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EFFECT OF STORYTELLING METHODS ON LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

AMONG TWO TO FOUR YEAR OLD CHILDREN

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PERFORMANCE AMONG TWO TO FOUR YEAR OLD CHILDREN

PSYCHOLOGY AT HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY

DINA AL-HIDIQ ZEBIB

Beirut, Lebanon

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EFFECT OF STORYTELLING METHODS ON LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE
AMONG TWO TO FOUR YEAR OLD CHILDREN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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DINA AL-HIDIQ ZEBIB

Beirut, Lebanon

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Signature



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Running head: Storytelling Methods and Language Performance

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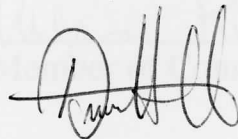
EFFECT OF STORYTELLING METHODS ON
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AMONG TWO TO FOUR YEAR OLD CHILDREN

DINA AL-HIDIQ ZEBIB

I, Dina Al-Hidiq Zebib

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ABSTRACT

Running head: Storytelling Methods and Language Performance

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Language Performance among Two to Four Year Old Children

Dina Al-Hidiq Zebib

Haigazian University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of storytelling methods and text genre on language performance among two to four year olds. Impact on language was measured through word recall scores. The storytelling activities were divided into four conditions which utilized books, props, or neither. The sample consisted of 20 preschoolers in the writer's child care center. As expected, results revealed that the storytelling method which utilizes props in conjunction with the storybooks better impacts language performance than the other methods. However, no differences were found in word recall scores from different text genres. Results have implications for parents, early childhood education centers, and preschools because their support will yield positive outcomes for the future performance of very young children.

Introduction

The Problem Statement

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth of language (Piaget, 1963). Kornei Chukovsky (1968, p.7), a famous linguist, says, "Beginning with the age of two, every child becomes for a short period of time a linguistic genius".

It is necessary that young children be provided with rich and stimulating environments that encourage emerging literacy skills and language acquisition (Hildebrand, 1997). Story telling activities have long been used as methods to enhance children's acquisition of these skills, as well as influence all the other developmental tasks, and instill their love for books and reading. Reading aloud activities have numerous benefits, and it has been well-researched that these activities are an effective way to develop children's vocabularies (Morrow, 2003).

Language acquisition is partly innate and partly learned, as children interact with other people and the environment. Hence, it is of focal concern to clarify specific methods that could be assimilated into the nurturing environments of early childhood in order to enhance language acquisition and learning. Numerous research has documented the importance of reading and storytelling activities on oral language development; however, limited research is available to study the effect of added cues to the story book reading or oral story telling activities.

It is necessary to find more effective methods to enhance storytelling activities within the storytelling domain. Young children are fascinated by the use of puppets and other three-dimensional stimuli to model stories. This appeal should be utilized to explore the effectiveness it has on children's language performance. The limited research available, nonetheless, provides evidence for the effective use of manipulatives and props in story telling activities.

Telling stories using props taken from play centers in the preschool classroom encourages oral language performance during sociodramatic play sessions.

Sociodramatic play, referred to as dramatic play (Smilansky, 1968), also referred to as symbolic play, begins early, and is enhanced by language development (Hildebrand, 1997). Similarly, language skills are practiced through dramatic play. The children's use of simple props during their play demonstrates their use of mental pictures of ideas and objects.

In this study we attempted to identify the differences in word recall among storytelling activities that incorporated props. It was assumed that adding the component of prop use would enhance the storytelling process with the assumption that animation and increased cues would increase the children's vocabulary acquisition of the story language.

Background of the Study

For the past three decades, women have been diligent members of the work force, and their roles have shifted from being merely homemakers to being active participants in the bread-winning task of the home, as well as seekers of greater ambitions and self-actualizing tendencies. Moreover, formal schooling in Lebanon has shifted down to four years of age in government schools and three years in many accredited private schools as a necessary starting age for formal schooling. These two movements as well as the increased competitiveness of school acceptance systems, have lead parents to search for opportunities to prepare their toddlers with the necessary preparatory skills in early childhood education centers that provide quality time and constructivism for their children, anticipating that their children will be equipped with the necessary prerequisite skills for entrance into reputable preschools.

Through her personal experience in teaching preschoolers and directing preschool programs, the writer has observed that, to a large extent, young children are exhibiting average and below average oral language performance. The writer's additional experience of being a parent has provided incentive for exploring early childhood education from more than the academic vantage point. The unavailability of the mothers to engage in oral discussions and good verbal relationships with their children, or the ignorance of mothers who are available for their children, seems to be related to children's language performance. Hence it has become obligatory for the child care centers and preschools to supplement the lack of verbal language opportunities with various opportunities for oral language growth.

Incorporating props with storytelling activities could become an official method used with young children to boost their language development. The former method could be incorporated into the various preschool programs of day care centers and schools as an approved of and standard component of the regular story time and reading aloud sessions.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to identify possible instructional methods to aid in the acquisition of new vocabulary and better develop early language skills.

Hypotheses

1. It is hypothesized that telling stories using props in conjunction with the storybooks better impacts language performance than when using either storybooks or props alone or when using neither one.

2. It is hypothesized that telling stories using only storybooks will yield better recollection of target words than when using props alone or when using neither storybooks nor props.
3. It is hypothesized that telling stories using only props will yield better recollection of target words than when not using the storybooks or props.
4. It is hypothesized that using predictive texts with props will yield better recollection of target words than when using narrative texts with props.

The Need for the Study

Using classroom toys (props) to model story themes enables preschool teachers to reinforce new vocabulary and concepts as well as help children in story comprehension. Telling stories with items found in the classroom also facilitates later pretend play. Recreating stories during free play activities allows children to practice new words as well as retell stories in sequence. This story reconstruction also provides a common theme for children from which they can develop conversations and practice language.

Nature of the Study

An experimental study was conducted in a preschool setting on young children ranging from the ages of 26 to 39 months.

The study is a complex design, specifically a two by four mixed factorial design. The first independent variable is *storytelling methods*, with the four conditions of using *storybook and prop (BP)*, *storybook only (BO)*, *props only (PO)*, and *no storybook or props (NBP)*. The second independent variable is *text genre*, with the two conditions of *predictive* and *narrative texts*.

The dependent variable of *story language recall* was used to measure the number of times the target words were recalled.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the statistical technique used to compare the sample results as well as examine the effect of the combination of the independent variables of storytelling methods and text genre. A series of *t* tests were performed to compare the experimental conditions of storytelling methods as well as the text genre conditions. A Pearson *r* correlation coefficient was calculated to compare word recall scores of the text genre conditions.

Definition of Terms

Early Childhood refers to the age range from birth to eight years. (Barratt-Pugh & Mary Rohl, 2000). The focus of the present study will be on the period from two to four years. These years are a period of substantial and significant intellectual development (Palmer, 1969, taken from Stanchfield, 1971).

