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Abstract Language and Student Response During Guided Play

By

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A culminating project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of

The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Adults use more advanced vocabulary words than they use with their children in non-play situations and extend children's pretend play using pretend talk," (Meacham, Vukelich, Han, & Buell, 2014, p. 563). This research study was an investigation into the way of using abstract teacher language in conversation with a child during guided play to verify itself as an effective strategy in the UPK classroom. It is significant that early childcare providers reflect on their behaviors and techniques used in the classroom to see what strategies and word choices are most effective for their students' learning; therefore, reflection served as an important segment to this research project. The purpose of this study was to discover how a student's responses helped me, the teacher, develop various ways to better approach questions and comments during guided play to support her in expanding vocabulary. Obtaining the most recent information on children's vocabulary acquisition provides a foundation for the use of the strategy with the UPK students this year and thereafter.

Problem Statement

Children enter school with several amounts of word knowledge. Oral discourse and vocabulary acquisition are significant for children as they become school ready, and many students have substantial differences in their vocabulary compared to others of their age. It is imperative to remember that the same Common Core State Standards affect all children as they enter and proceed through school. It is the obligation of early childcare providers to introduce numerous opportunities for children to expand their vocabulary by using it in conversation so they are academically and socially prepared for school.

Significance of the Problem

Many students have an array of vocabulary when entering school, and sometimes children become limited in the early childhood programs they attend. Curby, LoCasale-Crouch, Konold, Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, and Barbarin (2009) state that academic and social skill growth is highly influenced by the value of interaction that occurs between teacher and student.

 "Previous research has indicated that child care staff use language that is directive and complex, often fail to expand on the children's utterances, infrequently maintain topics over successive turns, and rarely ask questions that invite language responses at the children's level," (Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2006, p. 36). In my experience, I have seen this occur in the childcare centers I have worked for and continue to work for. I wanted to be sure that my students never fall victim to this type of conversation, and I hoped to strengthen my communicative skills through researching this problem.

Purpose for the Study

Guided play is an important concept of play that can be used to broaden student comprehension and imagination, but it also demonstrates what children can learn through conversation with their teachers and peers in the classroom. The incorporation of guided play to encourage children to use their imagination and use other learned vocabulary could be used to promote verbal communication and assist children's expansion of word knowledge. In this study, I integrated the use of read alouds and gave my participant opportunities to use guided play to incorporate the read aloud by using abstract teacher language to encourage her to think deeply about her play. This informed me of my effectiveness of using this type of language to promote

oral vocabulary in my pre-k student and how my reflections of my language usage with the student were beneficial.

Downer, Sabol, and Hamre (2010) state, "Although there are a lot of available data on the individual contributions of specific aspects of teacher–child interactions, we simply do not know enough about the ways in which these complex interactions uniquely and in combination foster both social and academic development in early childhood," (p. 700). More research needs to be complete to investigate the appropriate child development aspects for interactions. Therefore, I completed a self-study to see if my capabilities of promoting inferential discussion resulted in increased levels of both social and academic abilities among the participant.

Research Questions

- How effective is the utilization of abstract language questioning skills during guided play in order to expand oral vocabulary in a pre-k student?
- In what ways do the conversations and play between a pre-k child and myself contribute to the oral language expansion of this child in the early childhood classroom?

Personal Rationale for this Study

Children enter school for the first time, and thereafter, with countless amounts of word knowledge; some are very limited and some have endless amounts of oral vocabulary. Oral discourse and vocabulary acquisition are extremely important for every child, especially in the younger years, where they are exploring language more than ever before. Many school-age children have significant differences in their vocabulary compared to others of their age; however, the Common Core State Standards affect all children in each grade level as they proceed through school from K-12. Because of the significance in the Common Core and the drastic differences in language between all children, it is essential that early childcare providers

and Preschool and Pre-K program teachers provide numerous opportunities for children to expand their vocabulary by using deep thinking and inferential tasks when possible. It is of most significance that students become both academically and socially prepared for school. I completed this research study to ensure I am an effective teacher that provides a vocabulary-rich and deep thinking environment for my students in my UPK class.

Summary

As a current early childhood educator, I believe it is of utmost importance to provide children with a strong foundation of language that will carry them through years of learning. Massey (2013) states, "Early childhood teachers have an important responsibility: to promote oral language development for the students in their classrooms," (p. 125). Language is a skill that lasts a lifetime; we must expand on it whenever possible. Most importantly, in order to do so, teachers must feel prepared daily, ready to self-evaluate how the day's lessons went, and continue to improve their students and selves based on frequent reflections. Through my years of schooling thus far, I have learned that the reflective process of an educator is what shapes the learning of the students in the classroom most of all.

Definitions of Terms

Abstract language: inferential, thought-provoking way of speaking

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

It is safe to say that all students come from diverse environments, contexts, and families. All students come to school, especially Kindergarten, with entirely different amounts of language

and academic vocabulary knowledge. As much as there is research stating that it is important that educators provide opportunities to expand students' vocabulary acquisition, promote higher-order thinking, and list many different ways to strengthen and promote this in a classroom, there is much less research from a teacher perspective on promoting these skills. Curby et al. (2009) state, "Development theory postulates that students learn primarily as a result of the direct experiences (i.e., proximal processes) they have in a classroom," (p. 347). This literature review of recent peer-reviewed articles will highlight important points regarding ways to better develop oral language attainment in the early childhood classroom by looking at it through four different focuses: vocabulary variances in pre-k students, guided play, extent of student response to questions, interaction effects on academic and social development, and teacher reflection. This review gives insight to the development of the research questions I investigated throughout the research process.

Vocabulary Variances in Pre-K Students

Girolametto et al. (2006) explain their stance on the interaction that occurs in childcare settings, where providers seem to fail at extending children's responses, speak directly without expanding on their own words, and seldom ask higher-order questions that call for more in depth responses from children in their article, "Facilitating Language Skills: Inservice Education for Early Childhood Educators and Preschool Teachers." Children have different abilities when it comes to vocabulary. According to Girolametto et al., teachers ask unresponsive questions, which limit children's opportunities to answer questions more meaningfully and expand their language. Girolametto et al. state that different classroom activities influence the use of talk by childcare providers, as well as certain wording strategies, which can effect vocabulary acquisition when children go to kindergarten.

The purpose of this research article is to describe the reasons that effective teacher-child interactions are important, to display a model of professional development for increased teacher response, and to discuss data that displays an effective result from the in-service discussed in the research (Girolametto et al., 2006). Girolametto et al. discuss the necessity of having language and literacy learning increase in early childhood programs across the country, as well as Canada, because of the large variety of language in young children. Girolametto et al. also state that childcare providers regularly fail to develop and expand on utterances that children make, as well as infrequently ask questions that encourage children to respond to them at an appropriate age-level. The reasons regarding why vocabulary is sometimes limited in pre-k students are that directive talk is used during reading time to control behavior, to take control of turn-taking that occurs in the classroom, to control the topic that is discussed, and to control behaviors, whereas less directive talk is used during play (Girolametto et al., 2006).

