

**Factors Which Influence Kindergarten Teachers' Selection of Trade Books for  
Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms**

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## Abstract

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### FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' SELECTION OF TRADE BOOKS FOR USE IN READALOUD SESSIONS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

#### Purposes and Procedures

According to many scholars (Huck et al., 1983; Chambers, 1983; Trelease, 1985; Kimmel and Segel, 1988), reading aloud is a powerful way to reach children academically and emotionally. Because reading aloud has the potential to affect children and because reading aloud occurs most often at the elementary level, this study was designed to investigate the factors that influence teachers' selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their kindergarten classrooms.

Participants included six kindergarten teachers with varying levels of experience, and data were collected in the naturalistic setting through means of interview, focused book review, and think-aloud procedures designed to approach the participants' thinking from a variety of angles.

Fieldtesting was conducted to help strengthen the inquiry design and provide an opportunity for realistic application of the method chosen for analysis (Rubin and Rubin, *The Art of Hearing Data*, 1995). Analysis included color-coding for identification of concepts and themes both in individual interviews and across cases.

#### Findings

All six participants readily acknowledged the importance of reading aloud in the classroom, and, though time and length of readaloud sessions in their classrooms vary, each of these teachers includes it in her daily program. Further, these teachers indicated that there are a variety of factors which influence their choices, factors falling within several categories: purpose for reading, students' needs and desires, characteristics of books themselves, books' potential to enhance literacy growth, and issues of controversy. Further, these participants indicated their use of a variety of pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading strategies which they believe helps enhance the readaloud session for their students.

#### Conclusion

The results of this study promote the idea that kindergarten teachers recognize the importance of reading aloud and that they consider carefully their trade book selection. Perhaps also the results could provide a springboard into further, more issue-focused or specific research regarding the factors found to influence teacher choice.

This work is dedicated to everyone who believed in me.

--Nina Pebworth Adams

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

It was one of the original three “R’s,” its instruction is the central focus of children’s first years in school, and it is a common, even crucial, aspect of the everyday lives of people in every walk of life: reading. There are thousands of bookstores which hold millions of books on every subject imaginable, and books can hold as much pleasure as knowledge for their readers. One wonders why, in a society which not only needs the skills of reading but can also enjoy the simple wonder of books, there is such an attitude of negativity on the part of many children regarding reading and books and why there is such a high rate of illiteracy among teenagers and adults. According to Reutzel and Cooter (1996), “Although many statistics declare that 23 to 25 million Americans cannot read at a functional level, the greater tragedy lies in the fact that many Americans can read but make a conscious choice not to do so” (p. 30). Perhaps the answer lies within the heart; maybe some children never learn to love books and reading and, having missed the chance, move into adulthood where there is little room for the discoveries of childhood. It is within this context that the value of reading aloud to children is clear: If the process begins in the home and continues on throughout children’s school years, perhaps the “picture-book voice” (Pritchard, 1983-84) will stay in children’s hearts and keep the magic of books in their lives forever.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In his *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (1985), Jim Trelease sings the praises of reading aloud as a way not only to strengthen children’s growth in literacy but also to create in children a positive attitude toward reading, an attitude which if strong enough may help them become lifelong lovers of books and all the “worlds” books open up. This general concept is supported by other scholars (Huck et al., 1983; Chambers, 1983; Kimmel and Segel, 1988), and many, including Trelease, go on to suggest that the style or content of particular types of choices may make more effective prospects for both general and goal-specific readaloud sessions (Trelease, 1985; Feitelson et al., 1986; Elley, 1989; Leung, 1992; Lenz, 1992; Huck, 1992). Further, there is a consensus among many researchers and educators that readaloud sessions and appropriate books can be used to help build children’s emotional strength and help children deal with the challenges and problems they face in their own lives (Coody, 1983; Trelease, 1985; Sullivan, 1987; Kimmel and Segel, 1988; Glazer, 1991). But there is also growing controversy regarding the use of books with “questionable” content (Frank, 1973; Stewig and Higgs, 1973; Storr, 1976; Alexander, 1992). Some researchers suggest that teachers steer clear of certain topics, and others maintain that certain content is crucial for forming children’s ideas about people, society, and even themselves (Stewig and Higgs, 1973; Wersba, 1973; Storr, 1976; Luke et al., 1986; Gibbs and Early, 1994; Kurtz, 1996; Finazzo, 1997). While there are numerous lists of “teachers’ favorite books” available for review, there seems to be little research which focuses on how those choices are made. Because readaloud sessions have the potential to influence children so positively and because the majority of reading aloud takes place in the early grades, an important aspect of research should be investigation into the factors that affect teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud

sessions in the elementary setting.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors influence kindergarten teachers' selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms. While required basal readers are recommended by committees and adopted by entire school systems, trade books are individual books selected by individual teachers for use in their classrooms, a process involving myriad influences and considerations. Therefore, trade books rather than required classroom texts became the focus of this inquiry. Additionally, although this study investigated teachers' selection processes, information was also analyzed with regard to teachers' thoughts about readaloud sessions and strategies as obtained through the interview process; therefore, this area was included in the review of the literature.

### **Terminology of the Researcher**

For the purpose of clarity in this study, the third-person pronouns "he," "him," and "his" are used to refer to any singular child in general, and the third-person pronouns "she," "her," and "hers" are used to refer to any singular teacher in general. Also, the terms "readaloud" and "storytime" are considered synonymous, both referring to any session during which the teacher is orally sharing a book with her students regardless of whether any discussion is taking place before, during, or after the particular activity so termed. A careful review of the literature seemed to afford no clear distinction between the two terms, and so it was assumed that the authors' choice to use one term rather than the other was a matter of personal preference or perhaps dialect. Finally, the terms "picture book" and "storybook" will be considered synonymous, both referring to children's books which communicate stories or information through text and pictures. Both picture books and storybooks are types of trade books, a general term referring to those individual books intended for children which are selected by the classroom teacher and used in addition to any required textbooks.

### **Reading Aloud**

*If you do only one thing to improve your reading program, I would urge that it be increasing the time you spend reading aloud to children. Every time you read aloud, you are helping young children learn to read. (Huck, 1992, p. 4)*

*Through reading aloud, the reader re-creates for children not only their own world seen through other eyes but leads them, also, to worlds beyond the eye. (Vandergrift, 1965, p. 11)*



*The magic quality of books relies upon the child's feeling of wonder concerning his own power as a reader of the printed word--when he discovers that it is his reading act which breathes life into the book, and makes of it something more than an object composed of paper and ink.*

(Higgins, 1965, p. 55)

Each fall, kindergartners arrive in their classrooms at various stages of reading readiness but usually with an excitement about learning to read. Teachers must not mistake the desire to learn to read as a sign that children love reading and books and, therefore, will always be readers. Teachers must “sell” children on reading in these early stages so that books will become a part of their lives after the schooling is over (Trelease, 1985, p. 6; Kimmel and Segel, 1988, p. 22). According to Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1993), “A major goal of every school should be to develop children who not only can read but who *do* read--who love reading and will become lifetime readers” (p. 727).

Teachers can sell children on the idea that books are exciting in the same way advertising agencies sell their clients' products: “Send the message when the child is at a receptive age; make sure the message has enough action and sparkle in it to catch and hold the child's attention; and make the message brief enough to whet the child's appetite, to make him want to see and hear it again and again” (Trelease, 1985, p. 2). Teachers have to build up the product and make it interesting, and Trelease feels that the way to accomplish this is to read to children every day using the advertising strategy: start reading early, make the readings interesting, and tailor the initial readings to their children's attention spans (p. 4). If television can sell cereal this way, why can't teachers sell books?

Of course, reading aloud takes time in the classroom, but for those who would believe that reading aloud takes time away from the curriculum, Trelease (1985) suggests that reading *is* the curriculum. Further, Kimmel and Segel (1988) pinpoint one of the great advantages of reading aloud: a time-conscious teacher or aide reading one book can provide a wonderful learning experience for the whole class at one time (p. 31). If the teacher can establish in her own mind her purpose for reading, she may no longer worry about the readaloud being a waste of time (Trelease, 1985). Time must be taken for reading aloud because before children can desire books, they must have an awareness of literature.

Trelease (1985) is not suggesting that teachers forget about their required studies but rather that they bring facts to life through stories. Even a science or history lesson may be introduced by means of an exciting story and then strengthened by using the required science or history textbook. Maryann and Gary Manning (1995), University of Alabama faculty members in the School of Education and Teaching Editors of *Teaching K-8*, also support the idea of reading aloud in all content areas including social studies, science, or even math. They suggest that using biographies, fiction, or even books related to environmental issues will help children “. . . develop the

necessary depth and breadth in the content areas” and that “. . . students will naturally acquire understanding and become personally involved in the topics they’re studying” (p. 110). For example, they suggest using Walter Dean Meyer’s *Fallen Angels* to help students experience the life of a young Vietnam soldier. In this way, students may learn about the Vietnam conflict not only from a historical perspective but also from a personal perspective, and perhaps this combination of required/factual and optional/personal materials will help children learn history in a multi-perspectival way. Further, because of the variation in children’s preschool reading experiences, teachers are faced with the problem of “starting from scratch” with some of their students. If teachers can use reading aloud not only to support their students’ literacy growth but also to plant the desire to excel (Trelease, 1985, p. 7), teachers can give a lifelong gift to students who might otherwise develop contempt for school due to early failure.

A powerful reason for reading aloud is communicated by Chambers (1983):

If a child detects that no very strong value is placed on reading and literature by the adults around him--especially during the early stages of learning to read for himself--then he feels no compulsion to develop his own reading skill beyond the minimal, functional level we all need simply to carry on our daily lives in our print-dominated society. (p. 6)

According to Roser (1987),

It is the beginner who faces the most depleted resources--school texts made less rich in order to be more regular. For the beginner, in the school years devoted almost exclusively to literacy development, the supply of literature can be most scarce. The existence of a weak literature-literacy link at a point when its strength is critical is a strong argument for the continuation and strengthening of a classroom storytime, so that no child waits. (p. 96)

Of course, one of the main purposes of children’s early education is to teach them to read, but according to Trelease (1985), we must first teach children to want to read. Chambers (1983) notes that reading aloud will stimulate children’s desire to read for themselves what they have heard (p. 129). Trelease (1985) is not suggesting that we omit the instruction of reading skills in the early grades but rather that we balance the scale and teach the ability to read the books while also fostering a love for the books themselves.

Kimmel and Segel (1988) suggest that learning programs which are skill based separate the reading process from the children’s experience with the value of reading (p. 31). All too often, children come to the quick conclusion that reading and books are simply part of academic tasks and are associated exclusively with work in the form of workbooks, tests, and homework (Trelease, 1985). Their early negative attitude does not promote a love of books or allow children an opportunity to reap the rewards which consistent reading offers, and in our mad rush to teach literacy, we fail to develop “. . . truly literate persons who read widely and thoughtfully on many diverse subjects” (Huck, Hepler, and Hickman, 1993, p. 727).

Richard Allington (1977) observed that in remedial reading classes, students who were

involved in the activity of reading actually spent very little consistent time on the task due to constant interruption, corrections, and questions related to skill instruction. Trelease (1985) feels that the purpose of education should be to help individuals realize the meaning of their own lives and that this concept should be considered along with the schools' need to disseminate factual information. The skill and drill system, if used exclusively, may not allow children the opportunity to see the deeper value of reading, and they might turn away from, rather than be drawn into, the world of books. Ironically, if we make a practice of reading aloud to children, their literacy skills and their desire to have books in their lives will be strengthened.

Many proponents of reading aloud support its use not only in preschool and elementary environments but also for older children. Kimmel and Segel (1988) suggest that books which children find difficult to handle may become more inviting when read aloud. Also, students within a low socioeconomic level who have no access to stimulating material can maintain a connection with their rich literary heritage through readaloud activities (p. 20-21).

### **Reading Aloud and Literacy**

According to Anderson et al. (1985) in *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (p. 23), and study after study has supported the link between literacy and reading aloud.

There is a great deal of support for reading aloud as it relates to the acquisition of language and other communication skills. Trelease (1985) reminds us that imitation is one of the primary learning methods of children. This suggestion makes sense when we think about children's ability to memorize song lyrics, television commercials, and product jingles. When children spend a great deal of time in front of the television watching shows, they begin imitating poorly constructed language structure consisting mainly of jargon and slang (p. 11). However, the words of literature are intelligent, colorful, specific (p. 12) and often lyrical, poetic, and stylized (Cullinan, 1992). Trelease (1985) feels that the first step in the direction of a literate nation is reading aloud to children. The more children come into contact with words and see words' different uses, the better children will comprehend and spell those same words.

Trelease (1985) also makes mention of the fact that Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, yet that country's children must learn 1900 alphabet characters as compared to the United States' twenty-six. What accounts for the difference? The vast majority of Japanese parents read aloud to their children, and many of the Japanese magazines published for children are aimed toward primary grades and preschoolers (p. 12). Even Puritan New England experienced very little illiteracy because Colonial children were read daily oral lessons from the Bible. The purpose was religious instruction, but a secondary result was improved literacy.

### Reading Aloud and Vocabulary Acquisition

Trelease (1985), citing the Council for Basic Education, notes that while the average first-grade primer contains approximately 350 vocabulary words, the average first-grade student's listening vocabulary approaches 10,000 words. This fact would seem to support the importance of reading aloud with children in order to improve vocabulary knowledge. Many studies have been conducted which make clear the connection between vocabulary development and reading aloud. Nicholson and Whyte (1992) studied the connection between reading aloud and minimum and maximum vocabulary knowledge gains of children at different reading levels. Their finding that those of higher reading ability made the most progress led them to suggest that perhaps lower-ability students should also spend time reading silently in order to have more time to deal with the text itself. Though the results varied, all students exhibited growth, and the significant gains made by above-average students cannot be ignored.

Elley (1989), in studies conducted with seven- and eight-year-old students in New Zealand, found a link between reading aloud and incidental vocabulary acquisition. The seven-year-old students, after hearing the same story on three occasions, showed net gains of between fifteen and twenty percent in knowledge of target words without benefit of teacher explanation. Further, eight-year-old students who participated in the second study, which was aimed, among other things, at substantiating the results of study one and investigating their permanence, also made gains in vocabulary knowledge. While the study supports the belief that children may learn vocabulary incidentally from hearing stories, the results also indicate that such variables as teachers' additional explanations, words' frequency in text, and helpful verbal and pictorial context could produce even higher levels of vocabulary acquisition. And, unlike the "rich-get-richer" results found by Nicholson and Whyte (1992), Elley found that students who had less vocabulary knowledge seemed to profit as much as other students from the oral readings (p. 184).

Leung (1992), using Elley's (1989) model regarding the incidental learning of vocabulary from readaloud events, found that ". . . word-related variables of target words in storybooks read to kindergarten and first-grade children can significantly influence the incidental learning of vocabulary as measured by retelling scores and open-ended measures" (p. 495). She also found that the readaloud activities seemed to encourage children's exploration of multiple meanings of words. Some of the children tested were able to use words with similar meanings but different uses more accurately in their later retellings of the stories (p. 497). Further, as children retold the stories, they began to use vocabulary which was not necessarily part of the plot but which was still descriptive within the story frame. Leung attributed some decreased scores to confusion on the part of the children after listening to the story. If the verbal or pictorial support from the books' context was not clear, children had difficulty internalizing certain words' meanings (p. 496-497).

Senechal and Cornell (1993) studied four- and five-year-old children to determine their ability to acquire new vocabulary after one storybook reading with regard to a variety of conversational

methods. They found that children's receptive vocabularies did increase after only a single reading and that the words were not transitory; however, there seemed to be no difference in the measured acquisition of those who were involved in active participation and those who simply listened to the story read verbatim. The researchers offered a lengthy list of variables which might have contributed to this outcome and suggested further research (p. 369-370).

Senechal, Thomas, and Monker (1995) also conducted a two-part study involving four-year-old children who differed in vocabulary knowledge to determine how they learn new vocabulary during readaloud sessions (p. 218). For purposes of the study, some children were passive listeners while others participated by either labeling or pointing to pictures during repeated readings. They found that children with larger vocabularies, as determined by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised (PPVT-R), and those who were participants in the readaloud activity comprehended more words than did those with smaller vocabularies or those who were passive listeners. This study strengthens the link between reading aloud and literacy: the findings suggest that children's participation during a readaloud activity will more effectively allow them to acquire vocabulary knowledge, and the higher scores among those with large vocabularies would help support the value of early reading experiences as discussed earlier (Senechal et al., 1996).

In another study related to reading aloud and vocabulary acquisition, Senechal et al. (1996) found a connection between parents' and children's knowledge of storybooks and the children's receptive and expressive vocabulary scores, suggesting that early exposure to storybooks may positively influence vocabulary knowledge and accompanying language skills.

#### Reading Aloud and Other Literacy Skills

Reading comprehension. Additionally, there is evidence that reading aloud in the classroom can positively affect reading comprehension. Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986), conducted a study with first-grade Israeli students to see if listening to series stories had an effect on their comprehension and use of language. After being read to for a time period of twenty minutes per day (five to six days per week) for a period of six months, the students in the experimental group showed significant improvement on comprehension and active use of language measures (p. 353). Further, there were some unexpected, yet positive, results: Students in the experimental group also improved in the area of technical reading, outperforming their control counterparts on the measuring instrument, and they began to take more of an interest in reading on their own, the very result that Trelease (1985) insists is inevitable when reading aloud takes place.

Writing skills. Darlene Michener (1989), citing study after study to support the connections between reading aloud to students and improved ability in several areas of language development (p. 212), notes the need for investigation into the relationship between reading aloud and children's writing skills. Her first study was conducted with third-grade students from the East Coast of the United States, with a focus on measuring improvement in the areas of written syntactic maturity, written semantic maturity, and writing style. The results showed gains by the children in written

composition skills as well as a tendency on their part to begin incorporating vocabulary words they heard during readalouds into their own writing. Further, there were no measurable differences in the improvements made by those of lower socioeconomic levels which suggests that reading aloud can be beneficial to all students (p. 216). One very significant improvement shown by the children was in the area of written syntactic maturity (p. 215), and this result led Michener to conduct a more specific study with third-grade students from the West Coast of the United States. The results were very positive, suggesting that reading aloud can significantly improve students' written skills especially in the area of written syntactic maturity. Further, as with the East Coast study, the students began to assimilate the vocabulary they heard into their own writing, and they began to emulate the writing styles of some of their favorite authors (p. 217).

Reutzel and Cooter (1996) suggest that the processes of reading and writing are reciprocal (Strickland and Morrow, 1989). As writers, they say, children “. . . notice words and phrases used by favorite authors and the way mental pictures can be created through language” (p. 11). As children develop writing skills, they become better readers and vice versa.

Awareness of theme. Investigating children's developing sense of theme as a response to literature was the focus of a study by Lehr (1988). Students were categorized into two groups: those with low exposure to children's literature and those familiar broadly with children's literature as determined by the Revised Huck Literature Inventory (RHLI). After listening to three stories each day on two different days, participants were then interviewed individually and asked to respond to a variety of thematic-related questions by the researcher. Responses were categorized across three grade levels and compared to responses by adults. Lehr found that even at the kindergarten level, the children seemed to have the ability to match books thematically although the generation of thematic statements remained particularly concrete for the low-exposure group. Lehr also found, however, that those same children showed an increase in their ability to generate theme from kindergarten to grade two and again to grade four. The high-exposure group's responses typically were thematic statements of a higher level. While this study was very specific in its purpose, it shows a correlation between knowledge of books and thematic awareness and suggests that since the low-exposure group's ability increased over time, perhaps the children's involvement with literature in the classroom over the years helped strengthen their ability to give thematic responses.

Knowledge of genre. Lisa Lenz (1992) brought to light another positive outcome of reading aloud when she planned a nine-week poetry project for her students. Among other things, she found that “When teachers and children share their love of literature by reading aloud, classrooms become places where children learn to read and write with a sense of listening to the words on the page (p. 597). Listening to poetry and reading it aloud helped her students to “. . . develop a feel for the texture and power of language” (p. 597). Not only did the students develop certain literacy skills and begin on others, such as decoding, beyond their abilities, they also developed a love for

the genre of poetry.

Huck (1992) also supports reading aloud as a way to help children increase their awareness of such types of literature as rhymes, folk tales, picture books, informational books, and chapter books and also as a way to help children begin to learn about the structure of stories and to build a frame of reference for literature and how books work (p. 4).

### **Readaloud Strategies and Literacy**

Given that reading aloud has the potential to positively impact children's literacy growth, it is important to focus more closely on the thoughts and research regarding suggestions as to how this goal might best be accomplished. According to Teale, Martinez, and Glass (1989), storybook reading must be viewed as a social process, a view which suggests that reading aloud is basically an act of construction. "Children almost never encounter simply an oral rendering of text in a storybook reading situation. Instead, the words of the author are surrounded by the language and social interaction of the adult reader and child(ren) as they cooperatively seek to negotiate meaning" (p. 159). Realizing that "Classroom storybook readings are at once social, cognitive, and literary events" (p. 181) illuminates the importance of teachers' roles during the storytime activity.

Elementary school children's preferences for readalouds were surveyed and analyzed in a study conducted by twenty-five graduate students (Mendoza, 1985). Researchers found that sixty-two percent of the primary children and only fifty percent of the intermediate children surveyed reported feeling free to ask questions during the readaloud. This surprised the teachers of these children, and the teachers reexamined their readaloud environment (p. 526). Further, a significant number of children surveyed reported that they liked to talk about the book after the readaloud time, and they also overwhelmingly reported that they like to have a chance to look at or read the book themselves (p. 527).

In a chapter appropriately entitled "Casting a Spell: How to Read Aloud Effectively to a Group of Children," Kimmel and Segel (1988) offer tips on how to make the readaloud session more effective. They focus on the notion of a readaloud event as an interaction between the reader and the listener, with the reader being acutely aware of her "audience's" reactions and allowing children to respond (p. 34). Other concepts of which the reader should be aware are seating, timing, volume control, awareness of limitations in audience attention span, the possible need for flexible and appropriate editing, reading style, appropriate book selection, delivery, and the need for enthusiasm (p. 34-41). Trelease (1985) acknowledges the need for prereading by the teacher in order to avoid any subject matter which may be inappropriate or embarrassing for children, and Coody (1983) suggests establishing a regular schedule, taking the opportunity to teach the parts of a book, involving the children, and practicing for familiarity (p. 14-15).

In another study, Hoffman, Roser, and Battle (1993) used a national survey to look at readaloud practices in elementary schools in this country. They concluded that the "modal," or

most frequently occurring features, of a readaloud session in current elementary schools would have the following characteristics: The classroom teacher would read to the students from a trade book for a time period between ten and twenty minutes; the chosen literature would not be connected to a unit of study; there would be only a brief amount of time allowed for discussion related to the book (before and after); and no literature response activities would be offered (p. 500). The researchers in this case concluded that while there appears to be widespread reading aloud taking place, it “. . . is not an integral part of the instructional day and may not be realizing its full potential” (p. 500). They suggest that the “modal” should be replaced by a “model,” or set of characteristics, which include the following:

1. Designation of a legitimate time and place in the daily curriculum for reading aloud;
2. Selecting quality material;
3. Sharing literature related to other literature;
4. Discussing literature in lively, invitational, thought-provoking ways;
5. Grouping children to maximize opportunities to respond;
6. Offering a variety of response and extension opportunities;
7. Rereading selected pieces. (p. 501)

Finally, they offer the “model” of reading aloud toward which teachers should be working:

A well-stocked classroom library and an attractive, accessible display of unit books command immediate attention. The classroom teacher allocates a significant amount of time to storytime (twenty minutes or more daily). She carefully selects age-appropriate children’s literature that, because of its texture, topic, theme, craft, or structure, will likely evoke rich response from her children. The teacher may share her personal responses and encourage children to share theirs. The children have opportunities to explore the patterns and linkages within and among texts. Children also compare several authors’ interpretations of a theme or topic through discussions that are based on their responses to the stories. Perhaps journal writing, drawing, or paired sharing serve to stimulate children’s thoughts prior to small or large group discussion. The teacher gives children opportunities to revisit portions of the text that hold promise for extended explorations, as well as opportunities to extend personal responses in a variety of ways. (p. 502)

This issue is important because according to Hoffman et al., “Reading aloud in elementary classrooms, while definitely more prevalent than in the past, may still not be of sufficient quality to engage students fully within their literary community or to maximize literacy growth” (p. 502). Their answer is to challenge each teacher to make a commitment to a readaloud experience which is rich in quality so as to promote the highest level of literacy growth.

Teachers also need to remember there's such a thing as reading simply for pleasure (Trelease (1985), which can necessarily still involve wonderful interaction. The teacher should begin such an activity by treating the book well in the classroom, holding it warmly and extracting from it a



variety of emotions.

### Reading Strategies and Literary Response

In a study conducted by Wolf et al. (1996), several teachers engaged in individual case studies designed to examine children's literary responses. This resulted in preservice teachers' realization that questioning had a great deal to do with the level of the response, and they also found that the children possessed a wonderful ability to question, an ability stemming from a real desire to learn. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty months to eleven years with the average being six, a point which supports the case for beginning early. Further, the children demonstrated the capacity to intertextualize, to make comparisons between stories or between stories and their own lives (p. 146).

Hoffman et al. (1991) studied the effects of readalouds on children's responses and found that instruction could positively influence knowledge of literature and that the study further "... suggested the significant contribution that a thematic approach to literature study with systematic response opportunities can play in nurturing growth" (p. 302). The study concluded that simply reading aloud is valuable, but it may be greatly enhanced with a specific instructional design and unit approach.