Early Childhood Education: This is a terminology that represents a professional trend and is used to replace the terms ‘nursery’ and ‘preschool’. These replaced terms do not seem to highlight the importance of the early childhood years and the significant learning that occurs during these early years (Hildebrand, 1997). *Early childhood education* is one part of the continuous learning experience which begins at birth. It is concerned with the child as a whole and seeks to promote the balanced development of the child as an individual, a member of the family, and a member of society.

Emergent literacy refers to the precursory knowledge of reading and writing that children acquire early in their life prior to their conventional literacy instruction in formal educational settings (Neuman & Dickinson, 2003).

Literacy is the complex set of abilities central to the understanding and usage of every society and culture's chief symbol systems. It is at the heart of children's everyday experiences including activities and events such as shopping lists, recipes, community and shop signs, reading stories, music, festivals, and storytelling (Barratt-Pugh & Mary Rohl, 2000). "*Literacy is an everyday social practice in which individuals participate at home, in the community, workplace, and through mass media and religion*" (p. 6)

Language: Piaget describes language as a set of complex functions that the child uses to communicate thoughts (Piaget, 1959). It involves a "duality of patterning" (Hockett, 1954, taken from Jusczyk, 2000). The first set of patterns are those that relate to how sounds are organized. The second set of patterns are those that relate to how meanings are organized.

Vocabulary Acquisition refers primarily to the achievement of joint reference. To acquire a new word, children must be able to link the word with the object, scene, or event of reference, a process also referred to as "labeling" (Bloom, 1993). Word learning is the simplest stage of language development (2001). The learning of words, even in its simplest forms, is a complex interaction of rich cognitive capacities (2001).

Language Acquisition begins at birth, even prenatally, and refers to the process of learning meanings of words, in a "hypothesis formation and testing" method. The latter

occurs when a child hears a new word, notes the context in which it was used, formulates a hypothesis as to which concept the word corresponds to, and tests the word by using it in certain contexts to reinforce, alter, or reject the hypothesis (Bloom, 1993).

Story Language in this study refers precisely to the target words specified for every story told. They include words that are central to the plot which children might later recall for successful story language recollection. The terms “word recall” will be used throughout the study to refer to the children’s utterances of the target words (the dependent variable) during the play sessions.

Read-Alouds refer to the activity of reading aloud to students complete stories or story selections. They are perhaps from the most consistent classroom activities that provide literacy opportunities (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004).

Storytelling is a language-learning activity which provides many opportunities for children to use language spontaneously and imaginatively (Wason-Ellam, 1986).

Furthermore, storytelling is an act of recreating literature and of taking the printed words in a book and giving them life. It is defined as “...an art... can expand creativity, and create a sense of community and a feeling of connection with history. In libraries and classrooms, storytelling is used to motivate children to read, to improve listening and writing skills, and to introduce young people to good literature.” (World Book Encyclopedia, 2006, Storytelling section, ¶ 2).

Storytelling Aids are the sources of support that facilitate the comprehension of the story plot and language, as well as the children's level of engagement and attention. They include the component of animation through the use of manipulatives and props. In this study, the props used are toy items related to the stories, taken from classroom play centers.

Sociodramatic Play: Smilansky (1968) described sociodramatic play as dramatic play which involves language between two or more children. Dramatic play is defined as the "behaviors children use to transform the identities of objects, actions, and people" (Pellegrini, 1985, p. 108). Dramatic play is also termed pretend play (Katz, 2001), fantasy play (Pellegrini, 1983, 1984; Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977), and symbolic play (Pellegrini, Galda, Dresdon, & Cox, 1991). Calabrese (2003) defines sociodramatic play as "a form of voluntary social play in which children use their imaginations and creativity. They take on different roles, participate in conversations, use manipulatives, and engage in print rich environments" (p. 607). Sociodramatic play that is enriched with the use of props increases language among preschoolers (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland, 1992).

Text Genre corresponds to the 'kind' or 'type' of story literature. In this study, two text types were employed. The first type, predictive text, refers to stories which have repetitions of words or phrases throughout the story generating immediate children participation with the story based on their ability to make the predictions of which words will follow next. The second text type, narrative text, refers to stories which have a sequential plot structure where there is a sequence of events built around a main problem, to be resolved at the end of the story.

Scope and Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample consists of preschoolers in only one day care center. The various demographic variables pertinent to this specific setting and population make it difficult for us to generalize our results to the whole population of preschool-aged children.

Secondly, the sample group is small which makes it quite difficult to generalize the results.

Thirdly, the sample of children was read to in a second-language, namely English. The children are not native English speakers. Some children, however, are raised in a home environment where they are exposed to this second language. This may naturally differentiate certain children by being more ready to acquire new vocabulary words because of their developed ability to better discriminate certain sounds and have greater phonological awareness. This might affect the results on the number of target words recalled within the groups.

Chapter I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Storytelling

For hundreds of years storytelling has been one of the most highly advocated activities for encouraging language and literacy at home and in schools (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Goldfield & Snow, 1984). The origins of storytelling, however, did not arise with the explicit aim of enhancing language and literacy. They initiated as an endeavor to explain and make sense out of life and the mysteries of the world and cosmos (Tway, 1985). Moreover, storytelling evolved from the human need to communicate human experiences, commemorate, and preserve the experiences of ancestors. Furthermore, storytelling fulfilled aesthetic needs as well as religious needs to venerate supernatural forces.

Storytelling has a long history of being a shared event (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002). Rousseau shared the books his mother had left following her death, with his father when he was six (Rousseau, 1903). The French Philosopher Sartre's first reading experiences were shared events with his mother, reading numerous books from his *grandfather's library* (Sartre, 1964).

The origins of storytelling are ancient and emerge from a variety of cultures. One of our oldest surviving epic tales is that of the Sumerian king *Gilgamesh*, which remains a popular epic taught in most universities' cultural studies programs. Ancient Greek mythology, retold from one generation to the other and taught in universities, include the epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The latter describes Odysseus' journey back home from Troy, and the former has a focus of retelling the Trojan War with the aim of keeping it alive for people of all times to hear. Other ancient civilizations, such

as the ancient Egyptians, used storytelling for amusement purposes. There are surviving records portraying Cheops, the pyramid builder, being entertained by stories from his sons. Other surviving tales that have been told over the course of history are *Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* of English origin, and *The Ramayana*, a religious Indian tale. Shakespeare, in many of his plays, advocates the activity of storytelling.

Early Storytelling and Reading Experiences

Telling stories orally or using story books has various aims, including the development of children's emotional, cognitive, social skills as well as their speaking, listening, and reading abilities. Other goals include the development of children's ethical value system, their ability to interpret events beyond their immediate experience, cultural awareness, and for the healthy maintenance of their mental well-being.

A vast amount of literature has dealt with the benefits of storytelling and reading aloud activities on young children, and their connection to later school and reading success (Wood & Prata-Salvetti, 2001). *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, the report of the National Commission on Reading, stated that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.23). According to Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey (2004), "the benefits of read-alouds are numerous" (p. 8).

