EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN TODDLERHOOD

by

BOH YOUNG LEE

(Under the Direction of Jerry Gale and Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, which is composed of four manuscripts, (i) addresses the features or elements in terms of emergent literacy development in toddlerhood for further exploration by searching and examining articles that have been published over the last 20 years; (ii) describes the multiple dimensions of contexts where toddlers may develop their literacy knowledge and skills, such as literacy-related activities by themselves, with peers, parents, or teachers, during morning transition times, free play times, and story times, in a classroom of toddlers for one and half years; and (iii) examines literacy knowledge and skills that toddlers may have by observing and assessing them with a modified checklist.

INDEX WORDS: Toddlers, Emergent literacy, Storybook Reading, Literacy Development, Parental Involvement, Morning Transition, Book Knowledge, Assessment, Checklist, Peer Tutoring, Peer Culture, Shared Literacy Activity
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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................................... ix

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................ x

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 1

References................................................................................................................................... 5

2 LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................... 6

EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN TODDLERHOOD: PUBLICATION TRENDS FROM 1990 TO 2009 ........................................................................................................................................ 6

Introduction.................................................................................................................................. 6

Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 7

Findings ......................................................................................................................................... 9

Discussion and Implications ......................................................................................................... 16

References ................................................................................................................................... 20

3 INVESTIGATING TODDLERS’ AND PARENTS’ STORYBOOK READING DURING MORNING TRANSITION ......................................................................................................................... 39

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................... 40
Findings................................................................................................................................. 72
Implications.......................................................................................................................... 75
References............................................................................................................................. 76

5 THE ROLE OF PEERS AND PEER CULTURE IN SHARED BOOK READING: AN
EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY IN A TODDLER CLASSROOM ............................... 81

Abstract................................................................................................................................. 82
Introduction............................................................................................................................. 82
Method....................................................................................................................................... 85
Description of Classroom Dynamics ............................................................................... 87
Findings................................................................................................................................. 88
Conclusions and Implications for educators................................................................. 99
Limitations............................................................................................................................... 101
References............................................................................................................................. 102

6 CONCLUSIONS.............................................................................................................. 104
References............................................................................................................................. 107
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2. 1. Articles related to literacy development of toddlers .................................................. 23
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2. 1. Research articles using quantitative methodology ....................................................... 22

Figure 3. 1. Model of partnership between parents at home and teachers in school in the literature
........................................................................................................................................................................ 64

Figure 4. 1. Assessing book knowledge for toddlers .................................................................... 78
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There is growing interest in the exploration of environmental factors that influence their development centering on beliefs that 1) young children develop knowledge and skills of reading and writing, as active learners, while interacting with members of social contexts and with reading and writing materials and 2) literacy development is an on-going process and begins at birth (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006; Lee, 2011; Parette, Hourcade, Dinelli, & Boeckmann, 2009; Rowe, 2008). Few studies, however, have focused on aspects of children’s literacy development prior to the age of three (Rodriquez, Tamis-LeMonda, Spellmann, Raikes, Lugo-Gil, & Luze, 2009; Rowe, 2008). Thus, there is a need to document how young children, under the age of three, develop their literacy knowledge and skills to gain a better understanding of contexts, progress, and factors related to early literacy development.

This dissertation might best be described as a handkerchief embroidered with the colorful flowers of “toddlers’ literacy development.” I have embroidered four flowers, four manuscripts, in various colored threads (different agencies, variables, contexts, and themes) that are related to literacy development in toddlerhood and that use three needles that are the three theoretical perspectives of emergent literacy, social learning theory, and ecological perspectives.

The first manuscript entitled Early Literacy Development in Toddlerhood: Publication Trends from 1990 to 2009 has been accepted for a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal. The paper provides a review of United States publication trends on literacy development in
toddlerhood over the last 20 years, exploring what features or elements of toddlers’ literacy
development were documented, and how. The purpose of the paper was to suggest areas for
further exploration. In addition, this paper fulfills the role of a literature review in a traditional
dissertation.

After exploring what and how researchers documented aspects of children’s literacy
development prior to the age of three over the last 20 years, especially focusing on toddlers, I
found:

a) only 15 articles included only toddlers, their parents, or toddler teachers;

b) only 14 articles were longitudinal studies;

c) emergent literacy, ecological perspectives, and social learning theory have been most
frequently used theoretical frameworks in the articles over the last 20 years;

d) no article that examined interactions among toddlers, their parents, and toddler
teachers in the same setting in terms of literacy-related activities, such as shared book
reading;

e) relatively few topics related to description of young children’s literacy knowledge or
how they interact with reading materials and no article focused solely on toddlers’
literacy knowledge; and

f) no literature found investigating the role of peers or the peer culture in toddlers’
literacy development.

These findings became primary aims of the remainder of the manuscripts in that this
dissertation was designed to advance the understanding of early literacy development in
toddlerhood. The overarching theoretical perspective for this dissertation is emergent literacy,
which suggests literacy development is on-going process from birth (Lee, 2011). Based on an
emergent literacy perspective, I applied two other theoretical perspectives: 1) an ecological perspective, which I mainly focused on Microsystem, such as interactions between agents, factors that may influence children’s literacy development within contexts where children are exposed to literacy-related activities (Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2009); and 2) social learning theory, which states children develop their literacy knowledge and skills through interactions with members of social contexts (Ryokai, Vaucelle, & Cassell, 2003). These three theoretical perspectives have been frequently found in the articles that have been published over the last 20 years on early literacy development. In addition, I focused on exploring factors, contexts, and topics related to early literacy development of toddlers, which have been less found among the articles published over the last 20 years.

The second manuscript is entitled *Investigating Toddlers’ and Parents’ Storybook Reading during Morning Transition*. This paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2010. This qualitative study investigates how storybook reading with parents during morning transition times i) eases transitions for young children and leads children to engage in independent reading, and ii) fosters partnership between parents and teachers with regard to instructional strategies for children’s literacy development.

The third manuscript is entitled *Assessing Book Knowledge through Independent Reading in the Earliest Years: Strategies and Implications for Teachers*. This paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2011. The paper provides assessment strategies teachers might employ in their toddler classrooms along with detailed descriptions of toddlers’ book knowledge (book handling, print knowledge, and interpretive knowledge) with a modified checklist that toddler teachers might use.
The fourth manuscript is entitled *The Role of Peers and Peer Culture in Shared Book Reading: An Exploratory Case Study in a Toddler Classroom*. At the time of submission of this dissertation, this paper is under revision and resubmission. This study investigated the role of peers as partners in literacy learning and explored peer culture in literacy-related activities through observations of toddlers in their classroom.

Overall, the four manuscripts come together as a whole, not just simply four different papers. All the manuscripts focused on topics related to toddlers’ literacy development, while exploring contexts in which toddlers were exposed to literacy-related activities and considering factors that might influence toddlers’ literacy knowledge and skills, which have been less found among the articles published over the last 20 years. Thus, all the manuscripts attempt to make a contribution to the literature by filling the gap based on the findings of the first manuscript.
References


CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN TODDLERHOOD: PUBLICATION TRENDS FROM 1990 TO 2009

Introduction

In the field of early childhood education, there is growing interest in the importance of early interventions and in the contributions of ecological factors to children’s literacy development (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006). Researchers studying literacy fields from emergent literacy perspectives have claimed that “children in literate society begin to learn about reading and writing from birth” through the exploration of reading and writing materials and through interactions with adults or older children (Rowe, 2008, p. 66). Unfortunately, to date, relatively few studies have focused on how children, under the age of three, extend their understanding of literacy in the unique contexts where the children are exposed to literacy (Rodriquez, Tamis-LeMonda, Spellmann, Raikes, Lugo-Gil, & Luze, 2009; Rowe, 2008).

Accordingly, there is a need to explore what and how researchers have documented aspects of children’s literacy development prior to the age of three to acknowledge gaps in the literature and areas for further exploration. The current paper examines publication trends in the

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1 Lee, B. Y. Accepted by Early Childhood Education Journal.
U.S. regarding literacy development in toddlerhood over the last 20 years (from 1990 to 2009). Methods of inquiry including type of articles, theoretical framework, methodological approach, types of literacy, variability in participants, and research setting are summarized. This review is limited to research conducted in the United States because emergent literacy perspectives have been emphasized in the U.S. since Marie Clay used the term first in 1966 and there is variability in the manner in which researchers in the U.S. factor ethnic/cultural diversity into their work. The following research questions guide this investigation: (1) What are the research publication trends in U.S. regarding early literacy development in toddlerhood from 1990 to 2009?; (2) What are the main constructs researched in that body of literature over this twenty year span?; and (3) What topics emerge from that trend analysis that suggest the need for further exploration?

Methodology

Procedures

I searched Galileo Scholar databases and selected Education Research Complete (EBSCO), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR, which cover professional and scholarly peer-reviewed journals in a great number of areas in education. These databases were all selected and combined to search for articles to cast a wide net in gathering articles published by various outlets and to reduce the possibility of missing viable articles. Articles were selected using the search terms and keywords toddler, literacy and reading. To maximize the search output, the key words were placed in the “in text” search function of the search engine instead of just the subject or title search function. The search was restricted to articles published from 1990 to 2009. These initial search parameters yielded 1049 articles from the first three databases combined (Education Research Complete: 1039;
PsycINFO: 14; ERIC: 13), and the number of available results reflected the removal of duplicates. Additional 337 articles from the ScienceDirect database and 136 articles from the JSTOR database were also found. This broad search yielded some articles that were not relevant suggesting the need to refine the search with the parameters and exclusion criteria that included removing the article from the review if:

a) none of the participating children in the respective study were toddlers (operationalized as children between the ages of 12 months to 36 months)

b) the study included only children aged 3 to 4 years old, naming them as preschoolers

c) the study did not explicitly state the target participants’ age (e.g., young children) or the relationships between the participants (as adults or older children) and toddlers

d) as in the case of applied/informative articles, the article did not explicitly state the target readers’ relationship with toddlers (e.g., toddlers’ teachers or parents)

e) the study objectives were not related to investigating toddlers’ literacy development, their literacy-related activities, or at least exploring factors or contexts that may influence toddlers’ literacy development (e.g., home literacy environment)

f) the publication was a book or a book review

g) the study was not conducted in the United States

After a detailed and rigorous investigation, 66 were retained that met the initial search terms and the exclusion criteria summarized above.

Analyses

After the final 66 articles for detailed analysis were selected, they were carefully analyzed and categorized using content analysis with predefined categories. These categories
included publication date, type of article, type(s) of literacy, participants, methodology, research setting, and purpose(s) of study. Sub-categories based on the predefined categories were developed (Ezzy, 2002). Then, by employing a quantitative type of content analysis, the number of times all categories occurred was counted and analyzed. Last, for purposes of each article, thematic analysis was used to explore the initial identification of topics, which allowed initial codes (categories) to emerge from the data (Aronson, 1994). In examining publications, interpretive coding was necessary and some cases needed further exploration.

Findings

Frequency of publications regarding early literacy development in toddlerhood from 1990 to 2009

Using as a criterion the presence of toddler, literacy and reading in the text and limiting publication year to the range 1990 to 2009, as stated in the procedure section, 1522 articles were found. After narrowing down the search, analysis of the selected 66 articles among the 1522 publications revealed that 54 articles (81.82%) were published from 2000 to 2009, and only 12 articles (18.18%) were published from 1990 to 1999. Further analysis showed that 50 percent of the 66 articles were published since 2005.

The number of journals in which these works were published was 36. Of the 66 articles, the most frequently occurring journal outlet was Early Childhood Education Journal (about 10.6%). Other journals with multiple publications on the topics included Young Children (about 7.58%), Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology (about 7.58%), and Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children (about 7.58%).
What are the research publication trends over the last 20 years?

Types of articles

For the category, types of article, the 66 articles that were included in the study have been divided into three sub-categories: research articles, applied/informative articles, and review articles. A research article is one in which the researchers conducted the study based on their own research questions and theoretical framework(s). Also, that type of article includes methodology, the results of the study, and possible implications. An applied/informative article provides practical information and resources which readers might apply to their own lives. A review article is one that the author(s) summarize, discuss, and compare studies previously published by others and related to a topic. As shown in the Table 2.1., number one, two, three represent research articles, applied/informative articles, and review articles, respectively. This analysis produced 41 research articles, 20 applied/informative articles, and 5 review articles.

Theoretical framework

In examining publications based on their theoretical framework, only research articles and review articles were included. Unless the authors stated their theoretical framework explicitly implied it by using representative terms (e.g., zone of proximal development, scaffolding, etc.) or cited references written by representative scholars of a theoretical framework (e.g., Sulzby for emergent literacy perspectives; Vygotsky for Socio-cultural learning; Bronfenbrenner for ecological perspectives), the articles were categories as N/M (not mentioned).

