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Shared Book Reading Practices in the Daycare Setting

Sarah Oliver

Eastern Kentucky University, sarah_oliver18@mymail.eku.edu

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Shared Book Reading Practices in the Daycare Setting

Honors Thesis

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By

Sarah Oliver

Faculty Mentor

Kellie C. Ellis, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Department of Special Education

Shared Book Reading Practices in the Daycare Setting

Sarah Oliver

Kellie C. Ellis Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Department of Special Education

This study reviews emergent literacy, instructional techniques (specifically dialogic reading), and how involved different professionals are with literacy instruction with young children. Because little research has been done regarding shared book reading practices in the daycare setting, a mixed methods research design was utilized in order to determine the scale dialogic reading prompts are used during shared book reading by daycare instructors and their beliefs about early literacy. Analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected revealed three key themes: narrow view of literacy, limited understanding of early literacy instruction, and value of literacy. In other words, the participants believe that literacy is very important in giving children the skills they need to learn to read when they enter kindergarten but their instruction is contained to only two of the five areas of literacy. The results show that it is important for additional trainings and educational opportunities specific to literacy be offered to daycare instructors. This would require other professionals with a more extensive knowledge, such as special education teachers, reading specialists, or speech-language pathologists, to collaborate with daycare instructors by conducting workshops or coming into their facility and observing or demonstrating techniques to facilitate literacy skills. Teaching children these skills early will reduce the number of children who experience reading difficulties so that they can be more successful in their academic careers.

Keywords and phrases: emergent literacy, shared book reading, dialogic reading, daycare

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<center>**Literature Review**</center>

What is emergent literacy?

Emergent literacy can be defined as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing" (Whitehurst, 1998). This includes four main domains: phonological awareness, oral language, written language, and writing (Daniel & Reynolds, 2007). Phonological awareness entails knowledge of the sound structure of spoken language and understanding how words can be broken down and manipulated. Skills in this domain include rhyming, alliteration, blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme manipulation. Oral language includes both receptive and expressive language, which help children be able to define words to form a more advanced lexicon. Understanding written language as related to emergent literacy includes learning the function of a book, knowing that reading moves from left to right, knowledge of how to turn the page in a book, and being aware that the writing is used to communicate. In other words, a child must develop the realization that books are to be read and

that the text has meaning (LaCour, McDonald, & Tissington, 2011). Finally, learning to form

graphemes to put oral language into writing is also important for later academic success.

Emergent literacy skills can be categorized as constrained and unconstrained (Lennox,

2013). Constrained skills, such as alphabet awareness, print concepts, and phonological

awareness develop on more of a timeline, whereas unconstrained skills such as vocabulary,

background knowledge, and inferential language skills, continue to develop throughout the life

span (Lennox, 2013). Constrained or code-based skills are especially important for reading

development in kindergarten and first grade (Xu, Chin, Reed, & Hutchinson, 2013). In fact, a

child's knowledge of the alphabet is the single greatest predictor of later reading ability (Elliot &

Olliff, 2008).

Unconstrained skills, like vocabulary, have more of an effect in the long term.

Vocabulary instruction continues far longer and can be categorized into three tiers based on

complexity (Lennox, 2013). Tier one words are considered to be basic vocabulary that children

know or can be quickly understood (Lennox, 2013). Tier two words are more complex in nature

and occur across various contexts with multiple meanings depending on the context and appear

more in written text because the vocabulary is more sophisticated. Finally, tier three words are

the lowest frequency and are related to a specific content area only encountered in higher

education or professional fields.

Table 1. Tiered Vocabulary

	Description	Examples
Tier 1	Basic vocabulary used in everyday life that rarely need direct instruction	house, shoe, dog

Tier 2	High frequency words used across multiple contexts that are more common in written language	compare, contrast, explain
Tier 3	Low frequency words common to a certain academic area	diphthong, fricative, diadochokinesis

Phonological awareness is also a very strong indicator of reading proficiency upon entering school (Prior et al., 2011). Phonological awareness gives children the ability to manipulate the sounds within a word, whether it is a larger unit used to rhyme, count syllables, or blend syllables together or a smaller unit in manipulation of a single phoneme (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). All of these skills are interrelated to form a child's emergent literacy skills, which begin to develop at birth and continue to expand through learning opportunities provided by families, childcare, preschool, and the community that shape the experiences a child encounters in their daily life (Young, 2009; Xu, Chin, Reed, & Hutchinson, 2013).

Why is emergent literacy important?