Similarly, Elley (1989) describes the importance of oral story reading to preschool children and that there are significant benefits on language development. Further research done by Elley (1996) on the Book Flood strategy reveals that children's language growth can be strongly impacted by an abundant supply of high-interest illustrated storybooks. In this approach, classrooms are flooded with literature.

One of the main goals in offering literature to children is to instill in them a love for books and that books (or reading) are fun and enjoyable (Hildebrand, 1971). The main goal when offering storytelling opportunities to young children in the nursery and preschool is to “inspire in them a romance with books that will continue throughout their lifetime” (p.182). Adults must help children “catch” the enthusiasm for books (p.182). Hildebrand (1971) states that it is necessary to instill in children the love and romance with books in the period before the age of six. When young children develop familiarity and positive feelings with literature, this will consequently contribute to language.

Jan-Tausch (1970) describes the purpose of language as communication, and that since reading is language, then whatever develops language is actually aimed at teaching the child to be a better reader. Jan-Tausch argues that even the very young children who cannot read should be provided with age-appropriate literature experiences. In his Language Arts program, it is assumed that storytelling and oral exposure to literature may sharpen young children’s attunement to the language and broaden their oral vocabulary.

A lack of exposure to storytelling experiences and storybooks would deny young children the chance to acquire necessary reading-related skills crucial to pre-reading competencies required for beginning school. Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998) contended that entering school with limited reading-related skills results in increased risk of qualifying for special education services. One of the greatest obstacles that impede literacy acquisition is a lack of exposure to books (Wood & Prata-Salvetti, 2001).

Vocabulary Acquisition

There has been an immense growth in language acquisition research in the past 35 years (Jusczyk, 1997). Substantial research has shown that storytelling and reading aloud activities result in considerable vocabulary acquisition and language development (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Barnes, 1992; Blok, 1999; Elley, 1989; Goldfield & Snow, 1984; Hildebrand, 1997; MacLure, 1988; Morrow, 2003; Pinnell & Jagger, 2003; Scott, 1985; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994). Morrow (2003) similarly asserts that read-alouds are an effective way to develop children's vocabularies and story concepts.

Furthermore, Elley (1989, 1991, 1996) outlines the evidence that story reading to children is a significant source of vocabulary acquisition, and that the learning is relatively permanent (1989). Elley found that the extensive exposure to high interest illustrated books of the Book Flood programs led to increased learning of the target language (vocabulary and syntax), which appears to be incidental in nature resulting from the repeated interactions with good stories.

Beck & McKeown (2001) suggest the use of trade books for storytelling activities that emphasize vocabulary because they are excellent sources of vocabulary. Under the enjoyable circumstances of shared story book reading, children gradually learn the language of the book, leading to increased learning in terms of word sequences and vocabulary as a result of this exposure to good quality language (Elley, 1996).

In terms of reading, it is generally agreed upon that vocabulary is focal to reading (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002). According to Anderson & Freebody (1981) and Sternberg (1987) there is a well documented relationship between vocabulary and reading proficiency as well as with school achievement in general; hence, the most

obvious focus for any program that seeks to enhance children's early literacy would be that which emphasizes vocabulary acquisition and development (taken from Beck & McKeown, 2001; Gambrell, 2004).

With regard to child development theories as to when it is most beneficial to intervene with appropriate activities that encourage language acquisition, it is clear that following children's "word spurt" would be the ideal time. The phase in which young children's vocabulary "explodes" begins at about the age of eighteen months. Following this "word spurt", there is a steady increase in children's vocabulary (Bloom, 1993). Bloom (2001) describes children's first mapping experience of word learning as an ability to grasp words and their meanings through a small number of incidental exposures to the word. He affirms that explicit training is not necessary for the learning of the new words. Children have the capacity to learn new words fairly quickly even with limited experience and exposure to the new words. Estimates of the rates of word learning are 1.6 words per day for ages 23 to 30 months, and 3.6 words per day for ages 30 months to 6 years (Singleton, 1989). However, these rates are mere approximations.

In the child's initial years, he realizes that everything has a name. Each new object constitutes a dilemma which he solves by naming the object (Vygotsky, 1962). These words are at the core of what Vygotsky describes as concept formation. "...a problem must arise that cannot be solved otherwise than through the formation of new concepts" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 55).

To further explain the development and acquisition of vocabulary and language, a brief look at the Piagetian perspective would be necessary. According to Piaget's theory of development, the preconceptual phase (2-4 years) is a period of continuous investigation and growth in communication (Maier, 1965). The child's language development consists of word repetitions that he connects with visible objects and

tangible experiences. At this stage, the child loves to repeat and imitate the words he hears (Piaget, 1959). The child uses speech more than miming to convey meaning; he can express his desires more clearly using words rather than symbols. His developing communicative patterns of verbal language, which is actually the development between thought and word, relinquish his earlier autistic world (Maier, 1965).

Since at this stage children move from autistic self-imitation to the imitation of others, then consequently language becomes possible (Maier, 1965; Piaget, 1959). Imitative behavior is a spontaneous process in children at this stage. They become increasingly interested and aware of their environments in terms of objects and actions. They have a need for models in their environments whose actions they perceive and consequently imitate. "At his most imitative stage, the child mimics with his whole being, identifying himself with his model (Piaget, 1959, p. 11). Piaget describes imitation in children of up to ages 6 or 7 as completely unconscious, and that what they repeat from a model is imagined to be a game of their own creation (Piaget, 1959). This process increases their repertoire of symbols for objects. Their perceptions of the environment and their psychological accommodation into the child's subjective experience serve to enhance their language development, their language becoming more representative. It is the interplay of language and imitation that leads to communication with the external world, and a negation of their autistic world.

Effect of Text Genre

Concerning the effect of text genre on reading outcomes, a study was conducted using Head Start programs to examine differences in literacy-specific experiences and storybook reading dyads (Neuman, 1996). Results revealed that different types of stories provided different types of responses. These findings showed that predictable

texts yielded more chiming of familiar words and book-focused recollections, whereas narrative texts resulted in more discussion and recreation of story events and text (Neuman, 1996).

Storytelling Aids

Studies concerning the specific components of effective reading aloud and storytelling activities are limited (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). A study was conducted by Fisher et al. on the reading aloud practices of teachers whose students were rated as high achievers in terms of reading, and results revealed that there was a component of animation, one of which was the use of props, which seemed necessary to fully engage students in the storytelling activity.

Sidorsky (1985) also described how storytelling can be made more effective by the use of certain aids such as puppets and other simple props. These aids make the library visit an anticipated one.

Other suggestions for aids that increase the effectiveness of storytelling were offered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Inventory of 1984 (Aix, 1988. From ERIC Digest #34). Suggestions were offered for making low-cost crafts and materials that aid storytelling activities.

In a study with preschool children, Levy, Wolfgang, & Koorland (1992) enriched sociodramatic play centers by adding various theme-related props. Results revealed that the prop-enriched play environments contributed to language development during sociodramatic play. The incorporation of props into storytelling activities provides an opportunity to promote children's sociodramatic play.