According to Girolametto et al. (2006), the in-service program discussed in this meta-analysis is called the Learning Language and Loving It model, which is described as a professional development method that helps to assist language learning during interaction to eventually help children acquire literacy skills. This model is based on social interactionist beliefs, where children learn proper vocabulary and syntactic rules of language through interaction by playing games, communicating, and reading stories together (Girolametto et al., 2006). The Learning Language and Loving It model has four components to it; orientation, a "preprogram" videotape, 8 sessions for groups of educators, and 6 one-on-one feedback videos, which totals to approximately 25 hours of professional development (Girolametto et al., 2006). According to Girolametto et al., these group sessions are based upon teaching language

development strategies and create a welcoming and comforting environment that encourages interaction among peers.

As a conclusion to this research, Girolametto et al. state that although this in-service method has been used with "typically developing children" and has shown increasing vocabulary knowledge, it has not been used with educators of children with disabilities. Furthermore, the model aims to improve the teacher-child interactions that occur in the classroom, as well as endorses the use of language, improving the language variance that exists in children (Girolametto et al., 2006).

Guided Play

Massey (2013) discusses the purpose of her research article, "From the Reading Rug to the Play Center: Enhancing Vocabulary and Comprehensive Language Skills by Connecting Storybook Reading and Guided Play;" to see how abstract language creates a conversation in which a child must think deeply through reading and guided play to expand language development. Massey explored the use of providing meaningful conversation to expand vocabulary by connecting reading and guided play, rather than just one or the other.

In her article, Massey (2013) discusses her data collection, a meta-analysis of all her findings to support her thoughts and ideas. Massey states that children's vocabulary is strengthened when teachers use abstract language, exposing children to new words during classroom activities, such as guided play and read alouds. Massey discusses the need for a child to explore an object before thinking abstractly about it, such as its functions and uses, as one would during guided play. Play provides a meaningful circumstance in which children can learn language; where children can develop their own interpretations of their play (Massey, 2013). Massey explains that using guided play as an extension to read alouds gives students consistent

exposure to vocabulary that is used in abstract language through the particular interaction that occurs with the teacher and child. Guided play can sometimes require "pretend talk," using props and integrating the read aloud that was used, which requires more abstract language because children are able to apply emotions, thoughts and everyday occurrences to this play (Massey, 2013). Massey also states that the use of props is highly suggested for use during guided play, especially since it allows children to associate these real objects to the story, allows them to retell the story, as well as link the text to their experiences and expand their vocabulary. As a result, Massey states that both quality and quantity of deep-thought conversation is necessary to encourage appropriate interaction that will lead to language and literacy development, and guided play seems most appropriate to do so.

Guided play as an extension to read alouds. In the article, "Developing Oral Language in Primary Classrooms," Kirkland and Patterson (2005) discuss the problem that teachers have difficulty meeting the needs of all students because they are at various language learner levels, as well as using proper methods to best enhance particular language development in children. The purpose of the meta-analysis Kirland and Patterson formed is to discuss effective strategies to use in the classroom to meet the needs of all students and expand their oral vocabulary, including ways to connect language to literature.

Kirkland and Patterson (2005) used multiple sources to discover the focus of their research article and suggested many strategies and techniques to enhance vocabulary in the classroom while appropriately meeting all student needs. Kirkland and Patterson suggest using print rich environments to inspire an engaging and warming environment that will give students more opportunities to think critically about their reading. Additionally, Kirkland and Patterson suggest making connections to literature, as well as using wordless picture books to guide their

own stories and make up their own parts to it, which can be used during guided play once a read aloud has been completed. This is something that is very encouraging to do during guided play; by recollecting other past stories and using props to create a new one using their imagination. Asking children about problems of the story and character connections as a way to extend the read aloud aspect of learning is also another suggestion Kirkland and Patterson found during their research; they say that conversations regarding books should be higher-level thinking and can even be portrayed through something such as reader's theater that depicts the story that was read.

As a conclusion, Kirkland and Patterson (2005) describe the process of constructing language as a means to make meaning through comprehension in relation to the world, and point out that developing language has similar conditions as does learning about the world around them. Being able to apply situations to the real world is a life skill, and therefore guided play is essential for young children. Kirkland and Patterson state, "social interaction is foundational to language development," (p. 392).

Extent of Student Response to Questions

In the article, "Inferential Talk During Teacher-Child Interactions in Small-Group Play," Tompkins, Zucker, Justice, and Binici (2013) discuss the problem that academic instruction is a necessity in children's learning, but much less is focused on higher-level thinking during conversation. Tompkins et al. state that the purpose of this research article is to take a closer look at the questions and comments made by teachers toward students during guided play.

Tompkins et al. (2013) display the importance of teachers using abstract talk with students in small group guided play to enhance vocabulary acquisition. They believe the type of teacher language used with children during play will determine the type of response from them (Tompkins et al., 2013). Tompkins et al. also state that inferential teacher talk during play gives

children the exposure to this type of conversation, encouraging them to use it, which will help

them with future language and reading abilities. According to Tompkins et al., the level of

language used in conversation is determined upon the questions asked by the teachers; not driven

by children responses.

      According to Tompkins et al. (2013), the data collection procedures in this study

consisted of 39 early childcare teachers who were observed in their classrooms. The interactions

between these lead teachers and their students were observed during small-group play and video

recorded the instruction within the classroom for 30 weeks, every 2 weeks for 20 minutes, which

totaled 15 videos by the study's completion (Tompkins et al., 2013). Teachers received all

materials needed to complete the study, including instructions on what to do with students;

trained doctoral students transcribed ten minutes of each video (Tompkins et al., 2013).

Tompkins et al. describes that codes were used for teacher questions, which were categorized

into the four levels of cognitive demand language. As a result, Tompkins et al. discussed the use

of teacher-child interactions during small-group guided play and discovered that the cognitive

demand language level used in asking a child a question tends to result in an answer of the same

level (for example, level 3 question tended to receive a level 3 response). Therefore, posing

higher-level questions usually cause children to think more critically.

      De Rivera, Girolametto, Greenberg, and Weitzman (2005) complete a research study by

exploring the problem that more recently, prevention services and intervention services have

been needed for children requiring language assistance because of delays or possible risks of

delay. De Rivera et al. explored how teacher questions influence the particular response given by

children and at what rate they answered. De Rivera et al. explain that the use of questions is the

best way to encourage student participation because they encourage responses more than

comments do; they also suggest that the intonation of a question grasps student attention. Additionally, de Rivera et al. discuss the social-interactive theory in regards to language and child development and explore educators questioning skills and preschoolers and toddlers responses.

To complete this study, de Rivera et al. (2005) explained that 26 educators were videotaped during playtime in three visits within two weeks; 13 toddler teachers and 13 preschooler teachers, who used both open-ended and closed questioning. Each of the teachers chose four children to be a part of the study to gain data on small groups (de Rivera et al., 2005). It wasn't until the last visit that the educators and students were videotaped for 15 minutes at a play dough center, where educators were instructed to converse with the child as usual (de Rivera et al., 2005). According to de Rivera et al., play dough is more student-led and a familiar play center in the classroom, so discussion was more accustomed.