Roser and Martinez (1985) analyzed audiotapes of storytime talk between children and parents (home setting) and children and teachers (school setting) in order to determine adults' roles in preschoolers' literary response. They determined that adults assume one of three roles during storytime with children: co-responders, informers/monitors, or directors (p. 487), and they found that in the role of co-responder, parents and teachers modeled mature reader process, and as informer/monitors they supplied information in order to help children comprehend and probe the text (p. 488). They also found that the children involved in the storytime not only engaged in seven types of identified story talk (p. 486), but they also "... tended to respond to literature more like the adult in the situation than they did like other children" (p. 487).

Results from an earlier study by Martinez (1983) also suggest that during storytime, "... many levels of story-related thought may emerge ..." (p. 203). The participant, during storytime with her father, showed an interest in literal meanings and details (p. 203-204), moved to attempted construction of inferential meanings, and also responded in an evaluative manner on both affective and cognitive levels (p. 204). It is interesting to note that the child/parent storytime sessions had been a nightly occurrence in the child's life since the age of one, and she was four-and-a-half at the time of the study (p. 203). This would certainly add strength to the argument that early reading experiences may positively affect children's continuing literacy and, as Trelease (1985) indicates, a true love of literature.

Roser (1987), through analysis of transcriptions of storytimes, found that several teachers were not only reading but that they were also encouraging students to think aloud and actually explore that story that was being read. As teachers questioned aloud, children began to imitate and actually

interact with the literature. Roser concludes that “. . . it is storytime rather than reading period that often contributes most to both language and literacy by providing opportunities for experiencing and appreciating the best” (p. 93). She notes that some of the skills in which children are involved during storytimes are actually the beginnings of skills considered to be quite complicated. Further, she suggests that reading to children provides teachers with an ability to model comprehension techniques for the children and to involve in the session “. . . strategies, techniques, and the communicative processes that seem to foster young children’s active reasoning about stories and links to their own lives” (p. 94). According to Roser (1987),

Reading aloud, thinking aloud, asking and answering questions, constructing and reconstructing events, [and] playing with language contribute to language use and ultimately to literacy. Storytime is a powerful language event for beginners because of the convergence in one social time-place of demonstration, enlistment, language transaction, response, and joy. (p. 96)

#### Reading Strategies and Comprehension

Morrow (1984) studied the effectiveness of the DRA (Directed Reading Activity) prequestioning/post-questioning format on children’s comprehension and as a component of the study employed traditional versus structural questioning to measure their effectiveness in developing children’s ability to comprehend. She found that the use of the DRA format improved the children’s comprehension levels regardless of the types of questions asked. As regarded the types of questioning, the children’s posttest scores showed more improvement on the types of questions reflected by the treatment group they were in and small improvements on questions which reflected the alternate treatment. Further, the treatment group which had received traditional as well as story structure-related questions outperformed all groups, but Morrow did not find particularly favorable results for the low-achieving students.

#### Reading Strategies and Group Size

Another area of research dealing with reading aloud and accompanying strategies addresses the issue of group size. Morrow (1988) studied young children’s responses to one-to-one readaloud sessions in a preschool setting. The children were of lower/middle to lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and ninety percent of their parents had reported reading to their children at home only once a month or less (p. 95). Students in one experimental group heard ten different books while those in the other experimental group heard repeated readings of three books. In both situations, the research assistants conducting the activities were participants on three levels:

1. Research assistants were instructed to begin in a managing role by introducing each story with a brief discussion that included the books’ titles as well as background information to provide some knowledge;
2. Next, research assistants were instructed to prompt responses by inviting a child throughout a reading to ask questions or share comments and personal experiences related to the story;

3. Last, research assistants offered support and information by explaining parts of the text when asked and by reacting to comments. (p. 96)

Both experimental groups showed improvement in their responses: Their questions increased in number and complexity, and the repeated readings seemed to also generate students' focus on print and story structure, especially for those of lower socioeconomic status (p. 105).

In a later study, Morrow and Smith (1990) found that small groups' listening comprehension was more positively affected than that of either one-on-one or whole class settings during reading aloud and that one-on-one settings were preferable to whole class settings. While more research is in order on this issue and while some form of reading aloud is preferable to none, Morrow and Smith's results suggest that small group settings during reading aloud may prove to be the most beneficial to the children who participate.

#### Reading Strategies and Repeated Readings

The value of repeated readings during storytimes was investigated in a study conducted by Martinez and Roser (1985) who discovered that the differences in the responses of children listening to familiar versus unfamiliar texts were discernible in several areas. When familiar with the story, children talked more and their talk changed form. As the story was repeated, their talk tended to focus on different aspects of the story with responses indicating greater depth of understanding (p. 783).

Martinez (1983) also found a connection between repeated story experiences and literacy growth in an analysis of data collected from storytime talk between a father and his daughter. After subsequent readings, the child's increased verbalization about the story included more non-literal responses (p. 206).

#### Reading Strategies and *At-Risk* Children

Morrow, O'Conner, and Smith (1990) conducted a study with *at-risk* students in eight Chapter I, extended-day, urban kindergartens to determine the effects of a story reading program on the children's literacy development. The experimental groups were involved in the storybook reading instructional program while those students in control groups were taught using a prescribed reading readiness program. One of the major components of the storybook reading program was teacher-directed literature activities which were used along with quiet reading, recreational reading, and summarizing of the day's reading events (p. 264). The experimental group outperformed the control group with regard to free and probed recall comprehension measures as well as on attempted readings of favorite stories. These findings support the idea that interactive readaloud sessions enhance children's comprehension and reading skills (p. 267).

One very striking success between literature and literacy with regard to *at-risk* students can be found in Roser, Hoffman, and Farest's report on the LtL (Language to Literacy) program brought to the schools in Brownsville, Texas, a mostly Hispanic and very poor school district. This program introduced literature and daily reading aloud into the schools through a unit approach,

teacher training in such areas as sharing literature, collecting children's thoughts by means of Language Charts (Roser et al., 1992), and exploring the relationship between growth in children's oral and written language. Five of the six schools participating in the program made significant improvement on the state-mandated test of basic skills, and three LtL participants were among the five area schools cited as most improved in the state (p. 559).

The authors make clear the fact that other factors, such as staff and administrative support and the expertise of those in bilingual education, certainly contributed to the gains made by students, but they also suggest that literature-based programs can be used successfully with *at-risk* students and that those students will respond with the same enthusiasm shown by other children (p. 559). With regard to literature-based instruction, Indrisano and Paratore (1992) further suggest using different genre, especially poetry and drama, to enhance a variety of aesthetic, strategic, or generative responses on the part of readers *at risk* (p. 139-141).

### **Reading Aloud and Social/Emotional Growth**

It is clear from the literature that while there are many variables and levels in improvement in literacy, children can and do benefit from being exposed to readaloud sessions. But academic strengths are not the only positive outcome of such activities. Though teachers are in the position of academic guide, many times they find themselves also dealing with the concerns which face students--drug use, fragmented families, and peer pressure, to name only a few. Coody (1983) suggests that to ignore the problems of the children, to treat their problems too lightly, or to too quickly send them off to specialists is to “. . . shirk our responsibility as a child's most accessible and effective counselor” (p. 199).

#### **Reading Aloud as Bibliotherapy**

Joanna Sullivan (1987) reports that “A readaloud session can be a simplified form of bibliotherapy . . . a complex process involving the use of books to help change pupils' attitudes and behavior” (p. 874). Bibliotherapy is a somewhat new term, but the practice of using books to help children deal with their own problems is quite old (Coody, 1983). The prefix “biblio” refers to books, while the term “therapy” refers to healing, and the value of it lies in the belief that “. . . quality literature has the power to change behavior, to improve attitudes, and to aid in self-awareness and understanding” (p. 190). When students read books, they can identify and empathize with the characters. As they see the failure or success of a character based on his or her decisions or behavior, students can better make adjustments in their own personality characteristics, and young readers can be more analytical about the vicarious experiences of a book's character than they can regarding their own (p. 189).

One may consider the fact that, though the term “bibliotherapy” sounds quite technical, this methodology has been practiced for some time. If a classroom teacher specifically chooses a book for a particular student because of special needs or if she reads a humanistic story to a class whose

attitude or behavior is a concern, she is practicing bibliotherapy (Coody, 1983, p. 190). Making books on a variety of subjects available to children in an effort to help them deal with problems is a relatively low-key plan, so, as Coody adds, the intention is not to make a book a “. . . treatment instead of a treat” (p. 190).

Sullivan (1987) goes on to suggest that the teacher may combine the readaloud experience with the gentle nurturing of today’s troubled child by choosing books which may help promote discussion about sensitive issues (p. 875). Of course, she emphasizes the process and parent awareness in the undertaking of such a course of action, but in citing the case of fourth-grade teacher Mrs. Sheitel (p. 874), she explains how such an activity helped one group of students to become more aware of current social concerns while at the same time helping them seek ways to solve their own problems (p. 875). Mrs. Sheitel, along with input from parents and the students themselves, chose three books for her “bibliotherapy” session: one dealing with a young girl’s adjustment to her parents’ divorce, one dealing with peer conflicts, and one dealing with a young boy’s handicap and the rejection he suffers from others because of his physical situation (p. 876). To implement the readaloud session, the teacher used the following guidelines:

1. Previewing the story with the class to create interest in the character’s problem;
2. Selecting two or three passages from the story that reflected some aspect of the problem that the class would discuss;
3. Stimulating open discussion on each passage after reading. (p. 876)

The children were not pressured to relate personal experiences but were free to do so if they wished. The open-ended discussion style was used to allow and encourage students to apply the stories’ themes to their own lives and thus begin the process of seeking ways to solve these and similar personal challenges. Sullivan likens this type of structure to a pyramid: the point at the top relates to a story’s situation, the broadened middle area is likened to the broadening of the story’s application to the real world, and the wide base of the pyramid represents the students’ application of the story’s theme to the students’ own particular lives and problems (p. 877). Mrs. Sheitel was interested in using selected books and a particular mode of discussion that would promote her students’ thinking about some of the critical problems in today’s world (p. 878).

#### Reading Aloud and Children’s Perceptions of Themselves

According to Trelease (1985), reading aloud to children leads to their self-awareness and to their place in this world. He further reminds us that although one may have a great deal of knowledge, he may not be able to deal with life itself. Books help one to become aware of the universality of the human experience; he may see some of his own hopes and dreams, as well as challenges, in the people he meets through stories (p. xix; Cullinan, 1992). This is an important point to consider because some of the problems students are facing are well beyond the scope of normal problem-solving. One could not expect a book to solve the problems of a child suffering from hunger or intense anxiety, situations that call for other measures. However, books can

“ . . . help a child to understand that the struggle for security is universal and timeless. And book characters can provide examples of what people have been able to accomplish in the mundane and often weary process of earning a living” (Coody, 1983, p. 191). Other needs which may be addressed through the use of books are those dealing with safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (p. 192-195). By observing each of her children, recognizing individual interests and needs, and making thoughtful book selections, the classroom teacher may be able to effect positive change by bringing children and literature together (p. 195).

Glazer (1991) suggests that “ . . . literature contributes to the development of the imagination. Often [children] are seeing worlds which they will not experience themselves. The confrontation with lives both better and worse than their own and with different experiences refines their sensibilities and broadens their perspectives” (p. 72). By looking at the values and attitudes which shape others’ decisions, children may look at their own lives more objectively. In a survey conducted by Mendoza (1985), a child responded to the question “What is the best thing about having someone read to you?” in the following, very wise way: “If your eyes aren’t busy, your imagination is free to roam” (p. 527). Kimmel and Segel (1988) explain that “Stories give shape to the chaotic world the child experiences” (p. 15). Children’s awareness of story structure helps them to fit their own lives into story form thereby helping them to make sense of their experiences and thus improving their chances of surviving traumatic events without damage to the psyche.

Given that reading aloud can positively affect children’s literacy growth and emotional strength, it follows that reading aloud and accompanying strategies should be considered a valuable part of the instructional day. Further, inclusion of the reading aloud session in the classroom requires consideration of readaloud strategies and specific book selection, decisions which rest with the individual classroom teachers. Therefore, the literature review continues with a discussion of decision-making, both in general and within the field of education, and concludes with a focus on characteristics others believe teachers should consider when selecting children’s books.

### **Decision-Making**

*In theory, and even to some extent in practice, most of the activities of the individual classroom are a consequence of the decisions of the individual teacher. (Eggleston, 1979, p. 1)*

In *The New World of Economics*, McKenzie and Tullock (1981) suggest that economists approach their analysis of human behavior with the assertion that “ . . . *human beings act* and do so with a purpose. That purpose is to improve their lots--to change the situation from something less desired to something better . . .” (p. 8). They further note, without regard to the debate over the existence of free will, that people make decisions and that they do so in a rational manner, rational in the sense that they can decide, within limits, what they want, and then go about fulfilling their desires (p. 9). Economists feel that the environmental, social, and biological forces that may

influence, not determine, human behavior may be overcome by those with the resources and desire needed to do so. This position suggests that “. . . the individual will always choose more of what he or she wants rather than less” (p. 9).

Of course, sometimes people make mistakes, but that does not necessarily mean that they are not showing rational behavior. Expectation and desire may not always result in accomplishment. Further, desire does not always have to be materialistic in nature; it may be aesthetic, intellectual, or spiritual (p. 10). Economists suggest that by maximizing utility through behavior, individuals will take action for which they expect gain in some form. Doing for others, for example, could result in the gain of pleasure (p. 10). In order to maximize utility, individuals must make choices among many alternatives, so it follows that in doing one thing, we must discard another choice and in doing so, determine the cost, “. . . the value of one’s best alternative forgone when a choice is made” (p. 11).

The economists’ view of decision-making, conceptually, seems to exist in discussions of decision-making in broader contexts. According to Calderhead (1984), “Real-life decisions . . . are made within a context of influences and constraints. Factors beyond our control may limit the options available to us or determine how we perceive these options” (p. 3). He goes on to suggest that while our work or education may involve intrinsic satisfaction, the decisions involved in them can also be influenced by social pressures, legal regulations, financial interdependencies, and physical constraints (p. 3), so we are in the position of weighing the costs and making the decisions.

Any study of decision-making must address human actions, many of which can be difficult to comprehend. However, if one also looks at the thinking which preceded the action, as well as the context of that thought, his ability to understand puzzling actions may sometimes become more clear (Calderhead, 1984, p. 3). “Investigations of decision-making help us to understand the actions of others and to appreciate how our own actions emerge from the thoughts and experiences we have and the context in which we live” (p. 3).

#### Education and Decision-Making

Borko, Shavelson, and Stern (1981) note that the focus on teachers’ intentions, goals, judgments, and decisions has not always been considered a legitimate area of research on teaching (p. 450). Around the 1950’s, the focus was on teacher characteristics as they related to student achievement; for the next twenty years, the focus shifted to the teaching process and student achievement. The problem with this was it did not take into account “. . . teachers’ goals, motives, knowledge, plans, decisions, and the like” (p. 451). Consequently, the concept of the teacher as a decision-maker began to receive legitimacy. Teachers’ characteristics may influence their decision-making which will in turn affect teachers’ processes and considerations of alternatives (p. 451).

### The Teacher as Decision-Maker

Drake (1979) makes use of the microeconomic theory to explain teacher decision-making when he suggests that “Classroom decisions of teachers or learners can be characterized in terms of concepts which economists use to explain consumption or investment” and that “However numerous the options in a choice set, the value which the teacher places upon the most preferred option next to the chosen option is the price or cost of that choice. This valuation can be regarded as the product of probability and value” (p. 83).

Teaching is characterized by Borko et al. (1979) as a process of decision-making (p. 138), and teachers’ decisions, like those of other individuals, vary (Calderhead, 1984, p. 4). Some may be reflective, such as the determination of a teaching method or the adoption of a new textbook; many decisions are immediate, such as those related to discipline matters; and still others are made automatically, such as those relating to a daily classroom schedule and which, Calderhead suggests, may be invaluable to the teacher during times of intensive interaction (p. 4). Because some decisions made by teachers seem to be very rational and others made within the hectic atmosphere of the classroom appear less reflective, Jackson (1964) suggests that teachers’ work be separated into “preactive” and “interactive” segments (p. 151-152). Those decisions made in the absence of students, those to which more time may be devoted, may be considered preactive while those made within the regular day with the students there could be considered more interactive (p. 152). This would lend justification for viewing the role of the teacher in different ways depending upon the situation. Similarly, research into teacher thinking has not only “. . . investigated the nature of decision-making in both the preactive and interactive phases . . .” but has also “. . . supported and elaborated upon this distinction” (Calderhead, 1984, p. 4). In their view of the teacher as decision-maker, Sutcliffe and Whitfield (1979) rely on two categories of decisions: those termed reflective, which seem to relate to Jackson’s (1964) “preactive” decisions; and those termed immediate, relating closely to Jackson’s “interactive” decisions. The authors go on to illuminate the difference between decision and choice. They note that “. . . choice is a function of the individual’s conscious state at the time of his choice . . .” and that “. . . an individual must have recognized the existence of two or more alternative responses in order that a choice may be made (p. 13; Drake, 1979, p. 82). However, “Decisions may be made without a conscious awareness or weighing of options . . .” and “. . . decisions are not always consciously monitored” (p. 13).

### Teachers and Preactive Decision-Making

Shavelson (1976) explains that there are five features of decisions used to describe decision-making in teaching: the choice of a teaching act from alternative acts; states of nature which refer to such aspects as the students’ cognitive, affective, and social states; outcome; utility for the teacher by which a measure of outcome can be transformed to correspond to the teachers’ subjective interpretation; and goal or set of goals that the decision is intended to help attain (p. 374-375).



Statistical models of teacher decision theory can be used to apply to situations in which the teacher has the time available to carry out the five steps implied by the above elements. Decisions made during planning times may be pondered, but most situations in teaching do not correspond to statistical models, such as a matrix (p. 377).

According to Calderhead (1984), protocol analysis, or process tracing, is the method by which researchers have explored teachers' preactive-phase thinking. Through asking teachers to verbalize their thoughts as they plan lessons or strategies, researchers can study teachers' decision-making with regard to reflective types of decisions (p. 4), information which can "... provide valuable insights into the nature of teaching" (p. 5; Clark and Yinger, 1979). When teachers plan activities, they must make various decisions related to content, materials, participants, organizations, time, and expectations for behavior and achievement (p. 5). These types of decisions take a great deal of time, a factor that may, however, vary with experience level (p. 5; Hargreaves, 1979; Sutcliffe and Whitfield, 1979).

Calderhead (1981), using a psychological approach to teacher decision-making, comments that some psychological models present the process as little more than information processing, too analytical a model to be appropriate for use with busy classrooms. In training new teachers, the models do not necessarily correlate to the way the teacher will actually operate in the room.

#### Teachers and Interactive Decision-Making

Suggesting that interactive decision-making does not incorporate a great deal of reflection due to the demands of a busy classroom is not to say that these decisions do not incorporate thought but that they cannot incorporate the various levels, including weighing alternatives, etc. According to Calderhead (1964), "Decisions in the classroom generally occur only when something unexpected happens--the lesson is interrupted or the activities once implemented fail to run as smoothly as anticipated. At such time, teachers' thoughts often focus upon their pupils . . . and teachers use the resulting judgments about pupils to decide how to best cope with the remainder of the lesson" (p. 7-8; Calderhead, 1981). Shavelson (1976) supports this idea, noting that interactive decisions may be modifications of decisions made during planning but which allow less time for consideration of alternatives and possible outcomes under various states of nature (p. 396). A model of interactive decision-making (Peterson and Clark, 1978) illustrates the type of monitoring that accompanies this process.

Unlike that used for preactive decision-making, research on teachers' thinking in interactive situations has made use of stimulated recall procedures during which teachers' lessons are videotaped. Teachers then view the videotape to help them recall their thoughts at that time and to stimulate comments on their past thinking (Calderhead, 1984, p. 4).

In his approach to teacher decision-making, Hargreaves (1979) bases his thoughts on the assumption that many decisions made in the classroom are sort of "recipes" which provide "typical solutions for typical problems available for typical actors" (p. 74). Since these types of decisions

are usually in response to familiar, regularly recurring problems, they are typically termed “routine” (p. 74). However, they can become routine only through the experience of using them. Experienced teachers make “routine” decisions which, to the inexperienced teacher, may seem puzzling, thus causing them anxiety (p. 75). The shifting nature of the classroom usually requires many “on-the-spot,” or interactive decisions. Without familiarity with the situations, the inexperienced teachers cannot respond in a routine or typical way, but in the experienced teacher, “. . . the knowledge on which the teacher bases the decision is essentially *tacit* and need not be processed in a very conscious way” (p. 75). According to findings by Calderhead (1981), many of these routine decisions might be conceptualized in terms of teachers responding to “. . . configurations of clues where the perceptions of pupils rank high in importance” (p. 53).

One of the research problems with regard to these types of routine decisions and teacher thinking is noted by Hargreaves (1979). There does not seem to be much point in asking a teacher about the “. . . contents of his mind at the time of the decision” (p. 75) after a decision that has been made as a matter of routine and with little processing. Even if stimulated recall (such as videotaping) is used, the teacher would be unable to recall subconscious influences on the decision at the time it was made. If asked for a “commentary” (p. 75) on the decision, the teacher would most likely rationalize her behavior based on one of two concepts: she may either attempt to justify the behavior in a social sense by adjusting her recall to match the values, expectations, and interest of the person asking for the commentary, or she may attempt to express the decision as a very rational one that came about through her understanding of goals and actions (p. 75).

Hargreaves adds that the latter may be a legitimate source of information for studying the “. . . common sense knowledge which becomes tacit in the decision-making itself” (p. 75). However, one must remember the limitations of the commentary, such as the effect of the questions asked and the realization that not all of the decision-making elements can be determined.

#### Teachers and the Decision-Making Process

Many approaches to research have developed in the area of teachers and how they make decisions in the classroom. There has been the sociological approach which attempts to identify connections between society and the classroom, along with societal constraints within which teachers make decisions; the curricular approach which views decision-making in the classroom as a part of curriculum implementation; the psychological approach which is concerned more with how teachers make the actual decisions and what types of information teachers use during this process (Calderhead, 1981, p. 51); and the phenomenological approach (Hargreaves, 1979) which focuses on “. . . the teacher’s experience of such decision-making rather than on, say, the origins, sources, causes, consequences or effectiveness of the decisions . . .” (p. 74).

Clark and Yinger (1979) suggest that “Because much of the judgment and decision making that teachers exercise follows from their interpretations of their experience, it is important to study how teachers make sense of their world” (p. 251). Teachers’ conceptual bases include “. . . their

feelings about the elements of the classroom situation that are most important, the relationships among them, and the order in which they should be considered” (p. 251). Clark and Yinger use the term “teachers’ implicit theories” to refer to this area of research, and they suggest that “. . . the thinking and behavior of teachers are guided by a set of organized beliefs, often operating unconsciously” (p. 259). Though many approaches have been used in researching teachers’ implicit theories, no clear consensus can be reached. Perhaps this is not such a mystery when one considers the difficulty of attempting to study teacher thinking as a product of teachers’ interpretations of their experiences.

Eggleston (1979) notes the role of the teacher as decision-maker in the classroom as one which is constantly demanding and one on which research took two broad perspectives during the 1970’s: the approaches which were descriptive/interpretive, such as classroom analysis of the teachers’ activity, and those which were development/evaluative, which focused more on teachers’ options and the consequences of taking them (p. 4-5). However, he saw a need for investigation into what he called the middle area: “How and why do teachers make decisions in the classroom-- about the use of new and existing curricula, about progress, resource usage, selection of information, and much else?” (p. 5).

Clark and Yinger indicated in 1979 that the study of teacher thinking as having an effect on what teachers do was a relatively new idea. However, once teachers’ thinking was considered relevant to decision-making, researchers began to view the processing of cognitive information as a part of the study of teaching. Researchers’ interest focused on teachers’ judgment, decision-making, planning, and the thinking processes of teachers: how they gather, organize, interpret, and evaluate information (p. 231).

Sutcliffe and Whitfield (1979) in that same year also suggested that while there was a good deal of research related to classroom interaction and teachers’ actions, there was little known regarding the decision-making which preceded the observed action--namely, the process (p. 8). If one would attempt to change teacher action, he would first have to change the patterns of decision-making, and this could be attempted only through a clear understanding of the process (p. 8).

With a focus on research which could affect future teacher training, Sutcliffe and Whitfield (1979) conducted a study geared toward learning more about the process of teacher decision-making. They first arrived at what they felt to be appropriate definitions of the terms “decision, teacher, and teaching,” and by combining the three, arrived at a definition for “teaching decision”: “. . . a decision made during the execution of the professional responsibilities of the teacher . . .” (p. 15-16). With a focus on “immediate” decisions, the researchers videotaped the interactive class sessions of teachers four times each and then quantified and categorized the stimuli which prompted decision-making and the types of decisions made. They found that some decisions seem to be made, more often by experienced teachers, without observable stimuli, and that such decisions may be identified by changes in teacher behavior (p. 29); they further found

distinguishable differences between inexperienced versus experienced teachers with regard to latency of a decision following an observable stimulus, the proportion of immediate to reflective decisions, stimuli source origination, heart rate increases, teacher stress, and time teaching. These findings led them to consider some of the differences in experienced versus non-experienced teachers which may have led to particular decisions made in response to certain stimuli (p. 30-33; Calderhead, 1978).

