped according to themes, that parents provided for choosing the books they did, as well as the reasons why they would not select particular books. Given the lack of randomization in the sample selection and the relatively small sample size, the reader is reminded to interpret these results cautiously.

### *General Trends*

As shown in Table 1, parents were fairly eclectic in their book selection in that no book was selected by all of the parents and each of the books was selected by at least five parents. The Berenstain Bears (14 parents) was most frequently selected. Since we included this book because of the popularity of this series and the prevalence of these books in supermarkets, drug stores, doctors' offices and the like, this result is predictable. Trouble with Trolls (13 parents) was the second most frequently chosen book. Interestingly, two information books, A Dandelion's Life (12 parents) and Me and My Place in Space (12 parents) were each selected by one-half the parents. As reported earlier,

previous research (e.g. Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith, 1992) indicates that parents tend to select narrative texts to share with young children; here informational texts were selected nearly as frequently as were narrative texts. We speculate that this apparent change may be attributable to the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of high quality information books written for children over the last decade or so and parents are becoming more familiar with this genre.

We predicted that because their children would be commencing school in less than a year, most of these parents would select texts that focused on letters and numbers so as to prepare their children for school. That relatively few parents selected Black and White Rabbits ABC (9) and The Cheerios Counting Book (5) was thus unexpected. As will be discussed later, some parents objected to The Cheerios Counting Book because of its connection with a commercial product and it is possible that these particular parents might have chosen a different "counting" or "numbers" book.

So far we have presented the results regarding parents' book selection. We now turn to the question in which we asked parents to identify those books that they would not select for their children. It should be remembered that we asked parents to select the 5 books out of 14, which they would select. But when we asked them which books they would not select, no specific number was indicated. Seven parents reported that there were none of these books that they would not select for their child, other parents identified only a single book, and four parents identified at least five books.

There's a Nightmare in my Closet was the book most frequently identified by parents (11) as one they would not choose. Eight parents indicated they would not select The Cheerios Counting Book, a somewhat surprising finding given that, as was mentioned earlier, we selected the book based on the finding from the pilot study of this book's perceived educational value for four-year-olds. Two other books, Building Machines and What They Do (6) and The Frog Princess (7), were identified as inappropriate by a relatively high number of parents. Jessica was the only book which none of the parents identified as one

that they would not select.

**Table 1. Overall Selections**

Book Title	F-D <sup>1</sup>	F-S	Fs <sup>2</sup>	M-D	M-S	Ms	Total
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	5	2	7	4	3	7	14
The Frog Princess	2	0	2	3	0	3	5
Jessica	4	0	4	4	1	5	9
Trouble with Trolls	4	3	7	3	3	6	13
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	1	5	0	1	1	6
The Secret Short Cut	3	1	4	2	1	3	7
A Dandelion's Life	4	3	7	2	3	5	12
What is a Cat?	3	1	4	5	0	5	9
Building Machines and What They Do	2	4	6	0	4	4	10
Me and my Place in Space	2	2	4	4	4	8	12
The Cheerios Counting Book	1	2	3	0	2	2	5
Black and White Rabbits ABC	3	1	4	3	2	5	9
The Ice Cream Store	1	3	4	4	0	4	8
Hop on Pop	2	2	4	1	1	2	6

<sup>1</sup>F-D, fathers selecting for daughters; F-S, fathers selecting for sons, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Fs, total for Fathers selecting, Ms, total for Mothers selecting

*Book Selection and Parents' Gender*

When we examine fathers' book selection (See Table 1), no trends other than those just reported in overall book selection were apparent. However, it is noteworthy that only one mother selected There's a Nightmare in My Closet in comparison to five fathers. On the other hand, the mothers account for the majority (8 of 12) of the selections of Me and My Place in Space.



**Table 2.** Overall Not Selections

Book Title	F-D	F-S	Fs	M-D	M-S	Ms	Total
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
The Frog Princess	3	0	3	1	3	4	7
Jessica	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trouble with Trolls	2	0	2	1	2	3	5
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	2	6	3	2	5	11
The Secret Short Cut	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
A Dandelion's Life	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
What is a Cat?	2	1	3	0	0	0	3
Building Machines and What They Do	3	1	4	2	0	2	6
Me and my Place in Space	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
The Cheerios Counting Book	3	0	3	4	1	5	8
Black and White Rabbits ABC	2	0	2	1	1	2	4
The Ice Cream Store	1	1	2	0	0	0	2
Hop on Pop	1	0	1	1	1	2	3

There were only two books, *Jessica* and *The Secret Shortcut*, that none of the fathers identified as books they would not choose (See Table 2). *There's a Nightmare in my Closet* (6) was the book most frequently identified by fathers in this category. Interestingly, four fathers said that they would not select *Building Machines and What They Do*, a book that we predicted fathers would select since the subject matter would stereotypically be considered "masculine." There were six books which none of the mothers indicated were inappropriate. Three of these were information books. Five mothers rejected both *The Cheerios Counting Book* and *There's a Nightmare in my Closet*, indicating that the latter appears to be of concern to parents of both sexes.