As a result of this study, de Rivera et al. (2005) found that preschoolers used longer responses following a particular topic question and other open-ended questions, as compared to the toddlers. Additionally, de Rivera et al. found that in-service education for early childcare providers is effective for using these types of questions with children. Teacher-child talk is more extensive when a topic is consistent and children are able to expand on the topic, rather than talk about multiple broad topics at one time (de Rivera et al., 2005). Results showed that preschoolers tended to answer with longer responses to open-ended questions, which show that the questions asked influence the type of response (de Rivera, 2005).

Interaction Effects on Academic and Social Development

Curby et al. (2009) state that social and academic skills needed for school are both increased in a pre-k program and this is due to the "quality" of the interactions that teachers have with their students. Curby et al. conducted research that studied the types of teacher-child

interaction and the effect it has on both academic and social achievement in the Pre-K classroom. The study's purpose was to explore emotional, organizational, and instructional supports that make up most interactions in the classroom (Curby et al., 2009). Curby et al. aimed to explore the question: *"What is the relation between pre-k quality profiles of teacher-child interactions and children's achievement gains and social competence?"* (p. 353).

Curby et al. (2009) discuss that creating a strong relationship between child and teacher gives the child a sense of well-being, which contributes to successful learning in that classroom; this includes responding to children and interacting with them in a way that supports their needs for more appropriate responses. By providing various materials for children, educators encourage students to further explore and inquire about these objects, resulting in the use of inferential discussion, meeting both academic and social development needs (Curby et al., 2009).

The data collection included assessments of language, literacy, and math skills, along with observations during class time (Curby et al., 2009). The observations were completed every half hour throughout two half-school days on nine dimensions of the CLASS, which measures quality of interactions in the three domains; those using this measure were trained beforehand (Curby et al., 2009). Individual assessments were also completed, such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III to test receptive vocabulary, Woodcock-Johnson III to measure applied problems and academic achievement, and the Teacher-Child Rating Scale to measure social competence (Curby et al., 2009). According to Curby et al., when children left pre-k to go to kindergarten, their teachers had to assess them again regarding their social skills, families of the pre-k children had to complete questionnaires about demographics, and their pre-k teachers had to fill out a survey about their educational history (Curby et al., 2009).

According to Curby et al. (2009), the results of the study concluded that pre-k programs are beneficial to both the social and academic abilities of children, which is a result of the interaction quality between teacher and child. More specifically, children measured the biggest academic gains with the highest concept development provided, and the biggest gains in social development were evident in children who were provided the highest amount of emotional support (Curby et al., 2009).

Downer et al. (2010) bring up the debate about early childcare programs striving to focus more on academics rather than socialization and emotional development skills. According to Downer et al., academic learning and social learning are "intertwined," but mention that there isn't enough research to explain how they are related in that way because there is so much research stating that one depends on the other more, and vice versa. Downer et al. explain that early childhood programs place too much pressure on academic development instead of social development, and that so much focus on instruction can stump social development.

In this meta-analysis, Downer et al. (2010) also discuss the CLASS framework and how interactions fall into emotional, organizational, and instructional support. According to Downer et al., instructional support generally leads to social, academic, and cognitive success, so each is equally important.

To complete their study, Downer et al. (2010) referred to figures and diagrams regarding the effects of interactions and developmental outcomes, and a description of the CLASS framework that discusses interactions that promote learning and social development based on the three domains. Downer et al. discuss previous research based on teacher and child characteristics and quality of interactions based on education level, biological impacts, and quality of the interactions they have with each other.

As a result, Downer et al. (2010) found that to help provide instructional support and social language enhancement, teachers must ask problem-solving questions to promote higher-order thinking, offer feedback that provides learning opportunities, use experiences as a way to promote connections through discussions and model the use of academic and inferential language. Downer et al. state that interactions that are more instruction-driven aid language development by creating discussions that are "meaning-based" and therefore leading to abstract talk. These meaning-based interactions occur when teachers ask problem-solving questions that require higher-order thinking, as well as make opportunities available for students to connect questions and new learning with previously learned information, and when teachers model language for students to learn and use themselves (Downer et al., 2010).

Teacher Reflection

In this study, Fisher and Woodb (2012) address a problem that there are no forms of particular professional development opportunities that show what is effective for supporting change in education and teacher practices, and not enough knowledge is presented in order for teachers to evaluate and change their particular ineffective behaviors. Fisher and Woodb set to explore teacher reflection strategies, their conversation tactics used during teacher-child interaction in early childhood programs, and processes of change they may embark on, known as the Adult-Child Interaction Project. Professional development needs to be researched further to see how teachers actually learn from them and what in particular they learn so that student results show change in response to the in-services (Fisher & Woodb, 2012).

According to Fisher and Woodb (2012), video recordings, frequent interactions, and reflection were main components to this research study. More specifically, this action research contains the collaboration of early childhood educators; 14 teachers within a childcare age-range,

six months to six years old, who were chosen based on purposeful sampling (Fisher & Woodb, 2012). For this study, Fisher and Woodb discuss that two childcare providers worked together at a time with a child of a particular given age group; the educators met every 10 weeks or so to conduct reflective discussions based on their actions as seen on the video recordings of their conversations with the assigned children (Fisher & Woodb, 2012). According to Fisher and Woodb, the educators were told to detect a change they want to make that relates to their practices and reflect on the effects that particular action made. The educators kept writing logs to record anything that they found important throughout the study and used them to aid in their oral discussion reflections (Fisher & Woodb, 2012).

The data in this study showed that it was problematic for these educators to change their thoughts on their effectiveness or lack thereof, as it took much time to do so; the video recordings proved to be the best way to influence the educators to eventually change their thinking (Fisher & Woodb, 2012). According to Fisher and Woodb, the research displays that shared thinking and collaboration with peers is beneficial in the reflection process; the educators were able to develop effective teaching skills by watching themselves and their peers on the recordings, and discuss and create new knowledge learned from the videos. Fisher and Woodb concluded the study by stating that professional development and reflective processes are greatly effective and could assist others in creating change for their classrooms and students through successful collaboration with others.

Conclusion

The literature signifies the importance of teacher-child talk in the classroom to promote vocabulary for children in the early childhood years. The vast amount of language difference in children make vocabulary expansion more difficult in a large group setting, so individual or

small group meetings of conversation can become extremely significant in the early childhood classroom. Conversation and deep thinking can be easily accomplished by using guided play; children use props in an excited method that makes interacting about a story a fun manner to pretend play. Teacher-child interaction during guided play is crucial because it gives children time to think about the questions asked and respond with a similar response that can be expanded upon. These responses are important for teachers to reflect about in order to plan appropriately for further conversations requiring higher-order thinking. Although the literature posed existing disagreements on social and academic benefits of teacher-child interaction by saying one is more prevalent than the other, it is safe to say that interaction is imperative. Children are clearly able to receive both of these benefits in a positive, literacy-rich learning environment, one way or another.

Chapter 3: Study Design

Methodology and Design

I used a qualitative approach to this research project. According to Clark and Creswell (2010), my data collection is qualitative because I explored a concept supported with broad questions, most of the data collection was heavily dependent on the use of participants, and data was presented through words and subjective in manner.