Emergent literacy is important because it can predict children's acquisition of reading, which is the cornerstone of the education system that provides a gateway into learning all areas of the curriculum (Lennox, 2013). In fact, studies have shown that children growing up in a household with limited exposure to literacy are more at risk for reading difficulty (LaCour, McDonald, & Tissington, 2011). Poor literacy skills upon entering kindergarten are typically carried into first grade, an important year for phonics instruction (Callaghan, 2012.) Furthermore, early reading failure correlates with long-term problems throughout school (Juel, 1988).

What are some instructional techniques used to teach emergent literacy?

There are many different strategies and instructional techniques used by various professionals to teach emergent literacy skills to young children. Guo, Justice, Kaderavek, and

McGinty (2012) examined the relationship of the physical environment and the psychological environment. The physical literacy environment referred to the design, arrangement, and display of various literacy related items found in the classroom, including storybooks, writing materials, signs and labels, and literacy-related play prompts. The psychological environment included factors like the type of instruction children received. In other words, classrooms with psychologically rich literacy environments facilitated a positive learning environment with conversation, modelling of appropriate language, and explicit literacy instruction. Guo and colleagues (2012) found that high quality literacy interactions depended upon teacher knowledge, rather than access to the materials. In other words, the availability of books, pencils, and paper were not adequate for optimal growth without the knowledge of the teacher to utilize those materials in the appropriate way (Guo et. al, 2012). However, the combination of a physically and psychologically rich literacy environment was the most ideal for children to achieve maximum progress relating to their language growth (Guo et. al, 2012).

Environmental print is another avenue for teaching emergent literacy. In Young's (2009) study, teachers had their children bring in labels from home and the teachers centered instruction around those with the provision of pencils, felt markers, paper, magazines, and signs so that the children could participate in dramatic play. With explicit instruction, the children made use of their environment to learn while maintaining a play based philosophy. Time and effort was dedicated to individualizing specific accommodations for each student based on their level of functioning. The researchers ensured literacy was incorporated in every learning activity throughout the day. Additionally, use of literacy artifacts were embedded into generalization activities sent. Young found that the children's understanding of literacy was significantly higher

in the post-screening test than it was in the pre-screening test before the teachers received

professional development learning how to embed literacy instruction into play-based programs.

Vocabulary instruction represents another type of instruction that can be used to help

children develop emergent literacy skills. Because vocabulary acquisition is a complex process,

choosing age appropriate target vocabulary should be done in an explicit way. Lennox (2013)

shared her strategies for scaffolding vocabulary instruction. First, Lennox (2013) recommends

deciding which words children will need to develop a more sophisticated vocabulary, including

words to describe unfamiliar objects, events and more abstract ideas, and categorical terms to

organize knowledge within the semantic system. Second, educators should incorporate implicit

and explicit instruction, where children are discovering the meanings themselves to an extent, as

well as having direct instruction provided by a professional. Finally, activities should be planned

in a way for children to have multiple opportunities to practice throughout the curriculum using a

play-based philosophy.

What is dialogic reading?

Shared book reading has been identified as a cornerstone of emergent literacy instruction

(Lennox, 2013). Shared book reading occurs when adults read aloud to children and draw the

children's attention to certain concepts and vocabulary during the book reading (Flynn, 2011).

Several aspects are involved in order to maximize the effectiveness of shared book reading,

including pedagogical knowledge, book selection, quality of interactions, and developing

vocabulary and inferential language skills (Lennox, 2013). In short, the way books are read has

an influence on how beneficial the experience is for young children.

Dialogic reading is one instructional technique that can be used in joint book reading.

Dialogic reading entails strategic questioning and responses that build upon the children's

language. During dialogic reading, children become active participators rather than passive

listeners (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Given such, the interactions cannot be scripted

because they must be responsive and dynamic to children's utterances. The idea is to interact

with the child in a way that makes the initial utterance more advanced (Sim & Berthelson, 2014).

This can be done by asking open-ended questions about the characters, setting, or events,

expanding on answers by repeating, clarifying, or asking further questions, providing praise and

encouragement, and building upon a child's interests (Whitehurst, 1994). Two acronyms used by

professionals to learn different dialogic reading prompts are PEER (i.e. prompt a response,

evaluate said response, expand on the response, and repeat) and CROWD (completing a word or

phrase, recall details from the story, ask open-ended questions, ask wh- questions, and use

distancing prompts to have students relate what they have read to their own lives) (Morgan &

Meier, 2008).