#### *Book Selection and Children's Gender*

Several trends emerge when the child's gender is considered in terms of book selection. The most frequently selected books for sons were *Building Machines and What They Do* (8) and *A Dandelions Life*,

(6) Me and My Place in Space, (6) and Trouble with Trolls (6). It should be noted that three of these texts were information books. It is also interesting that the latter text is a narrative with a female protagonist. None of the parents selected The Frog Princess for their sons and only one parent chose Jessica and What is a Cat? To reiterate, at least half of the parents selected three of the four information books when selecting for their sons whereas only one of the four narratives was chosen by at least half the parents for sons.

Table 3. Selecting by Gender of Child

Book Title	F-D	M-D	Ds	F-S	M-S	Ss
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	5	4	9	2	3	5
The Frog Princess	2	3	5	0	0	0
Jessica	4	4	8	0	1	1
Trouble with Trolls	4	3	7	3	3	6
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	0	0	1	1	2
The Secret Short Cut	3	2	5	1	1	2
A Dandelion's Life	4	2	6	3	3	6
What is a Cat?	3	5	8	1	0	1
Building Machines and What They Do	2	0	2	4	4	8
Me and my Place in Space	2	4	6	2	4	6
The Cheerios Counting Book	1	0	1	2	2	4
Black and White Rabbits ABC	3	3	6	1	2	3
The Ice Cream Store	1	4	5	3	0	3
Hop on Pop	2	1	3	2	1	3

Parents did not appear to favor narrative or informational texts when selecting for their daughters although two parents, both fathers, selected the informational text, Building Machines and What They Do. On the other hand, 8 of 15 parents selected What is A Cat? for their daughters, a book selected by only one out of nine parents for their sons. Five parents chose The Frog Princess for their daughters, while as was indicated earlier, none of the parents selected this book for their sons.

Three books were not identified by any of the parents as ones they would not select for their sons. But as can be seen in Table 4, there were seven books which only one parent would not choose for their sons, indicating that for the most part parent choices of books they would not select were rather idiosyncratic. Although the numbers are relatively low, there appears to be a trend toward not selecting narratives for sons. There were also three books that were not identified by any of the parents as ones they would not select for their daughters. Seven parents would not choose The Cheerios Counting Book for daughters but only one parent would not select this book for his or her son. As was predicted, a number of parents said they would not select Building Machines and What They Do (5) for their daughters. This contrasts with the fact that Me and My Place in Space would not be selected by only one of the parents.

Some educators (e.g., Barrs, 2000; Schneider, 2001) contend that literacy is gendered in that boys and girls have different preferences in literacy and engage in literacy in markedly different ways. For example, one of the reasons that Doiron (1994) enjoins teachers to read more informational texts aloud to students is that boys prefer such texts to narratives, the genre dominant in many primary/elementary classrooms. We interpret the results reported here as suggesting that through book selection, some of the parents are setting gender role expectations for their children. That is, informational books are more appropriate for boys and indeed, some informational books more appropriate for boys than others. Furthermore, some narratives, (e.g. those with a scary title and plot line such as Trouble with Trolls) are suitable for boys while others (e.g. The Frog Princess) are appropriate for girls. It seems that, in general, these parents are influenced by the child's gender when choosing books and what has traditionally been held to be suitable for children in terms of "gendered" interests has not changed as much as perhaps would be expected, given the general societal concern with gender issues over the last two decades or so.

So far we have presented some overall trends in terms of book selection. The reader is reminded that after parents selected the five books, they were asked, "Why did you select these books?" Similarly, after parents had identified any books they would not choose, they were

asked to explain why. We now examine and share some of the explanations parents provided as to their choices. These are categorized according to themes that emerged as we analyzed the data.