Hargreaves (1979) suggests looking at teachers' classroom decision-making in terms of the "act-actor-situation" matrix and the teachers' understanding of it. Though the design is simple, the teacher uses complex interpretive work to carry it out. Teachers seem to share some definitions with regard to particular acts, such as working hard, talking out of turn, etc. (Calderhead, 1981). Hargreaves (1979) suggests looking for commonalities in the common sense knowledge of the teachers. However, because an act is interlocked with the actor, the meaning of a motive for the act depends upon the actor, and so ". . . the act which the pupil commits can be understood by the teacher only by locating the act within his typification of the pupil as a person" (p. 77). And, both the act and the actor must be interpreted in light of the situation. Further, Hargreaves believes that values play a part in teacher decision-making. In making decisions in the classroom, teachers feel pressured to keep the lesson moving while still holding to a moral consideration of social justice and value commitments. Thus, decision-making is an accomplishment involving values which is not separate from action but rather a way of looking at the action itself, and it should remain consistent across all areas of the school setting (p. 79-80). It is interesting to think of these variables being involved in the "routine" decision-making of experienced teachers, and Hargreaves (1979) suggests that if we can tap into what the experienced teacher takes for granted or holds in her subconscious, then perhaps the inexperienced teachers can be more adequately trained and can acquire more quickly those skills which in natural development come very slowly (p. 81).

Borko, Shavelson, and Stern (1981) analyzed four studies of grouping decisions made by teachers for reading instruction to determine what factors might have influenced their decisions. The study highlighted factors such as environment, availability of materials, and class size which influence, perhaps even restrict, the range of teacher choice (p. 459). They found that many teachers consider students' characteristics as indicators of reading ability, form groups, and then use these groups to make future decisions regarding instruction. These decisions may affect student learning: the decision to group leads to a difference in pace, which seems to affect student achievement (p. 463-464).

### **Book Selection**

*The role of literature is to help develop the individual and it takes a good book to do this. A poor book takes a child and puts him back a step or two, a mediocre book takes a child and leaves him*

*where he is. A good book promotes an awareness of the possibilities of life, the universality of life, the awakening of response.*" (Egoff, 1973, p.3)

As a teacher prepares to share literature with her children, she has to make determinations with regard to time, setting, grouping, strategy, and accompanying activities. But one decision must precede all of these others: the selection of the book to be read. How will she make this decision, and what factors will influence her choice? There exist many suggestions relating to the factors which a teacher should consider when making a book selection.

#### Evidence of Practice

Jipson and Paley (1991), in a study conducted with elementary teachers, found that their reasons for choosing particular books covered three broad areas: appropriateness of the text within a larger instructional context; personal preference for the book because of the story, author, illustrations, or award-winning status; and the recognition of gender, race, and ethnicity (p. 152), with personal preference including such items as the book's issues or illustrations. By analyzing particular responses from the teachers involved, the researchers found that ". . . many teachers selected children's books as part of a complex, curricular process--focusing not on the book itself but on the context in which the choice made sense" (p. 156). To many teachers, the process of book selection does not involve spontaneous, acritical decisions, but rather ". . . those embedded in the framework of a dynamic social setting and integrated into the context of larger curricular issues . . ." (p. 156).

#### Factors Which May Influence Book Selection

Purpose. Glazer (1991) indicates that a teacher should have her purpose for reading in mind as she selects a book (p. 51). A book chosen for the first day of school may need to be very different from one selected to share a particular concept. Popp (1996) notes that a teacher may select a book for the purpose of sharing her own favorites with her classroom children (p. 43). Whatever the purpose for a teacher's book selection, she should be very aware of it as it affects her choices.

Genre. Glazer (1991) suggests that teachers include a variety of genre in their repertoire of selected books: prose, poetry, realism and fantasy, contemporary and historical, new books as well as classics, and a variety of illustration styles (p. 75). Popp (1996) also encourages the use of myths, folk tales, and legends (p. 44). Glazer (1991) emphasizes that the poetry experience can be very exciting for young children and suggests that *Mother Goose* rhymes (Huck, 1976) are a good place to start due to the strong appeal of the rhythm, rhyme, and verses (p. 39).

The book itself. According to Glazer (1991), one of the factors which a teacher should consider when selecting a book should be its literary quality. If fiction, it should exhibit a strong plot and setting, as well as characterization, theme, style of writing--including expressive vocabulary, humor, or dialogue--, and coherence (p. 31-34). According to Huck (1976), "Since most [picture books] will be read to children rather than by them, there is no reason to oversimplify

or write down to today's knowledgeable and sophisticated child. If non-fiction, it should exhibit organization and accurate presentation of facts (Glazer, 1991, p. 36-37). Further, when selecting a picture book, the teacher should look for one in which the illustrations hold a close proximity to and develop the text and one which develops an emotional link between the story and the reader and is appropriate for the ages of the children (p. 40-47). Huck (1976) goes on to say that the pictures in a picture book should support the literacy growth which the book is hopefully intended to promote. For example, she says that if a teacher is selecting a counting book, then she should be sure that the objects which are to be counted “. . . stand out clearly on the page” (p. 104).

Children's interests and needs. The types of books the children would like to hear should factor into the teachers' selection (Glazer, 1991; May, 1995). Many children respond favorably to humor, exaggeration, and books about everyday events and animals (p. 73). Glazer suggests that because any book may become a favorite for different reasons, teachers should observe their children for positive response, or perhaps conduct interest surveys (Glazer, 1991, p. 18). Vandergrift suggests that teachers who are truly concerned with their students will, as they come to know the children, choose stories which will meet the needs of their particular children (1965). Coody (1983) suggests using an interest inventory to help determine children's literature interests (p. 10-11). Not only can the children's responses from the inventory be used to help teachers select books of high-level interest for the children, but teachers may also share this insight with parents to help make home readalouds more exciting for the children. Green (1965) supports the use of classics, contemporary books, realistic and informational books (Teale and Sulzby, 1989), and some with touches of the “fanciful” (p. 8).

Huck (1992) suggests that, for emergent readers, teachers choose books which will “. . . delight children, make them giggle, surprise them, comfort them, and please them” (p. 6) and then add instructional activities to strengthen that delight. She further encourages teachers to evaluate each book for its imaginative qualities, natural language, and familiar speech patterns (p. 6).

Potential to promote literacy. Glazer (1991) supports selecting books that give children “. . . exposure to the mature and effective use of language” (p. 105) so that as they listen to the words of the author, they may see the creative possibilities of words (Huck, 1976). She further suggests choosing books, such as concept books, that emphasize word meanings, present vocabulary directly (p. 109), or explain relationships (p. 73). Huck (1976) states that ABC books, for example, may be chosen initially to promote children's knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, but she adds that “If, in the process of identifying such alliterative phrases as the bumbling bear or the buzzing bee, the child becomes aware of the sound of the letter “B,” well, fine and good! In the meantime, he has had lots of fun extending his vocabulary and looking at beautiful and interesting illustrations” (p. 101).

Children's values. Gibbs and Early (1994) suggest that “. . . the confused state of public values in our society provides no clear set of core values for today's children” (p. 7). Because

children have access to news and television, they are bombarded with examples of wrongdoing and contradictions to what has been considered moral behavior. Further, because many children lack good role models in the home, they have no alternative to view when making choices for themselves. As a result, schools are put into the position of sharing the responsibility of making good people and good citizens out of these children (p. 7-8), children whose behavior patterns will help the survival of the group (society) (p. 9). It is with this responsibility in mind that Gibbs and Early suggest values education, carried out through the use of quality literature and careful book selection. Teachers are encouraged to select books which focus on human relations and help the reader/listener to think about the actions of the characters as they relate to core values of compassion, courage, courtesy, fairness, honesty, kindness, loyalty, perseverance, respect, and responsibility (p. 9).

Richey and Hurley (1996), who also support teachers' guidance in the area of children's moral development, focus on the aspect of "the piece versus the whole" (p. 54). They suggest that some books such as *The Book of Virtues for Young People* (Silver Burdett, 1995) contain excerpts from other books, stories, etc. The problem with teaching values with this type of selection is that they "... cannot possibly have a long-term effect on a child, let alone leave a life-defining impression" (p. 54). Richey and Hurley suggest that it is better to provide rich content with strong characters, and then children will "absorb" the virtues through having had a pleasurable reading experience (p. 54).

Issues of controversy. Perhaps the teacher, when faced with a selection decision regarding a book with content which may be questionable in some way, might rely on the advice of Josette Frank (1973) who suggested that one, when selecting a book, ask "... not, will it *damage* the young reader but rather, will it *benefit* him or her and in what way? (p. 169).

One controversy related to literature is whether or not children should be exposed to books which are scary. Storr (1976), in making reference to the folk story *The Boy Who Didn't Know Fear*, suggests that the boy was brave only because he did not foresee any danger or recognize any threat, qualities which left him also with no imagination and therefore with no cowardice (p. 146). Storr's opinion is that children "... should be allowed to feel fear" and "... must be allowed to meet terror and pity and evil" (p. 146).

Another controversy related to children's books occurs in the area of sexuality. Young children, who may be in the process of discovering their own sexuality, receive mixed messages from entertainers, television, and even peers. Perhaps it would be appropriate to deal with the issue through literature. Frank (1973) feels that juvenile sexuality in books may have a greater negative impact on children because children identify more with those characters than they do with adult characters on television exhibiting the same behavior (p. 170). Wersba (1973), however, suggests that there should be more sex in children's books--from the picture books to the young adult novels. She proposes not graphic detail but rather depth and truth (p. 171-172).

With regard to the use of religious materials in the classroom, Huck (1976) says, “The Bible has an important and rightful place in any comprehensive discussion of traditional literature” because “The Bible is a written record of man’s continuing search to understand himself and his relationships with others and his creator.” She continues by saying,

Our fear should not be that children will know the Bible; rather it should be that they will not know it. Whatever our religious persuasion or non-persuasion, children should not be denied their right to knowledge of the traditional literature of the Bible. For other literature cannot be fully understood unless children are familiar with the outstanding characters, incidents, poems, proverbs, and parables of this literature of the Western world of thought (p. 230).

Racial equity. Luke et al. (1986) suggest that because most teachers probably feel that all literature for children is “consensually derived” and “non-problematic” (p. 210), teachers usually rely purely on their own instincts when selecting material. However, because the literature does contain culture- and class-specific values and behaviors, the teachers are “. . . transmitting to students exclusive world views and understandings . . . “ (p. 210). When teachers choose, they simultaneously exclude, and thus occurs the process of a “selective tradition” (p. 209; Jipson and Paley, 1991). In their study involving student teachers and non-aided selection of books, researchers found that the choices “. . . were predominantly written by and about Anglo-European males . . . “ (p. 213). Similar findings were found by Jipson and Paley (1991) among teachers in grades K-7 (p. 151).

Multiculturalism. Finazzo (1997) suggests that literature “. . . encompasses the various forms of writing that reflect times, cultures, and people with special beauty and style” (p. 4). She goes on to say that while children’s literature encompasses these same forms, it also possesses a specific style as well as its own unique qualities (p. 4) and that multicultural children’s literature is “. . . written for the child’s eyes, and thus it sends a simple and straightforward message. It reflects the childhood of a culture or a group and expresses a child’s viewpoint with a sense of optimism, hope, and excitement” (p. 4). Finazzo feels that multicultural literature, like other literature, can aid in the development of literacy skills but with the particular reflections of “. . . diverse family structures, experiences, and environments of all children” (p. 7).

Jane Kurtz (1996), author of multicultural children’s books, notes the importance of cultural authenticity, both in text and illustrations, as it can affect the way “. . . children feel about themselves, about people from other cultures, and about books” (p. 41). In addition, books which focus on a particular culture can teach tolerance and diversity (Woodson, 1995) and elicit the children’s retelling of their own stories (Wolf, 1996).

Gender equity. The Feminists on Children’s Media (1973), after analyzing a set of books recommended by three prestigious sources, determined that a high percentage of them did not positively depict women and in fact that very few even featured female characters (p. 107). By providing examples of specifics found in the books, the authors hoped to bring to light the



stereotypical attitudes toward females that seem to invade many children's books and to share their support for books, aimed at boys and girls, which can depict women in more realistic roles.

Stewig and Higgs (1973), in responding to women's liberation groups which insist that stereotypical female characters in children's books are influencing the way girls view themselves, note that a high percentage of women not only work outside the home but hold professional-level jobs (p. 116). In order to clarify the facts, the authors analyzed 154 picture books, randomly chosen from a stock of 957 located in a university education department library and considered to be representative of those routinely available to children in schools and libraries (p. 118). After categorizing the number of instances women were shown in homemaking versus professional roles and men were shown in professional versus recreational roles, the authors concluded that women are not depicted according to the roles they seem to actually hold. They believe that a less stereotypical view of women in children's literature, especially for those at a young, impressionable age, would help children have a more realistic view of the roles of women in our society (p. 118-122).

Luke et al. (1986) found similar results in a study regarding gender bias among student teachers. When asked to choose one book they liked and that they felt would benefit primary children, the participants chose books with a significantly higher instance of male figures, both in authorship and characterization (p. 212). Further, males did most of the problem-solving. When asked about their choices, most students indicated that gender had not been a consideration in their selection (p. 214). Because the majority of female students selected books with male main characters, they actually seem to ". . . actively participate in their own exclusion . . ." (p. 215). Jipson and Paley (1991) supported these findings in their study of teacher book selection in the elementary school classroom.

In a study analyzing teachers' listings of their favorite book selections, Smith et al. (1987) noted an interesting fact: Based on the number of teachers involved, their average teaching experience, and average time spent reading aloud each week, the researchers calculated that "If these teachers had average classes of 25 students for a total of 3, 119 combined years, then nearly 78,000 students have been exposed to these teachers' read aloud preferences" and ". . . if these teachers read aloud 20 minutes 4.3 times for a school year of 36 weeks, then a child will have listened to teachers' read aloud preferences 361 hours from kindergarten through 6th grade" (p. 401). Their point was that it is important to select materials that appropriately characterize men and women in our society.

Others' views. Alexander (1992) offers some of the general reasons for which parents and others may oppose their children's reading of certain materials: negative text; conflict with religious views; bad language; and subversive, disagreeable, or inappropriate material. She suggests a distinction between selection and suppression is in order. "Not all materials are appropriate for student use in a classroom setting, and selections must be made on the basis of

informed judgment” (p. 168).

Awards. The Newbery Medal, named for eighteenth-century English bookseller John Newbery, “is to be awarded annually to the author of the ‘most distinguished contribution to American literature for children’ . . .” (Peltola, 1992, p. 1). The Caldecott Medal, named for nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph J. Caldecott, “. . . shall be awarded to the artist of the most distinguished American Picture Book for Children . . .” (p. 2). Further, those books which do not earn the Newbery or Caldecott Medals but are worthy of attention are termed Newbery or Caldecott Honor Books (p. 3).

### **Concluding Remarks**

A review of the literature clearly suggests that reading aloud can have a positive influence on the literacy and emotional strength of young children. Further, the teacher must assume the role of decision-maker in the responsible and careful consideration of the materials available for her use. On this foundation, I began inquiry into the factors that influence kindergarten teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

### Statement of the Problem

In his *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (1985), Jim Trelease strongly supports reading aloud as a way not only to strengthen children's growth in literacy but also to create in children a positive attitude toward reading, an attitude which if strong enough may help them become life-long lovers of books and all the "worlds" books open up. This general concept is supported by other scholars (Huck et al., 1983; Chambers, 1983; Kimmel & Segel, 1988), and many, including Trelease, go on to suggest that the style or content of particular types of choices may make more effective prospects for both general and goal-specific readaloud sessions (Trelease, 1985; Feitelson et al., 1986; Elley, 1989; Leung, 1992; Lenz, 1992; Huck, 1992). Further, there is consensus among many researchers and educators that readaloud sessions and appropriate books can be used to help build children's emotional strength and help children deal with the challenges and problems they face in their own lives (Coody, 1983; Trelease, 1985; Sullivan, 1987; Kimmel & Segel, 1988; Glazer, 1991). But there is also growing controversy regarding the use of books with "questionable" content (Frank, 1973; Stewig & Higgs, 1973; Storr, 1976; Alexander, 1992). Some researchers suggest that teachers steer clear of certain topics, and other researchers maintain that certain content is crucial for impacting children's ideas about people, society, and even themselves (Stewig & Higgs, 1973; Wersba, 1973; Storr, 1976; Luke et al., 1986; Gibbs & Early, 1994; Kurtz, 1996; Finazzo, 1997). While there are numerous lists of "teachers' favorite books" available for review, there seems to be little research which focuses on how those choices are made. Because readaloud sessions have the potential to so positively influence children and because the majority of reading aloud takes place in the early grades, an important aspect of research should investigate the factors that affect teachers' selection of books for use in readaloud sessions in the elementary setting.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors influence kindergarten teachers' selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms. While required basal readers are recommended by committees and adopted by entire school systems, trade books are individual books selected by individual teachers for use in their classrooms, a process involving myriad influences and considerations. Therefore, trade books rather than required classroom texts became the focus of this inquiry. Additionally, although this study investigated teachers' selection processes, information was also analyzed with regard to teachers' thoughts about readaloud sessions and strategies as obtained through the interview process; therefore, this area was included in the review of the literature.

### **Guiding Questions**

The following questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do kindergarten teachers view reading aloud, and to what extent is it used in their classrooms?
2. What do kindergarten teachers think about when selecting trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?
3. What role does “purpose for reading” play in kindergarten teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?
4. What student factors influence kindergarten teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?
5. What book factors affect kindergarten teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?
6. What issues of controversy in trade books’ content do kindergarten teachers consider when selecting them for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?
7. What additional factors affect kindergarten teachers’ selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms?

### **Research Design**

#### **Quantitative versus Qualitative Research**

\_\_\_According to Maykut & Morehouse (1994), before one may settle on the decision to proceed with either quantitative or qualitative research, he must first understand the underpinnings of both research methods. Further, he must be able to articulate, at least to himself, his reasons for choosing one method over the other (p. 2). It is not the research that drives the method; it is rather one’s understanding of reality which affects how he sees and acquires knowledge (p. 11).

#### **Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research falls under the larger perspective of positivism, a philosophy which insists on “. . . explanation, prediction, and proof . . .” (p. 3). The positivist approach holds true the following postulates:

1. Reality is one and by studying its parts one may understand the whole;
2. The knower can stand outside the known in order to achieve objectivity;
3. Values can be suspended;
4. Preceding events ‘cause’ those that follow;
5. Explanations are generalizable from one time and place to another;
6. Verification or proof must be sought for propositions. (p. 12)

Similarly, quantitative research is “. . . based on observations that are converted into discrete units

that can be compared to other units by using statistical analysis” (p.2). Consequently, if one sees the above relationships between himself and knowledge, then he will theoretically approach research in a quantitative fashion.

### Qualitative Research

On the other hand, qualitative research falls under the “phenomenological” umbrella, an approach which sees “. . . the individual and his or her world as co-constituted” (p. 3). The phenomenologist approach holds true the following postulates:

1. There are multiple, interconnected realities;
2. The knower and the known are interdependent;
3. Values shape what is understood;
4. Events shape one another;
5. Tentative explanations are possible for only one time and place;
6. Propositions are discovered or uncovered. (p. 12)

Qualitative research “. . . generally examines people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways . . .” (p. 3). Therefore, those researchers who identify with the bases of phenomenology will theoretically approach research in a qualitative fashion.

### Matching the Paradigm to the Inquiry

Theory. As a researcher, I was not dealing with a question of the “right versus wrong” paradigm; in fact, often the two paradigms fuse together as in data which is gathered through means of an interview and or observation but which is then coded and statistically analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 18). Rather, I was dealing with the realization that there is more than one approach to research. Because the “dominant” paradigm, quantitative research, has for so long been *the* method of research, I realized that if I chose to follow the “qualitative” path of research, I would have to be able to justify my decision through a clear understanding of the foundations on which each paradigm is built.

While, at least theoretically, a researcher will lean toward the research paradigm which most closely relates to his view of reality, at times it is the nature of the research problem which seems to best lend itself to a qualitative paradigm. This is not a case of the study determining the research method; rather, it is a case of the researcher determining that qualitative methods of data collection will best answer the questions that drive the study (p. 19; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 146-47).

This particular inquiry. Because I was interested in finding out what kindergarten teachers think about when selecting trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms, I realized that my quest would necessarily take on a qualitative air. With regard to the phenomenological postulates, I held the following beliefs about teachers and book selection:

1. There are multiple “realities” within the classroom; teachers will experience the reading situation in a variety of ways. Perhaps through an analysis of these different settings, I would be able to arrive at some truths which, though not generalizable, would still be enlightening;

2. The teacher and her instructional decisions are interdependent;
3. Values absolutely affect the choices teachers make;
4. Events within and outside the classroom can affect, and be affected by, teachers' choices;
5. Discovery is inevitable; proof is impossible since I am dealing with individuals, each of whom has her own ideas shaped by a variety of life experiences.

Based on my understanding of the philosophies underpinning the dominant (positivist) and alternate (phenomenological) paradigms (p. 11), I believed that this study would be of a qualitative nature, one directed at “. . . representing the situation as experienced by the participants” (p. 2). Rather than looking *past* the words of the teachers, I wanted to understand by looking closely *at* their words (p. 17).

Implications. Concerning the significance of my topic, I refer to Rubin and Rubin (1995) who suggest that topics may be important for several reasons, and the researcher needs to be sure he can justify the value of the inquiry (p. 52). Rubin and Rubin go on to suggest that while a qualitative study may focus on a small group or setting, the implications of the study may go outside the original arena. While asking teachers about their selection process for children's literature, I believed I might learn a great deal about teacher values, frustrations with policy, or planning strategies (p. 53).

### Participants

There were six participants in this study, all kindergarten teachers currently working in public elementary schools. One of the greatest advantages of my conducting my inquiry within the elementary atmosphere was that I was working in a culture very different from my own secondary (grades nine through twelve) setting. According to McCracken (1988), researchers who have this “distance” see everything in their inquiry as mysterious while those who have familiarity with their inquiry setting sometimes approach their study with prior assumptions about what they will find (p. 22). Though I am a teacher, I was quite unfamiliar with the elementary setting and accompanying methods of instruction.

#### Selection Criteria

Kindergarten level. Kindergarten teachers were chosen as the participants of this study because they have the earliest contact with children beginning the regular public school program. With regard to emergent literacy, reading aloud and the selection of materials for reading in the school setting are considered key elements in children's growth, and since kindergarten teachers have this early access, I felt investigation into their selection process would be of importance to the existing body of knowledge. According to Teale and Sulzby (1996), studies in the last few years have shaped the current outlook regarding emergent literacy as literacy learning has been studied more from the child's perspective, a perspective which provides more insight into the process. As a result of this new understanding, they developed a portrait of children as literacy learners which

includes the following postulates:

1. For almost all children in a literate society, learning to read and write begins very early in life;
2. The functions of literacy are an integral part of the learning process that is taking place;
3. Reading and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly in young children;
4. Literacy learners learn through active engagement, constructing their understanding of how written language works;
5. Even more important than the demonstrations of literacy are the times parents and children interact around print. (p. 3-5)

They go on to say that this perspective on young children's literacy "... carries with it significant implications for teaching reading and writing in the early childhood classroom" (p. 5) and suggest that because "legitimate literacy learning occurs during the early years, ... the question of when to begin reading and writing instruction is absurd" (p. 5). They note, too, the ways in which reading and writing are taught must be developmentally appropriate, and that "getting children to interact with books should be the key way in which children experience print in the early childhood classroom" (p. 7). They further suggest that children not only hear stories daily but that they also be given opportunities to "read" to themselves and one another (p. 7). Some children are fortunate in that they have had access to books from early on in their lives while others may not have had this same access. Therefore, kindergarten teachers are faced with the challenge of promoting literacy in children who may or may not have had access to books and reading. Teale and Sulzby (1996) suggest that "As a valued and regular part of the curriculum, storybook reading takes on great significance to the children. Children's literature--everything from folktales and fables to contemporary pieces--should be the main reading fare" (p. 7).

Experience. Teachers with a variety of experience levels were selected to participate. For the purpose of clarity, the term *extensive teaching experience* will refer to teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience, and the term *less-experienced teacher* will refer to teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience. The following criteria was considered with regard to selection of participants with varied experience levels:

1. Teachers with extensive teaching experience may be able to share a wide variety of thoughts regarding book selection;
2. Teachers with extensive teaching experience may be able to share both preactive and interactive decisions regarding book selection (Jackson, 1964);
3. Teachers with extensive teaching experience may be able to share reflections of their early thoughts regarding book selection versus their thoughts after spending many years in the classroom;
4. Less-experienced teachers may be able to share thoughts regarding more current pre-service training with regard to teacher decision-making (Sutcliffe & Whitfield, 1979);

5. Less-experienced teachers may be able to share thoughts which reflect more emphasis on current societal issues as they may affect book selection for use in elementary classrooms.

Representative versus typical cases. One of the six participants was to be a representative case while the remaining five were typical cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28).

1. Participant one was considered a representative case due to her expressed passion for children's literature, evidence of an extensive collection of children's books, and her twenty-five years of teaching experience. Through her participation in an educational program, she became acquainted with one professor who suggested she be a participant in this study due to her obvious love for children's literature;

2. A typical case "highlights what is normal or average" (p. 28). Five of the participants were chosen from a pool of those who expressed interest in this study by means of a questionnaire distributed to a number of public school kindergarten teachers. Those who responded positively were separated into very experienced and less experienced groups; three were selected from the experienced group and two were selected from the less-experienced group. This selection was purposive since the sampling was small (p. 27).

3. Because setting was an important consideration (p. 30), each teacher was interviewed in her own classroom; this allowed me to gather information regarding the classroom environment, evidence and variety of children's books, and a "visual" sense of any storytime settings described by the participants.

### **Instrument**

#### Procedures

Data for this study was collected through use of interview and think-aloud procedures. An interview was used for phase one of the data collection, a focused book review was used for phase two, and a think-aloud was used for phase three.