Table 2. Dialogic Reading Prompts

	Description	Example
P (Prompt)	Prompt the child to name an object on the page or ask them questions about the story	"What is that?" *"A tiger!"*
E (Evaluate)	Evaluate the child's response and correct them if necessary	"What is that?" *"A lion!"* "Close! This is a tiger, he is related to lions."
E (Expand)	Expand on the child's utterance by adding additional information	*"Orange tiger!"* "That's right! A tiger is orange with black stripes."
R (Repeat)	Ask the child to repeat an utterance	"Orange and black tiger! Can you say that?" *"Orange and black tiger!"*

Flynn (2011) categorized dialogic reading into three levels. Level one provides

scaffolding to help children learn certain vocabulary by focusing on illustrations and using

labeling questions to identify features and functions of objects pictured in the book. Level two

provides other chances to practice what the students have learned. Using the same book, the

teacher asks open ended questions and encourages students to expand their original utterance to

increase complexity of the language. If the student does not expand, the teacher will then model

an expanded response. Finally, level three allows students to relate to their own experiences and

then talk about those experiences. The teacher will also ask questions that require a higher

cognitive effort, such as predictions and inferences.

The children will then ask questions to monitor their understanding. Children also ask

more questions with multiple readings and also engaged in elaborated interactions that they did

not when the book was read the first time (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). After repeated exposures

to the same book, children's interactions typically move from clarifying what they have read to

making inferences and predictions as they grow more accustomed to that storyline

(McNaughton, 1990). Neuman & Dwyer (2009) stated, "We know that without frequent practice,

multiple exposures to words, and systematic opportunities to use words, children are not likely to

acquire the vocabulary and the conceptual linkages to knowledge at the pace that will be needed

to narrow the achievement gap" (p. 391).

How does emergent literacy instruction vary among professionals?

General education teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and speech-

language pathologists are all capable of utilizing dialogic reading strategies, but they do so in

different capacities. Teachers have the primary responsibility of teaching curriculum to their

students (Daniel & Reynolds, 2007). Studies have revealed that teachers tend to focus on the

orthography of language (i.e., aspect related to letter formation and spelling) when providing

early literacy instruction and do not always provide instruction in other aspects of literacy (e.g.,

phonological awareness) (Stellakis, 2011; Spencer, Schuele, Guillot,& Lee, 2011).In fact, when

interviewing kindergarten teachers, Stellakis (2011) found that teachers' definitions of literacy

were very broad and that they did not acknowledge the importance of reading, which is

surprising because it is considered the cornerstone of emergent literacy. Stellakis (2011) argued

that educators taught letters as an isolated skill, without scaffolding to build additional skills

needed for decoding text while reading and comprehending the text. Stellakis (2011) concluded

that teachers should be more educated on early literacy practices and stated, "Given the fact that

literacy is the most important provision of any level of public education and the role of pre-

primary education seems to be of crucial importance in children's road to becoming literate we

argue that preschool educators should have all the necessary theoretical qualifications as well as

practical guidance and support in order to supply substantial literacy education to their pupils"

(pg. 70).

        Research has also explored early reading instruction practices of other types of educators.

Special education teachers modify the curriculum to meet the needs of children with disabilities

whereas reading specialists work exclusively with children experiencing reading difficulty

(Daniel & Reynolds, 2007). When surveyed, reading specialists and special education teachers

reported spending the most time on phonological awareness instruction with at-risk children

(Daniel & Reynolds, 2007). This could be attributed to the fact that reading specialists and

special education teachers do not have as large of a caseload as SLPs, giving them more time to

interact with fewer children.

        Speech-language pathologists have the most specialized education in the area of

communication and the processes that are involved (Spencer, 2011). SLPs have advanced

education in providing strong foundations in phonological awareness skills which are especially

important for children with specific language impairments to acquire reading skills (Daniel &

Reynolds, 2007). In a survey of SLPs done by Dudek (2013), the consensus was that SLPs are

aware that their services must be academically relevant and align with curricular standards and

indicate that they are in contact with the classroom teacher at some point, whether it was only

when needed or as much as once or twice a week.

In fact, the education given to SLPs in recent years has made them more confident using

emergent literacy instruction within their practice, as evidenced by Watson and Gabel (2002).

They reviewed a study done by Casby (1988) which concluded that SLPs did not have the

necessary knowledge and therefore were not involved in assessment and remediation of reading

difficulties (pg. 174). Fourteen years later, Watson and Gabel found that SLPs were more

knowledgeable about phonological awareness tasks and that they should be actively involved in

assessment. They attributed the change to more formal instruction and continuing education

opportunities given to SLPs. Although SLPs have become more confident in this area, they

typically do not spend a large amount of their time in the classroom, limiting their time to the

children they see for therapy. Typically, classroom teachers are responsible for curriculum-

driven instruction and SLP's provide additional services when students need supplemental

instruction to be successful in the general education classroom.

The extent to which emergent literacy instruction is used varies greatly among disciplines

with many contributing factors, such as time, money, resources and motivation for the continuing

education needed to apply techniques and interventions (Justice & Purcell, 2003). Best practice

is to collaborate when necessary to gain important insight about the students' strengths and areas

of growth, which may vary across different contexts. This is why it is important to have a firm

understanding of performance across the settings that a student encounters during their daily life (Dudek, 2013).