To appropriately pursue this research project, I used the method of discourse analysis using conversation, as discussed by Florio-Ruane and Morrell (2011). These authors state that this is where people create meaning through discussion; I gave my participant this opportunity to create meaning through our discussions we had (Florio-Ruane & Morrell, 2011). Conversation was a critical portion of my entire research study, and the goal was to help my participant use deeper meaning and think more inferentially about stories during guided play.

The other segment of my research study contained the autoethnography method, or self-study approach, as mentioned by Clark and Creswell (2010). After my data collection, I reflected upon my own experiences through the process in which I evaluated myself as an educator, also discussed by Clark and Creswell. An autoethnography aims at pursuing a greater cultural issue, which in this case is the language used with children in early childcare programs (Clark & Creswell, 2010). I also recorded, reflected, and analyzed the responses of my participant to do so, another suggestion made by Clark & Creswell.

The purpose of this qualitative autoethnography was to explore the ways I used language with a Pre-K student, aiming to expand her oral vocabulary. Although the expansion of oral vocabulary was indirectly measured, my reflections of our conversations documented my opinion of how my words affected the participant's language. To obtain the most effective results to the research questions I investigated throughout this research study, my data collection included field notes I used during conversation with my participant, audio recordings that captured these conversations for reference, and reflection journal entries that I used to analyze my success or lack thereof in my questioning skills.

My Position as a Researcher

I completed my undergraduate studies at SUNY Fredonia in Childhood Inclusive Education grades 1-6, where I obtained my General Education and Students with Disabilities certifications. Since then, I have been working toward my Master's degree in Literacy Birth-6 at The College at Brockport. During this time, I have also received my Early Childhood and Early Childhood Students with Disabilities (Birth-2) certifications. Since beginning my graduate program, I have been a UPK teacher for Hilton Central School District, in which I consistently surround my students in a literacy-rich classroom. Having this teaching position for the last year

and a half has greatly shown me the range of abilities regarding vocabulary that children have at such a young age. Most of my students step into my class in September and struggle to put together a sentence in words. Therefore, I aimed to explore my strengths and weaknesses when having conversations with my students; however, at this time of the year, my students are consistently using complete sentences, so I intended to use abstract language to encourage my participant to think deeply and use more complex oral vocabulary than she usually uses.

Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How effective is the utilization of abstract language questioning skills during guided play in order to expand oral vocabulary in a pre-k student?

- In what ways do the conversations and play between a pre-k child and myself contribute to the oral language expansion of this child in the early childhood classroom?

Participants and Setting

This research study required one participant other than me. I used a 4-year-old female student from my Universal Pre-Kindergarten class, Mary (pseudonym). This student was chosen to participate in my study based on purposeful selection, as she is a student in my only UPK class. The student selected was based on the parental verbal consent, as I briefly talked with parents beforehand to plan appropriately for the research. This study took place in spare rooms in the building in which my UPK classroom is located, during daily play centers, for the duration of typical class time.

Mary as a student. Mary is a leader of her peers and makes choices dependent on what she wants to know and learn. She is a rule follower and ensures safe choices for herself and for her peers. Mary is enthusiastic about newly learned information and loves to read and write

whenever applicable. She pretends to read often and tries her best to write whenever she can, at school or at home. Mary is confident in her knowledge and usually chooses literacy activities when it is free center play.

Mary's home life. Mary is an only child who lives at home with her mother in a single-parent household, in a small house in a town located near the school. Her father is actively in her life and she sees him every other weekend and select school days. Mary has two sets of grandparents that are heavily involved in her life and care for her when her mother is working. Mary's mother cares for her needs immediately and effectively, as Mary is well fed, bathed, and wears clean clothes on a daily basis. There has never been a worry regarding Mary's well-being or home life since beginning daycare at the school three years ago.

Mary's parental support. Mary's mother reads to her almost every night. Mary owns multiple books and it is obvious she receives reading support when read to at night because her print and word awareness is evident, as she can demonstrate left to right directionality and sweep return, as well as recall multiple book plots. Mary explained to me that she and her mother, as well as one of her grandmothers, practice reading together often. Mary also recently notes that she and her other grandmother have been working on reading sight words located in Dr. Seuss books. Mary shows this evidence when she pretend reads, displaying intonation in certain parts of the books that hint at another familiar person's voice in her life. Mary's mother is actively involved in the classroom; she ensures Mary has "Show and Share" every week, extra clothing when necessary, and discusses any other news that is made evident from our classroom with the assistant teacher or myself.

Mary's overall academic issue in literacy. In literacy, Mary seems to struggle with expanding on her reasoning when questioned about particular story events or inferences. Mary

easily demonstrates comprehension of stories or gives particular predictions or inferences

regarding a story, but always struggled when asked *why*. This was evident since the beginning of

the school year, which gave me insight into conducting this research with her.

Procedures

This research study was completed over a six-week period between December 2014 and

January 2015. During this time, I gave my participant opportunities to use guided play to

incorporate the story that was read that day. I did this by completing a read aloud and asking

comprehension and inferential questions throughout the reading**,** as I usually do on a daily basis.

After, I allowed students to pick their free-choice centers. I pulled my participant out during this

time for 10 minutes to conduct guided play conversations; I talked with her, encouraging her to

incorporate the story that was read aloud just moments ago. To do so, I used abstract teacher

language to encourage her to think deeply about her play. I incorporated the use of props to use

them in a way that helped her depict the story more easily. I audio recorded the conversations we

had together and I transcribed each of the recordings after each time we met, which was 10

minutes every other school day, since each center rotation is lasts that long. I also documented

any vocabulary acquisition I noticed over the time period for my own reflection purposes; this

included the amount and length of her responses. Depending on the responses I received from

my participant, my frequent reflections demonstrated if and when I had to make changes to the

way I worded questions and comments I constructed with the participant during this guided play.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

My qualitative research study is valid because I used persistent observation; I carried on a

conversation with my participant every other day for 10 minutes each for a total of six weeks,

which also explains the prolonged engagement of this 1½-month research process. I also used

member checks to be sure my data was accurate by listening to my recorded conversations numerous times to confirm they were transcribed appropriately. This transcription process ensured that I was able to produce the most accurate reflective skills in my journal reflections based on the conversations I had with my participant. Again, my reporting included the use of a pseudonym, Mary, to ensure confidentiality. Transferability was used as the participants and setting have been established, while still maintaining confidentiality of the child, her family, and her school. Dependability was also used throughout the research process, as the details of the study procedure have been given completely. Lastly, confirmability was present in this research project, as the reflections I made regarding my self-study was directly based upon the responses and reactions I received from the participant. My thoughts and brainstorming of ways to become a better early childhood educator were reflective upon the conversations that took place with my participant.

Data Collection

  Audio recordings. As I aimed to explore the utilization of abstract and inferential language use during guided play with my participant, I used this type of vocabulary during conversation with her over the research period. As I took notes of my thoughts throughout the process, I also recorded my conversations with this student with the audio recording option on my iPhone. Each session I met with my participant was captured in essence via my iPhone audio recording application. I used this device to record each conversation I had with the participant to better evaluate how well I met my participant's social needs as an educator, as far as expanding her oral vocabulary. I did not want to solely rely on reflection, so having the recorded sessions with my participant was useful for me to understand how my questions and comments affected her responses.