To demonstrate further the effectiveness of using props as cues for better performance, a study was conducted on preschool children to show how assessment

procedures using props versus pictures yielded more responses in terms of social problem-solving strategies (Getz, Goldman, & Corsini, 1984). Results indicated that representational competencies of preschool children required more concrete and tangible experiences rather than conceptual or intangible ones (Getz et al.).

Furthermore, Beck & McKeown (2001) described how children rely on pictures as opposed to text language to derive information and construct meaning of a story. This is directly related to the fact that pictures are representative of what children are familiar with and accustomed to in their everyday encounters in their environment. Neuman (1990) similarly stated that young children respond to stories by focusing on what is easily accessible to them, hence the pictures and their background knowledge, not the linguistic content.

The use of props as useful aids for effective storytelling activities can be indicated through Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development (Piaget, 1963). According to Piaget's theory, children in the preconceptual phase (age two to four) of the preoperational period require experience with manipulatives of all ranges for their cognitive growth. In this phase, language cannot be something separate from objects and experience. Hence, the use of props to model a story and represent story language is crucial. Almy (1967) supports this view by indicating that children at the preoperational level of Piaget's developmental stages of intellectual development should be provided with varied and plentiful concrete experiences. Piaget's theory supports a nursery program which accentuates the importance of children's interaction with materials and concrete experiences, as well as having reading and books as part of the general environment.

In choosing an effective story time technique, Hildebrand (1971) suggested the use of various props to capture children's attention, encourage active listening, and build the story mood.

Heisner (2005) conducted an experiment in a preschool setting in order to test her theory that incorporating props from the block center into the storytelling activity to model the story will improve children's vocabulary during free play time that followed the storytelling activity. Results showed that combining props with a shared story reading resulted in increased language among the children during sociodramatic play.

The incorporation of props to aid storytelling was mentioned in an overview of the Books Aloud project (Neuman & Celano, 2001). This program was devised as a collaborative effort among the Office of Public Service Support of the Free Library of Philadelphia and seven county and city library systems in the Delaware Valley region of Pennsylvania, USA. It aimed at enhancing the language and literacy opportunities for young children (from infants through age 5) by enriching their lives through providing books and storytelling activities as a necessity in the everyday activities of child care centers. Preschool specialist trainers conducted visits and training sessions to assist and bolster the care givers' practices concerning storytelling techniques and child development. Jean, one of the trainers, recommended to the caregivers of Holy Day Child Center whom she was training, the use of props during story time and described their importance in sustaining children's attention as a prerequisite skill for enhanced language and literacy skills (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

Enzman (1971) had also discussed the importance of strengthening prerequisite skills necessary for reading readiness among young children prior to their entrance into kindergarten. He listed the outcomes that are essential to beginning reading, of which "good listening habits, better oral expression, and vocabulary development" are the first

three. As mentioned in the previous study, to enhance language and literacy skills, aids to enhance young children's attending, listening, and speaking skills must be incorporated into story telling activities. Enzman does not specify any specific component for acquisition and development of these skills; however, he states that teachers must be flexible and creative enough to seek approaches, materials, and techniques for better reading programs that equip young children with the essential pre-reading skills necessary for eventual success in kindergarten beginning reading programs.

Oral Language Development

One of the main learning goals of caregivers and teachers when reading to children is the enhancement of language skills, which includes growth of vocabulary and oral abilities (Blok, 1999). Oral language is believed to play a role in reading and writing (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002). Numerous interventions involving shared story reading that aim at enhancing children's oral language skills have been developed (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002; Watson, 1989; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Blok (1999) hypothesized that language development is a function of both the mental capability to learn a language as well as the experiences children have with language. He refers to language development as related to oral as well as written language. They include phonological as well as vocabulary skills. Blok describes how children have an inherent and preconditioned ability for learning language. Furthermore, their language learning potential is enhanced by biological growth and stimulated by experiences with language. Blok explains that story reading affects younger children of up to age 3 more in terms of oral language aspects (including vocabulary and grammatical skills) than on literacy skills.

It is necessary to establish a solid foundation for language development, upon which all future development will be built. The first six years are critical years in this development (Hildebrand, 1971). Language development is a product and bi-product of all other areas of development. When a child has language skills, social and emotional development are fostered. Consequently, the child will be a confident social leader and have a better self-concept as a result of his successful communication.

This solid foundation for language development was particularly identified by Vygotsky as essential structures upon which human consciousness as a whole develops (1962). They must be mastered by the child as an essential developmental process in order for their thinking skills to develop. Language becomes central for determining how the child will learn to think because it is through the medium of words that thought in the child will exist; language becomes the linguistic tool of thought. Vygotsky's views about the thought and language of the child differ from others. He contends that thought finds its reality and form in speech. He refutes the notion that language precedes thought or that thought precedes language; he sees thought and language as having distinct roots which eventually combine. Consequently, language guides thought on until speech becomes rational (Vygotsky 1962).

Hildebrand (1971) describes language as a "two-way street—listening and speaking" (p.171). Listening and speaking are equally important. To improve their speaking skills deems it necessary to improve their listening skills. This may be done using various methods and techniques to gain their attention and interest, with the purpose of providing numerous opportunities for involving children with language.

Sociodramatic Play

Numerous research reveals the positive impact of sociodramatic play on the language and literacy development of preschool children (Heisner, 2005). The interactions that occur during sociodramatic play aid in the development of children's vocabulary. Hildebrand (1971) described the conditions of dramatic play as contributing to their language development. Talking, handling concrete objects, and role-playing during the imaginative dramatic play sessions contribute to their learning. Sociodramatic play {also described as dramatic play by Smilansky (1968)} that is enriched with the use of props increases language among preschoolers (Levy, Wolfgang, and Koorland, 1992).

Calabrese (2003) strongly supports the role of play, specifically sociodramatic play, as a major component of early childhood education programs. He describes its powerful impact on all aspects of the child's development. In his article, Calabrese suggests guidelines for designing appropriate sociodramatic play in classrooms for young children. With regard to how sociodramatic play can be utilized to enhance language development, Calabrese suggests storytelling activities as a means to introduce vocabulary new to their repertoire to be practiced in the sociodramatic play center.

Play constitutes a major part of children's daily activities. Vygotsky asserts that play is a major factor in the acquisition of language skills, knowledge, and higher developmental processes (1978). According to Piaget (Maier, 1965), during the preconceptual phase of child development (2-4 years), play functions as a medium through which children reinforce their previous acquisitions. Children's experiences and perceptions of their environment are adapted through play. Their subjective learning experiences are represented as play ventures. It is through this kind of play that

pretend or symbolic play evolves. This symbolic play becomes prominent as children bring their everyday experiences into this pretense of real-life task performance. Their egocentric character fits perfectly with the egocentric nature of this imaginary play. They playfully repeat actual events of their everyday interactions with objects and events. Furthermore, this stage is rich in symbolic imitation, where children, spontaneously, imitate significant models in their environment. Their imitation is a product of their subjective perceptions of the model's actions and behaviors, resulting in their acquisition of a wealth of novel symbols for objects for use in their symbolic play (Maier, 1965).