Is emergent literacy taught in the daycare setting?

While research has documented the effectiveness of book reading interventions, studies have not fully explored the book reading practices of employees in daycare settings. In 2005, data from a national survey and census documents showed that more than 60% of children from birth to five years of age in the United States were in some form of non-parental care (Phillips & Morse, 2011). In 2006, 57% of four year olds were enrolled in center-based programs, with 20% in home-based settings with parents, 13% in home-based settings by relatives, and 8% by non-relatives in settings other than center-based programs (Edwards, 2013). These statistics show that a large number of children in the age range where they should be learning emergent literacy skills spend their days in the daycare setting, which highlights the importance of receiving instruction in that area during their time there in order to be prepared for kindergarten.

Little is known about the demographics of family child care workers and how this would relate to the knowledge, attitudes, and activities they provide (Phillips & Morse, 2011). Among daycare workers, who vary in the amount of education they have in the area, the belief is that academics are extremely important and children should receive a jump start when in their care. However, studies have indicated that daycare workers do not always feel comfortable with the amount of knowledge they have to implement practices that will build upon communication skills and language growth (Phillips & Morse, 2010). Most preschool and daycare centers implement a play-based ideology characterized by child-centered learning but do not include an explicit emergent literacy instruction as a part of that curriculum (Callaghan, 2012).

Methodology

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to describe book reading practices of daycare employees and to identify the beliefs of daycare employees about emergent literacy instruction. The research questions included:

- Are participants using dialogic reading prompts during shared book reading?
- What types of book reading prompts do participants use during shared book reading?
- What are participants' beliefs regarding emergent literacy instruction?

Research Design

This study used a mixed methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions. This study involved one phase of data collection in which quantitative and qualitative data sources were gathered concurrently. In addition, the "mixing" of the quantitative and qualitative data occurred during the interpretation phase of the study. Please see Appendix A for a visual model of the research design.

Participants

This study involved the use of a convenience and purposive sampling paradigm. The sample was a convenience sample in that participants were recruited from a daycare setting in which the primary researcher had access. The sample was purposive in that individuals had to meet established inclusion criteria to be eligible for participation. The inclusion criterion was as follows: 1. Participants must be employed full time as a teacher of two to five year old children in the daycare setting; 2. Participants must speak English as their native language.

The participants of this study included three daycare workers: a twenty-one year old female with some college, a twenty-two year old female currently studying Communication Disorders to

become a speech-language pathologist in the future, and a thirty-seven year old female with a Master's degree in Elementary Education. Ethnicity and health status of the participants was not pertinent to the study. The participants were approached by the primary investigator, who then described the study to them and what they would be asked to do. They were given an informed consent form with all the details of the study to decide if it was something they would be interested in participating in so that they were aware what the study entails and what would be expected of them if they chose to participate. All understood that they would not receive any benefits from taking part in the study and that they could choose not to engage at any time.

Context

The study occurred at a privately funded daycare in southeastern Kentucky located inside of a church facility, with approximately fifty children ages one to five.

Data Sources

As indicated above, this study used a mixed methods research design. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions.

Quantitative data. Two types of quantitative data were collected in this study: the number of CAR prompts used during the video observation and the rating based on the Likert scale on three questions on the survey instrument. Please see Appendix A. After the primary investigator accumulated the video from each teacher, they were analyzed on the types of prompts that they used while reading and how frequently they used them. The data sheet categorized the prompts used into three categories using the acronym CAR (Hamilton & Schwanenflugel, 2011):

- C (Competence)- questions or responses that assessed comprehension of the text
- A (Abstract)- questions or responses that required the children to use their higher cognitive functions to problem solve or make predictions

- R (Relate)- questions or responses that asked the children to relate what they have

  read to their own lives and experiences

Table 3. CAR Prompts

	Description	Examples
Competence	Assess comprehension	"What was the first animal Sarah saw at the zoo?" "What flavor ice cream did Danyelle get?"
Abstract	Encourage problem solving and making predictions	"What animal do you think they are going to see next?" "How do you think they are feeling?"
Relate	Require applying text to personal experiences	"Have you ever been to the zoo?" What animals did you see there?"

The survey instrument asked the daycare instructors to rate the importance of literacy instruction

for young children, their understanding of how to provide early literacy instruction, and their

experience providing early literacy instruction. Their answers were analyzed in conjunction with

the qualitative data collected from the survey instrument to assess the daycare instructors'

holistic perspective about early literacy.