Transcriptions. I used the audio recordings from each session to listen to and transcribe the conversations onto paper to have a more visual sense of documentation. These transcribed notes included both what I said and what the participant said in response, in sequential order of how the conversations occurred. After the six-week data collection period, I transcribed the 15 audio recordings of our conversations. When I completed the transcripts, I reviewed them to see which ways my language indicated my effectiveness for elaborating my participant's responses and which ways I hindered her language expansion. I read through the transcriptions, wrote notes that defined my questioning skills, and then color-coded particular question types with colored pens. I then narrowed down similar types of questions into four different characteristics, creating my question themes I found throughout the data collection.

Reflections. Reflections were a significant part to my data collection and analyses because of the methodology used in this study. After transcribing conversations I had with my participant, I took time out of every day we met to reflect upon our conversation. I reflected on my actions, questions and responses, and how in particular I should change my use of abstract language in conversation based on how my participant responded to me. I reflected on my research question: *in what ways do the conversations and play between a pre-k child and myself contribute to the oral language expansion of this child in the early childhood classroom?* I discussed my actions in whether our conversations reached toward answering this particular question in my research. After every session I met with the participant, I wrote a reflection regarding the meeting, the positive and negative actions I noticed during the meeting, and how the participant reacted to my particular questions, comments, and responses. These notes were significant in giving me insight into how effective my questions, my approach in asking the questions, and my attitudes affected my participant's responses.

Among the several questions I posed throughout the six-week period during guided play, I found that I asked Mary numerous questions that received various responses. Common trends in my data collection include Teacher Reflection on Classroom Inquiry, Topic-Continuing Questions, Topic-Initiating Questions, Story Comprehension Questions, and Suggestive Questions. Each of these themes demonstrated how the wording of the questions affected how my participant responded, indicating my effectiveness of expanding Mary's oral vocabulary using academic language.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

This self-study was conducted to delve further into my ways of teaching effectively, regarding my use of abstract language during multiple guided play conversations with a goal to expand oral vocabulary in a pre-k student. To see how well I did, I studied the ways in which conversations during play helped in contribution to my participant's language expansion, depending on the extent of her responses, and what information Mary provided me in reply to my prompts and questions. I asked her questions that help her think more inferentially about what she was doing or to play out exactly what would happen if the story had ended a different way, for example. At the end of the six-week period, I saw that the language used with my participant had caused her to use inferential thinking more frequently. The repeated use of reflections seemed to be effective throughout the recordings and transcribed notes, and I was able to efficiently see if oral vocabulary has expanded, since this type of language was used in conversation more than the language used in the first couple of weeks with this participant. The data from my reflections, transcripts, and audio recordings were examined and analyzed.

Documents were analyzed and color-coded for reoccurring themes. These themes provide the basis for the subsequent findings.

Teacher reflection revealed how the student was affected by guided play and academic language. A significant piece of the self-study method included the teacher reflection process. Bayat (2010) states that the teacher reflection process is pivotal in creating great teaching practices and is significant for integrating evaluation and instruction modification. Through constant reflection, I demonstrated narrative and illustrative characteristics that are research-based (Baumann & Duffy-Hester, 2002). Bayat (2010) also discusses "reflection-on-action," where the teacher reflection follows a teaching action. This type of reflection was the particular method I used throughout the reflection process, when I created journal entry reflections following each session with Mary. After each meeting with the participant, I reflected on what I thought went well during the session, what went unwell, and particular behaviors Mary demonstrated throughout the conversation in response to my questions and comments. These journal entries allowed me to reflect upon what needed change or what worked well for the both of us to have effective conversations. Consistent journal entry reflection displayed the narrative portion of the reflection process, since I completed this writing after each session of guided play and conversation. Bayat (2010) explains that a reflection journal helps teachers to construct meaning through writing, promoting the idea of the teacher becoming a learner through this process. The teacher learner attitude is significant, and through my reflections, I continuously learned from myself based on my thoughts, actions, and Mary's actions. My reflections guided me in how to go about conversing with my participant in a more effective way, giving me insight as to what worked best.

My reflection's illustrative process depicted the transcripts I created for each audio-recorded session, which Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2002) also discuss. While re-listening to the recordings, I typed up every verbal and nonverbal action for each session. My reflection journal entries for each meeting noted the occurrence of nonverbal actions throughout our discussion; I used the journal to crosscheck and help me transcribe the sessions. The transcripts created a visualization of the conversations and made it easier to see the discussions in a tangible format, re-play the conversations in my mind, and analyze these meetings successfully.

Along with this significant reflection theme reoccurring throughout the data collection and analysis process, four questioning themes remained prevalent throughout my research. Within each following theme, a reflection portion will be dedicated; since reflection stayed predominant in this self-study, reflection will be referred and evaluated within each remaining data theme.

Topic-continuing questions show engagement with language. The topic-continuing theme reference, adapted from Meacham, Vukelich, Han, and Buell (2014), describes how they categorized data, which the students initiated and the teacher continued during conversation with the students. I continued a conversation on the topic at hand during our meetings and asked for more detail using my participant's comments, repeated her comments and asked for further explanation to her responses, and probed her for more details. Additionally, I used new vocabulary and explained new word meanings while adding to her responses about a particular topic we spoke about. I also gave additional insight to questions already asked so Mary could have more details to aid in her response thoughts. I found that the characteristics defined the questions as "open." Scull, Paatsch, and Raban (2013) discuss that open questions give children opportunities to use and expand their vocabulary. The authors also state that open questions

allow children to use "complex language structures" and higher-order thinking (Scull et al., 2013).

Among the many topic-continuing questions, my participant gave numerous types of responses. The responses I received when I asked topic-continuing questions regarded examples of new vocabulary use and the expression of meanings without using the specific words I used in my questions and explanations. Mary comprehended new word meaning and expressed these understandings through her own portrayal. Some examples include, "*The rabbit practiced hopping like this*," where Mary demonstrated the new word definition by physically representing its meaning. Scull et al. (2013) discuss that oral scaffolding of new vocabulary and given explanations in this format help children obtain a better understanding of the new vocabulary. I probed and prompted Mary for more detail to continue the topic, which she responded and provided explanations. Open questions are also used to help children learn new words in ways that help educators support and scaffold their instruction using different methods (Scull et al., 2013). The way I worded my vocabulary-based questions helped Mary use them in a correct manner that depicted appropriate meaning and comprehension.

More common responses that pertained to this continuing-the-topic theme included short responses with minimal explanations, such as, "*No that's silly*," "*yes*," and "*no*" to answer particular questions. Mary tended to switch topics when asked to do or say something further about a particular topic; for example, she talked about hot lava, something non-existent in the book read that day. Mary also demonstrated explanation traits when having our discussions by giving supporting reasons to her responses. When asked what happened between two of the main characters, she responded by recollecting the event where one character broke all the other's toys, and also gave examples of the particular items. Some other responses to these question

types included longer, but vague responses; for example, Mary stated, "*Yeah. She's gonna go all the way over there.*" This response is longer than her few-word short responses, but much more brief than a detailed response including explanations of why the character performed a specific action. Another response characteristic I found in my topic-continuing questions was my question and response repetition use in Mary's replies, instead of creating personal reactions that were meaningful to her.