Three theoretical perspectives (emergent literacy, socio-cultural learning, and ecological perspectives) were the most used frameworks. An emergent literacy perspective posits that children’s language and literacy develop from the moment they are first exposed to reading and
writing through everyday social interactions. This approach highlights family involvement because it believes literacy development starts at home and considers children as active learners (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Saracho & Spodek, 2006). A socio-cultural view of literacy sees that all strategies, activities, and practices related to literacy development are embedded in children’s experiences through daily social interactions by considering literacy as a cultural practice (Billings, 2009). An ecological perspective emphasizes the effects of the environment on children’s development. It considers the interrelationships among various contexts and includes children’s development directly and indirectly, including the children themselves (Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005). Only five articles in the research articles applied other theoretical frameworks besides the three perspectives mentioned above (e.g., family system theory, family literacy theory, and cognitive neuroscience perspective) while in the review articles, a socio-cultural learning perspective was only found among the three popular theoretical perspectives used in the research articles.

Interestingly, most of the research articles (40%) and review articles (60%) did not provide specific theoretical frameworks. Among those articles, the topics or purposes of the studies were often related with evaluating or introducing/reviewing literacy programs.

Participants (or readers) Focus

As shown in the Table 2.1., All articles were divided into nine sub-categories based on the study participants: 1) only children, 2) only parents (or guardians), 3) only teachers (librarians, or interventionists), 4) children and parents, 5) children and teachers, 6) teachers and parents, 7) children, parents, and teachers, 8) program evaluation with participants, and 9)
program evaluation without actual participants. Two second level sub-categories were included:
a) with/for only toddlers, and b) with/for young children with other age group, including toddlers.

In the case of the research articles, the most frequently observed sub-category was
“children and parents” (about 46.34%), which means that the participants of the articles were
children and their parents. The second most frequently occurring sub-category was “program
evaluation with participants” (about 19.51%). In addition, about 31.7% of all the research articles
had only toddlers, their parents, and/or their teachers as the participants. The remainder of the
research articles included other age groups (infants through primary-aged children which
included toddlers).

The applied/informative articles and review articles did not have participants.
Accordingly, the articles were categorized by only the second level sub-categories. As a result,
10% of the applied/informative articles focused on information, resources, or strategies for only
toddlers’ literacy development, whereas there is no review article only focusing on toddlers’
literacy development or literacy-related activities.

In terms of participants’ genders, SES, races/ethnicities, and disabilities in the research
articles, 5 articles (about 12.2%) had children with disabilities, parents having children with
disabilities, and/or teachers (care providers) working for children with disabilities. 19 articles
(about 46.34%) had children and/or their parents from low-income/environmentally at risk
backgrounds. In addition, 10 articles (about 24.39%) had only or a majority of participants from
minority groups (e.g., African Americans, Hispanics). Interestingly, 2 articles (about 4.88%)
dealt with only boys or only fathers. 9 articles compared two or three different participants’
groups based on ethnicity (e.g., white or black), SES (e.g., low- or middle-income), gender (e.g.,
mothers or fathers), and primary language spoken at home (e.g., Hispanic/English/bilingual). In
the remainder of the research articles, only or a majority of participants were White, non-Hispanic (or European) from middle/upper income backgrounds, females (mothers or teachers).

Methodology

In terms of methodology, as shown in the Table 2.1., all the applied/informative articles and review articles were categorized as N/A (not applicable). All research articles were divided by three sub-categories (1) quantitative, (2) qualitative, (3) mixed and then three second level sub-categories (a) longitudinal, (b) intervention: pre- and post-test, (c) experimental: experimental and control groups if it was necessary. In the case of the longitudinal second level sub-category, if a study was conducted for more than 6 months, the study was labeled by the category.

The majority of the articles (about 68.29%) fell into the quantitative category. Those articles mainly used assessment (or evaluation), observation, or surveys (online or questionnaire). Approximately 27% of the articles were categorized as qualitative, which mainly used observation and interviews for their methods. Only two articles used mixed methodology (both quantitative and qualitative methods).

As illustrated in the Figure 2.1., approximately 36%, 29%, and 26% of the research articles using quantitative methodology were longitudinal, intervention, and experimental studies, respectively, and the rest of the articles (about 42.86%) were not labeled by any second level sub-categories, whereas approximately 27% of the research articles using qualitative methodology were longitudinal studies and the rest of the articles (about 72.73%) were not categorized by other second level sub-categories.
Types of literacy

Emergent (or early) literacy is defined as “the developmental process beginning at birth in which children acquire the foundation for reading and writing” (Erickson, Hatton, Roy, Fox, & Renne, 2007, p. 80). Family literacy emphasizes literacy activities at home such as shared reading, reading aloud, creating print-rich environments, or providing literacy-related materials as well as providing linguistic and cultural diversity at home (Morrow, Paratore, Gaber, Harrison, & Tracey, 1993). Digital (or media) literacy argues the importance of using technologies (e.g., software tools, computers, educational programs on TV) to facilitate children’s literacy development (Buckingham, 2006). Additionally, arts-based literacy highlights the importance of using art, music, dance, theater, and film literacy to maximize children’s literacy through activities by helping children visualize, listen to, and perform language (Piazza, 1999).

All the articles were categorized by five sub-categories: 1) Emergent (early) literacy, 2) Family (home) literacy, 3) Digital literacy, 4) Arts-based literacy (music, art, drama), and 5) Literacy in general. If an article stated one of the terms explicitly or at least implied that the author(s) took the notion of it, then, the article was categorized by the number representing the notion. Otherwise, the rest of the articles were categorized by number five, Literacy in general.

The majority of the articles took the notion of either emergent (early) literacy (about 40.91%) or family (home) literacy (about 27.27%). In addition, 3 articles were related to digital literacy and only one article focused on arts-based literacy (music). It is important to note that these 4 articles were published since 2001.
**Research settings**

Except the research articles, the applied/informative articles and review articles were categorized as not applicable (N.A.). All the research articles were sub-categorized in terms of the setting where research was conducted as follows: 1) Home, 2) Classroom, 3) Community (public library, special or intervention program), 4) Lab (clinics, places other than home and classroom), and 5) Across settings.

As a result, the most of the research articles (about 41.46%) were conducted at participants’ home. The second most frequently counted research setting (about 19.51%) was “across settings”, mostly including the participants’ home.

**Topics of research**

The topics of each article were investigated in terms of the frequency of topics published over the past 20 years. It is important to note that the total number of the tallies of articles for categories does not match with the total number of articles, as more than one topic for each category were used in some studies.

In the case of the research articles, the most common topic (about 41.46%) was exploring the influence of literacy-related activities on children’s literacy development, including intervention programs and home environment. The next highly investigated topic (about 39.02%) was examining parents’ participation in shared book reading with their children, including the contexts or reading patterns (behaviors or styles). On the other hand, there were a relatively small number of topics related to teachers’ participation (or beliefs) in early literacy practices (e.g., shared book reading) (about 14.63%) and description of young children’s literacy knowledge or how they interact with reading materials (about 7.32%).
Among the applied/informative articles, the most of frequently counted topic (85%) was sharing strategies (guidelines or information) and introducing programs to promote children’s literacy abilities. Introducing age- and developmentally-appropriate books or how to select those books was second.

Lastly, in the five review articles, three articles reviewed studies regarding the effectiveness of a certain literacy program (ROR), whereas two articles reviewing research to discuss the current state of understanding on the given topic.

Discussion and Implications

Among articles investigating literacy development, there has been a limited number of studies published, focusing on very young children. Even, among the studies, only few articles focused on only toddlers regarding their literacy development. In spite of many researchers taking emergent literacy perspectives, which refers to “the foundation upon which children’s conventional reading and writing abilities are built” and views “the emergent literacy foundation is acquired within the period preceding formal literacy instruction, transcending birth to about 6 years of age” (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003, p. 320), as their theoretical framework for their research, most researchers have conducted studies with children from preschool or older ages by emphasizing written language awareness and phonological awareness (Justice et al., 2003).

Even though the number of publications that address toddlers’ literacy development has increased over the last 10 years when compared to the previous 10 years, there is still a need to further explore the field of early literacy development among very young children.
Based on this investigation, there are relatively few studies addressing younger children’s literacy development, separated from reading research with preschoolers, such as how to operationalize very young children’s interest in literacy (e.g., successful and effective literacy-related activities, reading instruction approaches, or contexts in which the children evince an interest in literacy-related activities), or how the children develop literacy skills. Development of literacy is a gradual process from birth. However, there would be important distinctions between children younger than age three and preschoolers (Fletcher & Reese, 2005). Exploring those distinctions can help us to gain a better understanding of how children develop literacy knowledge and skills from birth. In addition, no review articles focusing on only toddlers’ literacy development have been published. Review articles can primarily focus on a review of current knowledge with the inclusion of critical perspectives regarding a particular topic. Thus, having review articles regarding literacy related topics focusing only toddlers will allow readers to gain in-depth understanding of how we can help toddlers for their later literacy skills as well as to highlight areas that require further investigation.

Among the articles focused on very young children, the majority documented relationships between the quality of children’s early literacy experiences and their early language, emotional, and cognitive development, rather than emergent (early) literacy development outcomes. These articles primarily focused on a specific dimension of the literacy-related home environment related to literacy, such as shared book reading with parents (frequency of reading or parents’ reading styles) or the total number of books for children available at home. Thus, there is a need to investigate the paths of association between early literacy experiences and emergent literacy outcomes by considering various factors that influence later literacy outcomes to understand more fully the dynamics and processes of literacy development. In addition, it is
crucial to examine systematically multiple levels of the environmental factors on literacy development, including the interrelationships among various contexts, because individuals are active within these contexts. However, no literature was found investigating the role of peers or siblings in toddlers’ literacy development. Thus, there is a need to explore extended interrelationships in addition to those of child-parent, child-teacher, and child-teacher-parent.

There is a relatively recent trend in which many researchers have started viewing emergent literacy with diverse perspectives, adopting the diverse notions of literacy, such as digital literacy and arts-based literacy (e.g. music, art, drama etc.). Thus, there is a need for more research to support this new research trend to remain contemporary with accelerating technological developments as well as to develop high qualities of literacy-related activities so that we can find better ways to help young children enjoy reading and learning literacy skills.

In terms of participants, the majority of studies have focused primarily on white, non-Hispanics, from middle socio-economic backgrounds, as well as on mothers and female teachers. For example, many articles claimed that they investigated parent-child storybook interactions in two-parent households, even though they looked only at mother-child dyads and generalized to the category of parents. Thus, there is a need to investigate early literacy development, solely focusing on people from ethnically and/or culturally diverse backgrounds, people with special needs, fathers, or male teachers.

Of the articles of the past 20 years, only 14 articles were longitudinal studies. The developmental process is on-going, and there is a need for carefully planned longitudinal studies that would give researchers a better understanding of very young children’s literacy development through exploring contexts over time.
Finally, there has been a growing interest in the home-school-community partnership for children’s development (Caireney, 2000). However, of the articles of the past 20 years, no article investigating the home-school-community partnership for toddlers’ literacy development was found. Thus, researchers need to examine very young children’s literacy development across multiple settings to help people build strong connections for children’s successful developmental outcomes.
References