From a behavioral perspective, the concepts of stimulus, response, and reinforcement can be used to understand children's language learning during play. According to Skinner's Verbal Behavior theory, he contends that reinforcement is a necessary condition for language learning (Lust & Foley, 2004). However, Skinner's term "reinforcement" appears loose and does not necessarily necessitate that a reinforcer be an identifiable stimulus. In early childhood, reinforcers for language learning don't necessarily have to be identified as external; they may be automatic self-reinforcements. Piaget described the natural repetition and imitation of words, sounds, and actions in young children as rewarding in itself (Piaget, 1959). Children enjoy repeating for no external reason. The reinforcement is the intrinsic pleasure it gives them to repeat and imitate, not necessarily for an external reward or audience.

Early Childhood Education Contexts

Numerous research has reported the critical need to enrich the learning opportunities of young children through interventions that address the development of preschool-age children (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002). These interventions include

efforts that aim at enhancing language and literacy skills which have proved to have beneficial effects. The 21st century has brought with it an awareness of the significance of the preschool years on children's literacy development and how the growing range of early interventions are beneficial in bolstering children's growth prior to school entry (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002). Recent reports convey how young children's mental capacities from birth through six are involved in critical developing processes and that providing quality programs during these early years contributes positively to children's success as readers and writers (Neuman & Dickinson, 2002).

Early childhood education professionals can promote literacy behaviors by providing children with inviting, stimulating, print-rich play environments. Neuman & Dickinson (2002) discuss how children's environment encourages or discourages the acquisition of a vocabulary repertoire. They assert that children who experience a rich linguistic environment in their early years, as opposed to children who experience a poorer linguistic environment, will more likely acquire a larger vocabulary repertoire at a faster rate.

Caregivers and early childhood education teachers have a fundamental role in facilitating literacy experiences that foster emergent literacy and prereading abilities (Hildebrand; Wood & Prata-Salvetti, 2001). According to Wood & Prata-Salvetti (2001), the school environment may be focal in providing the first literacy experiences, especially for second-language learners and at-risk children.

Young children are fond of story time and they readily anticipate listening to stories read aloud by their teachers who are themselves fond of the read-aloud experience (Barrentine, 1996). Blok (1999) advises teachers "to continue reading storybooks to children" (p. 368). His meta-analysis of the effects of reading to young children at school yielded that reading at school has a stronger effect on children's oral

language development than on their reading development. It was also noticed that reading effects are stronger for younger children.

Elley (1996) advocated that educational settings enrich their reading program through an exposure to a vast supply of high-interest illustrated story books, or Book Floods, to produce a remarkable rate of language growth.

Cambourne (1988) developed a language learning theory which asserts that certain conditions must be available in natural settings for effective literacy teaching and learning. He continues to explain that classroom teachers must simulate conditions from the children's natural settings into the story telling activities, including immersions, responsibility, demonstrations, and engagement. The latter can be demonstrated through the enticing of the children to participate in sociodramatic play following the storytelling activity. According to Goldenberg (1992), engagement should be enticed and not forced, through creating rich opportunities for the children to engage in instructional conversations about the story. Moreover, Sipe (2002) describes engagement as the literary response which may be expressive in nature and that includes dramatizing or sociodramatic play as one type of five parts.

Project Story Boost is an experimental early literacy intervention program that demonstrates the centrality of the school setting in providing early literacy experiences (Wood & Prata-Salvetti, 2001). This program is a collaborative effort between a local state university and the public schools of a small city in northern New England, USA. It aims at providing read aloud experiences to children who have lacked access to these experiences outside of the school setting, due to various reasons including poverty, lack of access to children's books, and lack of awareness of their parents of the importance of early experiences with a print rich environment. Results reported a significant growth of the children's literacy skills at the end of the first year. This demonstrates the

fundamental role of the school setting in providing the necessary literacy experiences, no matter what background or home environment the young children come from (Wood & Prata-Salvetti, 2001).

Emergent literacy encompasses prerequisite skills that represent oral, reading and writing behaviors, which serve as the foundation for later literacy achievements. Justice & Pullen (2003) describe the effectiveness of early emergent literacy interventions on young children. One of the three Evidence-Based approaches they described for early intervention is that of Literacy-Enriched Play Interventions. The latter involves settings that utilize highly contextualized, meaningful, and familiar activities to the preschool child. Justice & Pullen (2003) described the play-based interventions as involving the use of literacy props and materials in children's classroom play centers. (Literacy props include items such as menus and wall signs for the ice cream parlor center, telephone message forms, folders, and stationery for the business office center, and product containers and bank checks for the grocery store center.) Studies reveal that increases in literacy-related play positively influences emergent literacy development especially with young children in early childhood classrooms. According to Korat, Bahar, & Snapir (2002/2003) "literacy does not emerge from a vacuum" (p. 387). Consequently, for literacy to emerge intervention is necessary. Korat et al. define an important level of intervention which includes creating a print-rich environment in the different play and work corners in the classroom, and including literacy material in the curriculum to encourage literacy awareness.

A sizeable number of early childhood education experts have recognized that children's education should begin before the age of five (Stanchfield, 1971). Research reported by Karnes in May 1968 on highly structured nursery school programs revealed

superior performance in children in terms of language and cognitive development as well as school readiness

The ages from two to six mark rapid and crucial advances in language development. We have noted that numerous studies have documented the importance of these early years on future performance. Countless interventions that serve to foster early child development have been recorded, and results reveal that exposure to literature and literacy enriched environments do enhance young children's language development within a context of play in the educational milieu. However, there is limited research concerning effects of added aids to the storybook reading procedure that would cue increased language performance.

The Context of This Study

The purpose of the current study is to identify possible instructional methods to aid in the acquisition of new vocabulary and better develop early language skills.

The present study investigated, more precisely, the following hypotheses:

1. It is hypothesized that telling stories using props in conjunction with the storybooks better impacts language performance than when using either storybooks or props alone or when using neither one.
2. It is hypothesized that telling stories using only storybooks will yield better recollection of target words than when using props alone or when using neither storybooks nor props.

3. It is hypothesized that telling stories using only props will yield better recollection of target words than when not using the storybooks or props.
4. It is hypothesized that using predictive texts with props will yield better recollection of target words than when using narrative texts with props.

Participants

The participants were 20 preschool children from Little Truncheon Child Care and Education Center. They were 8 females and 12 males. They ranged in age from 26 months to 39 months. They belonged to different religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds. Most of the children (95%) were Mexican and only 5% were Christian. They all belonged to socio-economic classes that ranged from middle to upper class.

Children were grouped into four groups of five, according to the four conditions. The children were selected according to speaking ability, hence those who can use language to communicate their needs. They were distributed randomly across the groups.