Qualitative data. The qualitative data came in the form of an open-ended question

survey. The participants were asked to describe literacy, what skills children learn as a precursor

to reading, how they incorporate early literacy instruction in the classroom, and what factors

have influenced their teaching philosophy on the topic as a whole. Their responses were then

analyzed to identify any relevant themes.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Quantitative Findings

Video observation. The video tapes of participants reading a book to children during the

circle time lesson were analyzed. Analysis revealed that none of the participants used any

competence, abstract, or relate prompts during their shared book reading. Rather, participants read the text directly from the book.

Figure 1. Quantitative Data from Video Observation
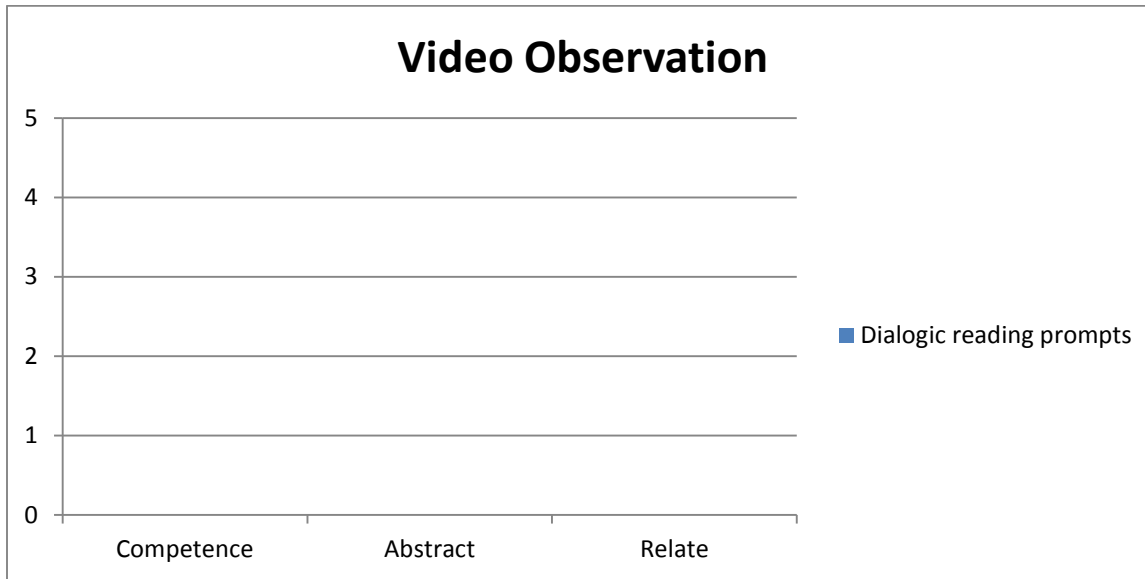
Responses to likert scale questions on survey instrument. Analysis of survey data from likert scale responses were analyzed to determine participants' view on the importance of emergent literacy, their understanding of how to provide emergent literacy instruction to young children, and their experience providing emergent literacy instruction to young children. All of the participants rated emergent literacy as very important. All of the participants also believed they had moderate understanding of early literacy instruction and moderate experience providing early literacy instruction.

Figure 2. Quantitative Data from the Survey Instrument
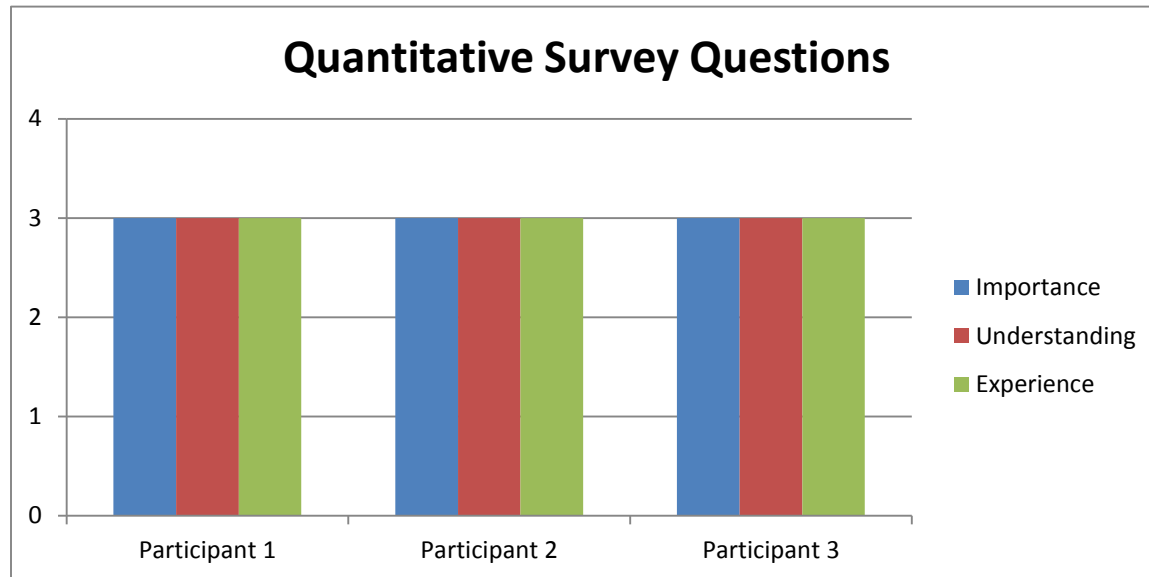
Qualitative Findings