Figure 2.1. Research articles using quantitative methodology

Longitudinal

21%

Intervention

7%

Experimental

4%

4%

11%

4%

7%

4%
Table 2. 1. Articles related to literacy development of toddlers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type of article</th>
<th>Theoretical framework</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Type of literacy</th>
<th>Research setting</th>
<th>Purpose(s) of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strickland, D.S. &amp; Morrow, L.M.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Reading Teacher</td>
<td>Family literacy: Sharing good books</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infant to primary grade)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Types of books: how teachers and parents might promote the development of young children’s literacy abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Stratton, J.M., &amp; Wright, S.</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Re:View</td>
<td>On the way to literacy: Early experiences for young visually impaired children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, toddlers, preschoolers)</td>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Exploring components of emerging literacy for all children, including visually impaired children; reporting the describing their project in detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>McRae, B.</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Children Today</td>
<td>The New Horizons Center for children and families</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (birth to 5) including children with disabilities</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Introducing the program that aims to foster literacy and learning in children and parents by helping parents develop their storytelling and reading skills</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>MacComiskey, A.V.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Journal of Visual Impairment &amp; Blindness</td>
<td>The Braille readiness skills grid: A guide to building a foundation for literacy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers) with visual disabilities</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Introducing a program to help children who are visually impaired or blind to learn literacy</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Brown University Child &amp; Adolescent Behavior Letter</td>
<td>Phonics and whole language learning: A balanced approach to beginning reading</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>How to teach phonics to children (guide for teachers and parents)</td>
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<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Galentine, J.K.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Infant-Toddler Intervention</td>
<td>Reading behaviors of toddlers before preschool</td>
<td>Describing how toddlers demonstrate knowledge about, and use of, literacy and literacy artifacts</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Connor, D.B., Knight, D.K., &amp; Cross, D.R.</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>British Journal of Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>Mothers’ and fathers’ scaffolding of their 2-year-olds during problem-solving and literacy interactions</td>
<td>Assessing parents’ effectiveness (mothers vs. fathers) to scaffold their children’s emerging skills during each session dyads participated in literacy tasks</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Rowe, D.W.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Reading Research Quarterly</td>
<td>The literate potentials of book-related dramatic play</td>
<td>Examining the influence of book-related dramatic play on children’s literacy interactions</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Armstrong, M.B.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Infant-Toddler Intervention</td>
<td>Storybooks to literacy: A collaborative shared reading</td>
<td>Evaluating the effectiveness of a shared reading project with children and their parents</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Almquist, N.L., Bisson, S., &amp; Wynia, A.</td>
<td>1998 Journal of Pediatric Health Care</td>
<td>Bringing an early pediatric literacy program to the clinic setting</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers, pre-K)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Reviewing a literacy program (ROR) and introducing some reading tips for parents of young children</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>N/M (A joint position statement of the IRA and NAEYC)</td>
<td>1998 Reading Teacher</td>
<td>Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers, pre-K, K, primary grades)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Introducing continuum of children’s development in early reading and writing/ suggesting recommended teaching practices for each age group</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Lawhon, T.</td>
<td>2000 Contemporary Education</td>
<td>Creating language and print awareness environments for young children</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Sharing strategies with teachers and parents how to create an environment for young children that encourages growth in literacy (pre-reading skills)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>High, P.C., LaGasse, L., Becker, S., Ahlgren, I., Gardner, A.</td>
<td>2000 Pediatrics</td>
<td>Literacy promotion in primary care pediatrics: Can we make a difference?</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8 b (infants through toddlers)</td>
<td>1 (interview &amp; follow-up interview)</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Evaluating the effects of a literacy promoting intervention (providing free books to families)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Huebner, C.E.</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk</td>
<td>Community-based support for preschool readiness among children in poverty</td>
<td>Primarily Black/low income</td>
<td>1 interviews, assessment, observation</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>Testing an intervention to increase the frequency and quality of shared reading among low-income parents and their toddlers</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Huebner, C.E.</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>Promoting toddlers’ language development through community-based intervention</td>
<td>Mostly White (81%), including children at risk for language problems; primarily English speaking at home</td>
<td>1 survey, assessment, observation</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>Evaluating a parent-child reading program (dialogic reading) to facilitate vocabulary and syntactic skills of toddlers</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Yarosz, D.J., &amp; Barnett, W.S.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Reading Psychology</td>
<td>Who reads to young children? : Identifying predictors of family reading activities</td>
<td>Diverse participants (White, non-Hispanic, primarily)</td>
<td>1 survey</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>Identifying variables influencing frequency of families reading to their children</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Neuman, S.B., &amp; Celano, D.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Reading Teacher</td>
<td>Books aloud: A campaign to “put books in children’s hands.”</td>
<td>Diverse participants, primarily early childhood educators</td>
<td>2 observation &amp; interview</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>Evaluating and discussing impact of the books aloud program on the literacy development of children</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Smith, C.R.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Reading Research Quarterly</td>
<td>Click and turn the page: An exploration of multiple storybook literacy</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Describing how a young child interacted with various types of storybook media (benefits of CD-ROM storybook sharing)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Frosch, C.A., Cox, M.J., &amp; Goldman, B.D.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Merrill-Palmer Quarterly</td>
<td>Infant-parent attachment and parental and child behavior during parent-toddler storybook interaction</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Investigating home environments of children in poor families (including reading opportunities)</td>
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<td>Introducing lists of books for infants and toddlers</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Honig, A.S., &amp; Shin, M.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Journal</td>
<td>Reading aloud with infants and toddlers in child care settings: An observational study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(infants)</td>
<td>1 (observation)</td>
<td>5 (home &amp; classroom) Exploring reading styles of teachers and caregivers with children; if the reading styles vary across gender or age of the children</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Jalongo, M.R., Dragich, D., Conrad, N.K., &amp; Zhang, A.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Journal</td>
<td>Using wordless picture books to support emergent literacy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (young children)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Importance of using wordless picture books for young children/ suggesting a strategy of using the books</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Rosenquest, B.B.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Journal</td>
<td>Literacy-based planning and pedagogy that supports toddler language development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Suggesting strategies how to use literature to plan toddler curriculum</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Karther, D.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Reading Teacher</td>
<td>Fathers with low literacy and their young children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>b (infants, preschoolers)</td>
<td>2 (case study; interviews)</td>
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<td>Describing father-child literacy activities</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Lawhon, T., &amp; Cobb, J.B.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Journal</td>
<td>Routines that build emergent literacy skills in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>b (infants, preschoolers)</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Girolametto, L., &amp; Weitzman, E.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Language, Speech &amp; Hearing Services in Schools</td>
<td>Responsiveness of child care providers in interactions with toddlers and preschoolers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 (a social-interactive perspective of language development)</td>
<td>1 (assessment, observation)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Investigating the responsive language input of child care providers to young children in class (one of the contexts: book reading) &amp; children’s language productivity</td>
<td></td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Mendelsohn, A.L.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care</td>
<td>Promoting language and literacy through reading aloud: The role of the pediatrician</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/M</td>
<td>4 &amp; 8</td>
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<td>Evaluating the intervention program (Reach Out and Read): the effect of the program on children’s language outcomes</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Foorman, B.R., Anthony, J., Seals, L., &amp; Mouzaki, A.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Seminars in Pediatric Neurology</td>
<td>Language development and emergent literacy in preschool</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 (a cognitive neuroscience perspective)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Reviewing articles as arguing that emergent literacy is subordinate to oral language development, rather than language development being subordinate to emergent literacy</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Robinson, L.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Young Children</td>
<td>Technology as a scaffold for emergent literacy: Interactive storybooks for toddlers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>Describing interactive storybooks-software programs for toddlers</td>
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</table>

| 33 | Gobin, R.P., Nordquist, V.M., & Twardosz, S. | 2004 | Early Education and Development | Parental accounts of home-based literacy processes: Contexts for infants and toddlers with developmental delays | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 (interview) | 2 | 1 | Investigating how parents of infants and toddlers with mild developmental delays viewed literacy processes at home and how they may be influencing their children; parent-child storybook reading and computer usage |

<p>| 34 | Fletcher, K.L., Perez, A., Hooper, C., &amp; Claussen, A.H. | 2005 | Early Child Development and Care | Responsiveness and attention during picture-book reading in 18-month-old to 24-month-old toddlers at risk | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 (assessment, observation) | 2 | 4 | Examining the responsiveness and attention during picture-book reading in toddlers from at-risk backgrounds |</p>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Roberts, J., Jurgens, J., &amp; Burchinal, M.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research</td>
<td>The role of home literacy practices in preschool children’s language and emergent literacy skills</td>
<td>1 1 4</td>
<td>1 (observation, assessment, questionnaire, interview)</td>
<td>2 1 (infants through pre-k)</td>
<td>Examining the relationships between home literacy practices (shared book reading frequency, maternal book reading strategies, child’s enjoyment of reading, and maternal sensitivity) during preschool years and child’s language and emergent literacy skills between the ages of 3 and 5 years</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>St. Pierre, R.G., Ricciuti, A.E., &amp; Rimdzius, T.A.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>Effects of a family literacy program on low-literate children and their parents: Findings from an evaluation of the Even Start family literacy program</td>
<td>1 4 (Family Literacy Theory)</td>
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<td>Huebner, C.E., &amp; Meltzoff, A.N.</td>
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<td>Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology</td>
<td>Intervention to change parent-child reading style: A comparison of instructional methods</td>
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<td>Fletcher, K.L., &amp; Reese, E.</td>
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<td>Developmental Review</td>
<td>Picture book reading with young children: A conceptual</td>
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<td>Reviewing studies cross-sectional, longitudinal, and intervention reading research (including other factors that impact picture book reading between parents and their</td>
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<td>Buysse, V., Castro, D.C., West, T., &amp; Skinner, M.</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Early Childhood Research Quarterly</td>
<td>Addressing the needs of Latino children: A national survey of state administrators of early childhood programs</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Blom-Hoffman, J., O’neil-Pirozzi, T.M., &amp; Cutting, J.</td>
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<td>Psychology in the Schools</td>
<td>Read together, talk together: The acceptability of teaching parents to use dialogic reading strategies via videotaped instruction</td>
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<td>Raikes, H., Pan, B.A., Luze, G., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Constantine J., Tarullo, L.B., Raikes,</td>
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<td>Predicting language development in children at risk: The effects of quality and frequency of caregiver reading and toddlers’ expressive language development</td>
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<td>Murphy, J.L., Hatton, D., &amp; Erickson, K.A. 2008 Journal of Visual Impairment &amp; Blindness Exploring the early literacy practices of teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with visual impairments 1 1 3 b (teachers served children aged 6 or younger) White, non-Hispanic women primarily; with certification or license of children with visual impairments 1 (survey) 1 2 Investigating teachers’ early literacy practices</td>
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<td>Moses, A.M., &amp; Duke, N.K. 2008 Journal of Literacy Research Portrayals of print literacy in children’s television programming 1 1 9 (10 tv programs) b (preschoolers, pre-K) 1 1 N/A Investigating print literacy events in the programs most watched by viewers between the ages of 2 and 5</td>
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<td>Schaefer, R. 2008 Children &amp; Libraries: The Journal of the Association Storyville USA: Library mini-town bustles in 2 N/A b (infants, preschoolers) N/A 5 N/A Describing the program in the library how to promote children’s language, literacy, and school readiness skills</td>
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<td>Duursma, E., Pan, B.A., &amp; Raikes, H.</td>
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<td>Young Children</td>
<td>Using stories effectively with infants and toddlers</td>
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<td>Neumann, M.M., Hood, M., &amp; Neumann, D.L.</td>
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<td>The scaffolding of emergent literacy skills in the home environment: A case study</td>
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<td>Mexican American mothers of low and middle socioeconomic status: Communication -n behaviors and interactive strategies during shared book</td>
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CHAPTER 3

INVESTIGATING TODDLERS’ AND PARENTS’ STORYBOOK READING
DURING MORNING TRANSITION²

Abstract
This qualitative study builds on the previous body of emergent literacy research by investigating the use of storybook reading with parents during morning transition times through observation on fifteen toddlers (2- to 3-years old), their parents, and teachers in a university preschool classroom. The focus of this study is to investigate whether storybook reading with parents eases morning transitions for young children as well as fosters their literacy development. Additionally, this study seeks to understand how storybook reading with parents during morning transitions affects the partnership between parents and teachers. The findings of this study contribute to the literature showing that i) reading a book with parents during morning transition times may provide smooth transitions, ii) It may help with direct interactions between teachers and parents and with direct parental involvement in a school setting, and iii) storybook reading with parents in class during morning transition times may lead the child to engage in independent reading.

The Ecology of Early Literacy Development
“Young children’s literacy does not develop in isolation” (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005, p. 207). Every child learns not only by exploring and participating in new things but also observing, listening, and experiencing through on-going activities with adults and other children (Rogoff et al., 2003). Research supports the importance of studying the various contexts in which children participate and connecting those contexts where they are exposed to children’s developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) advanced the ecological perspective on child development- that children develop within a variety of social contexts and that it is important to investigate the interrelationships among the various contexts when studying how children develop and make progress in learning processes.
The ecological perspective acknowledges young children’s immediate experience in the home/family environment and the child-care environment, which are two primary contexts that have a direct influence upon young children’s development. These perspectives also account for patterns of interactions between children and other environmental factors as they develop over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, preschool-age children also are influenced by other contexts including their neighborhood and communities, and cultural, economic, and other environmental factors (Rogoff, 2003).

In addition, Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that if there are positive interactions between contexts where children are exposed, people can predict the enhanced developmental potential of the children. Rogoff (2003) also supported the idea that children’s development can be more fully understood by investigating their practices while examining the contexts in which the children make developmental progress. Therefore, it may be more important to examine children’s development in the interactive processes between home and a child-care center than to examine them as separate contexts.

In this study, I am looking at one level but two different settings in the Microsystem of the eco-systemic systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): the home (parents) and early education (teachers) contexts, not as separate contexts, but interacting ones, in order to investigate the phenomenon of storybook reading among toddlers, their parents, and teachers during morning transition times in the classroom setting, which may have implications for young children’s literacy development.

**Parental Influence on Literacy Development**

Emergent literacy is the term used to describe young children’s developing literacy skills before formal schooling (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Because it is a process that continues and grows over time, the importance of young children’s home environments as a
contributor to their emergent literacy development, a setting where language and literacy are typically first encountered, has been emphasized (Purcell-Gates, 1996). According to Baker and his colleagues (1995), children are likely to become intrinsically motivated to read when their home literacy experiences promote the view that reading is a source of entertainment. Some key factors in home environments that impact literacy development include literacy resources, opportunities to learn, socio-economic status, parents’ educational level, and parental expectations. Among the key factors in home environments, the role of the parents is the most important factor for their child’s literacy development because they are the teachers, guiders, and models whom their child first meets (Baker et al., 1995).

Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) examined the relationship between parental involvement and emergent literacy skills and reading achievement with 168 four- and five-year-old children for five years. They found that the more parents were interested in helping their children to get early home literacy experiences (e.g., exposure to books), the more the children could develop their subsequent receptive language and emergent literacy skills, and these skills were directly related to the children’s reading in grade 3. This finding indicates that there can be a significant positive relationship between parent involvement in literacy activities with their children at home and the children’s academic achievement later.