Phase one: The interview. The purpose of the interview was to acquire demographic information, view the naturalistic setting, gather general information regarding the teachers' process of book selection, and set up future interview sessions. According to Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative interviewing is a great adventure; every step on an interview brings new information and opens windows into the experiences of the people you meet. Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate. Through what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, sex, and geographical divisions (p. 1).

According to Seidman (1990), "Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (p. 2). Seidman suggests that since people do have the ability to talk openly and freely about their experiences, it



makes sense to take advantage of that natural gift in order to approach inquiry (p. 2; Brenner et al., 1985, p. 7). When I interviewed, I was provided access to “. . . the context of people’s behavior . . .” and so I could better understand why they exhibited that behavior. The assumption we make as researchers is that people’s views of their experiences affect the way they carry out those experiences (p. 4). Brenner et al. (1985) add that the interview is a strong research method because any confusion about response may be cleared up at the interview session, an element not possible if one works with questionnaires or surveys (p. 3).

Seidman goes on to suggest that while a great amount of research is done within the educational field in our country, little of it takes into account the perspectives of those who are most closely involved: “students, teachers, administrators, counselors, special subject teachers, nurses, psychologists, cafeteria workers, secretaries, school crossing guards, bus drivers, parents, and school committee members” (p. 4). I could have used a variety of methods to explore people’s experiences--documents, observation, questionnaires, surveys, and existing literature, for example. However, if I was truly attempting to understand the meaning people made of their experiences in the field of education, then it made sense to talk to, and more importantly, listen to, those who were actually involved.

I was interested in investigating the factors influencing kindergarten teachers’ selection of readaloud books for their classrooms. Therefore, I interviewed kindergarten teachers to find out how they actually viewed and dealt with the experience of selecting and using reading materials. Interviewing, within this context, clearly was an appropriate choice. Although interviewing took a great deal more time than other possible procedures, it was important to remember that “Any method of inquiry worth anything takes time, thoughtfulness, [and] energy . . .” (p. 6).

Phase two: Focused book review. The purpose of the focused book review was to have teachers review, during the interview session, four different trade books and comment on whether they would or would not choose those books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms. The books used for the focused book review were selected specifically for their likelihood to promote discussion on a variety of topics. Further, teachers were asked to elaborate on their reasoning with regard either to selection or rejection of the focus books.

Phase three: Unstructured think-aloud. The purpose of the unstructured think-aloud was to have teachers think orally through their planning of a readaloud session or sessions for use with their students. The think-aloud procedure, termed protocol analysis or process tracing, is a method which has been used by researchers to explore teachers’ preactive-phase thinking. Teachers are asked to verbalize their thoughts as they plan lessons or strategies, and then researchers study the process of decision-making with regard to their reflective decisions--those made in the preactive phase (Calderhead, 1984, p. 4).

Ericsson & Simon (1993) approach the process of thinking aloud by first recognizing that there are three levels of verbalization:

1. The “. . . vocalization of covert articulatory or oral encodings” (p. 79). This level includes no intermediate process and the communication of thought requires no extra effort on the part of the participant;
2. The verbalization which “. . . involves description, or rather explication of the thought content” (p. 79). This level involves no new information but only a labeling of information held internally;
3. Participant explanation of his thought processes or thoughts. This level requires the participant to connect information in the short term memory with earlier thoughts and previous information already covered. (p. 79)

Because there are several levels, Ericsson and Simon highlight the importance of the instructions which the interviewer gives to the interviewee. If the participant is instructed in such a way that she believes she must explain her thoughts, the structure of her thought processes may change (p. 80). If researchers presume that the participant’s verbalizations will have the form of “inner speech,” a point made by Seidman (1991), and if the researcher wishes to have those thoughts vocalized, then providing simple instructions, such as asking the participant to vocalize her thoughts, will probably lead to the desired results of the study (p. 80).

I termed phase two a “focused book review” because I chose the particular books about which the participants spoke. Though they vocalized their thoughts, they were restricted to a chosen range. I termed phase three an “unstructured” think-aloud because the participants, though given the general topic of “planning,” were free to vocalize any aspects which they deemed important for that particular exercise.

#### Relationship Between Processes and Guiding Questions

Phase one of the process addressed guiding questions one and two; phases two and three of the process addressed the remaining guiding questions. The guiding questions helped form the broad boundary lines within which the data would fall, but the use of a variety of interview techniques helped me approach the participants’ thinking from a variety of angles, all of which helped form richer and more in-depth results than I might have gotten had I used only the traditional interview. The first interview led me through these teachers’ general ideas, the focused book review promoted their discussion about specific issues in books, and the think-aloud gave me access to a realistic view of what they are actually using in the classroom. Each piece of the collection instrument was essential to the collection of more complete and valid data.

#### Tools

Picture Books. Picture books are defined as “Books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all” (Nodelman, 1988, p. vi). Picture books were used in this study because they are the type of literature most heavily used in the early stages of children’s schooling for read aloud sessions.

Picture Books selected for use in the focused book review were the following:

1. *Grandfather's Journey* (Writer/Illustrator - Allen Say): This is the story of a young oriental boy whose grandfather and father alike feel torn between their desire to live in America and their desire to return to their homeland of Japan. At the end, the boy himself begins to experience a desire to see the land of his ancestors, and at this point he feels that he truly understands his grandfather. My selection of this book was based on the relationship between the pictures and the text, the concept of emotional turmoil, and the cultural setting and characters.

2. *Tops & Bottoms* (Adapter/Illustrator - Janet Stevens): This is an amusing tale of a clever rabbit who outwits a lazy bear. Through deals based on phrases with double meanings, the rabbit is able to cheat the bear out of some wonderful vegetables. My selection of this book was based on its style (it opens top to bottom), its age-old theme ( you can't get something for nothing), its potential for predicting outcomes, and for its characters.

3. *Working Cotton* (Writer - Sherley Anne Williams; Illustrator - Carole Byard): This book attempts to depict, through the eyes of a child, the difficult struggle of a southern Black family who must pick cotton to earn a living. The children accompany the parents into the cotton fields, and this story is written from the viewpoint of one of the young daughters. The text, which is written in the dialect of the characters, seems to portray both the unstoppable positivism of childhood while still reminding the reader of the difficult and burdened life of many children of the period. My selection of this book was based on its realistic dialect and its non-fictional and somewhat emotional subject matter.

4. *Yo! Yes?* (Writer/Illustrator - Chris Raschka): This story involves the development of a friendship between an African-American child and a Caucasian child. Each uses only one-word expressions which reflect each child's own dialect. My selection of this book was based on its uncharacteristic text, the relationship between the text and the illustrations, the dialect, the cultural issue, and the theme of equality among people.

All books chosen for use in this study received either the Caldecott Award or a Caldecott Honor distinction between the years 1993 and 1996. These books were chosen with the following guidelines in mind:

1. length
2. evidence of multiculturalism (Woodson, 1995; Kurtz, 1996; Wolf, 1996; Finazzo, 1997)
3. use of positive themes (Gibbs & Early, 1994; Richey & Hurley, 1996)
4. relationship, or lack of relationship, between illustrations and text (Glazer 1991)
5. text variation

My selection goal was to choose those books which contain evidence of traits addressed in the review of the literature. I felt these elements would provide the greatest opportunity for me to gain rich data from the focused book review, phase two of the interview process. Length was considered for logistical reasons: books which contained very lengthy texts could not be

effectively used within the parameters of the interview. Because I intended to ask teachers to read and comment on the books *during* the interview session, I thought they might feel compelled to “skim” the texts in order to get through each book more quickly, and then response to the books would be “watered down.” I felt that if I requested that the teachers read each book fully and carefully, they might become frustrated with the length of time spent in the interview. Measor (1985) suggests that the type of critical listening skills necessary in a good qualitative interview make a lengthy session just as difficult for the interviewer as for the interviewee (p. 63). These decisions resulted from my impressions as I read several books under consideration.

Audio taping. The purpose for the audio taping was to allow for transcriptions to be made of the interview sessions so careful analysis could be made of the data. Permission was sought from each participant prior to taping (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 127).

According to Brenner et al. (1985), taping is necessary for several reasons. First, because the interviewer must quickly absorb information in order to take advantage of rich veins of thinking, the interviewer doesn't have time to process and recall all of the specific points within the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 126). Also, tape recording will allow the interviewer to review the “meat” of a concept that he was perhaps only able to jot down during physical notetaking (p. 154). Maykut & Morehouse (1994) add that use of the tape recorder ensures the best possible account of the words of the interviewee and that, if the interviewer uses the recorder effectively, it will not cause any disruption to the process (p. 98; Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 126). Rubin & Rubin also add that the participants sometimes see the tape recorder as a signal that their words will be taken down accurately (p. 126).

Of course, Rubin and Rubin (1995) stress that the tape recorded interview should not be relied totally upon by the interviewer as the only data available. Data which may be crucial to telling the inquiry story may include facial expressions, posture, and mood (p. 99), as well as observations about such elements as setting and the interviewer's personal impressions. Also, Rubin & Rubin warn researchers against getting so comfortable with the tape recorder that they don't listen as effectively and sometimes cannot recall conversations and events from memory, so taking notes can force the interviewer to listen more carefully and will ensure good data in case of a technical foul-up (p. 127). The interviewer should take notes on such elements during the interview itself as well as immediately after the interview has ended. I used the tape recorder after the interview as well to just talk openly about my impressions of the participants, settings, and interviews in general.

All interviews were transcribed by a third party, and each participant was made aware of this at the first interview session. Following the completion of transcriptions, each tape was destroyed. Each participant was given a summary of major ideas discussed during the first interview and focused book review, and each was offered the opportunity to view a copy of the transcription once completed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 103). Maykut & Morehouse (1994) provide a

list of suggestions for transcribing interviews (p. 100), and these were forwarded to my transcriber. While it would have been helpful to transcribe my own data in order to relive the experiences (p. 101), time constraints and my transcriber's generous offer convinced me to accept the help.

Research journal. The purpose of the research journal was to keep a detailed account of personal reflections regarding the total inquiry experience, some of which became part of the data collection and analysis processes (p. 69). Maykut & Morehouse (1994) suggest that research notes may contain “. . . the researcher's personal record of insights, beginning understanding, working hunches, recurring words or phrases, ideas, questions, thoughts, concerns, and decisions made during the research process” (p. 68).

### Fieldtesting

Purpose. The purpose of fieldtesting was to finetune the process in the following areas:

1. The time factor involved (on average) for each interview session;
2. The likelihood that the intended process would yield the desired results (ie.whether my guiding questions could be answered by my intended procedures);
3. My ability to listen for opportunities to “get at” rich information and strengthen my own ability;
4. Creation of a foundation to support my selected research method.

Contacting the sample. I contacted one kindergarten teacher employed with a public school system. I have known her for many years and felt she would be willing to participate in the fieldtesting. I asked her for suggestions regarding another possible fieldtesting participant, and she introduced me to a first-grade teacher in the same elementary school. The second teacher was also willing to participate, and each completed the fieldtesting process.

Conducting the interviews: Interview one. This kindergarten teacher was very willing to participate. According to my planned process, we first discussed the general issues of reading aloud and book selection. From there, we moved to examination of the preselected children's books for the focused book review. I continued on with the second phase of the interview at this time because the participant seemed energetic about the conversation. The first phase of the interview did not take as long as I had anticipated, and I sensed that the teacher had a very busy schedule which allowed very little time for another meeting.

Upon completion of phase two, I attempted to set up another meeting time for the unstructured think-aloud, phase three, but the teacher seemed to hesitate and proceeded to just cover some of her thinking regarding selection of a “first day of school” book she had recently purchased for use in her classroom. Because I had indicated that the third phase would deal with planning, she talked about all of the plans she had for using the book. Though it was not a true “think-aloud,” I felt as though she was not open to another meeting due to time constraints. She talked openly, and I tried to simply listen as I would had the experience gone as planned. I do feel as though I was able to

gain a great deal of valuable information even though the plan had changed. I felt that my ability to be flexible awarded me some information I might not otherwise have gotten, and if I had pushed the issue, perhaps ill feelings may have resulted.

Conducting the interviews: Interview two: I met with participant two in her classroom for phases one and two of the process. I felt that since these two sessions had combined so easily for the first fieldtest interview that I would try it again to see if it would work as smoothly. After we spoke generally on the subject of children's literature and the influences on her choices, we moved on to the review of the specific picture books. Originally, I had decided to use only three books for the focused book review, and I presented only three to fieldtest participant number one. With fieldtest participant number two, I decided to try all four and then determine which three seemed to promote the richest discussion. The teacher easily covered all four, and so I decided to use all four in the actual study.

Following phase two, I set up an appointment for the think-aloud. This particular session was quite interesting because the teacher felt a strong urge to converse and to find out if she was "giving me what I was looking for." I learned a great deal about the think-aloud process, and it proved to be a rich source of data in this inquiry.

Conclusions regarding the process. As a result of the fieldtesting, I made several changes regarding the process for data collection. Phase one (interview) and phase two (focused book review) were combined as the first session, and the appointment for phase three was finalized at that time. Further, I was sure to direct teachers to read the picture books for phase two before they began talking about them. The first fieldtesting participant discussed "as she read," and consequently some of the text was skipped. Also, I took notes during the teachers' "reading time" in phase two. During the fieldtesting, when I just sat and waited, the teachers seemed to become uncomfortable, almost as if they were holding me up. When I took notes and remained busy, the participants read more carefully. Finally, I spaced out the interview sessions. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), spacing the interviews allows the researcher time to listen to the tape again in order to improve his method of interviewing and ponder changes in questioning before the next session.

#### Justification of Outcomes

Qualitative researchers have, as a group, been criticized for being unclear about research methodology (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). I therefore, as a researcher in the qualitative arena, must be able to justify why confidence should be placed in the outcomes of my study and why others should believe what I have reported (p. 145). With regard to my inquiry, credibility, consistency, communicability, and triangulation were some of the concepts I researched as building blocks for my foundation of justification.

Credibility. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), the credibility of qualitative work is judged by its "transparency, consistency-coherence, and communicability" (p. 85). Transparency

indicates that the reader of the report is able to see clearly the data collection process and that it allows him to “. . . assess the intellectual strengths and weaknesses, biases, and conscientiousness of the interviewer” (p. 85). One can achieve transparency in a qualitative research study by maintaining careful records; keeping original records of notes or recordings (through transcriptions), discussions, or other field notes; keeping a record of how the data was analyzed, coded, and sorted; and staying in close touch with the data (p. 86-87; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146).

Consistency. Consistency indicates that the researcher “. . . checked out ideas and responses that appeared to be inconsistent” by examining themes in one interview for coherence with the themes presented in others (p. 87). Rubin & Rubin are not suggesting that we as researchers attempt to eliminate inconsistencies but rather that we understand and be prepared to explain why they may occur. If participants hold contradictory understandings of the same event, the researcher should be able to show why this is a viable happening (p. 87). With regard to my fieldtesting, I had one teacher indicate that she would use the book *Yo! Yes?* while another indicated that she would not. Though these were contradictory feelings regarding the same book, I believe through analysis of their reasoning, I could explain why. One felt it would give children access to another culture through dialogue while the other felt that it might offend those of that same culture. My being able to explain this type of inconsistency afforded my conclusions credibility. Inconsistencies may occur, but my understanding of them strengthens their validity.

Communicability. Communicability indicates that my inquiry story should “. . . communicate what it means to be within the research arena” (p. 91). Those who hear my story should feel its reality, and they should be able to understand and to some degree see themselves in the research area even though they may not agree with all of the interpretations (p. 91).

Triangulation. Measor (1985) discusses triangulation as one of the best ways to validate data (p. 73; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 266-267). Triangulation supports a finding by showing there is agreement about an idea by more than one source. For example, in my fieldtesting, I found that both teachers believe children are eager to borrow the books that are read aloud in class. Since both teachers offered this information separate from one another, and since their findings were based on the actual desires of the students in each setting, I considered it a valid piece of data.

#### Addressing Trustworthiness

According to Measor (1985), one strategy which will add to the validity (trustworthiness) of data is for the interviewer to build a good relationship with the participant in the study so that the participant will talk freely (p. 72). In this way, the researcher can be somewhat sure that the participant is giving real and sincere responses. Likewise, Maykut & Morehouse suggest use of member checks which refers to “. . . the process of asking research participants to tell you whether you have accurately described their experience” (p. 147). The researcher need not change the data, but he might consider not using data which the participants do not find accurate.

Maykut & Morehouse, referring to Elliot Mischler's contribution to trustworthiness in qualitative research, indicate that the ultimate test of the trustworthiness of the study is whether others in the field would rely on it for their own work (p. 147).

### Analyzing the Process

Through review of the literature regarding interview and think-aloud techniques, and through careful reflection of my fieldtesting experiences, I learned a great deal about how to conduct interviews which would most effectively help me to explore the questions which guided this study. Before beginning the actual collection of data for this study, I considered my position with regard to each of the following elements deemed by researchers to be necessary for successful inquiry.

Sincere interest in others (Seidman, 1991, p. 3). I believe I was indeed truly interested in the stories of others. I continued to thrive on the passion with which I entered into this inquiry many months ago, and I found myself becoming very eager to hear others' thoughts regarding the selection of children's literature and the picture books I had chosen for inclusion in the study.

Realization that others' stories are as valid as my own (p. 3). Though I did have many ideas regarding book selection and even those picture books which I used for this study, I valued the ideas of others as clearly valid. I did not conduct this study to judge others' ideas or compare them with my own but rather to become aware of ideas which were the personal thoughts and beliefs of other professionals in my field.

Realization that others can never be understood perfectly (p. 3). By attempting to understand the choices and actions of others, I was able to understand them to some degree assuming, as Seidle (p. 4) suggests, that the decisions people make are a result of the meaning they make of their experiences. I did not feel as though I failed when I could not reach "closure" with every aspect of the interview because, according to Rubin & Rubin (1995), "The interview . . . is invented anew each time it occurs" (p. 7).

Awareness that listening is the most important interviewing skill (p. 56). Seidman (1991) refers to the three levels of listening: (1) Listening to what the participant is saying; (2) Listening for the "inner voice," the unguarded, personal voice; and (3) Listening while remaining aware of the process that is in progress (p. 57). I tried during each interview session to recognize in myself these three listening levels. Particularly in the later interviews, when I felt a bit more comfortable with myself as interviewer, I actually tried to listen to all three "voices" at once: I paid close attention to the words of the interviewee so I could process her thoughts, I listened for any words that I could use as avenues into the inner person, and I tried to remain conscious of the process itself. This definitely took practice because I sometimes got so wrapped up in the interview I would lose track of notetaking or questions I wanted to pursue.

Ability to allow questions to emanate from points made by the participants during the interview (p. 59). I had "guided" questions which covered the major areas I wanted to cover and which I used if conversation did not flow (Measor, 1985, p. 67). However, I did not meet with a great



deal of quiet time in any interview. When a participant made an intriguing comment, I attempted to elicit elaboration on that point in order to gain a better understanding of the participants' ideas; in several instances during the interviewing, I was afforded several opportunities to "seize the moment." For example, as one participant looked at the book entitled *Tops and Bottoms*, she commented about the "lesson." I waited until she was finished developing her thought because, as Seidle mentions, to interrupt a participant could cut off a potentially powerful thought (p. 63). Afterwards, I commented that she had mentioned a lesson and asked her to explain more about the thought, and she went on to discuss the work ethic shared in the book, a thought which helped me discover something about her values and her support for positive themes in children's books. McCracken (1988) supports this same type of skill, commenting that ". . .at crucial moments in the interview, the entire success of the enterprise depends upon drawing out the respondent in precisely the right manner" (p. 21).

Rubin & Rubin compare this type of interview structure to a major river that ". . . merges different currents into a single stream and then breaks into separate channels, possibly combining again later into a single stream" (p. 159). My guiding questions opened one of the "currents" and I tried to follow it wherever it led.

Presence of mind to ask questions when I do not understand something or ask for more information about a subject (Seidman, 1991, p. 58-59). I tried to explore comments which were unclear to me or ask questions about unfamiliar concepts. Because I was interviewing each participant more than once, I did not want to run the risk of missing the significance of something in the second interview because I passed up the opportunity to ask for clarification of something in the first. I also tried to trust my "gut instinct" by promoting discussion about interesting comments that sometimes proved wonderfully insightful.

Respect for the difference between exploring and probing. Probing could lead to defensive action or uneasiness on the part of the participant. I attempted to gently explore the participants' thoughts, providing myself the greatest chance for an effective session. This was a tricky area, however. According to research, too much exploration could lead to the interview's becoming ". . . a vehicle for the interviewer's agenda rather than an exploration of the participant's experience," but too little can leave the interviewer with weak data which will yield little insight into the inquiry area (p. 61). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) actually support the use of gentle probing for various purposes: to gain detail, to have the interviewee elaborate, and for clarification (95-96).

Avoidance of the tendency to lead the participants to particular responses (Seidman, 1991, p. 62, 67). I tried to be sure that my questions allowed the participants to interpret the meaning in their own way so that the responses were sincere. Another less obvious way of biasing the participant is by reinforcing too quickly her response with a head nod or a "Yes, Yes" comment. I was quite guilty of this in the first interview, believing that it would give the interviewee a positive

feeling about the session, but Seidle explains that if the participant gets clear positive or negative reinforcement, responses may not be sincerely felt. McCracken warns against “active listening,” which he says encourages the interviewer to “read” the hidden meaning of speech and gesture and “play it back” to the respondent” (p. 21). As a researcher, I tried to avoid this type of obtrusive inquiry.

Tolerance for silence (Seidman, 1991, p. 70). Sometimes when participants get very quiet, they are constructing the meaning they wish to pass on to the interviewer. Though I may have felt uncomfortable with a period of silence, I had to be patient because I knew there was a potential for wonderful information to follow.

Importance of establishing rapport (p. 73). Though I wished to make the interviewees comfortable with sharing ideas, I did not want to get so chummy that the session transcended the interview level and became only a conversation. I talked briefly about myself, but I kept the focus on the experiences of the participant. Offering further advice, Seidman suggests asking if the interviewee would like to be called by her first name rather than simply assuming that she won't mind. While attempting to strike the rapport balance, Seidman offers simple guidance: it's better to be too formal than too familiar (p. 74).

Diligence in keeping the tape recorder in good working condition (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 126). During my second fieldtest interview, I discovered that the batteries in my tape recorder were weak. There was a very disruptive squeaking sound in the room, and I finally discovered that it was coming from the recorder. The interviewee supplied me with batteries that she took from her camera, so the interview continued on. However, there was a terrible noise on the first half of the interview tape, a fact which made it difficult for the transcriber to do her work. This early but valuable lesson taught me to double and triple check my equipment and supplies prior to each interview.

Awareness of personal appearance (Measor, 1985). Measor suggests that wearing attire which is generally “acceptable” within a particular setting will aid in the ability to establish rapport. If one is interviewing a group of older teachers, he probably does not want to wear jeans or other very informal clothing. The older teachers may feel that the more traditional clothing is appropriate, and the attitude of the interviewees toward their interviewer will affect the outcome of the session (p. 59). Since I was interviewing kindergarten teachers, I felt that a balance between sophisticated and fun was in order.

Awareness of my personal bias. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), the key to most effectively hearing data is clearly knowing yourself. If the researcher knows his own biases, interests, experiences, etc., then he can more easily attempt to avoid allowing his bias to alter his view of the data (Measor, 1985, p. 76; Mostyn, 1985, p. 129). One should not seek to be either biased against or neutral towards any group he is interviewing, but rather to gain some empathy, even for conflicting points of view (p. 12-13). This was valuable advice for me although not as

easy as keeping my tape recorder in working order. I did, however, spend some time reflecting on my own biases, interests, etc. For example, with regard to the books used in the focused book review, I formed clear opinions of them prior to my interview sessions, but I had to remain cognizant that those were my personal feelings only so that I could remain open-minded to the comments of the participants regarding those same books.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1995), the purpose of data analysis is to organize the interviews to present a narrative that explains what happened or provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behavior (p. 229). The data treatment procedure outlined in *Qualitative Interviewing* (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) served as the foundation for my analysis. This process included several steps.

#### **Use of Rubin and Rubin's (1995) steps of analysis (p. 229)**

**Coding.** I analyzed for concepts; frequent use of words; vividness of vocabulary; repetition of nouns or noun phrases; pairs, mates, or opposites; the creation of labels for certain concepts; and important ideas. Further, I identified and analyzed specific "stories" within the data and searched for matching themes. I used color coding to maintain organization within each piece of data.

**Identifying over-arching themes.** Following the analysis for individual concepts and themes, I used the coded data to build an integrated explanation (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 251).

#### **Other Steps in the Process of Analysis**

**Cross case analysis.** I focused on possible themes which ran across cases, but I was careful not to allow this attempt to result in simply an adding up of variables (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 172).

**Miniature case studies.** I also constructed miniature case studies of each of the participants with reference to their backgrounds and specific views of reading aloud in order to build a foundation for their views regarding this inquiry.

### **Excerpt from Fieldtest Interview #2**

**Interviewer:** And what about, would there be any books that you would avoid for any reasons, content types of things?

**Participant:** I guess there could be. I've never really come across one. If I felt like that it might . . . several years ago I had a child in my room whose mother specifically asked me not to get into many of the normal things at Halloween. They do not celebrate Halloween in their family, and she was really concerned about that, and so I was careful with what I read. There's a book . . . about some children who walk down the road at nighttime, and there is a tree that is real spooky. The knothole on the tree looks like an eye, and they call it the ghost eye tree, and I always read that every year around Halloween time. This particular boy happened to be absent one day, and so I

chose that day to read it. I didn't know whether that would cause problems like his mother was worried about, but I figured why take a chance? If parents ask, that kind of thing, I'm careful. I think I know what you're asking, but I've never really come across a book at this level; I think you'd run into that more in the high school level where you'd have more things to have to worry about.