Materials

A selection of 24 fiction books of predictive and narrative text genres taken from the center's library (10 predictive and 14 narrative) was used for the storytelling activities.

The children's level of story language was assessed according to a Story Language Recall Checklist including target words for every story (See Appendix). Story target words ranged from 6 to 18 words depending on the story. They were chosen according to their centrality to the story plot. The play sessions in which the children were observed for their recollection of the target words were recorded using a video camera placed on a table between a stack of books. The children were unaware of the presence of the camera.

Chapter II

Method

Participants

The participants were 20 preschool children from *Little Treasures Child Care and Education Center*. They were 8 females and 12 males. They ranged in age from 26 months to 39 months. They belonged to different religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds. Most of the children (95%) were Moslem and only 5% were Christian. They all belonged to socioeconomic classes that ranged from middle to upper class.

Children were grouped into four groups of five, according to the four conditions. The children were selected according to speaking ability, hence those who can use language to communicate their needs. They were distributed randomly across the groups.

Materials

A selection of 24 fiction books of predictive and narrative text genres taken from the center's library (10 predictive and 14 narrative) was used for the storytelling activities.

The children's recall of story language was assessed according to a Story Language Recall Checklist including target words for every story (See Appendix). Story target words ranged from 6 to 16 words depending on the story. They were chosen according to their centrality to the story plot. The play sessions in which the children were observed for their recollection of the target words were recorded using a video camera placed on a table between a stack of books. The children were unaware of the presence of the camera.

Procedure

Stories were told to the four groups of preschool children using storybooks taken from the center's library, and props taken from the play centers in the classroom. The groups of children were read to according to the four storytelling experimental conditions:

- A. Story told using book and props (BP)
- B. Story told using book only (BO)
- C. Story told using props only and without book (PO)
- D. Story told without the use of book or props (Control Group) (NBP)

In each storytelling condition, the story was told to the children in an identical fashion and tone of voice. The only difference among the groups was the use of the storybook and/or props. The four groups of children were read to by the same caregiver, in the same manner and place every time.

The caregiver prepared the stories beforehand and practiced them well so that she would be able to tell each story in the same manner for every group of children.

The storytelling activity was conducted daily for a period of five weeks. The predictive and narrative texts were read on alternate days. The story books were read to the 4 groups of children according to a randomized sequence of time.

The sequence of time was randomized according to the following order:

Time	8:30 am	10 am	1:30 pm	2:30 pm
Groups	A	B	C	D
	A	C	D	B
	A	D	B	C
	B	C	D	A
	B	D	A	C
	B	A	C	D
	C	D	A	B
	C	A	B	D
	C	B	D	A
	D	A	B	C
	D	B	C	A
	D	C	A	B

The above sequence was repeated once: a total of 2 blocks (24 working days).

The props used for each story were selected from the classroom play centers to correspond to the target words selected for every story.

Directly following the storytelling activity, the props were returned to the play centers. Every individual group of children had an individual free play session for twenty minutes, and their story language use (target words) was observed. The free play sessions were recorded on a video camera and observed at a later time. The camera was placed on a table between stacks of books. The view from the camera was clear and was able to capture the entire play area that the children played in following the storytelling activity. The children were unaware of its presence.

During the play sessions, the children had to play in the block and the drama centers, among which the story props were placed. The caregiver sat quietly with the

children as they played. If a target word was recalled, an encouraging “Bravo!” or “Good!” was given. The caregiver did not initiate any of the target word recollections. She merely sat with the children and made sure that every child was playing and participating in the centers.

When the sessions were observed on tape, a checklist with the target words was used to mark the children’s use of story language (see Appendix).

According to Beck & McKeown (2001), their previous program of work in vocabulary demonstrated that if children do not use a word after initial instruction, it is unlikely that they have acquired it. Thus, measuring the children’s recall of story target words during the play sessions following the storytelling activity will be an accurate measure of vocabulary acquisition.

Chapter III

Results

A two factor mixed design ANOVA was used to calculate the variance ratio (F) to examine the effect of storytelling methods and text genres on word recall. No main effects were found for either text genre ($F, 1, 8, p = .05$) or storytelling methods ($F, 3, 24, p = .05$).

A series of t tests was conducted to test the set of expected differences in word recall scores in the related groups of text genre and unrelated groups of storytelling methods.

A t test was conducted to test the first hypothesis that telling stories using props in conjunction with the storybooks (BP) results in better recollection of target words than when using either storybooks alone (BO) or props alone (PO) or when using neither one (NBP). Results obtained from each three comparisons are significant with $df = 18$. Results are displayed in Table 1.

More t tests were conducted to test the second hypothesis that telling stories using only storybooks (BO) will yield better recollection of target words than when using props alone (PO) or neither one (NBP) for storytelling. Results from these two comparisons are not significant with $df = 18$. Results are displayed in Table 1.

Another t test was performed to test the third hypothesis that telling stories using only props (PO) will yield better recollection of target words than when not using the storybook or props (NBP) at all for storytelling. The result is significant with $df = 18$. Results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

t Test Comparing Word Recall Among Groups of Storytelling Methods

Storytelling Method Comparisons	Means	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	Level of significance
Book & Props (BP)	.668	18		
With Book Only (BO)	.528	1	5.208	p= .01
With Props Only (PO)	.557	1	4.107	p= .01
With No Book or Props (NBP)	.506	1	6.034	p= .01
Book Only (BO)		18		
With Props Only (PO)		1	-1.101	
With No Books or Props (NBP)		1	.827	
Props Only (PO)		18		
With No Book or Props (NBP)		1	1.927	p= .05

To test the last hypothesis that using predictive storybooks with props will yield better recollection of target words than when using narrative storybooks with props, another *t* test was conducted to compare the results from the predictive and narrative texts in the first condition (BP). Results obtained are not significant with $df = 4$. Results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.

t Test Comparing Word Recall Between Groups of Text Genre

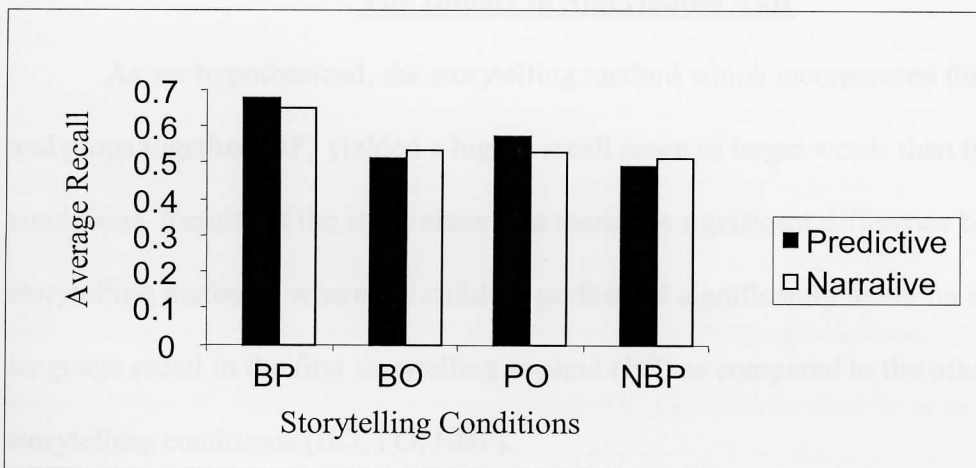
Storytelling Groups	Text Genre				
	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	Level of Significance
Book & Props (BP)		.002	4	1.186	p= .05
Predictive	.684				
Narrative	.652				

To find the relationship between children's word recall scores on each text genre, the Pearson *r* correlation coefficient was calculated. The highly significant *r* of .9 was obtained.