Much of the research on the role of the home literacy environment has focused primarily on the occurrence or frequency of joint book reading between parents and children (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Payne et al., 1994; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). For example, Payne, Whitehurst, and Angell (1994) concluded that joint book reading positively influences acquisition of language and literacy skills in preschool children from low-income families. Also, Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) demonstrated that the frequency of joint book reading between parents or other adults and children had a positive effect on child literacy outcome measures among preschool-age children. Additionally,
Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) examined the impact of home-based reading practices on young children’s literacy development and reported reading frequency was the only significant correlate of children’s early literacy-related skills.

Also, parents’ reading behaviors, such as personal enjoyment of reading and time spent in reading, have been related to positive reading outcomes for children (Baker et al., 1995). Parental beliefs about their role in their children’s literacy development were highly predictive of both the degree to which parents exposed their children to joint book reading and the quality of parent-child interactions while reading books (DeBaryshe, 1995).

Moreover, Ordonez-Jasis and Ortiz (2006) suggested that culturally and linguistically diverse parents value literacy and see it as the single most powerful factor for their children’s future. This also can be linked to parental beliefs about the importance of literacy for their children.

**Parental Influence on Motivation for Reading**

Researchers demonstrate that children can have increased motivation to read when parents believe reading is important for literacy development and understand how children learn to read (Hannon, 1998; Sonnenschein et al., 2000).

According to Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002), the affective quality of the reading interaction was the most powerful predictor of children’s motivations for reading. The results emphasize the importance of the affective quality of reading interactions for fostering children’s interest in literacy.

Children’s interests and curiosity drives them to gain many literacy-related skills long before they encounter formal reading and writing instruction in school (Morrow, 1989). These early experiences are important for young children’s motivation to read.

Storybook reading provides children with an opportunity to have a warm, positive interaction with their parents, often with comforting physical contact. Reading a book
together with a parent before falling asleep is called bedtime story. According to Heath (1996), bedtime stories are one of the most familiar literacy events for preschoolers, and they can help set patterns of behavior that recur repeatedly throughout the lives of young children and their parents (or other adults). This can provide children opportunities to have motivation for reading as well as to build positive social development. Also, children are likely to view reading as a leisure activity if they are engaged in literacy experience with enjoyable interactions (Wigfield & Asher, 1984).

Storybook reading can create an anxiety-free experience and a positive emotional response to subsequent reading experiences. To children, it also can model how to become interested and engaged in a text (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982).

According to Bus and van Ijzendoom (1995), interest in reading is not a natural phenomenon but rather is evoked by the pleasure of sharing a book with the parent. Children become interested in reading books because of parental efforts to evoke and support interest. This reveals parents’ powerful influence in children’s motivation for reading.

**Teachers’ Influence in Child-Care on Literacy Development**

As the number of mothers in the workforce increases, the importance of young children’s child-care environment as well as home environment has been emphasized as a contributor to their emergent literacy skill development. In addition to effective strategies and instructions to lead children to improve their literacy development (Pressley, 2006), we cannot overlook the teacher demographic components such as teacher education, age, literacy level, educational experiences, and income level. Burchinal and her colleagues (2000) reported that the greater teachers’ educational experiences and training, the better children’s receptive language skills. Likewise, Honig and Hirallal (1998) found that those teachers who had early childhood education and child development classwork made stronger contributions.
to preschool-age children’s language skills than did teachers with lower levels of education and training.

However, the most important influence of teachers on young children’s literacy development is the frequency and quality of teacher-child book reading in the classroom settings as well as their beliefs about young children’s literacy development. For example, Dickinson and Smith (1994) demonstrated that the frequency and quality of teacher-child book reading in child-care programs were related to children’s vocabulary and story comprehension growth. Neuman and Celano (2001) examined teachers’ beliefs about children's literacy development and found that the amount of time allocated to book reading was affected by teachers’ beliefs about early literacy. They also found a positive relationship between the importance of the availability and use of books in child-care classrooms and children’s literacy development.

**Importance of Partnership between Parents and Teachers for Literacy Development**

Baker and his colleagues (1996) demonstrated that home-school partnerships can impact positively on literacy if families and teachers together develop ways of communicating and building meaningful curricula that extend the insular classroom community.

The quality of the partnership between the home and school can promote literacy skills among school-age children (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). For example, if parents and teachers support one another’s efforts or both are actively and fully engaged in their role in each setting, it can help improve children's reading ability.

Owen and her colleagues (2000) examined how parent-teacher partnership behavior impacted the quality of teacher-child and parent-child interactions by administering the Parent-Caregiver Partnership Scale to 53 mothers of three-year-old children and to 53
teachers of those same children. The results showed that the more parents and teachers engage in communication about their childrearing beliefs, the more sensitive and supportive teacher-child interactions in child care and parent-child interactions at home can be because both parents and teachers understand the home and child-care contexts of the child’s experience and can use that knowledge to support and enrich the child’s experiences.

Figure 3.1 presents a model based on the systems as suggested by literature above (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003). Each circle around children represents a context in which the children can make literacy developmental progress; home and classroom. In order to better understand children’s literacy development, it is critical to investigate interactions among all contexts in which the children make developmental progress, as opposed to examining them as separate contexts (Rogoff, 2003). However, interactions between parents and teachers (Figure 3.1) both affect the child but occur in separate setting (i.e., home or center). How can we invite and create open parental involvement in class, which may help children to make progress in literacy development?

I examined morning transition times in class because parents actually have not only direct involvement but also interact with teachers in the classroom during that time.

**Purpose of the study**

This current study seeks to build on the previous body of emergent literacy research by investigating the use of storybook reading with parents during morning transition times. The focus of the study is to investigate whether storybook reading with parents eases morning transitions for young children as well as fosters their literacy development. Additionally, the study seeks to understand how storybook reading with parents during morning transitions affects the partnership between parents and teachers.
Method

Participants

Participants in this study were two- to three-year-old toddlers, their parents, and teachers in the toddlers’ class in an early educational center in an urban setting. The total number of children was fifteen (nine boys and six girls), one child had a disability, and all the children were in a full-day program. For each observation, at least two teachers were present—a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. All teachers were White and non-Hispanic, with the lead teacher currently pursuing her Master’s degree. All the assistant teachers either had the Bachelor’s degree or were actively pursuing the degree. Parents of participants were all highly educated (most holding advanced degrees) and worked in an institution of higher education (IHE). All of the participants were White and non-Hispanic.

Ethnographical case study

This current research involves the study of an issue explored through events within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007), which is a classroom setting during morning transition times. Also, this study focused on certain contexts (parents’ involvement in storybook reading during morning transitions) and a specific setting (toddlers’ classroom). The aim of this study was to find out what some phenomena mean as enacted within a particular case by observing and interpreting how participants, especially children, individually and collectively respond to particular situations through interactions with others (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In addition, this research developed thick and rich descriptions and analysis of multiple cases. This study used descriptions of participants’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors to construct interpretations of their “real worlds” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 18) in a research setting, the classroom. Therefore, ethnographical case study was used as the methodology.
Data Collection

At first, I only observed children during storybook reading times. One day, in the middle of the storybook reading time, a mother of one of the children stopped by to see her child. The parent sat on the playground like others, and her child sat on her lap while listening to stories. As soon as a teacher let children have and read books by themselves, her child grabbed a book and brought it to her. Then, they read the book together, and they seemed to feel comfortable as if they were at home. As observing them reading the book, I asked myself if we could bring parental involvement in classroom settings for literacy development of young children. As a result, I decided to focus on morning transition times in class, when I could observe direct parental involvement in class. In addition, I focused on parents’ interactions with teachers and their children and how the interactions influenced their children. Lastly, because I believed that parents play an important role in their child’s literacy development, I focused on the role of storybook reading with parents in class during morning transition times.

Data were collected three times a week for 11 months in the toddlers’ classroom in “natural” settings, during morning transition times. The total number of observations made was 132. Sessions usually lasted an hour, from 7:40 am to 8:40am, when they had their free play times. Because video cameras are particularly well suited as data-gathering technologies for small group interactions, classroom studies, and participant observation, a digital camera was used to collect and preserve the record of observations as videotape of interactions among children, parents, and teachers. Field notes were also taken to interpret experiences.

Analysis

The collected data, the field notes on participants’ actions in particular contexts (e.g., in the classroom during morning transitions), and the videotaped data were organized and
compared to search for coherence. Therefore, constant comparative analysis (Patton, 1990) was used to compare each event within the same setting to find patterns of participants’ behaviors that seemed relevant in order to probe beyond the behavioral descriptions, considering the importance of what is happening (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

First, I looked at all the video clips and field notes and came up with codes. Then, I marked all sections of field notes in which the presence of parents in the class influenced children, children participated in storybook reading with parents, parents and teachers interacted, and children participated in storybook reading with teachers or by themselves right after their parents left, during morning transitions. Then, I saw repeating events and could begin organizing codes into larger themes that connect different codes, and finally these marked data categorized into three different themes.

**Findings**

This current study was conducted to investigate the effects of parental involvement on the children’s literacy development in the classroom setting by reading books with their child during morning transition times before they leave. Findings from this study suggest that parental involvement in storybook reading during morning transition times: (1) facilitates smooth morning transitions, (2) provides opportunities for literacy development to young children, and (3) allows direct/indirect interactions between parents and teachers.

**Theme 1. Short presence of parents**

The first category of coded data represents children’s reactions when parents stayed for only a short period of time in the class during morning transition times. This coded category was focused on how it affected children when parents stayed in the class during
morning transition times for a short time and did not interact with their child or teachers much.

**Episode 1.1.**

8:20 am. Free play time. A teacher was about to read a book to three children, sitting on the rug in the center of the classroom. The other teacher was helping one child play with wooden blocks in the block area in the corner of the classroom. Two-year-old David\(^3\) came to the class with his mother. She had only a short greeting with the teacher who was about to read a book, and signed the sign-in sheet on the countertop by the door of the classroom. She brought David to the group of the children, said goodbye to him. He cried and held her right leg to try to stop her, but she left. It was at 8:23 am. As soon as she closed the door of the class, David flopped onto the floor and started crying. Other children sat down and were engaged in their storybook reading activity. However, David kept crying even though the teacher who was in the block area continued to try to make him calm down. It took more than 20 minutes for him to calm down.

This episode showed that a short presence of parents in the class during morning transition times can negatively affect young children’s adjustment to the next transition. Among data categorized as a short presence of parents in the class (less than 5 minutes) and little interactions (parents doing only what they have to do, such as signing the sign-in sheet, bringing their child to the teachers or the group to help their child to engage in the ongoing

\(^3\) All names are pseudonyms.
activities, or getting attention from the teachers and letting their child go to the teachers) during morning transition, approximately seventy percent ended up like the example above. Regardless of their age and gender, most children could not easily make the transition from home to school when their parents stayed in class less than 5 minutes and left. The only difference among them was the length of time that it took for each child to calm down after the parents left. In these episodes, children showed separation anxiety (Bowlby, 1960) for parents easily, even among those who were about to be engaged in class activities before their parents left.

**Theme 2. Storybook reading with parents**

The second category of coded data represents children’s reactions after having storybook reading with parents in the class during morning transition times. This coded category was focused on finding how children reacted after they read books with their parents for a while before their parents left and how it is different from the one in which their parents left without interacting with their child in the class for a while.

**Episode 2.1.**

8:00 am. Two-year-old Ricky came into the class with his mother. A teacher asked her to stay a little bit longer. His mother brought him to the book area in the corner of the classroom and sat down on the cozy sofa with him. Then, she chose a big book, *Big Red Barn*, and started reading it. While reading the book, three other children came, sat around them, and listened to the story. After his mother left, one of three other children, three-year-old Melissa, took the book and read it. Ricky also joined and read it together with Melissa. After reading it, Melissa chose another
book, *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*, to read. On the other hand, Ricky read the book again by himself.