      Responses to open-ended questions on survey instrument. As noted above, qualitative data included the participants' responses on the open-ended questions on the survey instrument. Participants 1 and 2 described literacy as the ability to read and write. Participant 3 took their definition a step further and included the use of phonics as an important component of literacy. Participants 1 and 2 identified reading books and learning sound-letter correspondence as skills that help young children learn to read upon entering kindergarten. Participant 3 expanded on the previous responses to include learning sight words, using phonics, and writing. Participant 1, teacher of the two year old classroom, incorporates literacy instruction into her classroom by reading a story every day and reciting the alphabet with her children. Participant 2, teacher of the three year old classroom, also reads a story every day and recites the alphabet. Additionally, they begin learning how to write letters and trace their names. Participant three, teacher of the four and five year old classroom, reads a story every day, recites the alphabet, sounds out unfamiliar words, learns sight words, and writes names independently without the use of lines to trace. All

of the participants attribute their knowledge of emergent literacy to courses they have had in

school and work-related trainings. Participant 3 also mentioned observing others and their

instructional techniques as a way to learn new methods to implement in her own classroom. In

vivo codes were generated from analysis of the data and similar codes were group to develop

themes. Upon completion of the analysis, three themes emerged from the data.

Table 4. Qualitative Data from Survey Instrument

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Describe literacy. What does it entail?	"Literacy is the ability to read. Writing skills are also important."	"The ability to read. Writing skills are also important in literacy."	"Literacy is the ability to read. However, literacy is not based solely on reading. Writing skills are important as well. Children need to be aware of phonics. All of these assist them with literacy skills."
What skills help young children learn to read when they enter kindergarten?	"Reading books, showing them letters, and sounding them out helps them learn to read."	Reading books at a young age and showing the letters and what the sound of the letter is helps them learn."	"Reading books to children allows them to start a love for it at an early age. Identify letters and sounds they make will aid in reading. Introduce them to word families and sight words. The use of phonics and teaching them to write."
In what ways do you incorporate literacy instruction into your classroom?	We read a story every day and go over our alphabet."	"We read stories every day and go over our alphabet and numbers. Also we work on tracing our letters."	"We read stories every day in our room. We say our sight words, alphabet, and numbers each day. We work on writing skills (including names, alphabet, and numbers). We sound

			out our letters and words."
What factors have influenced your understanding of early literacy instruction?	"Classes I have taken and trainings I have attended for my job."	"Classes that I have taken and training I have attended for my job."	"My college education and various trainings I have attended related to my job. I also watch others and use instructions they use with their children."

Theme one: "Narrow view of literacy." Participants' narrow view of literacy is

evidenced by their answers to qualitative questions on the survey instrument in which they

described literacy as reading, writing, and use of phonics and identified shared book reading,

sound letter correspondence, phonics, and writing as skills children needed upon entering

kindergarten. The participants' knowledge about literacy was contained to a narrow

interpretation and did not include several skills that help children think about language in a more

complex way.

Theme two: "Limited understanding of early literacy instruction." Participants' limited

understanding of early literacy instruction is shown by the qualitative data derived from their

answers about the skills children need to be able to learn to read and the ways they incorporate

literacy instruction in the classroom. The daily activities that they do with their children are

limited to only one domain of literacy. They did not identify any activities that teach the children

phonemic awareness, vocabulary, or comprehension. Fluency is indirectly addressed through the

memorization of sight words, which enables a child to read with increasing automaticity and

allows them to focus on comprehending the text rather than sounding out the words. However,

sight words are categorized as a phonics skill. Although the participants believe that they have a

moderate understanding of early literacy instruction, their responses on the survey show areas of growth.

   Theme three: "Value of early literacy instruction." Value of literacy is evidenced by the qualitative data showing that they do make a conscious effort to teach literacy skills to their children. All of the participants believe that literacy instruction is very important for young children, birth to five years of age, in order for them to have the skills they need to be successful in kindergarten.

Research Questions

Are participants using dialogic reading prompts during shared book reading?

   The participants reading straight from the book during the video observation indicates that the participants do not use any dialogic reading prompts during shared book reading.