**Interviewer:** So, the concerns of the parents are important to you?

**Participant:** Oh, sure.

**Interviewer:** Now, how would you handle that with the other children? If it's a major holiday and you normally use books about that holiday and one child's parent has a concern, how would you handle that?

**Participant:** Well, in this particular instance, we did do things. We didn't do as much in this room. [The parent] felt that [her son] could leave the room [during a Halloween activity] if we provided him with another activity. If we were doing a Halloween project, I would ask him if he wanted to do this and if he felt like it would be okay with his parents. He was a really responsible child, and he would say, "I want to do this one," and if he didn't, he would say, "I don't think I should do that," and I would give him another activity to do at the same time as these children were doing an activity, so he was comfortable.

### **Sample Analysis Excerpt from Fieldtest Interview #2**

Based on the suggestions of Rubin and Rubin (1995) in  
*Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*  
(chapter 10: *What Did You Hear?: Data Analysis*)

*A goal of analysis is to find themes that both explain the research arena and fit together in a way that a reader can understand.* (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 254)

#### The Process of Analysis

Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that there are five main components in the analysis process: recognizing concepts, hearing stories, hearing themes, coding, and identifying overarching themes. For the purposes of discussion of this sample analysis excerpt, I will explain each component individually and include, after each separate explanation, a sample of my analysis regarding that specific component.

Recognizing concepts. Concepts are ideas through which people understand their world. The researcher may analyze for concepts in one of the following ways:

1. Look for specialized vocabulary or frequently used words that sound different from ordinary vocabulary;
2. Look for nouns or phrases that are repeated frequently and seem to express important ideas;

3. Look for the pair, mate, or opposite of the concept just discovered;
4. Be aware of concepts unrepresented by specific words. These may be labeled by the interviewer with a word or phrase that suggests the meaning of the underlying idea.

Sample analysis: Recognizing concepts: I focused on several conceptual ideas in the fieldtest interview:

1. The participant, upon beginning to share a classroom “story” (component #2), indicated that one particular child’s mother asked this teacher not to get into many of the “normal things at Halloween time.” This appeared to indicate that the participant regards Halloween as a normal occurrence which is generally celebrated.

2. The participant, describing the content of a particular book, described children walking down the road at nighttime and encountering a “spooky” tree. This seemed to indicate that she may associate nighttime with fear or mystery.

3. By commenting that she always reads a particular story every year at Halloween, the participant appeared to indicate that she may rely on stories that she knows well and enjoys or that she believes her children will enjoy, which could indicate her sensitivity to her students’ desires.

4. In responding to the question regarding whether or not there were books she would avoid, the participant stated, “I think you’d run into that more in the high school level where you’d have more things to have to worry about.” The statement appeared to suggest that this teacher believes there is little about which to be concerned regarding children’s books.

5. I noted several instances where non-specific words such as “might, guess, if, really, and think” were used. Their usage could indicate that the participant does not see issues regarding children’s books as necessarily “cut and dried” and that perhaps she likes to leave room for consideration of alternatives in any given situation.

Hearing stories. Stories can be used to answer difficult or threatening questions indirectly. Once stories have been identified, they should be analyzed for the lessons they may be trying to communicate.

Sample analysis: Hearing stories. The excerpt I chose for this analysis does indeed include a story. I had asked the participant if there were books she avoided for any reason, and her response came in the form of a story regarding a student whose mother did not want him to have access to a story about Halloween because their family did not celebrate the holiday. The use of the story format was interesting because it added a personal account which brought sincerity to the participant’s responses. The participant’s answer indicated her avoidance of a book for one child with special needs, not the avoidance of a book for reasons related to the book itself. Perhaps her response provides further support for her earlier indication that she believes most of the literature published for children is appropriate for the kindergarten-aged child. However, in the focused book review, she did express a concern with the book *Working Cotton* (Williams), stating that the dialect could embarrass or offend a student.

Hearing themes. Themes offer descriptions of how people do, should, or should not behave. In the analysis stage, a researcher may use the following strategies for recognizing themes:

1. Listen for themes, and then ask which ones go together. Related themes help build a stronger foundation for a theory;
2. By combining information from different interviews, the researcher can create descriptive themes that no individual interviewee mentioned;
3. Examine interviews for confirming and disconfirming evidence to ensure that the linkages are grounded in the data.

Sample analysis: Hearing themes. Through my analysis of the excerpt, I identified several themes:

1. Teachers should be willing to cooperate with parents. This theme was indicated again in the other fieldtest interview. The participant was describing her desire to have parents trust her decisions and choices; she felt that trust would improve the teacher/parent relationship;
2. Teachers should respect others' beliefs and traditions;
3. Teachers are willing to cooperate with, but do not wish to be controlled by, parents;
4. It is better to be safe than sorry;
5. Teachers should consider the feelings of the children.

Coding: Coding involves grouping interviewees' responses into categories that bring together the similar ideas, concepts, or themes discovered by the researcher. Further, coding should reflect the interests of the report's intended audience.

Sample analysis: coding. I decided to use color coding for my analysis. I coded the themes in green, the concepts in tan, the story forms in blue, and conflicting ideas in yellow. Further, I used numbers to relate the text to the main categories. For example, all the themes were coded in green, but each green coding also carried a number which related it to the appropriate theme. Throughout the transcriptions, all themes were coded in green so they could more easily be grouped and sorted after analysis was completed on the individual transcription. I did, however, attempt to envision each participant's "big picture" within the midst of all of my specific coding.

Building toward overarching themes. This process involves putting individual concepts and themes together to build an integrated explanation. There are two stages within this process: examining and comparing the material within categories, and comparing material across categories.

Sample analysis: Building toward overarching themes. Through analysis of the excerpt, I began to see linkages between it and other themes which popped into my mind from the other fieldtest interview. Forming these relationships between themes and concepts helped me to create a clearer picture of the connections between the data and to begin consideration of their broader implications for education, an aspect crucial to worthwhile inquiry.

After completing the fieldtesting, I still had a passion, in fact, an increased passion, for my topic, and I considered myself more able to delve into the art of interview and data analysis as well

as the intriguing world of children's literature. With these goals in mind, I began my actual inquiry into the factors which influence kindergarten teachers' selection of trade books for use in read-aloud sessions in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### **Introduction of Participants and Comparison of Their ReadAloud Styles with Hoffman et al.'s "Model"**

As discussed earlier in the review of the literature, Hoffman, Rosser, & Battle (1993) suggest that the most frequently occurring features, or "modal," of a readaloud session in current elementary schools would have the following characteristics: "The classroom teacher would read to the students from a trade book for a time period between ten and twenty minutes, the chosen literature would not be connected to a unit of study, there would be only a brief amount of time allowed for discussion related to the book (before & after), and no literature response activities would be offered" (p. 500). They go on to say that while reading aloud seems to be a part of most elementary classrooms' instructional day, it is not an integral part, nor is it being used to its full potential (p. 500). Therefore, they offer the "model" which should replace the "modal":

1. There should be a legitimate time and place for reading aloud designated in the daily curriculum;
2. Instructors should select quality material;
3. Instructors should share literature related to other literature;
4. Literature should be discussed in a lively, invitational, and thought-provoking way;
5. Children should be grouped in order to provide them maximum opportunities to respond;
6. Instructors should offer a variety of response and extension opportunities;
7. Instructors should reread selected pieces. (p. 501)

Because this study deals with factors which influence kindergarten teachers' selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms, it is logical that the more closely each participant's readaloud sessions resemble the "model," the more meaningful the data collected will be. If any individual instructor deems reading aloud important enough to make it a meaningful experience rather than simply a daily scheduled activity, then it would follow that the data would be more deeply considered and, therefore, a more valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge.

### **Introduction of Helen and Comparison of Her Readaloud Style with Hoffman et al.'s "Model"**

Although every teacher interviewed shared experiences which mirrored, to some degree, Hoffman et al.'s suggested "model," Helen's experience seemed to symbolize the very purpose of the model: a challenge to teachers to make a commitment to a readaloud experience which is rich in quality so as to promote the highest level of literacy growth. It is with a description of this model teacher and a discussion of the relationship between her readaloud style and that supported by



Hoffman et al. that I begin. This foundation provides me a solid beginning on which to build the findings in this chapter.

### Helen

*“Reading is the foundation of the learning process in this room.”*

Interestingly, Helen’s quote is one which matches well the view of Jim Trelease (1985) who says that reading aloud does not take away time from the curriculum but rather that it *is* the curriculum. Children must become aware of literature before they will begin to desire books.

Helen began her teaching career 26 years ago. She taught one year of remedial reading before transferring to the kindergarten level at a school where she has remained for the past twenty-five years. She holds a master’s degree in reading and has post-graduate experience in other academic areas. Helen has a strong academic background, but it is her love for children and books which transport her from the realm of “successful” into that of “exceptional.”

To Helen, reading isn’t just a skill that is taught or a subject required by a curriculum guide. Instead, she sees reading as an integral part of daily, even normal, life. Reading and books were a part of her childhood, both at home and at church, and so when she became a teacher, instinct told her that reading aloud to children would be a natural thing to do since they could not read by themselves. She feels that by reading aloud daily and showing an enjoyment of reading to children in their early years, she can help them learn not only to enjoy books but also to realize that books are a natural source to which they may turn for knowledge, answers, and entertainment so that books will become a part of their lives (Trelease, 1985; Kimmel & Segel, 1988). “If they don’t see that a book can bring something important into their life,” says Helen, “they’re not going to pick one up on their own; they are going to wait for an adult to tell them they have to and then it becomes a hassle” (Chambers, 1983). Furthermore, she sees that as children turn to books for pleasure, their increased interest in reading leads to a strengthening of their literacy skills (Anderson et al., 1985; Feitelson, 1986). Helen said,

It starts them on the reading process; it lets them see the appropriate use of a book. It helps them learn just the turning of the pages and knowing that books go from left to right, that books tell a story, that books serve a purpose, either fantasy or fiction, that books will teach them, teach them letters of the alphabet, teach them word formation, teach them the concepts of words, teach them tracking; they’ll see people showing them words on a book, they will find familiar things that will just lead to a normal step-by-step process to help them to develop into readers so that when the formal instruction comes, they already have some of that background knowledge.

Helen also acknowledged the relationship between reading and writing, suggesting that these two activities are in fact interdependent. She noted that toddlers don’t just watch Mommy and Daddy read the paper. They notice that their parents and others use pencils to make marks on paper in many different situations. So, toddlers begin scribbling, and through access to books and

other reading materials, they begin making the connection between the words on books' pages and the marks they can make on paper, and “. . . young children are ushered into the world of literacy viewing reading and writing as aspects of a much larger system for accomplishing goals (Strickland and Morrow, 1996, p. 3). Michener (1989) supports this conclusion with studies which suggest that reading aloud can improve students' written skills in the areas of syntactic maturity and vocabulary assimilation, and Reutzel and Cooter (1996) suggest that “. . . it is not possible to teach the writing process without helping children become better readers.” (p. 11)

One of the most fascinating elements of Helen's goal to help children and reading begin a natural life together is her understanding of children. She believes that a trusting and comfortable relationship between herself and her students will allow her to more successfully help them become lovers of books. In essence, though she wants to help children love books, she first wants to understand and bond with the children themselves. For example, she places a selection of toys in her room right across from the doorway through which the children enter on their first day of school. They can identify with toys, and so right away they feel a small comfort of home. Also, she has an array of “familiar” books which the children may recognize. For example, she may display stories from Dr. Seuss, nursery rhymes, and *Little Golden Books* like those purchased in grocery stores. Helen has an extensive collection of books, 4,000 in her approximation, and all except those dealing with specific holidays are shelved within her room for daily student perusal.

She feels strongly that students' access to books has decreased in the past few years, saying “When I first started teaching, I think children had books at home that even if people weren't reading to them, they saw that books were there. Books were used for gifts and things like that.” However, her informal surveys at the beginning of each year suggest to her that fifty to sixty percent of her students have either no books at home, or very few, and even those are not consistently used. She believes this is because years ago, families used books as entertainment, and today there are so many other activities--movies, video games, computers--vying for that same time. Helen feels that parents need to remember that books can still “take you away.” She also feels that the once-a-week library checkout, through no fault of the librarian, is simply not enough. Therefore, in the first weeks of school, Helen offers the children the opportunity to share “her” books; she tells the students,

I wish I could read all these books to you, but I don't have the time, but you know, I'd love to share my books with you. Do you think you would like to take any of my books home? Well then, if you think you can take care of my books, I'd be glad to let you take them home.

Helen's letter to parents sharing her “Family Book Share Program” plan further strengthens her goal as it brings students and parents together for reading time at home. After students have been taking the books home for a period of time, Helen suggests further sharing: “You know, when your friend is checking one out or taking one home, if you think it's a good one, you might tell them.” Eventually, the book sharing system evolves into an everyday occurrence, with children

“borrowing the teacher’s books” each school night. In this way, Helen appears to be sharing her own personal property, and she hopes her children feel very special because they get to borrow her books. Actually, the students are beginning to show a love for books and are beginning to share books with others. “I tell them a love of books is a love of learning. If they love books, books can teach them anything, anything they want to know,” she said.

I believe this deep-rooted appreciation for and understanding of the children adds to Helen’s ability to be an extraordinary teacher. The skills she is able to teach through reading aloud are more effective because of the relationship she first builds with the students in her care.

#### Comparison Between Helen’s Readaloud Style and Hoffman et al.’s ”Model”

Helen daily illustrates a commitment to the postulates believed by Hoffman et al. (1983) to be necessary for an effective readaloud model for elementary classrooms:

Reading aloud. Helen’s legitimate time and place for reading aloud is throughout the day. She feels that since reading should be a part of normal life, it must have inclusion throughout the day, whether for instructional purposes or just for fun. She said, “. . . if they don’t see that reading is a part of normal life, then they’re not going to see that reading is anything but a chore when they come to school.”

Selection of quality literature. To Helen, “quality” literature comes in a variety of bindings: she chooses books based on author, awards, recommendations of others, personal opinion, appearance, theme, content, and request by her students. In choosing from a wide variety of sources, she feels that she is selecting an array of books which will provide interest for students of all backgrounds and ability levels. Helen believes that “. . .if you are doing your job, you are choosing from everything that might pique a child’s interest, might draw their attention.” The only types of books she does not normally choose are those based on children’s movies or cartoons because she feels there is not really a point to the text.

Relating literature. Helen often relates her literature to other stories. For example, after reading *Grandfather’s Journey*, the story of a man who travels back and forth from his homeland of Japan to America, Helen relates the characters’ feelings and conflicts to those which may have been experienced by the early travelers to America. And, a reading of Williams’ *Working Cotton* with her students prompted a comparison between that selection and Lawson and Ray’s *Apple Picking Time*.

Discussion style. Helen uses a variety of discussion techniques to draw the interest and conversation of her students. She believes that a motivated reader makes a story much more interesting for students, and she makes use of such strategies as predicting, “reading” pictures, and student-to-student discussion to help children take ownership of the stories and their ideas.

Grouping. While Helen does not group children by reading levels, she does make use of small group activities. There are several stations in her classroom: a science station, a family/home station, a math station, etc. Helen groups her students for center activities by looking at the

childrens' social characteristics. For example, she will include in each group children whom she believes will get along with one another, or she may put a timid reader into a group with a strong reader. There are books in each station which relate to the activities which take place there, so students have access to the books during the entire time in which they are in the center. Further, Helen has a sharing rack on which she displays books which relate to the units of study taking place over the current and future weeks. Students may select any books they please, but the books themselves are grouped. The easy readers are at the bottom, and the more complicated books are toward the top of the rack. Students often select those books which not only interest them but also those which are more closely related to their own reading levels. Finally, Helen did note that when her whole group (her entire class) is smaller, the conversations about books get more in-depth. "The smaller the group you have, the more you can continue to talk because with the larger groups the more they get distracted; they get fidgety."

Response and extension opportunities. Throughout the reading aloud time in Helen's classroom, she asks questions and allows students to share ideas about the reading (Senechal et al., 1996). This discussion occurs both before (with relation to the title, author, and cover) and after the reading (with relation to the purpose, theme, and related ideas suggested by both the teacher and the students). Also, if students read or bring in related books, Helen allows them time to share, and there are many craft and literacy activities which are related to the ideas discussed in the books. For example, after sharing *Working Cotton* with her students, Helen distributed a piece of real cotton from a cotton plant to each student. The students pulled the cotton, separated the seeds, made cotton pictures, discussed climate and where cotton might best grow, and then she began a discussion of the cotton gin and other related historical concepts.

Rereading. Helen often rereads selected literature (Martinez, 1983; Martinez & Roser, 1985; Elley, 1989; Teale and Sulzby, 1996). Sometimes she will read a higher level book in the beginning of the year and then reread it toward the end of the year so that children may more easily relate to the ideas which may have been covered through class (Martinez, 1983; Martinez & Roser, 1985). Sometimes she rereads favorite books or easy readers so that her students may become familiar enough with them to "read" them on their own. She says that in her class, "We read books and reread books and look at the pictures and we talk to each other which seems to be a normal part of reading. We reread those that have a text that I think that they can learn very quickly like *Brown Bear Brown Bear* (Martin) and something that they can echo, read with each other, share reading, or read by the pictures." Helen also may reread a book more than once if she has a large class and is not able to take the discussion as deeply as she might have liked. She says, "I might have to read it more if it's a large group than if it's a smaller group."

Because the reading experiences in Helen's classroom are rich, they provide the students a great opportunity for literacy growth. Further, because her philosophy of reading aloud is based on having books become a natural part of a child's life, the ideas related by her for this study are

based on actual experience and should be considered valid and beneficial to the field.

### **Introduction of Other Participants and Comparison of Their Collective Readaloud Styles with Hoffman et al.'s "Model"**

The introduction of the other five participants will take the following form: Each teacher's background will be discussed individually, with the exception of Nancy and Barbara who are discussed in the same section due to their close working relationship and combined interview. Following the completed introductions of the remaining five participants, their combined similarities to Hoffman et al's seven "model" postulates will be summarized.

#### **Danielle**

*"I love books. If you can get a child interested in reading and help him develop a love for reading, then I think it's going to help him learn to read sooner."*

Danielle began her teaching career four years ago right after her graduation from college. She has taught kindergarten in the same school setting for all four of those years. She was given a choice between kindergarten and third grade, and she chose kindergarten because she perceived children of that age to be very "loving." Danielle said of the kindergarten age,

They are so innocent and loving and teach me lessons about how to treat other people. They are so innocent and blind to the world, and I think that's why I love it so much. I think the number one reason would be that they are so loving. They love everything and everybody because they haven't been exposed to life. They teach me lessons sometimes about how to look at situations from a child's point of view because it is so much easier to deal with things from a child's point of view.

Like Helen, Danielle shows first an interest in the children and then an interest in helping them learn. She referred more than once to the lovingness of children at this age, and she showed a fondness for books which support a loving, gentle atmosphere. An example of her dedication to the children can be found in her early attempts to read individually to every child each week so that they would be able to post points on their reading logs and thus earn prizes. She quickly realized that this was an impossible task due to her daily responsibilities, and she recognized the necessity of parents taking part in this home/school reading program. However, she became obviously sentimental when she related the fact that some children now have to go without points each month because so many parents cannot find the time to read to their children. Danielle's concern for her students makes her efforts to guide them more realistic.

Although she is a relatively new teacher, Danielle has a large supply of books and indicates that she will continue to add to her collection. She holds reading aloud time each morning, and students are encouraged to get books from the shelf to read if they complete their morning work before the others are finished. Danielle has noticed that students often choose books which have already been used for storytime, and she feels this is because they have become familiar enough

with the book to retell it themselves. A colorful shelf in the middle of the room holds unit-related books, and these are available for students throughout the day. Danielle periodically substitutes new books as the units of study change. She also has a collection of hard-cover books which she stores behind her desk so they will remain in good shape for student use throughout the year.

### Bernice

*“I love a good story. Someone’s reading, and you just sit there and you just listen and you just want more, more, more.”*

Beginning her career in teaching with third grade and then moving to the kindergarten level, Bernice has spent the last 26 years teaching kindergartners in the same school setting. Reading became an important part of her life when she was in school where her teachers made reading “come alive” for her, and so she seeks to share this love of books with her students. She said, “I enjoy books as much as the children do. Who is it that doesn’t like a good story?” And, she added that as a teacher of little ones, she has to keep a little bit of “kid” in herself. She feels very strongly that if she can make stories and books interesting for her students, then they will develop the same love of reading that she developed as a child.

Bernice believes in reading aloud as a way to help children develop a joy for reading (Trelease, 1985). She feels that her reading aloud purpose in kindergarten is to have children enjoy the time together and to develop a love for learning, books, and reading which will cause them to listen and consequently acquire literacy skills such as comprehension and recall. As they grow to love books, they will pretend to read, making up their own little stories, and this will give them a good start on wanting to read. Bernice makes time for reading aloud each day, noting that children seem to respond well to a routine (Coody, 1983). At the beginning of the year, she holds reading time in the morning, and then as the students begin to enjoy and look forward to the storytime, they begin to ask to hear books or to bring in books of their own. “I just kind of wait,” she says, “until they get settled down and start developing a joy for reading.” At this point, she adds a storytime in the afternoon as well. Her room is filled with shelves, bins, and drawers of books which she has collected over the years from many different sources, and she is both willing and eager to share these with her students.

Bernice stressed that one of the most important elements of the readaloud session, and the element which most influenced her during her growing years, is the reader’s ability to make the reading experience exciting for children by using her voice and mannerisms to put herself into the story. This attitude mirrors Trelease’s (1985) view that literature can be “sold” to children in much the same way that advertisers sell cereal. If a teacher can make the “product” interesting, the child will “buy.” Throughout Bernice’s interview she referred to the importance of making the story come alive so that children would develop a love for books and then a love for reading.

I guess I just have some kid in me too, you know, she said. I just kind of pretend that I’m in the story, and then I think about the teachers I had when I was smaller, the tone of voices they

used, the expression, and the mannerisms, and then I just try to get into the story. The interest level is high, and I can look at their little eyes and just tell when they are really interested. You can tell by their faces, the interest, how they sit there and they just don't take their eyes off of you. They want more, and sometimes they will say, 'Is that the end?'

### Frances

*"When I read a book, I say, "Oh, that would be good for Mother's Day, and I put it down under my Mother's Day group, so when Mother's Day comes, I can pull that book and read it."*

Frances has been teaching school for seventeen years, the last fourteen of which have been at the kindergarten level in the same school setting. She takes very seriously her responsibility to teach the SOL's required by the state, and she looks at books as a way to help her accomplish this goal with an activity that children enjoy. Although she mainly stressed the use of books as they relate to her required curriculum, she indicated that she enjoys seeing the children enjoy books as well.

She makes time for reading aloud each day, indicating that it is required in the classroom. She also reads before lunchtime when there are a few minutes to fill, and she encourages students to visit the classroom language arts center whenever they have completed their assignments. Frances plans carefully the books she will use for her storytime. "If they [the students] are doing Martin Luther King, I would do a biography on him because when we do a reading unit, we do books like this every day," she said. She further indicated that she selects books for use in content areas other than language arts, using for example counting books to enhance the instruction of math skills. And, she sometimes chooses books which are simply fun and which the children enjoy hearing (Trelease, 1995). Frances has young children of her own on whom she generally tries out new books before bringing them to the classroom because she is interested in using books that have a high interest level for her students as well as a relationship to the concepts being studied at that time. Before using *Tops and Bottoms* (Stevens), which Frances admitted is one of her favorites, for a classroom readaloud, she took it home for her children to read.

Back when I bought this book, I took it home, and I said 'You read this,' and . . . they were just cackling at some of it. They were about three and six [years of age] and he was reading it to her and they were just having a ball. They loved this book. And I thought, 'What is so funny?' I had to go back and read it and see what was so funny. So I really enjoyed it.

Frances has a large collection of books, most of which she purchased herself at yard sales, through book clubs, and at bookstores. She also keeps a log of all of her books organized by category or unit of study so that when she plans a unit, she has a handy listing of all of the books which will help enhance that unit. Frances is very cognizant of her responsibility for teaching the state-mandated SOL's, and she uses books to help her meet this goal. Requirements aside, however, she seemed to thoroughly enjoy reminiscing about the books on her list, even stopping to giggle as she recalled a particularly funny book that her students always enjoy.

### Nancy and Barbara

*“I want them to love literature the way I love literature.”* (Nancy)

*“I talk about my classroom as being a family. We are all a family. I say, ‘I’m not your mom, but when you are here, I take care of you, and these are like your brothers and sisters and cousins, and we need to treat each other that way.’”* (Barbara)

Nancy is a second-year teacher, having taught both years at the kindergarten level. Her previous work as a substitute teacher and church volunteer, as well as being a mother of two, have provided her with more than twenty-five years of experience with children, experiences which she feels have helped her gain insight into how children think at all levels. Barbara, after taking time off from an earlier teaching career to spend time at home with her children, returned to the school system as a first-grade teacher, a substitute, a middle-school instructor, and then finally a kindergarten teacher at a school where she has remained for the past eight years. These teachers’ friendship began when Nancy was placed as a student teacher in Barbara’s classroom and then gained a position in that same school setting. Since then, they have become close colleagues and feel that they share common professional ideals and goals for their students. Barbara said that she and Nancy have similar philosophies of teaching, as well as parenting skills. Since teaching kindergarten sometimes resembles parenting, their similarities in this area draw them closer. They requested to be interviewed together, and when the summary of the interview was written, it consisted of a combined synopsis of all ideas presented during that interview.