**Episode 2.2.**

7:45 am. Two-year-old Alicia came into the class with her mother, holding a book, *Go Away, Big Green Monster*. Her mother asked a teacher where she needed to put the book (it seemed like the book belonged to the class). After she put the book in the library area, she kissed Alicia’s forehead and said good bye. Alicia tried to stop her mother, but the teacher held her shoulders, and her mother could leave. Alicia started crying out and ran after her, calling her mother. Alicia tried to open the door, crying so hard. The teacher kept trying to make her calm down, but she cried louder. About three minutes later, her mother came inside with a concerned look. Alicia nestled up to her mother. Her mother grabbed a big book, *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*, among books on the countertop near the door, saying, “I’ll read this book and say good-bye, ok?” Alicia nodded. They sat on the rug in the library area and read the book. After reading the whole book, Alicia asked her mother to read it one more time. Her mother hesitated to do it at first, but she started reading it again. While reading it for the second time, Taylor (another child) joined them, sitting next to Alicia. After reading it, as they promised, the mother kissed Alicia’s forehead, stood up, and walked toward the door of the classroom. Then, Taylor grabbed the book and opened it, looking at the pictures. Alicia rose up little bit, but as soon as she looked at Taylor, she sat down again and looked at the pictures in the book together with Taylor.
Among data categorized in the second category, a presence of parents in class during morning transition times (more than five minutes) and children participating in storybook reading with parents in class, almost ninety percent ended up like the examples above; children started reading books with other children or by themselves without teachers’ help after having storybook reading with parents in the class during morning transition times. These episodes show that storybook reading with parents helped young children not only to have smooth transitional times but also provided opportunities to foster their literacy development during morning transition. For example, Ricky didn’t have a difficult time adjusting to transition time even after his mother left. He even continued to read the book by himself that he shared with his mother and friends, which indicates independent reading. In the case of Alicia, seeing her mother leave was difficult, but once she engaged in reading books with Taylor, she was able to transition easily. Additionally, I can speculate that Alicia’s mother motivated Taylor to engage in reading as well, which may imply that parental involvement in storybook reading in class can have powerful influence on even other children, not just the parents’ own child. Of course, there is the phenomenon of relationship such that the presence of Taylor (another child) provided a relationship for Alicia to be in, which allowed mom to leave. However, reading books together, which Alicia’s mother initiated, was a strategy that provides for the two children to be mutually involved (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reading a book with parents in class could give children the same motivation for reading with reading a book with parents at home. Parents themselves are one of the home environment’s components. Also, young children may be familiar with literacy activities with their parents at their home, such as bedtime stories, more than ones with teachers in their class. Therefore, extending literacy activities in home settings to ones in class settings can motivate young children for reading in class settings.
Additionally, big books were used only during story times in this class. Children were not supposed to handle them because teachers were afraid that children could tear them. However, their parents were allowed to read those big books to them, and so were the children with their parents. To put their hands on books that they have not been allowed to touch can create interest for children in the books and motivate them to read. The motivation may also lead them to read other books naturally as well.

Overall, this finding shows that reading storybook with their parents in class during the morning transition times is an effective transition for some children as well as a possible mediator for their literacy development by easing children’s tension and anxiety and allowing them to focus on literacy activity during morning transition times.

Theme 3. Direct/indirect interactions between parents and teachers

The third category of coded data represents direct/indirect interactions between parents and teachers as parents had storybook reading time with their children in class during morning transition times.

Episode 3.1.

8:10 am. Two-year-old twin brothers, Ted and Ken, read a book, *My Five Senses- A Lion’s Tail*, with their mom. After reading it, their mother said, “Mommy gotta go.” As she left, she gave the book to a teacher. Ted and Ken were upset because she left. However, as the teacher started reading the same book, Ted was soon engaged in the story and Ken also calmed down and listened even though he did lie on his stomach, looking sad. Other children (seven children) also gathered around the teacher and listened. Therefore, it became a small group story time. After reading the book, some of the children continued to listen to other stories, and others read
other books by themselves. It was after half an hour that they moved to the next activity.

**Episode 3.2.**

8:02 am. Three-year-old Mia came into the class with her mother. A teacher beckoned to her, calling her name, to join a small group where three other children were drawing pictures. Mia held her mother’s left leg and hid herself behind her mother. Mia’s mother tried to make her join in the group. Even the teacher came to her and sat down on her eye level, saying that she could choose what she wanted to do, but to no avail. Rather, Mia seemed to become more upset. A few minutes later, her mother finally decided to stay in class longer and grabbed a book, *Mrs. Wishy-washy*, from the shelves in the library area. Mia sat next to her mother on the sofa in the library area, and they started reading the book. Then, three other children came near them with curious eyes and sat on the floor to listen to the story. One of the children, Jerry, tried to sit on the sofa to look at the pictures in the book, but Mia pushed him off, which made Jerry almost cry, and one teacher approached him to calm him down. The teacher sat on the floor with the rest of the children and with Jerry sitting on her lap. All of them continued to listen to the story. No one could see the pictures of the story except Mia and her mother. While Mia’s mother was reading the book, the teacher began adding comments to what she just read.

Mother: Oh, lovely mud, said the pig, (..) and he rolled in it.

Teacher: What did the pig do?

Robby: Roll!

Teacher: That’s right↓ Where did he roll?

Mia: In mud!
Mother: Good job, Mia, [Teacher: great job!]

Teacher: What else do we have ↓ ((Mother turning the page))

Robby: A duck!

Mother: Yes, Robby, a duck ↓ Oh, lovely mud, said the duck, and she, ((pause))

Cindy: She paddles! [Mia: plays!]

Mother: Good ↓ [Teacher: Good ↓] She paddled in it ↓

After reading the whole book, the mother gave the book to the teacher. The teacher sat on the sofa and started reading the book again, showing pictures to the children, whereas the mother sat on the floor like the rest of the children, with Mia sitting on her lap. While the teacher was reading the book, the mother whispered to say goodbye to Mia, but Mia did not let her go. Instead, after the teacher read the book, Mrs. Wishy-washy, Mia brought another book, *The Wheels on the Bus*, to her mother to read. The teacher said, "Let’s read another story", smiling at Mia’s mother. The mother had Mia sit on the floor and started reading the book, holding it toward the children, as the teacher had done. She sometimes paused to wait for the children to complete the sentence, just like the teacher. After reading the whole story, she gave the teacher a look to signal she needed to leave. The teacher started singing *The Wheels on the Bus*, which made all the children, including Mia, turn around toward the sofa where the teacher sat. The mother slipped out while no one was looking.

Data containing the following elements were categorized as the third category:

- presence of parents in class during morning transition times (more than five minutes),
- children participating in storybook reading with parents in class, and interactions between teachers and parents when parents stay in class more than five minutes. Almost sixty percent ended up like the examples above -- teachers read the same books to children that parents just
read with their children, teachers sometimes read the same books to the children using questions similar to the parents’ questions as the parents read, and parents imitated teachers’ strategies that they learned while reading a book with their children. The episodes above show that storybook reading during morning transition times can lead to indirect or direct interactions between the parent and the teacher, which may lead them to create positive interactions. While the parent is reading a book with her children, the teacher could observe and apply the strategies that the parent used with her children in her own instructional strategies. This also supports the previous evidence that storybook reading with parents helped young children not only to have smooth transitional times but also to foster their literacy development during the morning transition. Likewise, parents also could learn the strategies that teachers use when they read books to their children in class, and the parents could apply the strategies of reading books to their children at home. In this way, teachers who usually reported what happened in class to parents and parents who just listened to those reports or asked limited questions are now able to create opportunities not only to learn from each other’s strategies about how to help the children develop their literacy skill, but also to form closer relationships. Thus, children can receive positive influences on their literacy development from parents and teachers by having storybook reading time with parents and teachers, respectively during morning transition times.

Conclusions

This study provides support for evidence to suggest that there is a strong relationship between parent-child-teacher interactions in the classroom and literacy skill development.

Field and his colleagues (1984) showed that toddlers were more distressed by leave-takings, showing more proximity-maintaining behaviors such as hovering, attention getting, verbal protest, reaching/clinging, and crying than infants and preschoolers. I have
demonstrated that during morning transition, storybook reading with parents helped children, parents, and teachers to ease the tension of the transition time. Many researchers suggest ways to ease young children’s separation anxiety to parents. One of the ways is ‘keep your good-bye short’ (Tobin, 2002); the shorter and quicker parents make greetings and good-bye, the easier children can adjust in class. This current study demonstrates that spending some time with children while reading books can help make smooth transition times, if only staying with the child for a while. This challenges existing studies and there is little literature to support the result of this study.

Additionally, when having storybook reading time with parents during morning transition, not only can children get more chances to improve their literacy skills, such as seeing books with positive eyes and engaging in reading independently, but also parents and teachers can create and develop a positive partnership for literacy development. Parents and teachers need to be aware of that storybook reading with parents during morning transitions is not only a literacy activity, but also an potential opportunity to build their positive partnership with teachers that support children’s later literacy skill development.

**Implications**

This study has limitations. I focused only on interactions between children, parents, and teachers within storybook reading in class during morning transition times. Other possibilities that can impact on the result of this study were not ruled out. For example, parental demographics and parental literacy habits with children were not considered. Also, children’s reading competence or temperament differences were not considered.

Even though this current study demonstrates that spending some time with children while their parents are reading books to them can help create smooth transitions, the same quality of transition could occur while sitting with the child at the table or while playing with
blocks on the floor before the parents leave. Rather, the duration of parents’ presence in class may be a bigger factor.

In addition, because I chose only a small number of participants within certain contexts, future research needs to seek ways to implement the hypothesis used in this study to other different contexts. It also needs to take the model to more open, flexible, and dynamic contexts with diverse populations. Therefore, how well these data apply to children of different ages and developmental levels and backgrounds (e.g., low-income, recently emigrated, English language learners, special needs) is a question for future research.
References


Figure 3. 1. Model of partnership between parents at home and teachers in school in the literature.
CHAPTER 4

ASSESSING BOOK KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INDEPENDENT READING
IN THE EARLIEST YEARS:
PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Abstract
The purpose of this current study is to build on the previous body of emergent literacy research by investigating the necessity of assessing book knowledge (e.g., print knowledge, interpretive knowledge, and letter identification) in toddlerhood to set up successful literacy development by providing independent storybook reading opportunities. This study suggests strategies that teachers can employ in their toddlers classrooms for accomplishing activities such as i) setting up common and recurring opportunities to read books independently in their toddlers classrooms and ii) informally observing and assessing children’s book knowledge. Additionally, implications for practice are provided with detailed examples of how toddlers demonstrate their book knowledge and their understandings about books through independent reading.

Introduction
Children in literate societies have knowledge about written language long before they read conventionally from print (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Consider the following example of a two-year-old and his knowledge that written language represents something meaningful:

Parent: Eric knows that [written language] if he goes to Kroger [the grocery store], because I let him ride the cart for children, it looks like a car, whenever I go to Kroger with him, he will ride it. In the middle of playing outside, if I take him into my car to go to Kroger, he is irritated because he doesn’t like to be interrupted while playing, but, um, once I say, let’s ride a honk-honk, then he calms down and sits still in the car. Then, right after he sees Kroger, he starts screaming, honk-honk ((chuckles)). He knows he is about to ride a
car-cart ((chuckles)) by saying honk-honk, ah ((…)) also, when he sees the plastic bags with the Kroger mark, he says, honk-honk.

Galda, Cullinan, and Strickland (1997) noted children make sense of new situations by seeking patterns and applying their childlike logic to those situations. Likewise, the above example suggests that while Eric is not able to read or decode words in a conventional sense, he employs environmental print, recognizes the symbol for the grocery store, and applies it to his own experience. Thus, this example indicates that children of very young ages have knowledge about written language. It is consistent with the argument that it is important for young children to be frequently exposed to print, which would facilitate young children’s early literacy development as they learn to recognize environmental print, such as logos and shop signs (Makin & Whitehead, 2004).

Studies have highlighted the importance of young children’s emergent storybook reading experiences prior to formal instruction for reading (Anderson & Matthews, 1999); the more very young children are exposed to written language, the more likely they are to develop knowledge such language. Studies have also demonstrated that through parental interaction, teacher support, and quality literacy environments, young children develop a positive socio-emotional relationship with books and experience book handling behaviors in an authentic manner, setting them up for successful literacy development with invaluable information about why people read, how to handle books, and how written communication works (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999).

Therefore, studies regarding literacy development, including those on emergent literacy, have emphasized the importance of developing pre-reading skills at an early age through exposure to print, such as book exploration either with adults or independently. These studies suggest the use of repeated reading routines to enhance early literacy skills by
having adults hold young children on their laps, offer age-appropriate books, engage children in conversations such as labeling the pictures on the pages of books, and ask children to describe what is going on in the story (Venn & Jahn, 2004; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003).

Although researchers have investigated what strategies facilitate early literacy development, they have not yet studied how to assess young children’s book knowledge at very early ages. Assessment of young children’s book knowledge may be a crucial factor in helping teachers to provide best practice for young children in their development of these literacy skills which may ultimately result in proficient readers.

**What Is Book Knowledge?**

Book knowledge is a necessary tool for children when they transact with books to facilitate “sensitive and meaningful enculturation into the world of books” (Owoki & Goodman, 2002, p. 39). It is categorized into three domains: book handling knowledge (e.g., turning the book right side up, turning one page at a time, etc.), print knowledge (e.g., understanding that print and pictures are different, understanding that print carries meaning, etc.), and interpretive knowledge (e.g., eagerness to read books, reading books by using cues)(Owoki & Goodman, 2002).

Because most literature has focused on the assessment of book knowledge for older children, Figure 4.1 represents a modified version of checklists (Owocki & Goodman, 2002) appropriate for use with toddlers.

**Why Do We Need to Assess Book Knowledge?**

By observing and documenting children’s book knowledge, teachers may foster effective teaching strategies (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). Conducting meaningful
assessments allows teachers to reflect on emergent literacy goals they have for their students (Puckett & Black, 2008). As they become increasingly sensitive to individual differences in children’s book knowledge, teachers create opportunities to engage in shared reading with children, focusing on an individual child’s need to develop their literacy skills based on what they have already mastered. In this way, teachers help children to become aware of their capabilities and the learning process.