Table 4. Not Selecting by Gender of Child

Book Title	F-D	M-D	Ds	F-S	M-S	Ss
The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey	1	0	1	0	0	0
The Frog Princess	3	1	4	0	3	3
Jessica	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trouble with Trolls	2	1	3	0	2	2
There's a Nightmare in my Closet	4	3	7	2	2	4
The Secret Short Cut	0	0	0	0	2	2
A Dandelion's Life	0	0	0	1	0	1
What is a Cat?	2	0	2	1	0	1
Building Machines and What They Do	3	2	5	1	0	1
Me and my Place in Space	1	0	1	0	0	0
The Cheerios Counting Book	3	4	7	0	1	1
Black and White Rabbits ABC	2	1	3	0	1	1
The Ice Cream Store	1	0	1	1	0	1
Hop on Pop	1	1	2	0	1	1

*Subject Matter-Content*

In providing reasons why they chose particular books, the most prominent category was Subject Matter/Content and in their comments, parents made mention of the content of the book being referred to. For example, one parent referring to his selection of The Trouble with Trolls for his son commented, “[It] looks like a book about relationships”, evidently, thinking it an important concept for children to learn about. Another parent, in reference to What is a Cat? said “It describes what cats do” and indicated that this was a subject that would appeal to the child. Parents also referred to what they perceived as the appropriateness of content in relation to their child’s gender as was the case of a mother who, in selecting Jessica for her daughter, remarked, “[It] looks like a

little girl's book." Other parents noted the engaging nature of the content, such as one father's remark about Black and White Rabbit's ABC, "Fun to read and we could make all sorts of fun noises while reading it."

Subject matter/content was again the most frequent category when parents explained why they would not select particular books. In reference to the content of There's a Nightmare in My Closet, a parent stated "It's emphasizing scary things." Another parent opined that The Frog Princess was unacceptable because it is "not realistic-the princess ends up marrying the prince." Given the universal appeal of Dr. Seuss books, it was somewhat surprising that one parent indicated that she would not select Hop on Pop because "it's really silly, doesn't make sense." Gender was also a factor in parents' reasons not to select certain books. For example, a father stated that he would not choose Building Machines and What They Do for his daughter because the book is "for boys."

### *Children's Interests*

The second most frequent category in terms of reasons for selecting books was Children's Interests. This finding is consistent with other research (e.g., Robinson, 1993) that found that parents select books based on the child's interests. Here, parents tended to focus on the general interests of the child. For example, a mother choosing The Trouble with Trolls for her son commented, "[My] child is interested in fairy tales, trolls and monsters." Similarly, in reference to Building Machines and What they Do, a father commented, "N's [his son] big interest - trucks and diggers." Some parents connected their child's interest with the text genre, as was the case with a parent who commented, "She's very much into rhymes right now," in relation to her selection of The Ice Cream Store. It is noteworthy that while mothers and fathers contributed almost equally to the reasons pertaining to subject matter, mothers provided almost three quarters of the references to children's interests.

Parents also cited children's interests as a reason for not selecting particular books, although less frequently than when identifying reasons for selecting specific books. Here parents tended to make general comments such as "Not an interest of hers." Interestingly, many of the

comments in this category referred to Building Machines and What They Do and most of them pertained to daughters.

### *Aesthetics*

Parents also explained that they choose certain books because of their aesthetic qualities and this was the next most frequent category of reasons for selecting books. The majority of the comments here pertained to the illustrations as in the example of the father who commented, "The illustrations are wonderful," in explaining why he would choose A Dandelion's Life for his daughter. Some parents were more specific in commenting on the illustrations, a case in point being the parent who suggested, "The pictures are whimsical and surreal" in The Secret Shortcut. Some parents also referred to the appeal of the cover of the book. Typical of such responses was the parent who commented, "The cover struck me" in selecting A Dandelions Life. One parent commented on the aesthetics of the language in The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey, remarking, "Child-like rhymes-not poetry like R. L. Stevenson poetry but still poetry." Interestingly, almost two thirds of the comments in the "Aesthetics" category came from the fathers.

Somewhat surprisingly, some parents found the "Aesthetics" of particular books as reasons for not selecting them. Pointing to the illustrations in The Trouble with Trolls, one parent said "Trolls are not very good looking." And one mother found that "the graphics [in Hop on Pop] never really appeal to me."