Upon reflection, I posed more open questions with room for abstract thinking and reasoning and received a mixture of responses, between one-word answers to explanatory responses including supporting examples. What I found differed the most between the questions included how these type of questions introduced new vocabulary that Mary reproduced and then used correctly. I found that familiarizing Mary with the new vocabulary and explaining specific words in an open question format demonstrated beneficial aspects toward Mary's language development. The manner I posed topic-continuing questions were valuable for her oral language because of the vocabulary she learned and successfully used due to the benefits of having the guided play conversations. Below is a table that entails the topic-continuing question theme, the topics' characteristics, and the participant's response to each.

THEME	THEME CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONSE
Topic-Continuing Questions (open)	- Used participant's comments to ask for more detail - Repetition of what participant stated - Asked for explanation of previous response - Probed participant for details of original response - Used/explained new(er) vocabulary	- Short response (ex: *no that's silly*) *Yes/no* responses - Switched topics (ex: *those go in hot lava*) - Explains what she means (ex: *the monster from the bubble book*) and gave examples to support her previous responses (ex: *Like my jumping rope, my swing, and my bike.*) - Longer, but not detailed,

	• Gave insight/information to question I already asked	responses (ex: *Yeah. She's gonna go all the way over there.*) • Used new vocab (ex: *The rabbit <u>practiced</u> hopping like this.*) and expressed new vocabulary meanings without using my specific words • Repeated my questions/responses

Topic-initiating questions demonstrate further engagement with language and inference making. The idea of using the topic-initiating theme was adapted from Meacham et al. (2014), when they categorized data initiated by the teacher during conversation with children. To begin new conversation topics, I asked inference-based questions centered on the text selection read that day. I also asked my participant prediction-making questions based on what she thought would happen next. To initiate new conversation topics, I probed Mary to dig deeper into her imagination, and encouraged her to demonstrate her play while discussing an occurring event to express her emotions more easily. To discuss and play simultaneously, I also asked my participant to apply her emotions by comparing characters to incidents she experienced or other story events, and by comparing emotions to her feelings. In some instances, I asked new, broader-topic questions, leaving room for Mary to answer however she pleased. These topic-initiating questions are also categorized as "open" questions. Scull et al. (2013) state that open questions are "cognitively challenging" and help children relate their own experiences to what is being discussed. This text-to-self connection was a strategy I used while conversing with my participant to promote and develop connections with text.

Mary's physical responses in combination with her dialogue responses typically occurred when I asked topic-initiating questions. Mary played with her props while she explained what

was occurring during the play to better demonstrate the event that happened in the reading. She continued this play and discussion in response to my questions that requested a demonstration of something particular that she could display with her words and character props.

More common responses that pertained to the theme of initiating topics included short responses, such as, "*hop away,*" "*school,*" "*yes,*" and "*no,*" which contained no elaboration. She also used longer responses by explaining herself when questioned *why*. Additionally, Mary used long, but imprecise responses with topic-initiating questions; for example, she responded, "*Mamma is holding the baby in her pocket.*" This example is a lengthier response, but it still lacks the explanation of why the mother acted in that particular manner. Research states that teachers use open questions to seek explanation (Scull et al., 2013). When verbally asked *why* something occurred or *why* a character acted in a particular manner, Mary supported her reasoning. Furthermore, during conversation, Mary repeated my questions while responding to create complete sentences. Sometimes, she switched the topic we talked about at the time by stating something with no relation to the question asked. As I used these topic-initiating questions, I hoped for her focus on the particular question initiations that I asked her at the time, so the conversation could convey smoothness without a change of topic after every question asked. This behavior was not the case during each entire meeting; just a few times when she decided a character should do something else when prompted with a different event.

Upon reflection, these open questions helped me push Mary to play while responding to me, encouraging the dramatic play that helped language development. The encouragement of making inferences and predictions helped my participant perform these acts effectively. The emotional application helped Mary depict new topics in her play, and the play helped her express longer and more detailed responses because I encouraged her to relate feelings toward herself.

Topic-initiating questions also resulted with Mary answering the question *why*, although most of

the time the question was asked, rather than implied. The idea of shared thinking involved during

these questions displayed my involvement in the thinking process, alongside Mary, to stimulate

her higher-order thinking, and helped her to make text-, world-, and self-connections with the

text read that day (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008). Initiating topics through open questions

allowed Mary to present an array of responses, which demonstrated her language exposure and

oral language practice through her replies in many communication forms. Below is a table that

entails the topic-initiating question theme, the topics' characteristics, and the participant's

response to each.

THEME	THEME CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONSE
Topic-Initiating Questions (open)	- Asked inference-based questions - Asked prediction-making questions - Probed to dig deeper into imagination - Asked participant to show (play) when talking - Asked participant to apply emotions (compare characters/events/self) - Sometimes asked new broad topic questions	- Short response (*hop away, school*- but did not elaborate) *Yes/no* responses - Long responses; explained when questioned *why* - Played while explaining what was happening - Longer, but vague responses (ex: *Mamma is holding the baby in her pocket.*) - Repeated my question to make a complete sentence - Switched topic (ex: *Little duck didn't like that*- does not coincide with question of *what will happen to little duck*?)

Story comprehension questions displayed recollection of academic language and

story expansion. I asked basic comprehension questions that required Mary to recollect events,

remember story sequence, and recall basic characters and other small events that occurred

throughout the story we read that day. Some instances existed when I asked Mary multiple

questions at one time, although all related; for example, "*Did he go back home to see his parents? Did he just want to go back to bed? Did he want to hide from the other people?*" Additionally, during comprehension questioning, I repeated my participant's words a few times and added corrective information from the story when an action or event was incompletely understood. I completed this action through question format, such as, "*He wants to get clean? I think he also wants to get warm after being outside for so long. When did he decide to take his bath?*" A few times, she wandered off to the side and played with props unproductively when asked comprehension questions. Furthermore, I redirected Mary back to story-related topics when she became off-task in this manner.

These open questions included responses that were essentially predetermined, posing that more than one answer could be correct (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008). Although comprehension questions often help a student understand a reading, there is rarely one accurate answer; it is determined upon how the child interprets the events and actions within the text. Therefore, I left a lot of room for Mary to dig deep into her thoughts and the story during guided play.

Multiple responses that resulted due to reading comprehension questions consisted of Mary's use of the word *because*, when she referenced an explanation of something in particular. When asked *why* something happened or *why* she represented a character a certain way, she explained her answer using the one word as her first response, without providing reason. Additionally, Mary also used detailed and imaginative responses to the comprehension questions; for example, when asked why a monster appeared, she explained, "*There's leftover monster sludge by the garbage*," initiating a detail difficult to remember from the reading. During these types of questions, Mary also explained any extra information I unintentionally left

out from the story, when I composed a question to her. She accomplished this action by first

correcting, or adding information to my question, and then by responding appropriately, or not

responding at all until I told her that the new information given was correct.