What types of book reading prompts do participants use during shared book reading?

   As previously mentioned, the participants did not utilize any competence, abstract, or relate prompts.

What are participants' beliefs regarding emergent literacy instruction?

   According to the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions on the survey instrument and the quantitative data from the likert scale questions, the participants believe that emergent literacy instruction is very important to help children obtain the skills they will need to be successful in kindergarten.

Discussion

   The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to describe book reading practices of daycare employees and to identify the beliefs of daycare employees about emergent literacy instruction. Findings from a combination of the quantitative and qualitative data concluded that

daycare instructors have a narrow view of literacy, limited understanding of early literacy

instruction, and highly value literacy.

Connections to Prior Research

The participants responded in a way that corresponds with the amount of education that

they have had specific to emergent literacy and instructional techniques. As previously

mentioned, professionals with more training and education are more qualified to teach emergent

literacy in the appropriate ways (Lennox, 2013). Participants 1 and 2 both defined literacy as the

skill of reading and writing. Participant 2 has had some college in which she has completed

various general education courses but she has not had any courses with content specifically

related to components of literacy or instructional techniques to teach it to children. Spencer

(2011) concluded that SLPs have the most specialized knowledge in this area as a result of the

coursework that they are required to take. Although participant 1 is a communication disorders

major studying to become a SLP, she has only recently started in the program. Therefore she has

not taken many of the required classes that would begin adding to her fundamental knowledge to

foster a more broad understanding of literacy as a whole. As a result, she defined literacy

narrowly as reading and writing rather than addressing the inner components that will broaden

her understanding and enable her to take a more holistic approach to emergent literacy

instruction in her future practice.

Their responses also correlated with the skill level of the children in their classroom. As

the children become older, it is important to maintain their curriculum just outside the zone of

proximal development. In other words, the concepts they are learning should be new to them so

that they are building upon their knowledge but should not be so complex that they cannot grasp

it at their current cognitive level. For example, Lennox (2013) utilized this train of thought in

regards to vocabulary instruction when she stated that vocabulary instruction should provide

scaffolding when choosing target words. The words should enable the child to build a more

sophisticated lexicon so that they can explain unknown and abstract ideas while being applicable

to the child's life rather than words they will not use and are not relevant to them at the moment.

The participants used this concept when describing the activities they use to teach literacy to

their children within the classroom. Participant 1, teacher of the two year old class, reads a story

and recites the alphabet with her children every day. Participant 2, teacher of the three year old

class, reads a story, recited the alphabet and the sounds that each letter makes, and traces the

letters every day. Finally participant 3, teacher of the four and five year old class, reads a story,

recited the alphabet and corresponding sounds, learns sight words, sounds out other unknown

words, and learns to write their name independently without the use of lines or dots to trace.

Therefore, the literacy related activities they do with their children are age appropriate and

become more difficult as they grow older and master the prerequisite skills needed to move

forward.

        As noted above, analysis of the data revealed the presence of three themes: narrow view

of literacy, limited understanding of early literacy instruction, and value of early literacy

instruction. These findings reflect results from prior research. Stellakis (2011) and Spencer et al.

(2011) found that teachers tend to focus on orthography and the formation of letters into words

based on spelling rules. The participants' responses were very similar to that of the teachers. The

five areas of literacy include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and

comprehension. Without the ability to analyze the individual sounds in words, memorize sight

words, and interpret the meaning in the context presented, children cannot begin to read with

increasing automaticity so that they can focus more on comprehending the text rather than

decoding it (Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, & Lee, 2011). The instructional techniques utilized by the

participants were not done in a way to encourage the children to employ critical thinking skills in

order to apply what they have read. The participants' value of early literacy instruction correlates

with the study done by Phillips and Morse (2010), which also concluded that "providers

favorably endorse regular implementation of educationally-related activities and play with

literacy- and math-related materials, but may lack the specific expertise and curricular support to

best support the early development of early language, literacy, and math skills" (p. 213).

   The overall implication of this study is that daycare providers need to receive more

educational opportunities and professional development experiences in order for them to acquire

the knowledge and skill set they need to be able to teach early literacy skills more effectively. On

the survey instrument, each of the participants said that their existing knowledge of literacy

comes from their education and trainings they have been required to attend for their job. Their

belief that literacy instruction is very important and the fact that they already attend trainings

regularly implies that they would be willing to participate in literacy-specific trainings so that

their children will reap the benefit. These opportunities could come in the form of professional

workshops in which various daycare centers can attend to receive more extensive information

and strategies for early literacy instruction taught by a professional with more specialized

knowledge in that area, such as a reading specialist or speech-language pathologist. Those

professionals could also come into the daycare setting and perform demonstrations by having a

short literacy lesson with the children. They could also simply observe and offer constructive

feedback or resources and ideas for other activities. Coming into the daycare would offer a more

hands on experience for the daycare providers than sitting and listening to a presentation. It

would allow them to be able to directly watch the strategies that other professionals use in their

practice to teach literacy or learn from their suggestions so that they can offer more in depth literacy instruction to their children.