Emergent literacy skills, which are critically linked to later literacy success, are acquired in the social and cultural contexts in which young children participate (Justice & Pullen, 2003). Thus, there is a need to explore and understand social and cultural contexts to learn what motivates children to engage in reading books. It is important for teachers to question in which settings (contexts) young children read books and appear to be comfortable to read books, and in which contexts young children read books alone, read books to someone else, or ask to read books for adults (teachers). While assessing book knowledge, teachers have great opportunities to extend or refine children’s learning experiences and to have knowledge about the socio-cultural nature of literacy learning.

Using the findings of assessment of children’s book knowledge, teachers should share their understandings and strategies for promoting children’s literacy skills with the parents of their children. In this way, the parents may understand which age-appropriate strategies will help build their child’s literacy skills so that parents can assist in the vital role in fostering precursors of formal literacy skills. Such support from teachers will also assist parents in the provision of early, affectionate, and positive settings in which their children may acquire book knowledge, not only in early care and education settings but also at home.
How to Assess Book Knowledge

Step 1. Enriching Reading Environments

Teachers need to create genuine opportunities as often as possible for children to read books by themselves and with adults or peers. Meaningful and effective assessments may occur in individualized and small group situations in various contexts (Puckett & Black, 2008). Not only is it important to place various kinds of books that are both age- and developmentally-appropriate in a library (reading) area, it is crucial for students to be motivated to read books in natural settings so that they may be exposed to enriched reading environments. For example, teachers may plan for children to have independent reading time right after story time. Children are eager to have the books that their teachers have held and read to them during story time, and they are not satisfied with just sitting, looking at the pictures, and not being able to have the books in their hands. Alternatively, after nap time and during free play time, teachers can set up a table with books in which children may be interested in reading, placing the table in the middle of the classroom so that children can find interesting books easily without having to go to the library area. Or, during morning transition times, teachers can establish a routine where children read books with their parents or the teachers themselves, an activity which may help students experience a smooth transition as well as positive opportunities for literacy development (Lee, 2010).

Step 2. Setting up Meaningful Assessment Opportunities

Simply observe children while they are reading books with a reflective eye and take notes on the quality of the children’s behaviors. For some items, the assessor does not need to ask questions. By observing children reading books more attentively, the assessor may develop a sense for meaningful assessments and take a step toward documenting children’s progress as well as identifying any concerns about a child’s development. Because the
assessor has already listed questions, deciding what characteristics the assessor wants to note about each child in the class, the assessor may notice previously unnoticed behaviors that may give him/her a better understanding of the children’s current abilities.

Ask the students questions. The assessor will find that some items on the checklist cannot be assessed without asking such questions. Asking questions is one of the simplest ways to challenge children to attempt to express what they know. Thus, by asking questions, the assessor will assess children’s language competencies as well as their book knowledge.

Assess one child at a time in a natural setting. The assessor may face some limitations when assessing children in a large or small group. The assessor may not succeed in getting enough detailed information to understand what the child knows because young children tend to copy what other children say. Thus, assess each child individually. Additionally, if a child feels any pressure or is forced to read books, like a type of test, the child may easily lose interest in reading books. Thus, ask a child to read books that he or she chooses. If the child is reluctant and says he or she cannot read, the assessor can reengage the child by stating that he or she can just tell the story of the book. Avoid assessing children with many items at the same time to avoid the child’s loss of interest.

Assess items multiple times with a suggested number of three unique observations. The assessor does not have to assess one item three consecutive times. However, in order to get accurate, reliable information, the same result must occur three times. For example, if the assessor has observed a child holding a book in an upright position three consecutive times, then one may conclude that this child knows how to orient books correctly.

Finally, remind that young children develop physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually at different rates. Additionally, toddlers may lack expressive skills. Thus, teachers or assessors need to be patient when assessing young children while at the same time implementing effective interventions to help toddlers develop appropriately.
Toddlers’ Book Knowledge

What kinds of emergent literacy skills, or book knowledge, may toddlers have? I assessed ten toddlers (four boys and six girls) enrolled in a classroom in a Southeastern university preschool program in the United States. The children’s ages ranged from 26 to 38 months \((M = 33.30, SD = 4.11)\). The parent-reported ethnicity for all children was White, non-Hispanic. The children’s parents were all highly-educated (most holding advanced degrees) and worked in an institution of higher education (IHE).

Children were observed twice a week during their free play time for five months. The observation time usually lasted an hour. No child was forced to read books. During the free play time block, I could approach children and ask questions of them individually while they were reading books to assess their book knowledge. For each session, videotape equipment was used to document children’s reading behaviors and to capture their book knowledge wherever and whenever the children chose to read a book by himself or herself. Children viewed themselves on camera prior to the assessment, a practice which helped establish comfortable with the videotaping process. Individual assessments were conducted and included an interview with each child and an assessment of the child using the modified checklist (see Figure 1) with the child’s self-chosen favorite book. All observed and recorded literacy knowledge, practices, and interviews were classified according to the items in the checklist.

Findings

On the modified checklist, 35 items under three categories investigating book knowledge: book handling (13 items), print knowledge (12 items), and interpretive knowledge (10 items) are provided. Through recorded video clips and fieldnotes, I marked each item when I found a child demonstrating the indicated behavior more than three
consecutive times. As a result, I determined the participants’ book knowledge by synthesizing information once coded on the checklists. The following data describe children’s overall book knowledge:

**Book Handling**

Children displayed consistency in the frequency of several behaviors that were tallied on the checklist. For example, all children could hold a book in an upright position, turn pages from left to right, and indicate the top (or bottom) edge or toward the top (or bottom) when asked. Ninety percent of the children could use the cover illustration to predict what the story was about and use illustrations to make predictions. Another frequently noted skill was that children could show where the front of the book was (80%). Seventy percent of the children could use the book title to make predictions; appropriately understand (or use) terms such as cover, page, story, and title; and show where the back of the book was. Sixty percent of children could show where the story began. Half of the children could tell where the title of the book was. Additionally, thirty percent of the children looked at pictures on the left page before the right page.

**Print Knowledge**

The frequency of several behaviors that were tallied on the checklist indicated that children could demonstrate print knowledge consistently. For example, 90% of the children could point to pictures when asked to show me where s/he read. Seventy percent of the children could participate in reading when the language was predictable. Half of the children knew what/where a letter was. Thirty percent of the children could point to pictures on the left page and the right page by using a finger. Additionally, twenty percent of the children knew what a word was. Lastly, only 10% of the children could point to words when asked to
show me where he/she read, point to words on the left page and the right page by using a finger when asked to show me where he/she read, understand that print proceeds from top to bottom, or attempt to match a voice with the print.

In the case of letter identification, seven participants were able to identify at least two alphabet letters of twenty six alphabet letters ($M = 8.43, SD = 10.26$). All of the children could identify the first letter of their name. Interestingly, the children with siblings recognized also the first letter of their siblings’ names. Additionally, children who were able to identify an upper-case letter that had the same shape as a lower case letter such as $C, O, P, S, V$, and $X$ were able to recognize the corresponding lower case letter. However, children were not capable of distinguishing upper case letters from distinct lower case letters.

**Interpretive knowledge**

The frequency of several behaviors tallied on the checklist indicated children also could demonstrate interpretive knowledge. For example, all the children were eager to be read a book and labeled pictures while looking through the pages of a book. Ninety percent of the children were eager to select a book to read alone. Seventy percent of them could make personal connections with books by sharing their own experiences based on pictures, alphabet letters, or contents of the books. Seventy percent of them could also retell what the book was about. Among this seventy percent of the children, seven children could retell briefly what the book was about and three children could retell a story in detail. Additionally, seven of the ten children could retell stories, referring to only pictures in the books. However, only two children could retell stories, referring to problems in the books, and only one child could retell stories including resolution in the books. Lastly, 30% of the children were eager to select a book to read to someone else and read books by using pictures cues to construct meaningful and connected stories.
Implications

In emergent literacy perspectives, researchers acknowledge young children have literacy knowledge. However, most studies focus on preschool-aged children because researchers believe children have to be at least five years old to be assessed properly to determine their literacy development. Even though researchers have claimed that learning to read is a developmental process, they overlook the possibility that even toddlers can be assessed well enough to determine their book knowledge, one of the crucial steps to help them to become proficient readers. By shedding light on what kinds of book knowledge toddlers have, this study suggests that teachers, parents, and educators need to be aware of age-appropriate book knowledge for toddlers in order to help toddlers to develop emergent reading behaviors.
References


Figure 4.1: Assessing book knowledge for toddlers

Book handling knowledge

This child can....

___ Hold book in an upright position
___ Turn pages left to right
___ Look at left page before right page
___ Indicate top edge or toward top when asked if s/he can show me the top of the page
___ Indicate bottom edge or toward bottom when asked if s/he can show me the bottom of the page
___ Use cover illustration to predict what the story is about
___ Use illustration to make predictions
___ Use book title to predict what the story is about
___ Understand or use terms such as story, page, cover, or title*
___ Show me the front of the book**
___ Show me the back of the book**
___ Show me where the title is
___ Show me where the story begins (where to start reading)

Print knowledge

This child can....

___ Point to pictures when asked to show me where s/he reads
___ Point to words when asked to show me where s/he reads
___ Pointing to pictures on the left page and the right page by using a finger when
asked to show me where s/he reads

___ Pointing to words on the left page and the right page by using a finger when asked to show me where s/he reads

___ Understand that print proceeds from top to bottom

___ Know where a letter is (name or point to a letter when asked; use the term conventionally during conversations)

___ Know where a word is (name or point to a word when asked; use the term conventionally during conversations)

___ Understand that pictures are viewed and print is read

___ Participate in reading when the language is predictable

___ Attempt to match voice with print

___ Point to a capital letter when asked***

___ Point to a lowercase letter when asked***

Interpretive knowledge

This child….

___ Is eager to select a book to read alone

___ Is eager to select a book to someone else

___ Is eager to be read a book

This child can….

___ Label pictures which looking through the pages of a book

___ Read books by using picture cues to construct a meaningful, connected story

___ Make personal connections with books (sharing their own experiences based on pictures or content of the books)

___ Retell what the book was about (brief response or detailed response)
___ Retell stories, referring to pictures in the books
___ Retell stories, referring to problem in the books
___ Retell stories, referring to resolution in the books


*Display book. Then, ask “What’s inside it?” or “show me ___ in this book”

**Present book upside down and back toward child

***Use alphabet cards
CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF PEERS AND PEER CULTURE IN SHARED BOOK READING:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY IN A TODDLER CLASSROOM

Abstract

This year long qualitative case study did observations of fifteen toddlers (two- to three-years old, nine boys and six girls) in a university preschool classroom while spending time with books during free play times. The research focus investigated the role of peers as partners in literacy learning among toddlers within the contexts in which they engage in literacy related activities. This study also explored peer culture in literacy development in the classroom, which may result in successful literacy learning. The findings of this study show that i) preschool-aged children, even toddlers, can develop literacy through participating in meaning-making activities with peers while reading books together, and ii) valuing and creating a peer culture in which children engage in shared literacy activities while they are interacting with their peers is important.

Introduction

Episode

Jenny\textsuperscript{6} was reading the book by herself, turning the pages left to right. She was reading it aloud to me. She was looking at pictures, not letters. For example, although the text was on the bottom of the right page, she was looking at the illustration on the left page first while telling me what the story said. Yet, she seemed to have memorized the story of the book because her story matched its words pretty well. (When I asked her later if she liked the book, she answered, “My favorite”) Tom came to us and became interested in what Jenny was doing with me.

\textsuperscript{6} All names are pseudonyms.

Tom: What’s this?

Jenny: It’s like doggy loves to eat a cake.

Tom: A puppy?

Jenny: No! It’s not a puppy. It’s a doggy. See? (pointing to a picture on a page) It’s a doggy.

Tom: (looking at the picture) looks a puppy.

Jenny: No! A puppy is small. It’s big. It’s a doggy.

This is a part of my observation notes from one day when I observed two- to three-year-old toddlers in their classroom during their free play time. In this episode, Jenny chose a book that she wanted to read from the bookshelf and started reading aloud, which may have been what led to Tom’s involvement. Then, they started discussing if the character of the story was a puppy or a dog. No person or class structure forced these toddlers to get involved in this activity or even facilitated the discussion. To them, this might be play itself, the chance to learn relationship skills, or literacy learning opportunities (Bateson, 2000).

For children, peers can offer unique opportunities for literacy learning in a relational manner different from those that adults provide; children can model, assist, negotiate, affirm, and contradict each other, engaging in conversations and literacy activities as equal-status partners (Ryokai, Vaucelle, & Cassell, 2003). Children can also construct their own versions of understanding reality with their peers, and play their own conceptions of the social roles of helper, friend, collaborator, and competitor. In this way, they can stimulate each other’s language and literacy development as well as their perspective taking (Oden & Hall, 1998), which supports the views that teachers need to let children control their own literacy learning
and participate in the production of knowledge by establishing their voices (Christie, 1998). Accordingly, it is crucial to pay attention to contexts where children engage in literacy activities by themselves, without teachers’ supervision or facilitation, in order to gain a better understanding of how children influence each other in literacy learning as they play together.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of the role of peers in literacy learning: older children tutoring younger children how to read and joint meaning making with their peers by using communicative strategies while engaging in literacy related activities. In addition, many studies have suggested that peer culture also can be considered as a crucial mediator of literacy learning while children are playing (Corsaro, 1992). For instance, Corsaro and Nelson (2003) found that children engage in shared literacy activities when they interact informally with their peers, and these activities are shaped by the interests of the classroom peer culture.