The means were calculated for the scores of each child's number of words recalled. The means for the word recall scores are presented in a bar graph in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Mean Recollection of Target Words Per Child



Chapter IV

Discussion

The Impact of Storytelling Aids

As we hypothesized, the storytelling method which incorporated the use of book and props together (BP) yielded a higher recall score of target words than the other conditions. Results of the study show that there is a significant difference between the storytelling methods, where the children performed significantly better on story language recall in the first storytelling method (BP) as compared to the other three storytelling conditions (BO, PO, NBP).

Possible explanations as to why the conjoining use of storybook and props together has an effect on children's language performance could be largely due to the reinforcing and bolstering factor of the consolidation of the storybook with props. The pairing of these two methods reinvigorates the effect and impact of the total storytelling activity.

Young children enjoy the activity of storytelling, especially those who have been accustomed to the practice and joy of books. To these children, books symbolize a pleasurable opportunity where they will be enchanted with playful characters and events. Listening to a certain sequence of events expressed with vivid emotions and sound effects captures their attention and interest, keeping them craving for more. They await the ensuing events with anticipation and eagerness, delighted with the surprising, amusing, and resolving occurrences which generate chuckles of glee as well as a range of delighted responses of "Aw!", "Wow!", and "Yeah!".

The use of the storybook, especially with very young children, during the storytelling process allows children to relate the meaning of what is being told to the pictures of the book, leading to a better comprehension of the story. This is confirmed

by Beck and McKeown (2001) who noted how children relied on pictures to respond to a story.

Since the two-dimensional pictures of a storybook actually reveals, in practical observations, delight, active participation, and excitement, then the addition of three-dimensional visual aids would certainly capture their interest even more. This was suggested by Piaget (1963) that since children between the ages of two to four are still in the preconceptual phase of the preoperational period they need various experiences with manipulatives for their cognitive growth, where language cannot be something separate from objects and experience. This view is also supported by Almy (1967) who contends that children at this stage should be provided with an abundance of concrete experiences. Furthermore, the study conducted by Getz, Goldman, and Corsini (1984) argued that three-dimensional props provided better stimuli than two-dimensional pictures on preschool children. All these previous researches in addition to personal observations of the writer deems it necessary to use storytelling aids to yield better story comprehension.

Our experiment results further confirmed this insinuation. The children's increased story language recall following the storytelling activity corroborates the surmise that adding the element of props to the storybook during the storytelling activity would be more interesting and increase attentiveness to the story.

Moreover, results that compare storytelling using props alone (PO) to storytelling using neither props nor storybooks (NBP) reveal that there is a significant difference between them. This can be explained in terms of presentation power and intensity of the story portrayal brought upon from the use of the three-dimensional visual aids (props). As described previously, it appears that props are very appealing to children and their presence and use in portraying a story is more effective than when

not using any aids at all. Their use as a sole method in portraying a story is not as effective in terms of story language recall as their use in conjunction with the storybook; nevertheless, when used, they yield a better recall of words than when not using any aids at all.

The Impact of Storybooks

Results that compare storytelling using book only (BO) to storytelling using props alone (PO) or neither one (NBP) reveal that there is no significant difference between them. The children performed more or less similarly in the two comparison groups. They recalled a similar number of target words.

It appears that the BO and NBP conditions communicated the story equally. The children in both conditions were influenced equally by the storytelling method. The presence or lack of the storybook did not affect the recall of words following the storytelling activity. Similarly, the children in the conditions of BO and PO were also influenced equally by the two techniques, yielding a similar recall of words.

It was noted previously that numerous research had documented the positive impact of storytelling on language performance. Various studies have discussed the importance of using storybooks in storytelling activities to enhance vocabulary acquisition and language performance. Plentiful research dealt with the importance of storybook reading and the necessity to provide young children with an abundance of books (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Elley, 1989, 1991, 1996; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004; Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004; Hildebrand, 1971, 1997; Klesius & Griffith, 1996; Neuman, 1996; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Neuman & Dickinson, 2002; Watson, 1989; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Wood & Prata Salvetti, 2001). For this reason it was expected that word

recall scores from the BO condition of the storytelling experiment would be second highest after the initial BP condition. However, results did not confirm this assumption and they were not significant in this aspect. For the same reason, the BO recall scores were expected to be higher than PO recall scores. However, results indicated the opposite. Using only props in the storytelling activity produced higher recall scores than when using only books. The disconfirmation of the expectancy may be due to the fact that there was limited research to support the initial development of the assumption. The vast literature supporting the importance of storybooks allowed for the development of the expectancy that recall scores from the BO method would yield better scores than the PO method. Moreover, the limited research available about the importance of storytelling aids as a necessary component to boost word recall scores affected the expectancy that books alone are more effective than props alone.

It was a mistaken assumption to consider the use of props alone as less effective than books alone. Young children are naturally more attracted to three-dimensional aids and toy-related items. The world to them is comprised of a vast array of play and game opportunities. Observing children in their everyday surroundings shows how they experiment, imitate, and engage egocentrically in any opportunity that provides aids that they may employ as toys. This can be illustrated by describing how some children are fascinated by construction tools. The replacement of these dangerous instruments with safe plastic toy-related tools would satisfy the child's need for pretense in "fixing" things. Regular observations on young children demonstrate how they have a need to handle three-dimensional objects that they play with and treat as toys. For example, waiting rooms and lobbies that are most popular among children are those that provide play opportunities of toy-related props and amusement activities. Places which do not provide such opportunities only result in a frustrating time for the parents whose

children end up “playing” with the water cups, chairs, and equipment, possibly causing expensive (and embarrassing) damages. Furthermore, formal school assessments provide play-related opportunities for the young children to engage in naturally, through which their developmental abilities appear in their natural surroundings. Rigid interviews and forced tasks will only cause frustration for the child, leading to an unclear measure of their true abilities.

Such careful observations by the writer have made it possible to assume that the component of props is a vital element to the storytelling procedure. However, the limited literature available about the importance and vitality of props as a sole method in enhancing language performance led the writer to place it in a rank following the rank of the book only condition, rather than in the rank preceding it.