Nancy and Barbara share a love for the kindergarten level. Barbara said this age is her favorite, and Nancy agreed, adding that it is a challenge to work with children who come from a variety of backgrounds and begin school on a variety of academic levels (Trelease, 1985), but she said that these children come to school so eager to learn. Nancy said being an effective kindergarten teacher requires a great deal of organization. Likewise, Barbara admitted that it is a lot of physical work keeping up with all of the visual aids, posters, and books. While there are supplied books and materials for teaching the content, she and Nancy have a lot of flexibility in deciding how they’re going to teach each unit, and they have many supplemental materials that they use and share.

Their love for books is another characteristic shared by Nancy and Barbara. Reading aloud time is held each day in each of their classrooms, and they express its importance not only for teaching skills but also for cultivating a love of books. Barbara feels that if they love books, children will become lifetime readers, and she added that “If you can read, you can do anything.” They noted, however, that although reading time is included each day, it is not always at the same time of day because books are read for different reasons. “It’s not really that fixed,” said Barbara, “because we really read for pleasure, we read for facts, to gain knowledge, and it just depends on where it comes in the lesson plan.” So, the reading time would come when it would fit in most appropriately with the reason for reading. Higgins (1965) supports this synchronization of literature with the everyday life of the classroom (p. 55). In addition, Nancy does normally have



an afternoon reading time for “pure pleasure,” and both teachers provide students with a quiet reading time each day during which they may go back and forth to the book shelf selecting whichever books they would like.

Nancy and Barbara shared ideas about books and ways to use them, and they each have a large collection of books which they use in the classroom throughout the year. During the think-aloud session, as they were going through the large stack of potential spring books, Barbara noted, “Let’s not get into the Easter ones because if we do, it would take us a year.” This illustrates well that they have a large variety of books which they consider for use during their readaloud sessions. They also make suggestions to one another about which particular books seem to work well with the children and certain units of study. Each room has a display of books that relate to the unit of study, and children are encouraged to look at the books during such activities as quiet reading time. Both teachers are committed to helping their students achieve the greatest amount of academic success possible, and they feel that the use of a wide variety of books will help them accomplish this goal.

#### Discussion of Similarities Between These Teachers’ Readaloud Sessions and the Suggested “Model” of Hoffman et al.

These five teachers, through their attitude toward and respect for the value of reading aloud, generally illustrate a move toward the “model” suggested by Hoffman et al.

Reading aloud. To begin, all five of these teachers schedule time each day for readaloud sessions. Although the time frames and duration of the sessions may vary, the commitment to reading aloud is clear (Trelease, 1985). Danielle holds reading aloud time in the morning, encouraging children to “read” books on their own during the day; Bernice, who increases her reading aloud time as the year progresses, believes reading aloud will help her children develop a joy for reading while also enjoying the social aspect of the readaloud session; Frances not only includes daily reading aloud time in her schedule, but she also uses it when there is free time before lunch or other activities; and Nancy and Barbara include the readaloud session when it is most appropriate for the purpose in mind. When a book will help enhance a lesson in their plans, then the book is used whether it be morning or afternoon.

Selection of quality materials. Each instructor believes that she is choosing the material which will most positively affect the children in her classroom. The factors which influence these choices vary, but all five teachers vocalized the reasons for their selections, citing specific elements for which they look when viewing books, and they actively seek out books which they would call “quality” books (Egoff, 1973). Also, these teachers consider others’ recommendations, such as

those by colleagues, book clubs, or bookstores, when making selections for trade books to use in readaloud sessions. Barbara shared her feeling that “We have to cover the material we have to cover, and we want them [the students] to develop a love of books, and what better way to integrate those two than to use books to teach the concepts we have to teach?” In order for her to

effectively teach these concepts, she has to use books which will help her accomplish this goal. For example, one of the instructional elements required for kindergartners in the state of Virginia is position and speed, including such skills as “over, under, in, out, above, below, left, right, fast, and slow.” A teacher could use a book such as *Inside, Outside, Upside Down* (Berenstain) to help introduce these concepts to children. I believe all of these teachers make their readaloud selections with this same attention to books’ specific and individual relationships to the skills being taught. This observation is supported by the fact that each teacher has her own collection of trade books which she uses for readaloud sessions, display, and student perusal. During the think-aloud session as these teachers sifted through books they were considering for use with an upcoming unit, they consistently made comments which suggest that they were quite familiar with the books through which they looked. They offered example after example of trade books appropriate for use with specific lessons and commented about why those books were preferred by either themselves or their students. Helen stated during her interview that building a large classroom library was one of the wisest ways in which one could spend educational funds. Bernice, Frances, Nancy, and Barbara all have extensive classroom libraries, and although Danielle has not been teaching for an long period of time, she too has begun a personal collection of books which she uses with her students throughout the year.

Relating literature selections. In several different ways, these participants consistently relate pieces of literature to one another by relating books being read to other books with a similar theme or character, by relating books being read to a historical event or piece of non-fiction which has been studied, or by comparing different versions of the same story in order to practice comparison/contrast. Several teachers suggested using books to introduce units of study about famous Americans or using books which reflect similar historical circumstances. For example, one of the trade books used in the focused book interview, *Working Cotton* (Williams), was considered by several teachers as an appropriate book to use in conjunction with other books about slavery or plantations. While the characters in this particular book are not slaves, these teachers suggested it would provide a basis on which to discuss the lifestyle of those involved in this time in history. Nancy enjoys sharing the *Sherlock Chick* (Quackenbush) books because they have the same character involved in a variety of situations, and the children can become familiar with the character and his feelings. She also enjoys sharing different versions of the same story to promote a discussion of the similarities and differences between the texts. Barbara uses the book *Tops and Bottoms* (Stevens) in conjunction with similar thematic stories such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper* and *The Little Red Hen* to bring out the point that one should complete his work first and have fun later. And Bernice likes to use different books which fall under the same general heading but deal with specific subcategories. For example, when discussing arctic birds, she uses one book about penguins and one about puffins for an exploration into comparison and contrast.

Discussion style. All of these teachers indicated that the reading experience should be

enjoyable for children, and all referred to a variety of ways in which they attempt to make the reading session as effective as possible. Most importantly, these teachers indicated that the speaker's tone and storytelling ability are crucial. If the children enjoy the readaloud experience, they may be more apt to be open to discussion designed to enhance their learning. Bernice feels that children need to enjoy not just the book but also the reading experience, and she suggests that a good story reader can hold the children's attention just as effectively as can any other activity.

Grouping. None of these teachers indicated that they specifically group their children by academic or reading levels, but small reading groups are formed by some teachers as learning activities. Nancy and Barbara indicated that they separate their children into groups on occasion, with each group being given a copy of the same book. One person, usually one who has good reading skills, in the group is given the title of "page turner," and this student reads for the others as they also look on in the book. Later in the year, students are allowed to form their own groups and select books of their choice. All of these teachers suggested, however, that even in the large group, their children have the opportunity to ask questions and respond to the ideas presented through books. There are also other small group activities which occur throughout the day, such as the reading center where a small group of children listen to the same taped book through headphones. According to Kimmel & Segel (1988), however, the whole-class reading session is still a positive experience for children: a time-conscious teacher or aide reading one book can provide a wonderful learning experience for the whole class at one time (p. 31).

Response and extension opportunities. All teachers indicated their use, to varying degrees and in different ways, of response and extension activities. The readings in their room are definitely not isolated and disconnected activities. With regard to response, these teachers feel that reading strategies play a part in helping make the experience a rich one for students. They feel that asking students questions about what students believe is happening in the story, why they think the characters make particular choices, or what they predict may happen later helps them to think on a higher level. For example, while reading Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, Bernice engages her students in a conversation about Max's pet, which types of animals might make better pets, and how the title of the story might have to be changed. Danielle suggested using questions to help students understand higher-level stories or those with unclear themes. Further, all of these teachers indicated their openness to questions by students during the readaloud process.

These teachers also plan and conduct a variety of extension activities designed to grasp the concepts of the book and apply them to the children's lives. Nancy uses books to introduce science experiments which are performed after the reading, Bernice uses books on arctic animals to lead into an activity using the globe, and Barbara reads a variety of books on chicks and eggs to enhance her egg-hatching activity in the spring. These are only a few of the many examples of extension opportunities in which these teachers involve their children after a readaloud session.

Rereading. These teachers read children's favorites throughout the year, books with which

the children become familiar and then begin to “read” on their own (Teale and Sulzby, 1996).

If, as Hoffman et al. suggest, adherence to these postulates produces a quality readaloud session, then I believe that Helen, Danielle, Bernice, Frances, Nancy, and Barbara all provide readaloud experiences that mirror the model in many ways. Further, because they all indicated this commitment to a rich storytime for their students, the ideas and thoughts they have shared in this study should be considered beneficial to the existing body of knowledge.

### **Discussion of Guiding Questions and Resulting Data**

\_\_The selection of books for use in readaloud sessions requires teachers to be decision-makers, and they use both preactive and interactive skills to make their choices (Jackson, 1964). However, whether a teacher devotes a great deal of time, in the absence of her students, to plan the use of books, or whether she selects one quickly before lunchtime to calm her students, she is influenced by a variety of factors. \_ The participants of this study indicated that they do view reading aloud as an important part of the daily classroom experience for their students, and they all consider a variety of criteria when selecting the materials they will use for those readaloud sessions. These considerations range from qualities of the book to past experiences or intuition, results which mirror many of the categories determined by Jipson & Paley (1991) in their study of elementary teachers to be those that teachers consider when selecting books. In order to look more specifically at the factors which influence teachers’ selection of books for readaloud sessions, this section will address the participants’ responses as they relate to the guiding questions which directed this study.

### **How Do Kindergarten Teachers View Reading Aloud, and To What Extent Is It Used in Their Classrooms?**

It has been established through the descriptions of the participants and the comparison of their readaloud styles to Hoffman et al.’s model that these teachers are all committed to the use of reading aloud in their classrooms on a daily basis though the scheduled times and duration of those sessions may vary. Further, these teachers indicated their desire to enrich these sessions by selecting materials and using strategies which they feel will help promote the most growth in literacy by their students. Their large classroom libraries and organizational tendencies regarding books further strengthen the legitimacy of their readaloud habits. Because the entire analysis section provides data relating to these teachers’ selection of books and instructional strategies designed to promote an effective readaloud, it follows that their commitment to reading aloud is clear. Therefore, the rest of this chapter should be viewed as a broad supporting statement for the belief that these teachers support reading aloud as a learning tool in their classrooms and that they do, in fact, make use of reading aloud with their students each day.

Further, it is important to note as these teachers discussed their purpose for reading and their preferences related to trade books, they consistently referred to their responsibility to cover the

Standards of Learning dictated by the state of Virginia. While not every single book was used as a direct result of a teacher's desire to introduce an SOL concept, the great majority were used for the dual purpose of promoting an enriching readaloud experience while simultaneously approaching some SOL-related concept or skill. The kindergarten SOL's required by the state of Virginia cover, among other things, (1) oral language, which includes listening, identification of rhyming words, and asking questions; (2) reading and literature, which includes identification of the parts of a book, using pictures to predict story outcomes, and following words from left to right; (3) mathematics, which includes recognition of patterns, knowledge of numbers one through twenty, knowledge of geometric figures, knowledge of time, and ability to classify; (4) science, which includes sensory awareness, study of objects' physical qualities and life processes of certain animals and plants, and weather observations; (5) history, which includes knowledge of interesting Americans, awareness of past events, and knowledge of commemorative holidays; (6) geography, which includes use of simple maps, use of comparison and contrast skills with relation to people and places, and knowledge of community symbols; (7) economics, which includes knowledge of occupations and the basic economic concepts of saving money and exchange of money for goods; (8) civics, which includes the understanding of the qualities of a good citizen (taking turns, sharing, responsibility, respect, and consequences of breaking rules), identification of patriotic symbols, awareness of courageous and patriotic characters in history, and the Pledge of Allegiance; and (9) basic writing and research skills. Analysis of even these partial SOL categories indicates that kindergarten teachers' instructional responsibilities involve a variety of areas dealing not only with academics but also with social behaviors and patriotism. These teachers' selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms consistently involves their reflection on a book's ability to help enhance the introduction of an SOL skill. While the following analysis does not include an SOL-related statement with every example of teachers' choices, each teacher made clear in the initial interview that this state-mandated responsibility is a priority in her classroom. On occasion, a book may be read by a teacher just for fun, but according to these teachers, even "fun" books contain elements which could be used to address SOL skills.

### **What Role Does "Purpose for Reading" Play in Kindergarten Teachers' Selection of Trade Books for Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms?**

One's "purpose" reflects one's reasons for carrying out a particular action. For Helen, an initial purpose is simply getting the students interested in books. She accomplishes this with her book share program discussed earlier. Also, she accomplishes this with strategic display and use of books over time. At the beginning of the year, for example, she reads stories just for storytime and students' enjoyment, and she displays familiar books and picture books on her bookshare rack. As the year progresses, she adds easy reader books and books which have been used in the readaloud sessions, as well as unit-related books, so the students may begin selecting books that

they can read to themselves or one another. In this way, she eases students into the use of books after having gotten their initial interest by way of picture books and entertaining storytimes. Frances follows a similar pattern, starting out the year with high-interest level, colorful books.

Many of the responses of the participants dealt not with what they liked about a book but rather with the reason why a particular book was chosen (Glazer, 1991; Jipson & Paley, 1991), indicating that there was a particular purpose, or use, in mind for the book in that situation. Helen indicated that an instructor should always have a purpose in mind when selecting a book or other activity for her students. She said, "You can teach just about any concept you want through an appropriately chosen book and sometimes, most of the times, several concepts with an appropriate book" (Kimmel & Segel, 1988). Helen also involves her students in the identification of purpose. Even if she is reading quickly, Helen always discusses with her students the title of each book read in the classroom. She asks them to discuss what the book might be about and whether they think it is real or make believe. Finally, she will ask the students if they can determine the "center" from which the book was chosen. This strategy helps students associate the book with a particular learning area, and purpose becomes more clear to them. According to Trelease (1985), defining one's purpose in his own mind alleviates the concern that he might be wasting valuable learning time by reading aloud. According to Bernice, "Just about any book can be suitable; it's only limited to your imagination." Those purposes to which the participants referred fall into three distinct categories: academics, emotion, and entertainment.

#### Academics: Introducing Units of Study.

General studies. In the majority of situations, teachers choose particular books because they afford an opportunity to help strengthen students' acquisition of skills required by the SOL's (Standards of Learning) determined by the state of Virginia. All of the participants are responsible for covering the SOL's. Because of this, most of the selections these teachers make are books that they feel can help them introduce or enhance a particular unit of study (Trelease, 1985; Glazer, 1991). Danielle said that if she is covering a particular unit, she will pick books to help her students "extend their thoughts," and Bernice added that she often tries to select books that will correlate with her required SOL's. Helen has a wide variety of books, and she says she pays a lot of attention to what she is trying to get across; she tries to pick up books that will go along with the subject being studied. For example, if she is beginning a fall unit, she will choose books about leaves, trees, pumpkins, apples, and books that will teach students about that season. As the unit of study changes, she will slowly change the books out on display; as students begin to notice the new books out, they will begin asking about them or talking with one another about them. Barbara shared that when she looks at a book, she thinks about "what alphabet letter it could go with, what color it could go with, what thematic unit it could be used with, and what SOL ...it could go with." She said, "We have to cover the material we have to cover (SOL's), and we want them to develop a love of books, and what better way to integrate those two than to use books to teach the concepts

we have to teach?” Frances has developed a system for organizing her books into categories. She has a notebook with each letter of the alphabet, each major holiday, and units of study. She said, “When I read a book, I say, ‘Oh, that would be good for Mother’s Day,’ and I put it down under my Mother’s Day group so when Mother’s Day comes, I can pull that book and read it.”

Specific content area. Another good example of using books to introduce units of study for a particular content area (Manning & Manning, 1995) came from Nancy, who uses Joanna Cole’s *Who Put the Pepper in the Pot?* as an introduction to a science unit. Following the reading, she involves students in a pepper experiment in which they observe pepper floating across the top of a pan of water. Helen also uses books in the same way Nancy does, to introduce a unit of study or other activity. She uses *Brown Bear Brown Bear* (Martin) in conjunction with class projects on colors and rhythms. After hearing the book, her students continue the story with other rhymes such as “polka dot, polka dot . . .,” and she also involves students in a teaching color contest.

Famous people. Books are also useful, according to these teachers, for introducing required units about famous people who may be unfamiliar to the students. According to Helen, “If you are teaching Martin Luther King, a book on Martin Luther King would definitely help. . . , or, if you are teaching presidents, a president book would help . . . ; if you are teaching about George Washington, you can’t necessarily talk to them about George Washington without giving them something as a visual aid.” Frances uses books, also, to introduce famous people, but she still tries to choose those which are easy enough for the children to follow. For example, she feels that many of the books available on Harriet Tubman are difficult because the children are not familiar with such concepts as underground railroads, so she is always looking for a “better book” (Hoffman et al., 1993).

#### Academics: Introducing Concepts or Skills

Rhyming. Not only may books be effectively used to introduce a unit of study, they may also be used to introduce, and strengthen knowledge of, certain specific academic concepts. For example, Nancy said that books with rhyming words and sight words contain the repetition necessary to promote choral reading (students reading along with the teacher and one another); This is important because, according to Barbara, the English series in her county gives the students “. . . an opportunity to do a lot more sophisticated things than you think the kindergarten level is able to do: punctuation, reading with expression for a question mark, an exclamation mark, quotation marks.” She went on to suggest that as the students are involved in the choral reading, the teacher is tracking the text (pointing to each word with her finger as it is read), and the children see the punctuation and hear the expression involved, so they are learning without realizing it. For her students, Nancy refers to the exclamation point an “excited mark.” She said that when the reader changes the level of her voice during reading, a discussion may be held to help students understand why the voice changes and how it affects the story. Barbara feels that kindergarten children cannot be taught punctuation in the same way it is taught to high school students, so

books with repetitive text provide kindergarten teachers an effective way to cover this area. Repetitive text, such as that of Martin's *Brown Bear Brown Bear*, is useful for providing students with easy-to-read- text which they can learn quickly and then reread to themselves.

Parts of the book. Another academic concept introduced through books is the parts of the book. Barbara discusses setting, front cover, back cover, and title page of the readaloud books she uses with her students, and Helen stressed the importance of discussion of each book's title. Not only do children learn the parts of the book (an SOL requirement), but they may also be introduced to the concept of predicting which, as Helen tells her students, is better than a guess. She teaches them that authors give "hints" through text or perhaps illustrations, such as those of Jan Brett, and by using these hints, students can predict what may happen in a story.

Comparison and contrast. Comparison and contrast is another concept which may be effectively introduced through the use of books. Nancy indicated that she likes to share different versions of the same story as a way to promote discussion of similarities and differences with her students. "A lot of times I will save books that retell, like *The Gingerbread Man*, and you may have them told with a different twist and using different characters, and I will save those and read them together and then we will go through and decide how they are different, how they are alike, and we compare books" (Wolf, 1996). Bernice likes to discuss likenesses and differences by using books which come under the same general heading but deal with specific divisions. For example, when studying animals, she discusses penguins and puffins, both arctic birds, but differing in color, habitat, parenting styles, physical characteristics, etc.

Vocabulary. These teachers believe that new vocabulary can be taught through the use of books as well. Bernice gave the example of one book which describes an animal's home as a "burrow." She discusses with children what they think that means and then what it actually means, but it is discussed within the context of an animal study, so use of that context enhances the learning (Elley, 1989). Further, Nancy and Barbara recognize the ability of books, especially those with some sort of patterned text, to enhance their children's acquisition of sight words.

Critical thinking. Bernice also likes to engage her students in higher-level thinking skills such as discussion of irony. She uses Helen Lester's *A Porcupine Named Fluffy* to discuss whether that is a particularly good name for a porcupine and what else the animal could be named. Nancy also introduces irony to her students in small doses such as by calling attention to the author of a series of mystery books dealing with a chick: Robert Quackenbush! Bernice also uses what she calls "story stretchers" to enhance the unit of study and the skills on which she is concentrating. For example, she sometimes asks children to come up with titles for books that they feel would better fit the action, and she sometimes involves them in discussions designed to describe what would change if the story's action took place in another setting.

General information. Books are also useful, according to Bernice, for general information about such subjects as nature and animals, and several of these teachers indicated that they



sometimes do not recognize the potential of a book until they use it, and then sometimes they see another purpose for which a book may be used. According to Helen, “If you sat down and made an outline for every book you read, you would have a multitude, if you really thought about it, of what comes out of that story.” Though she might choose a book just for fun, she admitted that “it looks like it’s fun, and then after I choose it and read it to the children, the book itself might give me ideas totally opposite of what what I picked it for. Books teach me how to teach and give me more ideas.” Frances said that sometimes she also does not recognize potential uses for a book until a particularly good occasion arises. She recalled one book in particular that she read and did not really care for, but as Mother’s Day approached, she remembered something about the book and just knew it would be perfect to use with that holiday.

### Emotion

These teachers’ emotional connection to books. Another purpose for which teachers select books is for their ability to affect children’s emotional growth (Coody, 1983). I noticed, additionally, that these teachers themselves seem to be affected emotionally by children’s books. Perhaps it is this connection which underlies their belief in the power of books to connect also to their students. Nancy desires to “provoke any kind of emotion children can get out of books when they read.” She recalled reading a book about a little girl who went fishing and camping with her grandmother. As a child, the girl was cared for by the grandmother, and when she grew older, she became her grandmother’s caregiver. At this point, Nancy said, she began to cry because she personally had a similar experience. She appreciates literature’s ability to provoke this type of emotional experience. Danielle provided another example of this emotional connection between teacher and book. She loves to read *Love You Forever* (McGraw) because when she reads it, she “feels so much love.” At the end of this particular book, the mother, who has grown old, is being rocked by the son, who is an adult, and upon seeing this situation, the children become quiet and sad. Danielle admits she’s not really sure what the book teaches, but she loves sensitive books, those that stress emotion rather than skills. Frances expressed a different type of emotional connection when she is discussing her students’ love of the book, *Roses Are Pink, Your Feet Really Stink* (De Groat). She openly laughed and giggled as she shared her students’ reaction to the use of the word “stink” in the classroom setting. Further, Frances shared a sketchy memory of a book that dealt with feelings of friendship and love. Helen noted her love of the book *Time for Bed* (Fox) for its nurturing quality as it tells of mother animals putting their babies to bed. It is this “feeling” she gets from the book which makes it, in her eyes, valuable for her students.

So, these teachers indicated the existence of an emotional relationship between themselves and books. How, then, do they use books to affect their students’ emotional side and, in fact, support emotional/social growth in them? Each teacher interviewed shared thoughts regarding this special power of books.

Addressing students’ needs. Nancy chooses books which relate to her students and their

problems. As she reads, she asks the students to discuss the characters' coping strategies and why they believe the characters may have made particular decisions. By discussing the characters' choices and actions, Nancy may help children decide on effective resolutions to difficulties they may face now or in the future (Coody, 1983; Gibbs & Early, 1994). This use of "bibliotherapy," as discussed by Sullivan (1987), is quite useful because children are often able to be more analytical about the problems of a book's character than they can about their own problems (Coody, 1983). Nancy further shared that her students use a variety of sources to determine characters' feelings: characters' actions, facial expressions, and the setting of the book, and she says children's perceptions infiltrate related activities in which they participate after the reading of the book. So, children not only consider what is going on in the book, but they carry these ideas over into individual work after the reading session (Michener, 1989).

Addressing rebellion. Nancy said that she will use books in which children exhibit rebellious attitudes, but only if there is a positive outcome. She wants the children to learn how to positively deal with rebellious feelings. In fact, as a result of one readaloud session, she believes she may have saved a few parents from enduring the dreaded "temper tantrum." She was sharing with her students a book about a young boy who was growing impatient while shopping with his mother, and, upon arriving in the toy department, he prepared to throw a temper tantrum. At this point, Nancy asked the children to illustrate such a tantrum. After one child completed his exhibition and there was a discussion regarding it, she asked her students if they would like to see a real temper tantrum, and she proceeded to get down on the floor, kick her feet, and scream. She laughed as she shared her students' wide-eyed reactions: *So that's what I look like when I do this?* Her use of a book sharing one boy's poor behavior helped her to realistically illustrate the reaction of others to what her students may actually have done themselves.

Young children's self-awareness. Barbara shared that at the beginning of each school year, kindergarten students begin with a "me" unit during which they discuss physical growth, emotions, families, and feelings. She said that books are an important part of that unit and that she chooses those which relate to the students' lives. For example, she mentioned the Mercer Mayer *Little Critter* series for such books as *Grandma and Me* and *Me Too!* and *The Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain) for books dealing with relationships and feelings. Barbara lets the children know that her classroom is a family with her taking care of her students when they are in school, just as a mom takes care of her children when they are home, and she encourages them to treat one another as they would treat members of their own families (Gibbs & Early, 1994).

Books as teachers. Various other books are used by these teachers as introductions to emotional subjects. Helen uses the fable of the town mouse and his cousin the country mouse to discuss how to get along with others, the differences between city and country life, and how our differences may actually help us to see what we have in common. She also uses the rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb" to introduce the concept of how we take care of pets. Frances uses stories such

as *The Little Engine That Could* to give a sense of hope to students who are having a difficult time with a particular situation. Social issues may also be taught through the use of books and readalouds. For example, Danielle uses *Thank You Amelia Bedelia* to help instruct students in the use of proper manners, and Nancy enjoys sharing a book about a mouse making a bargain because it deals with sharing, another crucial social skill (Gibbs & Early, 1994). In fact, Bernice believes that just the readaloud session itself strengthens another important social skill: listening.