### *Familiarity*

Parents also indicated that they selected a particular book because they were familiar with it or its author. Here some parents focused on the child's familiarity with the particular book. For example, when selecting The Ice Cream Store, a mother stated, "A big time favorite." Other parents alluded to the child's familiarity with the author or the series, rather than to the specific book in question. An example of such an explanation was a father's comment about Trouble with Trolls, "We have the companion book at home." Some parents indicated their own familiarity with the book informed their choice as was the case with the

father who said, "Used to read this one with my other daughter" in explaining his selection of Hop on Pop. Again, about two-thirds of the comments here are attributable to fathers.

Some of the parents also indicated that because their children were already familiar with some of the books, they would not choose them at this time. For example, referring to The Frog Princess, one parent explained, "Has read several different versions of it-read it so many times in different ways."

### *Educational*

Some parents referred to the educational value of books in explaining their choices, although as was explained earlier, less frequently than we predicted when commencing the study. Here, parents referred to teaching or learning or described a particular book as educational. For example, one father, in referring to his selection of The Cheerios Counting Book for his daughter, commented, "[It is] educational-she can learn her numbers." Referring to Me and My Place in Space, a mother allowed, "[My daughter] would learn about the environment and science." While many parents spoke of the specific knowledge or learning which could result from sharing the book, other parents alluded to the general educational potential of a book as with the mother who stated that Black and White Rabbit's ABC "is educational." Interestingly, one parent alluded to a different type of learning when she felt that There's a Nightmare in My Closet "would help him [her son] come to terms with being scared of the dark."

As might be expected, no parents cited the educational value of books as reasons for not selecting books.

### *Difficulty*

The relative difficulty of the book was the sixth most frequent category of explanation. Parents appeared to use developmental appropriateness as a criterion in selecting books. For example, one parent said of Me and My Place in Space, "It has the right amount of words." Another parent commented that she would select Me and My Place in

Space because it has “short sentences.” Likewise, a father suggested that A Dandelion's Life contained “easy to recognize words, nice big text, would recognize words easier.” In commenting on The Trouble with Trolls, a father noted, “Sufficient story with lots to talk about.” Some parents also considered the length of the book as was the case with the father who felt that The Frog Princess was “a long story—could read in possibly two or three episodes.”

Perhaps as expected, parents' concern with the relative difficulty of the text was the second most frequent category of reasons for not selecting particular books. One parent commented that his daughter was “not ready” for The Cheerios Counting Book, that it was “beyond her at this time.” Another parent felt that The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey contained “too much text and she would get bored.” A mother stated that The Trouble with Trolls contained “too many difficult words” when explaining why she would not select it for her son. Some parents saw some of the books as being too easy for their children. For example, commenting on Black and White Rabbit's ABC, a parent indicated that his daughter was “past that stage—knows her numbers and letters.”

### *Parents' Interests*

Interestingly, parents' own interests also informed their reasons for selecting books. In explaining his choosing of Me and My Place in Space, one father reported, “As a child I was always interested in space and astronomy.” One mother, in explaining how her own interests influenced her choice of A Dandelions Life commented, “When I read, it has to interest me as well.”

Similar to reasons for selecting, parents' own interests played a role in the decision not to select books. Typical of this type of response was the father who, when explicating his reason for not selecting What is a Cat?, claimed “things about cats are not very interesting.”

While these parents might be criticized for putting their own interests ahead of those of their children, we speculate that these parents are telling us something important here. Those of us who have seen a parent (or teacher) painfully struggle through a book that they do not like



have witnessed the negativity associated with such an event. We think these parents are aware of how they can unconsciously send negative message about sharing a text that they find uninteresting with their child and so want to share those texts that they will share in an exciting and engaging manner.

### *Values*

A new category also emerged from the analysis of the explanations for not choosing particular books that we labeled "values." Dzama & Gilstrap (1985) also found that parents considered the values inherent in the books to be shared with their children.

For example, several parents had concerns with The Cheerios Counting Book as did the parent who said, "[I] don't really like the idea that it is advertising." Commenting on the same book, another parent remarked, "It's a name brand-product promotion." And in elaborating on why he would not select The Frog Princess for his daughter, one parent opined "Inappropriate. Looks like one of these old style princess books."