As previously mentioned, professionals are already of the belief that collaboration is best practice to have insight about students' strengths and areas of growth across contexts, as well as incorporating each individual's expertise in order to address all the needs of the student for a well-rounded education (Dudek, 2013); however, time, money, resources, and education can be stumbling blocks that keep collaboration from happening on the scale that it should (Justice & Purcell, 2003). Therefore, it is not a question that additional training and collaboration is needed, but overcoming the obstacles in order to implement it.

Providing children with the skills they need to read cannot be understated. Early literacy is the cornerstone of the educational curriculum that allows children to be successful in all areas of study (Lennox, 2013). Reading difficulty correlates with long-term problems throughout school (Juel, 1988). More of an effort has to be made on all fronts to ensure that children are receiving the supports they need. From a student perspective, reaching children at risk for reading deficits and giving them the necessary skills to read efficiently could greatly improve their school experiences from an academic, social, and behavioral standpoint (Lennox, 2013). If children receive exposure to these skills, especially early intervention for children who are at risk for reading difficulties, it can greatly reduce the number of children who need response to intervention (RTI) in the school system or even reduce the number of children with a communication disorder. So even though it may seem like participating in workshops and collaborating with professionals takes extra time and unnecessary effort, it can even save professionals time in the long term if their services are not required later.

Limitations

This study utilized a convenience sample and the resources available to the primary investigator. As a privately funded institution, this daycare has a different population than a public daycare would have. The participants, as well as the children in their care, are not very diverse in nature as far as demographics. None of the children have special needs or require early intervention services, which would impact the way the daycare teachers interact with them because they would need more explicit and direct instruction than a typically developing child.

The nature of the study can be a limitation in itself. Because there are only three participants, the data shows detailed information about the teaching philosophies and techniques exhibited by those three individuals. However, it does not account for all daycare instructors as a whole. Depending on the setting, educational background, and various other traits specific to the individual, each daycare instructor will have a different approach to literacy instruction. Therefore, this study provides a holistic view of these three participants but is not representative of the whole population.

Additionally, the study only captured the behavior of the participants on that given day. Behavior is conducive to many different factors and varies from day to day. Because the video observation was only done on one day, it does not accurately describe the way the participants read to their children every day. That could change based on the type of book they are reading or the previously existing knowledge the children have on the subject or even something as simple as the participants' mood that day could impact the way they interact during shared book reading.

The presence of the primary investigator and the knowledge that they were being recorded could have had an effect on the data as well. The participants could have had some anxiety stemming from the fact that they were being observed and evaluated, which could have

led them to behave differently. Each of them also made sure to tell the children to be on their

best behavior for the camera, which in turn could have caused the children to be hesitant and

withdraw from asking questions and interacting with the participants as they usually would.

Avenues for Future Research

Suggestions for future research in this area would include a larger sample size, multiple

trials, and a pre and posttest. Conducting a study across multiple daycares with a larger

population of varying teacher and children backgrounds would offer a more representative view

of the whole population of daycare instructors with both typically developing children and

children who may need more specialized instruction. Multiple trials over a longer period of time

would also offer a more accurate and comprehensive view of how daycare instructors interact

with their children during shared book reading on a daily basis. Finally, initially recording

daycare instructors' typical shared book reading with their children, offering a training in

dialogic reading prompts, and then recording them again to gauge if they apply any of what they

learned would show evidence suggesting whether workshops would be effective in improving

the quality of the shared book reading experiences children receive within the daycare setting.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Name: _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Highest Level of Education Reached: _____

Field of Study: _____

Occupation: _____

Please answer the questions below.

1. Describe literacy. What does it entail?

2. What skills help young children learn to read when they enter Kindergarten?

3. Rate the importance of literacy instruction for young children (birth to five years of age). Circle your response.

1	2	3	4
Not Important At All	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important

4. Rate your understanding of how to provide early literacy instruction to young children (birth to 5 years of age). Circle your response.

1	2	3	4
No understanding of early literacy instruction	Minimal understanding of early literacy instruction	Moderate understanding of early literacy instruction	Extensive understanding of early literacy instruction

5. Rate your experience providing early literacy instruction to young children (birth to 5 years of age). Circle your response.

1	2	3	4
No experience	Minimal experience	Moderate experience	Extensive experience

6. In what ways do you incorporate literacy instruction into your classroom?

7. What factors have influenced your understanding of early literacy instruction?