Danielle believes that the use of books which may bring out emotional subjects promotes discussion among the children, and she feels that they do want to talk about emotional issues. Frances added that in her school, the guidance counselors come into each classroom two or three times a month to share self-esteem types of books and activities. There are many individual and series books which attempt to help children deal with social/emotional issues. For example, the *Berenstain Bears* series (Berenstain) deals with such concepts as visiting the dentist, getting stage fright, resolving conflicts with friends, going to camp, and moving. Also, well-known stories such as *The Little Red Hen* may help children see the value and fairness of helping others. Books and stories offer children a way, on their level, to conceptualize and perhaps seek answers to their own fears and problems (Trelease, 1985; Gibbs & Early, 1994).

Dealing with a changing society. According to Helen, because children's books today cover such a wide variety of topics and styles, teachers can easily use books to help children identify with their own life situations. She said,

More children's authors are realizing that children have feelings and children have backgrounds and children have a variety of situations and home lives; children are living with grandparents now, children are living with one parent now, and children are living in apartment houses and farms and in cities and in mobile homes. You don't have to specifically teach it anymore; it's there for you, and if you are doing your job, you are choosing from everything that might pique a child's interest, might draw their attention.

Bernice, too, recognizes the changing family situations of today's youth, and she uses the habits of certain male animals to reinforce the male's role in the family:

I think today a lot of kids are brought up in one-parent homes. They live with grandmother and this type of thing, and I think that they should know that the father should play, and especially if it's boys, they should play an active role. I just do. I guess maybe that's an emotional thing with me.

Actually, just the students' access to the books' story elements can help them make sense of their worlds. Books' plots, climaxes, and resolutions are all part of the characters' adventures or situations, and according to Kimmel and Segel (1988), "Stories give shape to the chaotic world the child experiences" (p. 15). Children's awareness of story structure helps them to fit their own lives into story form thereby helping them to make sense of their experiences and thus improving their chances of surviving traumatic events without damage to the psyche.

### Entertainment

Finally, teachers choose some books just because they are fun and the children like them (Trelease, 1985). Helen said,

A lot of time, I will pick up a book that is just a fun story because during the day we have what I call just a fun storytime where a child goes and picks one they just want you to read, just for no reason at all, and they can browse through the shelves and pick up one.

Frances said that her students always love to hear the book “Roses are Pink, Your Feet Really Stink” (deGroat) because it has the word “stink” in it, and the children feel like they’re really getting away with something by hearing that word in school. Other choices purely for entertainment include fairy tales, fantasy books, and books with animal or human characters who involve themselves in silly actions. Danielle added that if she is not covering a particular unit of study, she will just pick something “exciting,” such as Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*. She said her children like this book because can use their imaginations (Glazer, 1991) to think about whether the events are real or not. Of course, these books can be used for other purposes as well, as these teachers indicated that children naturally seem to enjoy fantasy and fiction over non-fiction. In fact, several teachers noted that even when they are reading books just for fun, they usually manage to pull in a few “learning” points without the children even noticing! Helen said, “You can read a book for pure enjoyment, just have fun storytime, but you can also fill your storytimes and lessons with fact and fiction and comparison and contrast of literature.”

### Sharing Purpose with Children

Whether they are choosing factual or fictional books, and whether they are introducing a concept or reading for fun, teachers have a purpose for choosing the books they share during readaloud sessions in their classrooms. And, purpose is an important consideration since they ultimately want children to learn to love books. By reading for a variety of purposes, children see that books can bring information, excitement, comfort, or pleasure. Helen takes purpose to an even higher level by actually discussing with her students the purpose for reading different books. If a child brings in a Bible, an encyclopedia, or even a comic book, she will discuss with her class how and why one might use the selection. She asks the students where they might look for certain types of information, and she sometimes shows them books with lots of print and discusses with them why the book might be useful even though it might not be a selection for storytime. In this way, she helps her young students to begin to see the value in all types of books, not just the books that are read in the classroom (Huck, 1992).

### **What Student Factors Influence Kindergarten Teachers’ Selection of Trade Books for Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms?**

These teachers do consider many factors about their students when selecting their readaloud materials, but it seems that most of these considerations come in the form of “findings through

experience.” They choose books which they feel will best fit the needs and the attention levels of their students based on their experiences with other students of the same age (Glazer, 1991). Several of these teachers indicated that they simply try a book in the classroom and watch the reaction of students to determine whether it would be a book they would use again (Glazer, 1991). As Barbara put it, “I go by their reaction, the books that they seem to like.” She judges her students’ approval of books by their attention while she is reading and their comprehension as evidenced by their discussion following the readaloud session (Kimmel & Segel, 1988). Bernice said that trial and error has helped her determine which books will work in her classroom and which will not. This observation of their students has promoted these teachers’ following generalizations of what types of books they feel most interest their students.

#### Students’ Preference for Fiction/Animals

These teachers feel that students most enjoy books which are fictional or involve fantasy or animals, both fictional and non-fictional (Glazer, 1991; May, 1995). Frances believes that kindergarten children live in a fairytale world. Nancy feels that this is due to their developmental level; because they are still at an age where they like to play and enjoy make-believe, they enjoy the fantasy world of fiction and animal characters. This idea would seem to be clearly supported by the fact that those books suggested most often in the interviews to be children’s favorites are the series books involving *Clifford* (Bridwell), *The Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain), and *Arthur* (Brown), all of whom are animals. Further, the bear family and the aardvark named Arthur dress and behave as humans do. Bernice agreed that children truly seem to enjoy books about animals perhaps because they like to have pets, and animal books make them feel comfortable. Danielle, after reading Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, took a class poll of whether they like the “real” books or the imaginary ones, and she was not very surprised when they overwhelmingly voted that they like the imaginary ones best. She feels this is because they can use their imagination as they listen to stories of make believe (Glazer, 1991; Huck, 1992). She also said her students enjoy books that have non-fictional subjects explained through the use of cartoonish characters because it gets to their level and gets them to thinking about those kinds of subjects. Though her students have these preferences, she believes most of all that students just love to be read to. In fact, she said they are “starved to be read to,” a result, in her opinion, of little reading aloud time at home.

#### Mixing Fact and Fiction

Helen, while indicating that her children enjoy fantasy and that she tries to reintroduce the sometimes-forgotten classic fairytales and *Mother Goose* rhymes (Green, 1965; Huck, 1976; Glazer, 1991), also recognizes the opportunity to share the difference between fiction and fantasy (Glazer, 1991). For example, when reading a book, she will ask her children if they think it is real or make-believe (she uses the terms fiction and non-fiction later in the year). When reading *Tops & Bottoms* (Stevens), a book about a clever rabbit who outfoxes a lazy bear, she discusses the real relationship between a rabbit and a bear--that the rabbit would be food for the bear, and in her

spring unit, she involves children in activities dealing with both make-believe eggs and real eggs. As her students learn the difference between real and make-believe, they begin to recognize that a book can have both elements. Helen reads one book that has animals in the woods teaching real life lessons, and after the sessions begin, her students will comment, “That’s one of those books that has some real things mixed in with the make-believe things.”

Bernice, too, mixes fact and fiction in her readaloud sessions (Green, 1965). While she said the children enjoy fantasy, she added that it doesn’t always have to be pretend. She said they enjoy make-believe, but they also look for facts too. According to Teale and Sulzby (1996), “Young children can learn much about how the world works from informational books . . .” (p. 7). Bernice believes that children can enjoy any type of book. According to her, “It’s how you present the book.” Barbara indicated a similar feeling as she noted the many non-fiction books she has available for readaloud sessions and student perusal. She also has older books with older-fashioned illustrations, but she feels these can also be useful for student learning (Glazer 1991).

#### Serious Tone or Intellectual Level of a Text

Another belief on the part of several of these teachers is that stories which are too serious or are too intellectual usually cannot hold students’ interest. Nancy said, “A lot of times we read something realistic, and unless it is a very good storyline, we usually lose them on it.” Bernice added that she believes students like stories with a happy ending, when people become friends or, in fairy tales, when something good happens, and she herself likes stories where everything turns out well.

#### Interesting Pictures

One characteristic of books which these teachers believe attracts their students is interesting and detailed pictures which usually grab students and encourage them to begin telling these “stories” on their own. Bernice said that “little ones like bright colors, and they like sunshiny things and things that are bright and things that make them happy.” Helen and Danielle both indicated they enjoy the pictures of Jan Brett because they are so detailed and their children enjoy exploring them and finding all the little “hidden” pictures not only within the frame of the page but also around the borders.

#### Familiarity

These teachers believe that children like to see and hear books with which they may already be familiar. Danielle notices that when children have free reading time and are allowed to go to the bookrack and select their own books, they often choose those which have already been read in class (Mendoza, 1985). Helen, at the beginning of each new school year, always displays familiar books to which children can relate because she feels this gives them a sense of comfort in a new environment.

#### Award Status

After learning to recognize the Caldecott symbol (a skill noted by all participants to be one of

importance), children like to read books which bear the symbol because they have faith that those will be good books. I believe this speaks to the determination on the part of these participants to help children recognize good literature.

#### Other Factors Aiding in These Teachers' Knowledge of Student Preferences

Of course, watching students is not the only way teachers determine whether or not a child will enjoy a book. Frances always tries a new book out first on her own children while others sometimes rely on their intuition as to whether the students will like a book. Also, Nancy and Barbara have noticed that students, after perusing books during quiet reading time, will tell them which ones they prefer, and this helps these teachers make future book selections.

All of the participants are interested in whether or not the book will be effective in the classroom, indicating that no matter how much a book can teach, it will be worthless if it does not connect with the children. But many teachers know by simple experience that a book will just be a favorite of kids. The *Clifford* series (Bridwell) is one mentioned numerous times as an all-time favorite, as is *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin). Frances mentioned that some of her children's favorite books have "disappeared" from her classroom. She believes the children like them so well, they sometimes carry them home.

#### Helping Books To Meet Students' Needs

As well as choosing books which they believe children will love, teachers also consider ways in which they can use books which may have both strengths and weaknesses. For example, Frances cited an example of a book about plants which has beautiful and realistic illustrations but difficult and time-consuming text. She said she simply uses the pictures and makes up her own text. Another version of this remedy could come in the case of simple text with one or two unfamiliar words. Several of these teachers indicated that they may simply substitute a word with which the students could identify in order to keep the story going and keep the children interested. This shows a concern on the part of these teachers to keep their students actively involved so the reading experience will be not only effective but also enjoyable. Helen goes one step further: when she does not use the text verbatim, she explains to her students that the text is there to help her remember the story and that it would be useful if someone wanted all the information. She never seems to let pass an opportunity to alert her students to the value of books in a variety of situations.

#### Students' Requests for Literature

All of the teachers interviewed show consideration for their students' personal requests to read books brought from home. These teachers appreciate that a child's feelings may be hurt if his or her book is not shared, but in many cases there may not be time or the book may be inappropriate. Participants indicate that they share students' books when time allows, sometimes skimming the book or sharing just the pictures. Helen says that she never turns a student down, but in some cases where the book is very advanced, she might discuss what type of information the book holds and how it could be useful. Sometimes, if time is a consideration, she might ask the student to

share the book by retelling the story. This usually takes little time, and the student gains valuable experience in sharing ideas with his or her classmates. She feels that if a book is important to a student, then it must be given some consideration by the teacher.

### **What Book Factors Influence Kindergarten Teachers' Selection of Trade Books for Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms?**

We have determined that teachers consider both their purpose for reading and what types of books will most positively support the learning of their students. But teachers also make book selections based on the qualities of the books themselves. Of course, this is a natural assumption to make since the book itself will be used to determine whether it will fit the purpose and the audience. Barbara suggested that "They (kindergartners) certainly aren't old enough yet to critique literature for themselves, and I think it is our job to do that." But specifically, what elements of books are those on which teachers focus? The answer can be split into several categories: the appearance of the book, the author, the characters, the pictures, the text, the book's potential to enhance the instruction of particular skills, the cost, award recognition, and the teacher's personal feeling or intuition regarding each book as a whole.

#### **Appearance**

Regarding the "look" of a book, teachers first notice such elements as the cover and the size. Bernice and Helen both feel that the cover is the first item to "catch" their attention and, perhaps, the attention of their students. If a book has an interesting cover, one might be more inclined to peruse it for selection. Also, the cover provides a wonderful opportunity for predicting what a book might be about and what type of story it might tell. The cover of a book is somewhat like the title of a poem or the headline of a news story. If one's first impression is positive, he might be "hooked." The size of a book is also important. Danielle said that she likes the "big books" (oversized books) because they are wonderful instruments to use for tracking, a crucial prereading skill. She said that sometimes she has the students come up and actually move their own fingers across the page to help them see the pattern a reader must follow. Bernice also likes the big books because they are vivid, they get the children's attention, and they are easy for her to handle. Finally, the look of a book might include its feel: hard-cover books and well-made soft-cover books are particularly inviting for teachers who will make consistent use of them in their classrooms.

#### **Author**

Another element these teachers consider is a book's author. Without exception, each teacher interviewed noted many specific authors which either she personally likes or those which are enjoyed by her students. Some of the names which were consistently mentioned were Eric Carle because each of his books contains some sort of "surprise" such as pages with holes or pictures that make noise; Jerry Pallotta, whose ABC animal books are non-fictional and contain realistic



illustrations; Mercer Mayer, author of the *Little Critter* book series; Norman Bridwell, who writes the *Clifford* (The Big Red Dog or the Small Red Puppy) series; Jan Brett, whose illustrations are full and detailed; Stan & Jan Berenstain, co-authors of *The Berenstain Bears* series; Marc Brown, author of the *Arthur* series; and the famous Dr. Seuss. When a teacher becomes acquainted with an author, she takes on more “ownership” of the style and reputation of the author and will usually choose new books by that same author. Helen shared that when she has gotten used to a children’s author, she will put out more of that author’s books so that children will begin to notice the name. When students become acquainted with an author through storytime sessions, they recognize that author’s name and become excited before a reading of another selection by that author. Helen added that she also tries to introduce her children to authors who wrote children’s books many years ago, books which may fall among their favorites today but which may have been written long ago. A good example would be Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, a favorite of children today which was written in 1963, over thirty years ago. Children’s excitement about authors also spills over into the home. Helen added, “By being able to encourage children and mentioning authors over and over again, then that helps the parents maybe look for something in a store.”

#### Characters

These teachers like books that use animals as their characters. Nancy feels that children relate better to things that are not particularly realistic at this age because they still enjoy playing and make-believe. She noted that her students respond well to fairytales and especially nursery rhymes because many of them deal with animals. Barbara also likes the characters who seem to have their own distinct personalities. For example, she loves Edna Preston’s *Squawk to the Moon, Little Goose* because Little Goose exhibits clear characteristics, as evidenced by the following line from the text: “Little Goose waddled away with her head hanging low for shame.” Of course, the text relates the feelings (Glazer, 1991), but the goose takes on the characteristics as written. Barbara said her students can empathize with the character as they hear the book. Nancy added that children love series books that feature the same character involved in a variety of situations. Examples of popular series books are *Clifford, the Big Red Dog* (Bridwell), *Arthur* (Brown), *Danny and the Dinosaur* (Hoff), and *The Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain). Nancy also said her children love the *Sherlock Chick* series (Quackenbush) because those are mystery books. She sometimes will read a couple of these to “whet children’s appetites” and then save the others for later so the children will anticipate the readings.

#### Pictures

Picture style. According to the participants of this study, effective pictures are one of the most important elements a book can possess for several reasons. First, teachers like to see eye-catching pictures, and these can take many forms. Some pictures are quite simple, yet they contain a “feeling” of pleasure. *Grandfather’s Journey* (Say), one of the books chosen for the directed interview, has pictures which were described by two teachers as looking like actual paintings.

Helen and Danielle love the pictures of Jan Brett who takes her colorful illustrations all the way to the borders of the page and always has little “hidden” animals or activities that one can spot for the first time even after several readings of one of her books. Barbara has one book, *I Caught A Lizard* (Conklin), which contains pictures that she describes as looking like they came from the mid 1900’s, but Nancy feels that this is a good experience for children to see because it teaches them that life changes. And Frances prefers actual photograph pictures, especially when she is discussing “real” things. This area is somewhat personal in that different illustrations affect readers in different ways, but the point to remember is that these teachers do make some book selections based on the illustrations inside. Barbara commented that the Scholastic Book Club seems to consistently offer books with beautiful illustrations and she looks forward to receiving those books.

Using pictures to enhance skills. Another element regarding pictures considered by teachers is their potential to support student learning. “Reading pictures” was offered by these teachers as one of the most crucial prereading skills. Students themselves, before they can read, follow, and in fact create, a story by looking at the pictures. According to Helen, “First, they have to enjoy looking at books, looking at the pictures, enjoying and figuring out what a story might be.” Danielle also commented that she shares with her children that learning to review the details of the pictures is the beginning of the reading process. Likewise, the teachers interviewed shared their experiences of using some books with lengthy text simply as picture readalouds. They share the pictures with the class, discuss what those pictures do or could mean, and ask students to talk about what they “see” in the illustrations. As students learn to read or as teachers read the actual text in books, students learn to use picture clues to decode unfamiliar text or to predict what a story might be about by studying the pictures. For this reason, it is important to teachers that the pictures not only be attractive, but that they also correspond well with the text as written (Elley, 1989; Glazer, 1991; Leung, 1992). Helen, however, cautions teachers to beware the book with pretty illustrations but a text with no “meaning” (Huck, 1976), such as “commercial” books written from children’s movies. Danielle’s comments supported this argument. She feels that each story should have a point or meaning so that children will learn that books are not just enjoyable but also have value for learning.

### Text

The previous discussion of pictures leads us quite naturally into the next element of a book considered by these teachers: the text. As stated before, these teachers like for the text to coordinate nicely with the pictures. But there are a variety of other elements with regard to text which influence these teachers’ selection of books.

Length. These teachers like for the text to be short enough and on a level appropriate for the attention and learning level of their students (Trelease, 1985; Kimmel & Segel, 1988). Danielle stated that she tends to lose the attention of her students if she chooses books with lengthy text. In

these cases, she sometimes reads part of the book in the morning and the rest of it in the afternoon, but even this is not an ideal answer since she said sometimes the children tend to forget what happened in the morning reading. Frances similarly felt that lengthy books do not work well in the classroom. Barbara has one book which covers the life story of a frog. She said that it is an information book, not a storybook. Because it is, in her opinion, too much to read, she reads it first, paraphrases it for storytime, and then puts it on the bookrack for the children to view on their own. Bernice also said that books with lengthy text do not hold the interest of the children even if the reader is trying to project herself into the story.

Meaning. Further, these teachers like for the text to have “meaning,” an element which may be related to the purpose for reading or just related to these teachers’ feeling that the book needs a point or message to be shared. Danielle feels that children miss the joys of reading if there is no point to enjoy or a point which they do not “get.” She feels that children “have to understand what they are reading or else it may turn them off to reading.” However, she did add that children can also enjoy books simply by looking at the pictures which is what they do before they learn to read the text. She reminds her students that “reading” the details of the pictures is where reading actually begins. Helen stated that sometimes she might find a book with beautiful pictures but no meaning for her and no meaning, according to her perception, for her students (Huck, 1976). As she explained,

Every book has meaning, but it might be something that’s maybe a little immature for them at this stage, and we’ll talk about that. Let’s say the child brings in a baby book that has just one word on a page. I’ll ask them, ‘Who would use this kind of book? This is a kind of book that you used when you were little, when you first started reading,’ and then I’ll talk about how it doesn’t really have a story, but it names the pictures. Then, I’ll go into like a picture dictionary which evolves to a grownup dictionary where it doesn’t have very many pictures because most of them have used the dictionary, and we pull it out.

Helen went on to explain that, to her, some of the commercial storybooks do not have a lot of meaning, for example, a Ninja Turtle storybook of a battle or a Barbie book about Barbie and Ken going on a camping trip. She does not select these types of books, but if a child brings one in, she might read it if it’s short, or she will give a brief overview or ask the student to tell what it is about. This allows the student to get involved, and it protects the feelings of the child without using up a great deal of class time.

Repetition. Also, text which contains rhyme or repetition is liked by these teachers because they feel that children respond well to books that they can easily follow and memorize (Glazer, 1991) such as the books of Dr. Seuss or *Brown Bear Brown Bear* (Martin). Frances gave the example of Bernard Waber’s *Just Like Abraham Lincoln*, a book which contains the repeated phrase “just like Abraham Lincoln.” She said that although it is a bit lengthy, it holds the students’ attention because they like repeating the phrase. Another type of repetition Frances

mentioned was repetitive text with a musical beat. She brought up one book that has a repeated phrase that resembles the sound of a drum. The children love to hear her try to imitate the sound, and, because it is something different, she says it gets and holds their attention. Bernice also likes rhyme and therefore chooses books of poetry to share with her children (Glazer 1991; Indrisano and Paratore, 1992; Lenz, 1992). She likes the flow and the rhythm, and she will often choose poetry books which also complement a particular SOL or unit of study.

The potential of text to enhance the teaching of skills. Of course, consideration of a book's text includes one's determination that the book may be used to help teach particular skills, so this is another area considered by these teachers as they choose books for their readaloud sessions. These teachers want books that can help them teach skills such as ABC's and numbers, concepts such as theme and comparison/contrast, and particular units dealing with animals, weather, famous people, or general information. Jerry Pallotta's ABC books are mentioned earlier as those which are very helpful for teaching non-fictional information about animals. For example, his ABC butterfly book contains the names and pictures of twenty-six actual varieties of butterflies along with information about their characteristics and habits. Other books, such as those by Dr. Seuss, are helpful for teaching rhyme, and there are a variety of other choices ideal for helping young students become acquainted with numbers, colors, elements of time, and simple geography and history. These teachers consider how well a book will enhance the instruction of the required SOL's while still entertaining the students. As these teachers talked through their think-aloud sessions, they picked up book after book and commented on the usefulness of each in one way or another or the fact that any book could be used if one sat down and truly weighed its potential.

#### Cost and Building a Classroom Library

Cost is another factor teachers consider as they choose books for their classrooms. The Scholastic Book club was cited by each teacher as a wonderful way to acquire new books in a cost-efficient way because a teacher may not only purchase several soft-cover books for the price of one hard-cover, but she may also acquire sets of books with the bonus points earned from each order. Helen indicated that having a large classroom library is beneficial in two major ways. First, it allows children in a classroom to have access to a wide variety of books on a daily basis. Also, it lessens the amount of time particular library books are held by one teacher. If, for example, Helen wants to start a unit on frogs, she may go to the library and check out fifteen books about frogs. She will need to keep these books for as long as possible during the teaching of the unit, thus keeping the books out of circulation for use by others. However, if she has a large collection in her own room, she need not commit the library's books to her own use for a long period of time. Also, she may share her own books with other teachers, further allowing more teachers to use the books owned by the school, and she has a wide reference source available to immediately look up the answers to any questions students might still have after a unit has been completed. Frances alluded to the problem libraries have in servicing an entire school: "For books that are in the

library, I'll write down 'Use Library' in my notebook and I'll try to find it when we begin a unit, but it's hard; the book might be checked out or misplaced."

Helen indicated that one of the smartest ways that school districts can spend their money is by creating extensive book collections in the individual classrooms in each elementary school. "I just feel like," Helen said, "the more books you have in the classroom, with wide varieties of reading levels, the more children will see that they can find out anything they want to from a book." And, because children have different interests, a child who is not interested in one style of frog book may be interested in another, and students can share what they've learned from their books with one another. She said, "The more I have, the more they have access to feeling like they are choosing what appeals to them." Finally, Helen would like for her students to know that there are other places besides the school library to get books. Besides classrooms, there are "public libraries, traveling mobile libraries, and book clubs where children can buy books, and there are bookstores if they want to go and sit and read."

#### Award Status

Another consideration would be Caldecott or other honors given to books. These teachers, and eventually their students, have come to realize that the gold symbol given to those Caldecott award and honor books indicates that they have been designated as valuable pieces of literature for children. Barbara points out the Caldecott symbol to her students, and eventually, when she brings out a book with the symbol on it, they will respond with comments such as "It has one of those pictures on the front, one of those circles on the front." Barbara said that all they know is that the symbol means it is a really good book, but that is all they need to know now. Nancy added that when she sees the Caldecott symbol, she will take a second look. Helen went on to say that she watches those books which are highlighted by bookstores or those responsible for critiquing young children's books. She wishes to remain open-minded to a wide variety of books so that she will choose the best books possible for her students (Hoffman et al., 1993).

#### Personal preferences

Favorites. Additionally, teachers consider their own feelings about books when they begin choosing those which will be included in read-aloud sessions in their classrooms. A teacher may have a childhood favorite of her own (Popp, 1996), a favorite of her own children, or, as Danielle stated, a book which simply makes a teacher feel good when she reads it or one that will get the students' attention. She loves the books of Maurice Sendak because of their potential to promote the use of imagination (Glazer, 1991). Frances commented that she herself loves the fairytales, especially those of Paul Galdone. She said some teachers don't like fairytales because they do not present life in a realistic way but added that she does use them because life doesn't have to be that serious, and that she likes "the happy ending."

Providing variety. As Barbara sifted through books she will use during her spring unit, she noticed that she has a great number of non-fiction books on the elementary level. Nancy feels that

this is because Barbara is strong in math and that math and science are interrelated. Barbara added, “It’s just something about my background that makes me think if I’m reading, it needs to be for some other purpose than pleasure.” However, with a eye toward what will work best with her students, Barbara includes a great deal of fiction as well.