Still, there are few studies regarding the role of peers as partners or of peer culture in literacy learning among toddlers while they are doing shared-reading with books. Rather, most people still consider shared-reading activities among toddlers as simple pretend play, even though researchers have realized that there is a need to recast pretend reading as one of the earliest forms of reading by redefining and broadening “what counts as literate behavior” (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992, p. 185). Thus, this study, carried out over a one-year period, seeks to build on the previous body of emergent literacy research by investigating the role of peers as partners in literacy learning among toddlers within contexts in which they engage in literacy related activities and by exploring peer culture in literacy development in the classroom, which may result in successful literacy learning.
Method

Participants

Participants in this study were fifteen two- to three-year-olds toddlers (nine boys and six girls) in the toddlers’ class of an early educational center in an urban setting in the United States. Parents of participants were all highly-educated (most holding advanced degrees) and worked at an institution of higher education (IHE). All of the participants were White and non-Hispanic, with relatively high socio-economic status. Although my role was that of an active participant-observer in the contexts where the children were reading books with their peers, I strived to avoid directly intervening in their interactions. While observing, I took extensive filed notes. The process of how my role changed will be described in more detail later.

Case Study

This qualitative/interpretive case study explored events within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007) in a specific setting (a toddlers’ classroom during free play times) by focusing on certain contexts (shared book reading with peers during free play times). The participants were observed three times a week in the classroom for 11 months to gain understanding of the role of peers and their peer culture in this context. This study aimed to find out what some phenomena mean as enacted within a particular case by observing how toddlers individually and collectively respond to particular situations through interactions with their peers (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In addition, this study used an interpretive approach to seek to construct the meaning of some patterns of phenomena through the thick and rich descriptions developed (Merriam, 2009).
Data Collection

Data were collected three times a week for 11 months in the toddlers’ classroom in a “natural” setting by focusing on a) the contexts in which toddlers are reading books by themselves or together and b) toddlers’ interactions with their peers while reading books, during free play times: a) between storybook reading times and lunch times (which usually lasted fifteen to twenty minutes) for seven months and b) after nap times (which usually lasted an hour) for four months. The total number of observations was 130. Since video cameras are particularly well suited as data-gathering technologies for small group interactions, classroom studies, and participant observation, a digital camera was used to collect and preserve the interactions among children. Field notes were also taken to record the experiences for later analysis.

Analysis

First, I went over all the observation notes (including analytic memos and narratives) and video clips, developed analytic codes to group pieces of data in relevant categories, noted recurrent themes that could represent meaningful differences among contexts, and identified key narratives (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

Additionally, constant comparative analysis was used to identify inductive category coding and to compare each event observed within the same setting (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981), which helped me construct my case study by identifying relevant, differentiated, or meaningful contextual pieces and making them a coherent, persuasive narrative (Patton, 1990).
Description of Classroom Dynamics

Free Play Times after Story Times

The children had their story time outside of their classroom except on rainy days. Story time usually took place in the playground connected to their classroom, usually under the porch or next to the slides, because their story time was right after their free play time. When the children read books under the porch, they sat down on the bench, which was long and wide enough for them to sit together and form up in two ranks, or on the ground as long as they could see the pictures of the books and they didn’t interrupt the rest of the children trying to see the pictures. When they had their story time next to the slides, they sat on the colorful plastic tunnel, stuck in the ground horizontally, or leaned on the tunnel. On rainy days, they had their story time in the hallway, and the children leaned on the wall. Wherever the location, the teacher who was the storyteller sat on a chair, facing the children and holding the books toward them. The other teachers sat with the children.

After story time, they had their lunch inside. However, the teachers wanted to make the transition smooth, so they had the children take turns to go inside to wash their hands and be ready for lunch. Therefore, while two or three of the children went inside first, the rest of them had independent reading times or free play time as they chose.

Free Play Times after Nap times

After their nap time, the children were allowed to choose what they wanted to do for about one hour before moving on their next transition. They could do easel painting or play at the block area, the dramatic play area, or the library area. There were three large tables with chairs in the middle of the classroom for the group activities. Sometimes, teachers put various books on one of the tables, not just in the library area, so that the children could have more opportunities to read books.
Findings

This current study was conducted to investigate the role of peers as partners in literacy learning among the participating toddlers in the classroom setting during their free play times, focusing on the contexts in which they read books by themselves, exchanged books with others, and read books together. This study also explored peer culture that emerged in the classroom while the participating toddlers were engaged in literacy related activities, focusing on their interactions with their peers. Findings from this study show that the participating toddlers often competed over, shared, or exchanged books as they did with toys, but they also used each other as great resources in literacy learning.

Theme 1. Competing over/sharing or exchanging books

This first theme illustrates that the children considered books as precious objects. From the beginning of the observation, they were often seen competing over the same book, as they did with toys in class.

Episode 1.1

Robert was also one of the children who loved to read books by themselves, and he usually picked up more than one book from the ground when the teacher put out the books that they used for their story time. He always sat on the books that he chose and didn’t share them with others even if someone asked him to share it or even if he had finished reading the book. For example, when he read one book and wanted to read another book, he pulled out a book from the books that he was sitting on, placed the book that he had just read on the other books, and sat on the books again. He usually picked big books and small books together, and it seemed to make the other children interested in the books because they could see which book he sat on. If someone tried to take away one of the books that he was sitting on, he instantly
screamed at him/her and refused to share it. One day, after the teacher had the
children choose and read the books used during story time, Robert was reading the
book *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. A few seconds later, Molly
approached him from behind. She looked at the book over his shoulder, and she
tried to grab it. Robert turned his body on his left side, saying, “You read THAT
book!” He didn’t specify which book he indicated. He seemed simply to want her to
go away from him. As soon as Molly heard it, she hit his head pretty hard with her
right hand, which made him cry. One of the teachers came to them, said to Molly,
“Use your words.” Then, she took the book that they had fought over to read it to
them, trying to comfort him, which made him cry even harder as if he felt that the
teacher tried to steal the book from him. Another day, after they had their story time
sitting on the bench under the porch, Robert was reading the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See*, putting it on the bench and standing by the bench.
Ana climbed up the bench, sat down, and tried to look at the book without letting
him notice what she was doing. However, as soon as he noticed, he dragged the
book to the opposite end of the bench, and then he fastened his eyes upon her for a
while as if he was guarding the book.

As this episode shows, when the children read books individually and independently,
they often chose and fought over books that they wanted to read as they did with toys. They
also held on to the chosen books, not sharing what they had with other children, until they
were distracted by other things such as other books or other toys. The books were just like
toys that they couldn’t stand to share even though they shared the books as a large group
when the teacher read the books to them.
However, four months after the observations began, the children started sharing or exchanging books when they wanted to read a different book that another child already held.

**Episode 1.2.**

After listening to stories, the teacher said, “Who wants to look at books?” The children ran to the teacher to grab books before others. Ellie was one of them, but she was little bit late.

Teacher: Do you want *Is Your Mama a Llama?* (showing the book to her)

Ellie: (shaking her head)

Teacher: What do you want then?

Ellie: The monster!

Teacher: (giving her the book, *Go Away, Big Green Monster!*)

Ellie: (sitting on the ground and putting the book on her lap, leaning on the plastic tunnel)

Robert: (as reading other book) I WANT monster one,

Ellie: No!

Teacher: You can read it when she’s done, (boy’s real name)

Robert: (just crouched in front of Ellie and looked at pictures)

Ellie: (reading the book without paying attention to Robert) Go away, hair, (turned a page) Go away, ear, (turned a page) Go away, nose [Robert: nose,] (turned a page) Go away, face [Robert: face,] (turned a page) Go away, (turned a page again) eyes, [Robert: eyes,] (turned a page) Go away, (turned a page) monster,

Robert: Monster,

Ellie: STOP! (closed the book) Yay! (putting the book on the ground)
Robert: ((grabbed the book, *Go Away, Big Green Monster!*))

Ellie: ((grabbed the book that Robert had, which he put next to him))

This episode shows that Ellie and Robert shared and exchanged their book after all without realizing that they had actually done so. The teacher intervened to suggest that Robert could wait until Ellie was done reading the book. Episodes categorized as “sharing books” or “exchanging books” indicate that the children started learning naturally that they could share or exchange books if they wanted to read a different book that the other child already held with or without the teachers’ assistance. Interestingly, in this period when I could observe them sharing or exchanging books, the same behaviors that the children showed with toys were often observed. Of course, the children didn’t share or exchange things including books, in all cases. However, as this theme shows, behaviors of sharing or exchanging books began to become a meaningful part of peer culture when they had their independent reading times.

**Theme 2. Forming groups without reciprocal interactions**

This theme emerged three months after the observation began. It shows that the children started sitting together and forming special groups, creating their own peer culture. This was a quite different phenomenon, compared to the first theme. In both themes, the children sat together and read books. However, in the case of the first theme, they just sat where they had their story time. On the other hand, in the case of the second theme, they started choosing where they wanted to sit to read their chosen book and whom they wanted to sit next to.
After reading books under the porch, as soon as the teacher started giving the books to the children who wanted to read, the other children who left to play with other things came back to read books. However, due to the lack of the books, they started fighting over the books and screaming at each other. “We need more books!” said the teacher to the other teacher loudly. The other teacher brought more books from inside to give them to the children who didn’t get a book. “Book! Book!” The children who didn’t have a book ran over to the teacher to grab a book. Hanson was one of the children. As soon as he was handed the big book, *Things I Like*, he went to the other side of the porch where Ana was sitting and sat down next to her, keeping a little bit distant from her. Then, he called Robert. “Sit down! Sit down!” Robert came to Hanson, holding the book, *A Day with Firefighters*, and sat on Hanson’s left side. Robert even moved his bottom toward Hanson so that he could sit closer to Hanson. When Hanson turned a page, he noticed that his book covered Robert’s right leg and a part of the book that Robert held. Then, Hanson turned his body a little bit to the right so that he wouldn’t disturb Robert, even though Robert didn’t react at all and kept reading the book.

**Episode 2.2.**

Kate grabbed one book, *Things I Like*, and sat on the borderline between the concrete and the grass, right next to the concrete pillar supporting the porch. Dan came, holding the book, *The Wheels on the Bus*, and sat next to her. The place where they sat was about 3.5 feet away from where they had their story time. At the same time, Robert, Hanson, and Ana were reading the books, standing next to the
bench and placing the books on the bench where they were sitting when they had their story time.

These episodes indicate that participation in reading activities of their own volition in unstructured context was a powerful way to create not only forms of intentional reading at the individual level, but also unique motivations to share the space with others and unique forms of groups for doing so, even though it was not reciprocal interaction.

**Theme 3. Peer tutoring**

This theme indicates that the children were sometimes seen teaching their peers regarding book knowledge. That emerged five months after the observation began. The following episodes indicate that the children could help their peers to develop their literacy skills.

**Episode 3.1.**

Dan was reading the book, *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear*, holding it upside down and turning pages right to left. Hanson was sitting on Dan’s right side, reading the book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Dan started pretending to eat the big strawberry on the page of the book, just as the children usually did when they were read the book. Whenever the teacher said, “Who wants to have some?” the children stood up, approached the teacher, and pretended to take a part of the big strawberry on the page and to bring it to their mouths as if they really had it; this was their favorite part of reading the book.

Hanson looked at Dan and watched him pretending to eat the strawberry. Suddenly, Hanson stood up and came near to Dan. I thought Hanson would do the same thing that Dan was doing. I was wrong. Hanson said to Dan, “You hold it wrong!” taking
the book and helping Dan to hold it correctly. Then, Hanson sat on the place where he had been sitting. Dan didn’t seem to be upset when Hanson took his book for a second. Rather, after getting the book back, Dan kept reading the book, quickly found the favorite page where the big strawberry was, and pretended to eat it again.

**Episode 3.2.**

Kate was sitting on the concrete, leaning on the pillar, and reading the book, *Abiyoyo*. Nathan was reading the book, *Annabel*, singing the song as the children always did together when the teacher read the book. They sat facing each other. The part below indicates what the book says on a page.

- Annabel said we’d better go
- Better better go
- Annabel said we’d better go
- Annabel said we’d better go

Now, this is what Nathan read.

Nathan: ((like singing the song))

- Bell, ba ba go
- Ba ba go go go Ba ba go go go
- Bell, ba ba go

Nathan substituted a part of the words, reading “Annabel” as “Bell” and “Better” as “Ba.” Kate looked at what he was doing, and she said correctly, “Annabel.” Nathan looked at her, not saying a word, and he seemed to be trying to figure out what she was talking about. As though Kate thought she needed to let him know what she meant, she said again, but slowly, “An-na-bel,” looking him in the face. A few
seconds later, she stood up and sat on Nathan’s right side. She closed the book that Nathan was holding and pointed to the picture of Annabel.