More common responses pertained to this story comprehension theme also included the

use of shorter responses during conversation, such as, "*monster*" and "*he fell*." Additionally,

Mary produced explanatory responses by stating *why* something occurred when she presented

reasons along with her statements, and then described her responses.

Upon reflection, I found these open questions also led to various responses from Mary. In

some instances, I received an un-explanatory *because* response to my questions, without

providing reasoning *why* something occurred in the story. The experience of interest in the

events that occurred in the story, or the knowledge of the events that transpired, may have been

the reason for the response differentiation since the various responses occurred throughout

multiple story conversations.

A positive aspect resulted from these types of questions; the additional examples and

information Mary added that I forgot to demonstrate through our play. Mary increased her

language when she referenced the story, expanded her reasoning, and added the supplementary

information to the play and discussion. This expansion occurred because of the open manner the

comprehension questions were directed toward her. Below is a table that entails the story

comprehension question theme, the topics' characteristics, and the participant's response to each.

THEME	THEME CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONSE
Story Comprehension Questions (open)	• Asked for comprehension/ sequence/recollection • Sometimes asked too many questions at once • Corrective • Redirected participant back to story-related topics when off-task	• Short response (ex: *monster, he fell*) • Uses *because* to answer, instead of explaining *why* • Detailed/ imaginative response (ex: *There's*

		leftover monster sludge by the garbage.) • Gave explanatory response (ex: *because…*) • Explained some things I may have forgotten from the story

Suggestive questions show how modeling language encourages student adaptation to the particular language use. Some questions and comments that I used were suggestive for a guided play conversation requiring student growth. I delivered expressive comments and made suggestions within comments when asking Mary questions, and left her with closed questions and prompts. In most inquiry studies, researchers state that closed questions restrict opportunities of higher-order thinking (Scull et al., 2013). Although the research states otherwise, some suggestions were worded in open ways that administered choices for Mary to decide from when she responded to the questions. Other times, I presented too much information and insight before asking the particular question; I received answers that reworded my original question, also leaving her with a closed question to respond to. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2008) explain that closed questions should be followed with a short and factual reply; but when the reply does not occur immediately, teachers may supply the answers to children using clues in a suggestive manner. When an answer was not particularly predetermined in terms of Mary's knowledge or language development, I followed the instruction above and granted her suggestive hints.

Responses particular to suggestive questions were non-existent. Most responses were common responses among other particular questioning characteristics. Responses that were common among all types of questions and also pertained to this suggestion theme were short response use, such as, "*okay.*" Also, along with the short, one-word responses, existed, "*yes*" and

"*no*" replies. When I suggested possible answers within my questions, Mary occasionally

answered by switching topics, instead of answering the related question. To explain her

responses, Mary used my questions and comments since the two were evident within the

questions, instead of stating and creating her own. This action was plausibly tough for her, since

there was no room for her to have created her own replies, considering I supplied numerous

suggestions at once.

Upon reflection, I felt these closed questions hindered reasoning beyond the responses.

Mary used shorter responses, such as, "*okay,*" "*yes,*" and "*no*" to answer my questions during

guided play conversations because those answers were the only responses the questions were set

up for her to answer. The topic was switched because the lack of explanation was evident in the

questions and answers. My questions left no room for Mary to dig into detail, think beyond the

story, and expand oral vocabulary by expressing her thoughts and feelings through longer

responses. Throughout my research, I learned closed questions rarely help children express and

expand language. Moreover, by suggesting possible remarks and replies in my questions, I

supplied the only options for Mary to respond with; she could have expressed her own thoughts

if I asked questions and presented comments without suggesting possible replies for her own use.

In this case, I limited her thinking and her language expansion when I posed these question types

to her throughout the six-week guided play conversations. Below is a table that entails the

suggestive question theme, the topics' characteristics, and the participant's response to each.

THEME	THEME CHARACTERISTICS	RESPONSE
Suggestive Questions/ Comments	• Supplied/asked suggestive comments/questions • Presented choices in questions • Occasionally supplied too much information before asking about it	• Short response (ex: *okay)* • *Yes/no* response • Switched topic • Used my questions/ comments to explain

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Summary of the Results

The reasoning for completing this study was to encourage a child in my Universal Pre-Kindergarten class to engage in guided play conversations that aimed at promoting her to pose higher-order thinking responses. This laid the foundation for my purpose of assessing how effective I was with modeling and presenting particular questions to expand her oral vocabulary. My research study focused on answering the two questions that follow:

- How effective is the utilization of abstract language questioning skills during guided play in order to expand oral vocabulary in a pre-k student?

- In what ways do the conversations and play between a pre-k child and myself contribute to the oral language expansion of this child in the early childhood classroom?

My study answered these research questions through the themes of Teacher Reflection on Classroom Inquiry, Topic-Continuing Questions, Topic-Initiating Questions, Story Comprehension Questions, and Suggestive Questions.

Teacher reflection on classroom inquiry displayed growth and ability to think about actions and their effects on students. My journal reflections on classroom inquiry displayed this particular growth and ability to think about my actions in relation to my participant's efforts. This theme also displayed my conversations with my participant by detailing all 15 conversations I had with her. Teacher reflection depicted how effective the utilization of abstract language to expand oral vocabulary was during our conversations because it entailed the causes and effects of the questions and responses that occurred throughout our sessions. The reflection process displayed utilization of abstract language through my questioning because of the different themes of questions and responses that followed. The conversations during guided play

contributed to oral language expansion because of how I was able to change my questions based on previous days' reflections. The results show that reflection was the most significant part in giving myself insight as an educator to promote oral vocabulary in the pre-k classroom.

Topic-continuing questions displayed that providing questions and offering an understanding gave Mary supporting details that helped her continue discussion topics. The way I provided new vocabulary in my questions helped her use those words correctly to demonstrate understanding. Acquainting Mary with new words and expanding on their meanings helped Mary's oral language grow because of my exposure and modeling. My abstract language skills was effective in expanding Mary's oral vocabulary because of the way vocabulary was introduced, used, and then reused correctly by Mary in play; this demonstrated that this questioning technique helped her understand new word meanings.

Topic-initiating questions displayed that Mary was able to express characters' emotions through her play. Conveying characters' emotions through play was due to my consistent probing for Mary to think deeper in conversation. Her emotions were easily expressed because I encouraged her to make connections to the text. These behaviors of mine and her play of the story plots assisted in her comprehension of the books read. Mary's responses to these question types were facilitated in her play through her expression of detailed responses. The topic-initiating questions I used with abstract language were effective during guided play because Mary expressed connections to the characters and events of the story. Her abilities to effectively comprehend a text and go beyond the understanding by expressing feelings through her play helped to expand her language since her responses became more extended than her expressions to other questions.

Story comprehension questions displayed that Mary's responses to these particular types of questions were sporadic. The inconsistency of responses was due to Mary's lack of interest in certain books throughout some of the sessions. Although she demonstrated comprehension, Mary's pickiness of choosing what questions to answer convince me that she may have been bored at times. When answering questions more thoroughly, Mary referenced characters and events, as well as extended her reasoning during play. This behavior aided in the expansion of her oral vocabulary, due to the open questions I posed using abstract language. By being supportive and posing questions openly, the guided play and conversations moved smoothly based on the detailed responses Mary offered.