The Effect of Text Genre

Results that compare the use of predictive storybooks with props to narrative storybooks with props did not yield significant results. The children recalled almost the same number of target words from both types of text genres. The correlation coefficient that compares the target word recall scores of the two text genres reveals a very high correlation which suggests that there is no difference in the effect of text type. This also suggests that children who perform highly on word recall from predictive texts will also perform similarly on narrative texts.

Research suggesting that predictive texts produce more chiming of words due to the “predictive” and repetitive nature of the text is quite limited. However, it was plausible for the writer to assume that predictive texts would yield higher recall scores than narrative texts. Predictive texts have more repetitions of words and phrases generating an easiness in the children’s participation and repetition of the heard words,

as well as in the words they expect to hear next. Narrative texts, on the contrary, have a focus of plot sequence and problem-resolution arrangement. This does not mean that predictive texts do not have plot sequence or problem-resolution composition. In many instances they do, but it is portrayed through the repetitive pattern, whereas narrative texts do not. Hence, to assume that predictive texts would yield better language performance was more conceivable. However, experiment results did not confirm this expectancy.

This can be justified by the fact that all twenty four storybooks read in the experiment were fiction books. Both predictive and narrative text genres fall under the genre of 'fiction'. It is possible that fiction books of either predictive or narrative nature demand the same kind of cognitive engagement. This is suggested by a study conducted by Moschovaki and Meadows (2005) on young children's cognitive engagement during classroom book reading activities. They studied the differences according to book and text genre. They compared fiction books with information books. The fiction books they used included familiar formats (predictive) and unfamiliar formats (narrative). Results revealed that fiction books contributed to higher utterances of text recall and labeling than the information books. These cognitive engagements are of low cognitive demand as opposed to the high cognitive engagement prompted by information books. Hence, this can explain why children in the writer's storytelling experiment did not perform significantly different in the predictive and narrative texts. Both texts demand the same cognitive engagement, specifically that of low cognitive demand of recall, labeling, and chiming.

Implications for Parental Roles

It is false to assert that very young children, prior to age four, are not ready to learn. Metzger (1970) believes that “50 per cent of a child’s mature intelligence is acquired at age four, and 17 per cent of a child’s educational growth takes place between the ages of four and six...Therefore beginning academic instruction by age four is not too early. In fact, beginning any later is really too late.” (p. 38-39, 61) I personally allege that a structured curriculum which exposes young children to a diverse array of literacy opportunities is crucial for their growth in all areas of development. First and foremost, parents must become aware of the critical and rapid growth period of the first four years of their children’s development, prior to their entry into formal schooling. They have a duty toward their young ones to provide rich and stimulating opportunities for them to develop the skills necessary for them to grow into high-achieving and competent individuals in a rapidly changing and competitive era. Children are required to become increasingly exposed to a global environment as opposed to the children a few decades ago who were less exposed and “protected” in a safe haven called “home” away from external stimulation outside the home environment. Consequently, verbal communication becomes an even more necessary tool for communication with the outside world.

The role of the parents in this aspect is to develop an advanced verbal relationship with their children and provide an abundance of literacy experiences in order for them to acquire the readiness necessary for later school success, as well as become competent individuals in their social and educational sphere.

In addition to their immediate parental role as providers of language opportunities, parents have a role in providing high quality care through the enrollment of their children in high quality early childhood care centers. The latter are specialized

in early childhood education and their programs provide rich learning opportunities that cannot be provided in the home environment. Parents must realize the necessity of having their children be a part of a high quality child care center in order for them to acquire the various prerequisite skills as well as optimal growth in all areas of development. To deny this provision for their children, parents would be creating a foundation of deficiencies for their children's future development of a prominent status which, as a result, may not turn out prominent.

Humans are social beings growing among others in their globalizing society. To be provided with less opportunities than the rest of the majority of the children in today's world would be establishing poor grounds filled with literacy and esteem gaps that may develop into everlasting cognitive gaps which may never be filled. As Krashen once wrote: "...children are superior to adults only in the long run" (1982, 43).

Furthermore, it would be of extreme benefit for children to be placed in high quality early childhood education contexts by the age of two, which is the age of onset of critical language development. Children at this age are naturally ready to grasp and develop in language because a certain physical maturation and growth has been attained (Singleton, 1989; Lenneberg 1967). As St. Augustine describes in his *Confessions*: "Passing hence from infancy I came to boyhood, or rather it came to me, displacing infancy...For I was no longer a speechless infant but a speaking boy." (*Confessions*: 1.13).

Implications for Early Childhood Education Contexts

The present study advocates that child care centers and school preschool programs provide developmentally appropriate, challenging, rich, and stimulating learning opportunities. These include literacy-enriched prospects with print-rich

environments. High quality, age appropriate storybooks must be an essential provision in the children's everyday activities. Programs must allocate sufficient time daily for reading aloud activities that promote children's readiness for school and help develop a feeling that reading is fun and enjoyable.

Early childhood professionals have the duty to instill in their students a love for books that they will carry for a lifetime. To further enhance the positive impact that books have on children's language performance, it is necessary that the storytelling experiences utilize the component which our experiment revealed crucial, namely the component of props. The results from the present study can be used to advocate the incorporation of props with storytelling activities as a successful strategy to boost young children's language development. This strategy could be agreed upon by the various preschool programs of day care centers and schools as an effective method for enhancing vocabulary acquisition. The props component can become a standard element of the regular story time and reading aloud sessions.

Future Studies

A pertinent limitation to this study lies in the sample. Firstly, the sample group belongs to a specific setting and population of middle to upper class. This makes it difficult for us to generalize our findings to the population of preschool-aged children who belong to lower or higher socioeconomic status. For future studies, it is suggested that researchers conduct the experiment on a wider sample to include day care centers from all the socioeconomic levels.

Secondly, the sample size is quite small which makes it quite difficult to generalize our results. Future research should include a larger number of children from various centers so that results can be more generalizable.

Another limitation which should be noted is that the children were read to in a second-language, namely English, and they are all Arabic native speakers. Even though some children are exposed to this second language in their home environment, some children are not. This may have caused some children to benefit more saliently from the storytelling experiment than others, because it would have been less tedious for them to comprehend and acquire new words.

However, this is a limitation which is quite difficult to avoid since the Lebanese parents and culture necessitates that children start learning a second language as early as possible, for various educational, social, and professional reasons. Hence, to conduct the experiment in the first language of the majority of the population would go against the necessary trend in language development in Lebanon, and would violate the ethical standards that most parents have when they demand an early childhood education for their children. They expect that their children will acquire a second language necessary for their future success, whereby their first language is being naturally provided for in the home and familial context. A suggestion for future research in this matter is quite difficult, unless the children in the sample groups are matched according to their proficiency in the use of the second language.

Furthermore, it would be interesting for future research to measure word recall from the use of other text genres, such as information books that demand higher cognitive engagements. It would also be interesting to add a fifth condition to the storytelling methods such as computer-based storytelling since we are in a world of rapidly changing information technology.

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