Kate: Annabel↓ not bell↓

Nathan: Bell↑

Kate: No! Not bell↓ An-na-bel↓

Nathan: An-na-bel↓

Kate: Yeah, that↓ Annabel↓

Nathan: Annabel↓

Then, Kate returned where she was sitting, looked at me with a little bit of a smile as if she was satisfied with what she had done for Nathan, and started reading the book that she had been reading.

These episodes indicate that even toddlers can help their peers to develop their literacy skills. This corresponds to studies demonstrating the importance of peer tutoring, focusing on the positive relationship between active social interactions among children and their contributions to knowledge acquisition (Topping, 1989; Verba, 1998). Interestingly, toddlers who tried to teach their peers were a few months older than their peers; Hanson was 7 months older than Dan, and Kate was 6 months older than Nathan. This shows that “age” can be one of the important agents, along with peers’ influence, that affects young children’s literacy development (Azmitia & Hesser, 1993), a point which corresponds to views focused on collaboration as a source of development opportunities-- young children learn and accomplish skills on their own through cooperative dialogues with more knowledgeable partners, including peers (Berk & Winsler, 1995).
Theme 4. Creating discussions and sharing their thoughts

This theme emerged eight months after the observation began. When the children sat at the table together and read books that the teachers put on it, I often observed interesting phenomena.

Episode 4.1.

Hanson, Mandy, and Robert were sitting at one of the tables in class. At first, each of them read a different book, switching from one book to another. Hanson started reading the book, *The Best Easter Egg Hunt Ever*.

Hanson: ((looking at the page where there were lots of colorful eggs))

Easter eggs, all these Easter eggs, ((pretending to take a bite of one of the eggs)) Qwu-ek!

Mandy: Look at that many eggs↓ What they have in them↓ Looks like many chocolates↓

Hanson: Maybe↓

Mandy: Yeah, I think they have chocolates in them↓

Robert: Can-dies↓

Hanson: Maybe so↓ ((pretending to eat the eggs again)) Qwu-ek!

Mandy: Looks really yummy↓

Hanson: That’s why I am having these ones↓ ((pretending to eat the eggs)) Qwu-ek!
Episode 4.2.

Kate, Ellie, and Dan were reading books placed on the macaroni-shaped table. After washing her hands, Mandy approached them and saw Kate reading the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Kate: Two pears, ((turns a page)) three plums,

Mandy: I think the caterpillar (is) stupid↓

Kate: No! He’s not!

Mandy: Yes, he IS↓ He can’t eat pears↓ He can only eat a green leaf↓ ((Takes the book and turns the page indicating he ate a green leaf)) Look↓

Kate: But, but, but he ate a chocolate cake and cherry pie! Look! ((Takes the book and turns the page indicating he ate them)) See↑

Mandy: That’s why he was sick! He felt better, um, after he ate the leaf!

Kate: He ate them too much! That’s why he was sick! But, but, he can still eat them!

Mandy: Uh-huh↓ My dad said a caterpillar can’t eat them↓ he can eat only a leaf!

Ellie: Maybe he can eat them↓ It (the book) says↓ Maybe he ate too much, and he was sick↓

These two episodes demonstrate that these children, at early ages, could share their thoughts regarding pictures or contents of books without adults’ initiation or direction. Their self-driven conversations or even discussions displayed their abilities i) to engage in literacy activities in an unstructured and undirected environment and ii) to create the opportunities to construct knowledge together by articulating and sharing their hypotheses and ideas and by seeing how others respond to them.
Additionally, when the teachers didn’t put the books on the table, the children often led me to the library area together to read or to be read books.

**Episode 4.3.**

Mandy grabbed and pulled my hands and asked me to sit on the sofa at the library area. As soon as I sat on the sofa, Mandy picked up a book from the book shelves, one of the Curious George series books.

Mandy: Do you want to read this book? ((sitting next to me))

Me: Will you read this book for me?

Mandy: I cannot read↓ I am a little girl↓ and mommies read↓

Nathan: But!

Me: Mommies read↑

Mandy: Mommies and Daddies read↓ But not you↑

Nathan: But, ((Mandy’s real name))’s reading↓

Mandy: ((…)) ((kept turning the pages one by one))

Me: ((Mandy’s real name)), are you reading?

Nathan: Yeah, ((Mandy’s real name))’s reading↓

Mandy: No! No! I am NOT reading↓ I am looking at pictures! Not words!

Nathan: Not words↑

Mandy: Pictures are these ((pointing to the illustration of the page)) and words are these ((pointing to the words on the bottom of the page))

Me: ((Nathan’s real name)), did you hear what she said? What do you think are words?

Nathan: ((pointing everywhere on the page)) these↓
Mandy: NOOOO! Pictures are these ((pointing to the illustration of the page))
and words are these ((pointing the words on the bottom of the page))

Even though I played a mediator role in this conversation, Nathan and Mandy
definitely talked about their concepts of reading, and Mandy taught Nathan book knowledge,
especially print knowledge. Mandy showed i) her understanding that pictures are viewed and
print is read and ii) her knowledge of what a word is. This indicates that toddlers can i) create
meaningful discussions with their peers regarding book knowledge, which is an important
aspect of literacy skills, and ii) give other children information about book knowledge.

**Conclusions and Implications for Educators**

The findings of this study suggest that preschool-aged children, even toddlers, can
develop literacy through participating in meaning-making activities with peers while reading
books together. Therefore, there is a need to recognize that when children spend time reading
books together, it is “a form of group improvisation in which children engage in multimodal,
semiotic activity” (DeZutter, 2007, p. 232). In addition, educators need to offer opportunities
and times for children to spend time with books with their peers in unstructured environments
and without adults’ directions because children can learn things from one another in ways
different from how they learn from adults (Ryokai, Vaucelle, & Cassell, 2003). Accordingly,
educators need to view children as active agents who can help one another to create their own
culture and participate in cultural learning (Cook-Gumperz & Kyratzis, 2001), not just as
passive reproducers of adult culture (Kyratzis, 2004).

Valuing and creating a peer culture in which children engage in shared literacy
activities while they are interacting with their peers is important. In this study, after they had
their story time and before they came into the classroom for lunch, the children could choose
to read the books that had been used during story time, by themselves or with others (usually teachers). They often exchanged books with each other (sometimes with the teachers’ help) when they wanted to read different books. In this way, most of the children could enjoy independent or shared reading in the same space, which might have created a peer culture by helping the children realize that they would read and share the same books and space right after the story times. Moreover, when they had free play times, right after their nap times, teachers often placed books on the table in the center of the classroom so that the children could easily engage in reading books while interacting with each other.

Lastly, providing a literacy enriched play environment in which children can engage with their peers is crucial (DeZutter, 2007). In this study, the children could have opportunities to have books in their hands, to choose books that they wanted to read, and to use books as learning tools as often as possible on a daily basis. In addition, at least once or twice a month, the children in this study spent some time in the other classroom, in which the children were older and had more advanced literacy. In this way, not only could the children refresh themselves with different learning environments, but also they could be exposed to various kinds of literacy materials such as books that they were not familiar with, an alphabet magnetic board, and a cabinet on which the other students’ names were written. Additionally, the lead teacher in this class replaced some of the books on the shelves in the library area once a week while leaving other books that the children loved to read, which helped children engage in reading books willingly and facilitated their exposure to a variety of books.

When educators create pleasant, unconstrained, and undirected classroom environments that support children’s literacy learning and when they invite children to play with their peers by using books, the children will get benefits that are different from those that they get through interacting with adults.
Limitations

This study has limitations. First, as mentioned in the finding section, approximately seven months after beginning the observation, I realized that I often got pulled in and became an active participant in this study. Each time I entered the classroom, holding the digital camera, papers, and a pencil, the children knew I had come there to observe them reading books because for 7 months I had been there with them, recording their activities, wherever and whenever they had their story time and independent reading time. Some of them usually brought a book to me, saying, “You read↓”; some of them sometimes grabbed my hand to lead me to the library area to read books. Eventually, a few of the children in the class even automatically took a book to read or to be read by me from the bookshelves at the library area and sat down in front of me or sometimes smiled at me as if they knew they were being videotaped or wanted to be videotaped while reading the book. Therefore, I played the role of the mediator who led the children to engage in literacy learning activities, as the children read books by themselves or with me. Accordingly, my presence itself among the children might have affected some of the findings in this study. Second, since the participating children were from upper-middle socio-economic status families, they might have brought pre-existing knowledge from their home literacy environment into the classroom, for example, parental literacy habits with children or the children’s literacy competence, which could have created the unique phenomena found in literacy-related activities. Thus, the findings in this study may not be generalized.
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CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

To date, researchers have emphasized the need to investigate the literacy development of young children to better understand how children become literate. This investigation is based on the belief that children expand their knowledge of reading and writing from birth by enriched exploration of reading and writing materials and meaningful interactions with adults, siblings, and peers (Justice et al., 2003; Parette et al., 2009; Rowe, 2008). However, most research has focused on preschoolers (three- to four-year-olds) or older children, concentrating on their conventional reading and writing skills (Justice et al., 2003). Emergent literacy knowledge and skills are gradually developed from birth, and there is a need to explore how very young children, under the age of three, acquire, expand, and improve their literacy knowledge and skills (Lee, 2011). In addition, there is a need to investigate multiple levels of the environmental factors (e.g., interactions with parents, teachers, siblings, or peers; availabilities of literacy-related materials; or frequencies and quality of literacy-related activities) and multi-dimensional contexts that may influence the literacy development of young children as active learners.

In an endeavor to advance the understanding of early literacy development in toddlerhood and to attempt to make a contribution to the literature on emergent literacy development, this dissertation combined with four manuscripts through assessments and observations during one and a half year period to focus on the literacy development of toddlers by considering various factors that may influence their literacy knowledge and skills. These factors include literacy-related activities in a variety of contexts (morning transition
times, story times, free play times, and large group times) and interactions with their parents, teachers, and peers. In addition, the ultimate goal of this document is to expand an understanding of the interrelationships among cognitive, socio-cultural, and developmental dimensional perspectives of literacy by assessing individual toddler’s book knowledge and observing toddlers, their parents, and teachers in a class over time while they were engaged in literacy-related activities, such as independent reading and shared book reading in a small group or large group. The goals of each manuscript were examining publications that address toddlers’ literacy development over the last 20 years, exploring how literacy-related activities in a toddlers’ class might have an impact on toddlers’ literacy development, or investigating what elements and features of literacy knowledge and skills of toddlers. These papers focused on different agents or other environmental factors in different contexts. Findings were noted in each manuscript comprising this document.

To gain a better understanding of very young children’s literacy development, there is a need for additional longitudinal studies exploring literacy-related contexts over time because the developmental process of literacy is on-going. In addition, it is necessary to investigate multiple levels of the ecological agents and their experiences in different contexts related to young children’s literacy development while considering the influence of multiple levels of environmental systems that young children interact with (see Chapter 2).

When parents read a book with their child in class during the morning transition time, it may motivate toddlers and other children in the class to engage in independent reading or shared book reading with peers or teachers ultimately, creating crucial opportunities for toddlers to foster their literacy development and for both teachers and parents to learn instructional strategies. In this way, toddlers may have more opportunities to improve their literacy knowledge and skills by enjoying consistent literacy instructional strategies in both their home and classroom environments (see Chapter 3).
There is also a need to assess toddlers’ book knowledge so that their parents and teachers can acknowledge age- and developmentally-appropriate book knowledge for toddlers, find the best ways to meet a child’s needs in terms of literacy knowledge and skills, and ultimately provide the best literacy practices for toddlers. In addition, it is crucial for parents and teachers to remember the importance of written language exposure for young children from birth, but they also need to be aware that very young children, even two- to three-year-olds, may already have a certain level of book knowledge, which is one of the crucial parts of the literacy developmental continuum toward becoming proficient readers (see Chapter 4).

Finally, when teachers provide toddlers with an unstructured and undirected literacy environment (e.g., opportunities to have books that were used during story times in their hands, putting books in places other than just the library area, etc.) and opportunities for them to spend time reading books together without teachers’ help, initiation, direction, or intervening, toddlers can create their own peer culture while reading books together. This peer culture may involve sitting together, sharing books, exchanging books, helping their peers develop literacy knowledge and skills, and sharing their thoughts of and discussing pictures or contents of books (see Chapter 5).

Overall, the overarching contributions my dissertation makes are to (i) confirm the need of educators to explore, investigate, and learn a variety of factors that contribute to toddlers’ literacy development in contexts where they acquire, expand, and improve their literacy knowledge and skills; and (ii) remind researchers and educators that the literacy knowledge and skills of very young children, under the age of three, should be valued because literacy development is, after all, a gradual process, and children would face difficulties expanding and improving their literacy knowledge and skills without cementing the foundations of literacy prior to formal instruction.
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