### **Discussion/Conclusion**

We believe that it is important for educators to listen to what parents have to say about the books they select for their young children. As has been pointed out earlier, parents are their child's first teacher. Parents are also encouraged to read to their children from birth, to visit the library with their children on a regular basis, and to buy books as gifts and on special occasions. Many parents follow these suggestions but relatively little is known about what types of books parents select when doing so and why they select the books they do. According to Hannon (1995), educators have typically imposed on parents what it is they should be doing at home to support literacy development. He suggests that we also begin learning from parents. While this study's snapshot of parents' selection of books for their young children aims to do that, it must be viewed within the context of several limitations. First, the sample was one of convenience and thus did not represent a variety of ethnic and economic groups. However, when differences are found within a "static" group we believe it shows that generalizing to other

groups (e.g., the programs that teach "the way" to read to children) is dangerous. Second, parents were presented with a pre-selected group of books rather than being asked to list or discuss books they actually purchased. This procedure was selected to control the amount of information generated from interviews and to examine similarities across specific books and/or genres. Finally, when identifying books they would choose, parents were limited to five rather than being allowed more choices. Once again this had to do with convenience in limiting the length of the interview sessions since parents had just finished reading to their children and we had to be concerned with child care arrangements.

Our interviews with these parents reveal that there is considerable diversity in the books that a relatively homogenous group of parents select for their young children. However, some books were chosen much more frequently than others. The child's gender influenced the books which some of the parents selected and there were some differences between what mothers and fathers selected. In addition to the child's gender, parents considered various other factors such as subject matter or content or aesthetics of the book, and the child's interests when selecting books for their children. We believe this diversity in book selection is important in that it demonstrates that in different ways, these parents seem to have an intuitive understanding of which books will "work" with their children. That is, these parents are matching their children with particular books, helping to ensure that children will associate positively with the books shared, building on knowledge they already have developed, and developing new knowledge.

Despite the relatively small number of books used, certain books stood out as those that parents would not select. The child's gender appeared to influence parents' decisions not to choose particular books, as did other factors such as content, relative difficulty, and so forth.

We believe that the parents with whom we worked demonstrated considerable sophistication in selecting books and in explaining their choices. Although we have separated parents' reasons for selecting, or not selecting, particular books into descriptive categories, we speculate that a number of factors interact in informing parents' book choices. That is, parents often provided several reasons for particular choices. For

example, they mentioned the child's interests, the content or subject matter when explaining why a particular book was or was not chosen.

Even though we saw parents' relatively sophisticated stances in selecting books, we do have some concerns with the tendency on the part of some of the parents to have rather restrictive views of the gender appropriateness of some of the books. That is, some parents saw some of the books as "boy's books" or "books for girls." We believe it is important for early childhood educators, librarians, and teachers to help parents realize the importance of exposing children to books that challenge traditional gender roles.

Given that these children would be entering kindergarten within a year, we were somewhat surprised that parents appeared not to ascribe too much significance to learning outcomes when selecting books, in that the "Educational" category was fifth of seven in terms of frequency. Given what we perceive as pressure to begin teaching literacy skills earlier and earlier, we were heartened by what we interpret as the parents concern with selecting books that would engage their children, not on what Rosenblatt (1978) would call efferent reading. These parents appear to have an intuitive understanding of developmentally appropriate practice.

Familiarity seems to play an important role in informing parents' choices in that the Berenstain Bears, which of course are very well known, was the most popular choice.

The popularity of the Berenstain Bears might also be attributable to the fact that it is part of a series of books by the same authors. In fact, some of the parents alluded to this feature in relation to some of the other books (e.g., Dr. Seuss). Again, educators might capitalize on this factor and help familiarize parents and children with other series (e.g. the "Spot" series by Eric Hill), especially if parents are able to build upon this feature to engage their children in reading at home.

In addition, subject matter of the books and children's interests seem to be significant influences on parents' book choices. This reminds us of the insight which parents have about their children, which teachers

and librarians can never expect to have given the numbers of children with whom they work. But this also points to the need for educators to establish and maintain strong communication with the home so that we can learn as much as possible about the children with whom we work from them and their parents.

While more parents selected narratives than information books, as was reported earlier, in this study non-fiction was selected with greater frequency than in earlier research. Educators such as Doiron (1994) have called for the inclusion of more non-fiction books in the repertoire of books read aloud to children in school. We believe it is important that we continue to help parents understand the importance of providing non-fictional material for their young children. There is an increasing array of high quality non-fiction books available for young children and we need to insure that parents are aware of these.

And finally, we need to continue to ascertain how parents contribute to children's literacy development. In this regard, work such as described in this article is needed with parents from different socio-cultural groups. The more we can understand what informs parents' book selection and what they see as important, the better we will be able to work collaboratively with parents to support literacy learning at home and in school.

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Appendix

Children's Books Used

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