Suggestive questions displayed positive and negative effects. Being that these questions were mostly closed, there was limited room for Mary to create her own responses. This action may be the reason for her use of my questions and comments instead of developing her own thoughts when posed with suggestions during guided play. Mary's use of my suggestions could be the reason for the often subject change during conversation as well. Her language expansion was both limited and expanded in this case; although she was restricted to answering my questions with pre-suggested responses, Mary used my words correctly to express her answers, using words she may not have normally stated if not suggested. Utilizing abstract dialect with these types of questions helped expand Mary's oral vocabulary by giving her opportunities to practice my modeled language in methods to answer questions during play. Overall, regardless of the type of question I posed, I appeared to find techniques to expand Mary's language and vocabulary because of the situations in which I conversed with her concerning text situations.

Overall, my data analysis demonstrated that guided play combined with conversation is prevalent in oral language expansion. More specifically, giving this participant questions regarding topic initiation, topic continuance for further details, and story comprehension resulted in detailed and/or extended responses from my participant because of the open-question format. Giving Mary suggestions and options to choose from showed me that a closed-question option limited my participant's oral vocabulary by not allowing her to form her own responses.

Discussion of Literature/Personal Reflection

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2008) state, "…observations of the pedagogical approaches of pre-school practitioners, including their questioning techniques, can reveal potential strengths and weaknesses of varied approaches, which may in turn be used to inform better practice," (p. 15). These findings support my reflective learning I made within the differing themes in my data, considering how the alterations in my own questioning techniques initiated diverse responses from my participant. My strengths contained my ability to introduce and continue topics, which helped keep Mary elaborating her responses through discussion. Weaknesses in my techniques corresponded to when I suggested answers for my participant instead of allowing her to respond with her own views on the topic we were discussing. This research demonstrates the impact of using conversation in the early childhood classroom to help students expand language, as well as and the importance of producing various questioning techniques to help educators assess their own instruction.

By reflecting on classroom practice, productive action reflection supports the integration of improved teaching instruction (Bayat, 2010). By reflecting, I was able to alter the way I approached questioning techniques from the sessions that followed. Reflecting on what did not

work with my participant allowed me to talk with her in ways that could better improve her oral language.

Goh, Yamauchi, and Ratliffe (2012) state that classroom conversation is considered an important element that links with literacy and language development skills. Aside from my significant reflection practice throughout this research study, it was an extremely important goal to accomplish my participant's oral language expansion. Regardless of strengths and weaknesses in my questioning techniques, my overall effectiveness of increasing Mary's oral vocabulary display that her language and early literacy skills have improved because of the guided play conversations that occurred throughout this research.

Limitations of the Study

Although this was a self-study, a helpful contribution to my research would have been to require another teacher to observe my participant and me during the conversations or to listen to the audio recordings with me to discuss any agreements or disagreements about what occurred during the sessions (Meacham et al., 2014). These suggestions could have further ensured that the transcripts were updated with the most accurate information and that I was considering my actions and behaviors more precisely, with the input of another professional. The only way that I studied my effectiveness in using abstract language to expand Mary's oral language was solely based on my own reflections; my own judgment.

Another limitation in this research study included my personal amount of experience in teaching, such as the number of years I have been teaching and the way I talk to students in general, which could affect the frequencies in which I use particular types of questions (Meacham et al., 2014). Research states that these factors can affect a teacher's reflective study, especially considering that this year is only my second year teaching the particular age-level.

More or less teaching experience could have affected my questioning toward my participant differently, and therefore, my participant's responses could have varied based on these many factors.

A third limitation of this study was that I only studied one child out of my class of 14 students, which happens to be in a town where three different UPK classes are located. This limits my self-study because one child's responses cannot count for every pre-k child in the town, state, or country. It is very possible that Mary's responses could differ from anyone else's responses I could have received if I initiated this research study with another student or group of students. This means I will not have a valuable amount of experience using abstract language with many others of this age group aiming at answering these particular research questions.

Lastly, the six weeks of time dedicated to working with my participant to study my questioning skills using abstract language was a limitation. Although I received numerous amounts of beneficial information to aid me in studying the data, and nevertheless, study myself, I believe a longer time period could have been beneficial for continuing my data collection to get a wider range of data.

Implications for Practice

After studying my effectiveness of expanding one of my Pre-K student's language and finding my strengths and weaknesses between my question techniques, I have found what strategies work best and which ones do not, according to my reflective pieces. My beliefs and pedagogical teaching will remain relatively similar during conversations, however, I will try to limit my suggestions when posing questions to any students. During conversation that follows any type of reading, I will plan to always give thinking time to my students to prevent myself

from providing any supplemental information that may limit my students from expanding responses on their own.

Additionally, I plan to implement guided play into my classroom as a whole, since my participant demonstrated positive effects from my research. Since her oral vocabulary and language expanded from the use of text and verbal conversation, it can be beneficial to all of my students. By creating a guided play small-group center a few times a week, my students and I can continue the expansion of language and literacy skills that will prepare them for Kindergarten next year.

It is extremely important that early childcare providers, including Pre-School and UPK teachers, engage in conversation throughout the day. By incorporating the use of text and emphasizing connections between the children and what they read, their higher-order thinking skills will increase. Implementation of guided play within the school day can benefit children by learning methods to develop appropriate responses to particular questions, as well as aid them in developing connections with text through acting out characters.

Overall Significance of the Study

A self-study is a significant research approach for teachers to learn about the effectiveness of their instruction. It becomes evident in the classroom if educators frequently reflect on their behaviors and their students' growth. A teacher who engages in self-study is one that dedicates his or her instruction to the students.

During this self-study, I learned that as an early educator, it is extremely important to ensure the use of conversation to be prevalent at all times in the classroom. Through my data collection, analysis, and discussing my results, I found that although behavior management or student engagement problems were evident, Mary used her words, formed responses, and

ultimately expanded on her oral vocabulary. By posing questions and delving into higher-order questions that caused her to reevaluate what she wanted to say in response to my questions and comments, Mary learned ways of incorporating a story into play while pulling out evidential character emotions. Nonetheless, Mary depicted use of academic language in response to my questions, giving me results that demonstrate I effectively used abstract language to expand her oral language and vocabulary. Overall, the results show that the most prominent and efficient question types were open questions, which allowed for numerous student response options, including topic-initiating, topic-continuing, and story comprehension questions.

This study demonstrates the need for expanding the oral language of young children who have yet to enter Kindergarten, and the importance of evaluating oneself as an educator in accomplishing this act successfully. By incorporating methods to support language development, educators and other care providers can help to foster social and academic skills for students as they enter Kindergarten, and ultimately, enter the world of college and career readiness through the Common Core State Standards. All educators have the goal to help students succeed; it is significant for them to reflect on their instruction to be sure that this can productively occur. When educators properly elicit effective methods to expand children's language through support in conversation, students are not only exposed to academic language, but also adapt it into their own language.

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