Intuition. Several teachers indicated that sometimes they just “know” that their students will love a book or just “feel” that a particular book would not be a good choice. Danielle explained: “When I go to the bookshelf, I think, if a book is not good for that particular time, I put it back. It just depends on what’s going on in the classroom, what’s going on in the environment and that kind of thing.” Bernice, too, said she can just kind of tell if a particular book will be of high interest to her students, one of the reasons she usually previews each story she plans to read aloud. Perhaps all of the issues discussed in this section deal to some degree with intuition and personal feeling, but sometimes there is little more explanation than, as Frances said upon reading one of the books in the focused book review, “I don’t know. It just doesn’t interest me.”

### **What Issues of Controversy in Trade Books’ Content Do Kindergarten Teachers Consider When Selecting Them for Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms?**

To arrive at a discussion of what elements teachers cite for not selecting particular books, participants were asked if there were certain books or types of books which they would not choose. Data were also taken from ideas initiated by teachers during the directed think-aloud. There were several content-related elements which caused these teachers concern: religion, promotion of negative concepts, dialect, non-resolved rebellion, issues of race, and violence.

#### Religion

Because there is a great deal of controversy surrounding the teaching or discussion of religion in schools today, the majority of those interviewed (five of the six) indicated that they try not to share books which deal specifically with a particular religion or ones which seem to contain religious instruction. Calderhead (1984) reminds us that decisions made within the scope of real life are often subject to certain constraints or regulations. Only Helen remarked that she feels comfortable sharing the Bible (Huck, 1976) or other religious materials, but she also indicated that in her school district, discussion and celebration of religious holidays and concepts, at least in the elementary setting, is not as controversial as it may be in other areas. Therefore, she feels comfortable in discussing these subjects if they arise as the result of a particular readaloud selection. She said,

I’m sure at the high school level they are doing a lot more screening, but here [the elementary school] we can teach religion; we can have visible signs of religion. It’s not a course, but if a child brings in a Sunday school book that is a story of Noah’s Ark, I’m going to read it. If a child brings a book about the littlest angel that he got in his Sunday school class, I’m going to

read it because for that child, in his family, that is important, and if he brings it for show and share, that's a very important thing. I don't turn anything down if it's something that the child is interested in and I don't have any restrictive guidelines.

She went on to say that she also includes units on a variety of religions and religious celebrations, such as Hanukkah, as studies of other people and customs.

#### Promotion of Negative Concepts

Another concern on the part of two teachers is the tendency of some books to promote such negative concepts as stereotyping and sexual harassment (Alexander, 1992) and, in some cases, to use historical text considered too graphic for young children. One book given as an example of promoting sexual harassment is one which deals with the seemingly simple story of firefighters who end up arguing over who will get a drink of water for the young and beautiful female character. Nancy and Barbara cited sassy language, such as a child's chanting of "na na na na na, na," as a reason for not using a particular book. They feel that if something appears in print and they read it to their classes, the students may feel as if the teachers are condoning it. They would rather their selected books present a positive image. Danielle said that though she has heard parents argue about books which they feel contain demonic images or references, such references have not been obvious to her as she has chosen books for use in her classroom.

#### Dialect

One concern arose from the selection *Working Cotton* (Williams), one of the books used in the focused book review. The dialect of the text is written realistically as that of a young, southern African-American child, and two teachers feel that this book might best be used with older children for several reasons. First, young children might giggle or make fun of the dialect, unintentionally embarrassing or offending children who speak or whose families speak in this way. Also, these teachers feel that kindergarten children just beginning to learn the basics of a Standard English may become confused about what is Standard and Non-Standard if they have access to readaloud materials containing dialect which is Non-Standard and which may be spoken by children in the classroom. These teachers feel that older children might better be able to view the dialect of a particular culture more clearly with regard to a people and a historical background. One teacher commented that this is not a matter of avoidance of a cultural piece but rather postponement to an age level more appropriate for the reality of the text.

#### Non-resolved rebellion

Another area of concern raised by teachers deals with books which include rebellious attitudes on the part of characters without the benefit of positive resolution. Children can see detrimental behavior and in some cases may personally identify with it, but the positive learning comes with the students' seeing that there are good ways to resolve problems and handle conflict. No particular book was given as an example, but the indication was made that if a book deals with problems on the part of characters, teachers will be looking for a resolution from which a positive

lesson may be learned.

### Issues of Race

Nancy suggested that teachers need to be careful with books dealing with race or racial issues. She said that at this age her children do not really know color and that they feel comfortable with one another simply as friends and fellow human beings. Nancy noted that some of the new literature dealing with famous people seems to actually promote racism by suggesting that one particular race is more “unfair and unjust” and that “. . . all people of that race are that way.” She does not want her children to get the impression that one race is better or worse than another. Helen has a similar approach to this issue, stating, “I teach my children that they’re all humans, and that’s all they need.” She noted that at this age, racial awareness is not an issue and her students do not often question cultural characters in books, but she does allow questions to guide a discussion. If they ask, she’ll carry it further. Otherwise, as she says, “I personally don’t like to make an issue of [color]. It’s more ‘What do you see? Tell me what you see.’” Even when teaching famous Black Americans such as Harriet Tubman or Martin Luther King, Jr., Helen does not use them to teach race but rather to teach the life of an important person in history. She then reminds her students that the reason they can learn about these people from the past is because someone wrote down the words, and once again, the wonderful value of books is brought out for her children.

### Violence

Violence in books is of concern to Nancy and Barbara, but the violence they have seen is specifically related to nonfictional, historical accounts of slavery. One book used an example is *Minty* (Pinkney), a story of Harriet Tubman. Nancy feels that the book contains a great deal of violence which she deems unnecessary in the classroom. Barbara added that in the last couple of years she has noticed an increase in the number of books which seem too graphic for young children. As an example, she mentioned another book dealing with Harriet Tubman which has beautiful illustrations but very graphic text dealing with beatings and the way that slaves were treated. She feels that kindergarten students are too young to be able to understand that particular concept and to put it into historical context.

Bernice mentioned several times that she likes “friendly” books, books where everything works out well, and she believes children in general like books and stories with happy endings. She said that because children see enough violence on television, she tries to choose books which are positive.

Only Helen has never run into any type of children’s book which she would deem inappropriate. Of course, there are some that she feels would not be as effective for use in storytime sessions, but those reasons do not fall into a category of controversy. According to Luke et al. (1986), most teachers view children’s literature as non-problematic and therefore usually rely on their own instincts and experience (Hargreaves, 1979). Luke et al. go on to caution



that selection simultaneously causes rejection of other books, and this might mean presenting to the children stereotypical or exclusive viewpoints. However, Helen believes that a teacher owes it to her students to choose good books from all available sources. If she does so, her children will have access to many types of books with a variety of characters and settings. A fact which further strengthens Helen's viewpoint is the fact that she shares in some way, without exception, each book that is brought in by one of her students. Her commitment to giving her students varied and rich experiences is evident through her personal commitment to stay abreast of new book additions to the field and the best of those which already exist. "I'm not on those boards," says Helen. "I'm not choosing what wins the award. What I might choose to win an award might be different from somebody else, but I need to make sure that I am broad minded enough to include what [books] a wide variety of people have encouraged us to use in the classroom and to let children have access to them."

#### The Value of Previewing

Often, a concern about a book will not be recognized until the book is actually read, and each teacher indicated that it is a good idea to preview books either to find out if they will be an effective selection for the readaloud session or simply make sure there is nothing in them that will be an unpleasant surprise upon reading in front of thirty eager little faces (Trelease, 1985; Teale and Sulzby, 1996). Danielle explained that on one occasion she began reading a book in which the author was concentrating, even pushing, one specific religion. Her concern was not with the particular religion but rather with the potential problems that could arise if students gave their parents the impression that one religion was being stressed in the classroom. She made the decision to complete the book because she felt that children might have more questions if she were to stop reading (Calderhead, 1964), but because of the controversy over religion in schools, and because of potential problems, Danielle reconsidered the fact that previewing books might prove to be a good idea. Bernice also tries to preview her books to determine simply whether or not they will hold the interest of her children. She said, "You can kind of tell if it will [hold their attention]."

#### **What Additional Factors Influence Kindergarten Teachers' Selection of Trade Books for Use in Readaloud Sessions in Their Classrooms?**

Most of the information learned regarding factors which influence book selection have been discussed in the previous sections, but there is one factor which has not yet been mentioned: recommendation of books by others. Several teachers suggested that they share ideas with other teachers about books which have worked well with their students, and they also value those same types of suggestions made by others. Nancy and Barbara work closely together and often one will use a book simply on the other's advice that it has been received well by her class. This suggests a relationship filled with trust and professionalism. Other teachers interviewed share books donated

by parents or school organizations as those which come well-recommended, and many offer their colleagues suggestions as to “good” books.

Danielle admitted that when she began her first year as a kindergarten teacher, she did not know much about books, and so she went to another teacher whom she felt was very familiar with children’s literature and its potential uses. Danielle said of this teacher, “She loves books, and so I asked her for suggestions, and when she ran across some interesting ones, she would share them with me.” Danielle said another source from which she learns about books is the Scholastic Book Club, whose small summaries help her to learn a lot about the new and reprinted books coming out onto the market. Bernice also has taken suggestions of other teachers regarding good books. As she puts it, “If they have a good book, why not?” And, of course, she is willing to share her books with others.

### **Reading Strategies Relating to Readaloud Sessions**

As discussed earlier in this report, research has found that the use of particular reading strategies during readaloud sessions can further promote children’s literacy growth (Roser, 1987; Kimmel & Segel, 1988; Teale, Martinez, and Glass, 1989; Hoffman et al. 1991; Huck, 1992). In fact, Teale (1982) indicates that the nature of the reading activities is as important as the frequency of the events with regard to literacy development. And, Teale, Martinez, and Glass (1989) suggest the realization that “classroom storybook readings are at once social, cognitive, and literary events” illuminates the importance of teachers’ roles during the storytime activity (p. 181). Following is discussion of these participants readaloud strategies.

### **Types of Readaloud Strategies Used**

To begin, all teachers involved in this study mentioned the fact that a variety of books are consistently displayed throughout their rooms. This promotes their children's daily interaction with books which are related to current units of study. During the think-aloud sessions, these teachers used extensive piles and lists of books to plan their use of readalouds for an upcoming unit. Further, Helen has all of her books, except those relating to particular holiday seasons, on display all year, and there is a particular display used to hold those books relating to the unit of study going on at any one particular time during the year. While this is not exactly a reading session strategy, it is one which promotes student interaction with books on a regular basis. Those strategies which are used by these teachers during the actual readaloud session fall into three distinct categories: prereading, during reading, and post reading.

#### **Prereading**

Prereading strategies were discussed by these teachers as involving a variety of techniques used prior to actually beginning a story. For example, these teachers first discuss the cover of a book with children. They ask children to share their ideas about what the title might mean and how the

cover illustration relates to what they might find inside, early predicting skills. These teachers also discuss the parts of the book such as the cover, the title page, and the table of contents and index if applicable (Coody, 1983). Helen specifically discusses the type of book being read and its purpose, whether it is a fictional or non-fictional book, and how it could be used by others (Huck, 1992). These teachers also call attention to the author and whether or not the book has received a Caldecott or other honor. Finally, these teachers introduce situations or concepts to the children and discuss these prior to reading the stories. One very interesting prereading strategy in which Helen involves her students is the pre-unit think-aloud. For example, as spring approaches, she prepares a bulletin board with the question "What comes in the spring?" Then, the students think out loud about all the things that come with spring. This leads into her use of many readaloud books, both for reading and for displaying on the show and share rack, dealing with everything from trees and wind to crickets and frogs. And, of course she includes myriad activities related to the books and ideas covered.

#### During Reading

The role of the reader. During the actual reading of the story, there are several strategies that these teachers mentioned as those they use to enhance storytime and children's learning. One major idea expressed is the responsibility of the reader to make the story interesting (Trelease, 1985; Teale and Sulzby, 1996). These teachers cited use of inflection, excitement in the voice, paying particular attention to the punctuation, and use of a tone and mannerisms designed to make the story "come alive." Higgins (1965) compares reading to a form of drama needing, of course, dramatic presentation (p. 54). To many of the teachers interviewed, how one reads is as important as what one reads because if the students sense that reading is a chore, they may be turned off to books. However, if students see excitement in the reader, they will be more active listeners and will be more positively affected by the readaloud session. Bernice believes that children use all of their senses during a readaloud session, senses which she believes are keener than ours:

I think kids can sense how you feel about books and how you feel about reading, says Bernice. If you sit there (just reading) and act like you are nervous and this is just a chore to you, I think kids can kind of pick up on things like adults can. Kids are better at that than we are. Nobody will enjoy a story when you are just sitting there and it is just a chore.

Helen commented that reading a book aloud is like holding a conversation. If we are discussing an exciting event, our voices will change. Consequently, if we are reading an exciting story, our voices should make that apparent to the children. She believes that this connection between books and conversation will get the children into "feeling like stories in books are just like regular life." Helen and Bernice added that a good story reader can hold the attention of children as well as any other type of activity in which they become involved. Bernice also suggested that any type of book, even a non-fiction one, can be made interesting by the manner in which it is delivered. In essence, children should enjoy the reading experience and not just the book. Why is this so

important? According to Helen, “They might see adults reading magazines or a newspaper, but if they don’t see that reading is a part of normal life, then they’re not going to see that reading is anything but a chore when they come to school” (Chambers, 1983; Trelease, 1985).

Teachers as models. Additionally, these teachers serve as models during the readaloud session. They first model appropriate handling of books so that students may see that books should be cherished and respected (Higgins, 1965). As I interviewed Danielle, she exhibited a wonderful example of this type of modeling. She seems to really enjoy books. She holds them carefully, turning the pages gently, showing almost a respect for the books (Trelease, 1985). When she touches them, she does not manhandle them and put them aside but rather picks each up lovingly. And when she recognizes a particular book, she gets a look of joy on her face, exclaiming “Oh, yes, I know this one!” as if there has been established a personal relationship between herself and the story and she recognizes an old “friend.” Actually, each of the teachers interviewed exhibits\ this same type of reaction to those books which they deemed their favorites. If a teacher handles a book in a loving way, students see books as worthy of care and pride.

Also, these teachers, when reading aloud, model basic reading skills and procedures. The “big” books used by Danielle and Bernice allow them to demonstrate the natural left-to-right process involved in reading. Further, the exciting reading style supported by Bernice and Helen helps their students to become more involved in the story itself, and the questioning and comprehension techniques modeled by these teachers during reading aids in their students’ ability to reason and develop their own comprehension (Roser and Martinez, 1985; Roser, 1987).

Discussion of pictures. Another strategy that occurs during reading is the discussion of pictures. These teachers stop periodically during the story to ask questions about the pictures and promote some predicting about what may still be to come in the book. Pictures are also used to decode unfamiliar text. For example, Helen suggested that if a teacher reads “The girl has on a red \_\_\_? \_\_\_” and the students cannot read the word, she may ask them to study the picture. When they see the clothing item that is red, they will have the answer which completes the sentence. Finally, pictures are used independently of the text if time or lengthy text do not permit complete reading of a particular story. Teachers using this strategy ask the students to talk about what they see in the pictures and what they think is happening.

Strategic questioning/discussion. Another strategy that these teachers use during reading is strategic questioning designed to help guide children through the story or to promote discussion of anticipated events (Roser, 1987; Teale and Sulzby, 1996; Wolf et al., 1996). By asking guiding questions and encouraging children to share their thoughts, they can help their children focus on a variety of story aspects and themes (Morrow, 1984; Roser 1987). These teachers also discuss the actions of the characters and why they might feel or act as they do, and then ask students how they might handle the situation if they were in the story (Teale and Sulzby, 1996). Teale and Sulzby (1996) suggest that “It is this talk about books that gives storybook reading its powerful influence

on young children's literacy development" (p. 7).

Consideration of vocabulary. If a story has vocabulary that is too difficult for children, these teachers suggested that they would stop and explain the meaning of the word or simply replace the word with one which the children will understand so the story can go on uninterrupted (Kimmel & Segel, 1988). Danielle explained that she sometimes changes higher level words to simple ones or adds words to make the book make sense, to bring it to the children's level. Bernice had a similar opinion, saying, "You don't have to read every book word for word. You can delete; you can add. If there is a vocabulary word in there that you think is above their heads, sometimes it's good [for building vocabulary] (Elley, 1989; Leung, 1992), but at times you can use another word and just make it fun." Another strategy would be to stop and explain the meaning of the word, give some familiar synonyms or examples of use, and allow discussion. This would allow greater possibility for vocabulary growth (Senechal et al., 1996). Several of these teachers also suggested summarizing lengthy text by leaving out some of the details in order to simply relate a character's actions.

#### Post-Reading

Activities. After the story has been completed, these teachers rely on a variety of techniques to make the experience more effective for their students. One of the most common post-reading techniques involves the use of related activities. For example, after reading Easter books, Helen's students discuss the differences between real and make-believe eggs, make "egg art," and write egg stories. Her unit on frogs involves bringing in frog eggs, making frogs out of various materials, making little frog books and big frog books, and using specific books, such as *How A Seed Grows* (Jordan) to precede their planting of a garden. Barbara actually hatches chicks in her classroom during her spring unit and asks children to bring in tadpoles to view during the frog studies. Barbara shared that when the countdown to hatching begins, the kids "go wild." Nancy uses books to introduce science concepts after which she has her class perform experiments or complete math or science activities such as collecting bugs for observation, and Frances reads a book about water to introduce an experiment on water evaporation.

Nancy shared a reading game that is a favorite of students. The game is played in a format similar to the way taped trade books are read: one child goes to the front of the room with his classroom reading workbook. All of the other students follow along as the child reads, and at the end of the page, each of which has only a few words, he rings a bell to signal the "turning of the page." Nancy said her children really enjoy the "game" while they are actually improving their literacy skills.

Relating literature. Another effective post-reading technique involves forming relationships between the book studied and other books or units of study. For example, after reading *Working Cotton* (Williams) with her class, Helen discussed the relationship between that book and *Apple Picking Time* (Slawson and Ray), read earlier in the year. She also related the book to their field

trip to the orchards, the processing of the fruit, and the workers they met while there. Further, after reading aloud Grandfather's *Journey* (Say), she asked her children if they remembered studying a group of people who got onto a ship and faced many dangers in order to go to a new and perhaps better land. Helen forms relationships between books she reads and current as well as historical information. Nancy enjoys sharing the *Sherlock Chick* (Quackenbush) books because they have the same character involved in a variety of situations, and the children can become familiar with the character and his feelings. She also enjoys sharing different versions of the same story to promote a discussion of the similarities and differences between the texts. Barbara uses the book *Tops and Bottoms* (Stevens) in conjunction with similar thematic stories such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper* and *The Little Red Hen* to bring out the point that one should complete his work first and have fun later. And Bernice likes to use different books which fall under the same general heading but deal with specific subcategories. For example, when discussing arctic birds, she uses one book about penguins and one about puffins for an exploration into comparison and contrast (Wolf, 1996).

**Questioning.** Bernice uses question and answer time after reading to allow students to delve more deeply into a story or information and to do some critical thinking (Mendoza, 1985). After reading Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, she asks her students to discuss the types of animals that are in the book, what makes them wild, and what different types of pets her students might select for Max and why. Further, she extends the activity by charting the responses to share a mini math lesson. During the Valentine holiday, Frances shares *The Valentine's Day Grump* (Greydanus) with her students, and then she asks them to discuss why they believe the main character is being so grumpy.

All of the teachers interviewed share some of the strategies they use for readaloud sessions. The degree to which they use these strategies varies, but each expresses the idea that the reading of a book during a readaloud session is more than simply the vocalizing of words from paper pages.

### **Results Regarding the Four Books Chosen for Use in the Focused Book Review**

All books chosen for use in this study received either the Caldecott Award or a Caldecott Honor distinction between the years 1993 and 1996. It is necessary to note here that in the case of each book, the fact that it was a Caldecott award or honor book was mentioned by several teachers. These teachers not only respect this award as one which symbolizes the quality of illustrations in a book, but they also share this respect with their students. Barbara points out the Caldecott symbol to her students, and eventually, when she brings out a book with the symbol on it, they will respond with comments such as "It has one of those pictures on the front, one of those circles on the front." Barbara said that all they know is that the symbol means it is a really good book, but that is all they need to know now. Nancy added that when she sees the Caldecott symbol, she will

take a second look.

Further, all four books are geared toward children ages four through eight, a reading level assigned by the publishers and covering the wide range of children just turning four through those in second or third grade. Following is the analysis of the comments made by these six participants regarding the possible use of these four books in readaloud sessions in their classrooms. With regard to each individual book, the positive comments and concerns on the part of these teachers regarding these books as readaloud choices are discussed together within the confines of several subcategories.

### **Specific Results by Book**

#### **Yo! Yes? (Writer/Illustrator - Chris Raschka)**

This story involves the development of a friendship between an African-American child and a Caucasian child. Each uses only one-word expressions which reflect each child's own dialect. Though only two teachers were familiar with this book, all six indicated that they would consider using this book in their classrooms for its many strengths. There were also some concerns related to the book's text, but those teachers raising the concerns also suggested possible solutions which would still allow them to use the book in a positive way. Following are the ideas generated by these participants regarding the use of the book *Yo! Yes?*

**Tendency to promote rich discussion.** *Yo! Yes?* promotes discussion in a variety of areas. First, the text is simple. Barbara noted that though the phrases are only one word each, many of which are the required sight words for the grade level, the reader can get the "gist" of the intended meaning. Nancy feels that this is quite a positive element because the reader is not being "spoon-fed" but rather is having to figure out the meaning by making inferences. Barbara added that this book is similar in nature to a wordless picture book where the reader would have to figure out the storyline. Bernice likes the simplicity of the vocabulary also because she feels students could almost pick this up and read it for themselves pretty quickly.

Bernice and Danielle expressed concern that the students might not initially "get" the meaning of the short phrases or the theme as a whole but that discussion during and after the reading could help guide students toward a deeper understanding. After using this with one class, Danielle found her students to be a little confused as to the meaning, and she had to do some post-reading explanation and questioning to help them understand. Helen suggested talking with students about why they think the book is written so simply and what they think it means, adding that questions such as "What do you think they are talking about?" and "What do you think he wants him to look at?" would promote a wonderful discussion between students regarding the meaning of the book.

Also, Helen, when using this book, asks the children to explain why the conversation is so simple yet so meaningful, and children could discuss other one-word phrases which hold specific meaning. After reading this with one class, Helen had her students make their own picture or

poster books to go along with the ideas they covered. She recalled the text written by one little girl about herself and her friend: “Me, You, Two.” Another related activity undertaken in Helen’s class was a study of the valentine heart candy purchased during the Valentine holiday. Each day, each student would choose one heart, and then the class would discuss the meaning of the simple sayings: “Hey Girl, Sweet Thing, Cool.” Finally, Helen said that a correlation could be made to friendship and how it also can be very “simple.” Helen feels that this book illustrates the simplicity of friendship, and Danielle, realizing that kindergarten children are very eager to make friends, believes this book would help them envision one way to begin the process.

Tendency to enhance the introduction of skills. The one-word dialogue in *Yo! Yes?* is spoken with a variety of feelings expressed to the reader by means of punctuation. Nancy commented that this dialogue style would provide a teacher a great way to show how a reader’s paying attention to the punctuation helps him or her to be a more expressive reader and how it helps the text to come alive for the listeners. According to Barbara, her required English series gives her students” . . . an opportunity to do a lot more sophisticated things than you think the kindergarten level is able to do: punctuation, reading with expression for a question mark, an exclamation mark, quotation marks.” She suggests that the one-word expressions in this book would provide a way to help model for children the expression that results from careful attention to punctuation.

Realistic language. The language in *Yo! Yes?* is realistic for our time. Many of these teachers’ students are familiar with the word Yo! and could easily discuss its use in current conversation. Nancy commented that the characters’ interpretation of one another’s comments brings them together as friends. In other words, their differences bring them together. She went on to say that children could think of other slang words they use and the correct situations in which they could be used. Barbara agreed that a discussion of the use of slang would be a good idea because in certain, perhaps formal, situations, the use of a slang word could be considered rude or inappropriate.

Theme. Some teachers felt that the theme of *Yo! Yes?*, black and white coming together to be friends, could be incorporated into a unit on famous black Americans. The characters in the book are of different races, but yet they become friends, and Danielle indicated that she would definitely pull out the friendship issue as well as that of the racial differences not interfering with the boys’ ability to create a friendship. Other teachers indicated that they would not pull out the racial issue unless the children initiated this subject by means of questions because they feel that at this age children think of one another as simply friends.

*Grandfather’s Journey* (Writer/Illustrator - Allen Say)

This is the story of a young oriental boy whose grandfather and father alike feel torn between their desire to live in America and their longing to return to their homeland of Japan. At the end, the boy himself begins to experience a desire to see the land of his ancestors, and at this point he feels he truly understands his grandfather. Only one teacher was familiar with this book, and three



indicated they would consider it for use during readaloud sessions. There were both positive comments and concerns regarding use of this book for readaloud sessions in the kindergarten classroom. Following are the ideas generated by these participants regarding the use of the book *Grandfather's Journey*.

Reality of text and illustrations. Bernice commented that the story, the text, of *Grandfather's Journey* almost helped her feel the emotions of the characters, and she would use this book to discuss how a person can like two places at the same time. Cullinan (1992) addressed this characteristic of a book's quality when commenting that the words of literature are often lyrical, poetic, and stylized. Barbara commented that the pictures resemble watercolors that one could almost frame, and Danielle compared them to portraits. Danielle believes her children would like these pictures because they are "real" and detailed. Bernice agreed that the pictures are vivid and realistic, characteristics that attracted her attention.

Usefulness for enhancing other units of study. *Grandfather's Journey* could be used in conjunction with other units. Helen, after using this book for a readaloud session, asked her children if they remembered studying another group of people who traveled across the ocean to a new, and in their eyes better, world. This led her to a discussion of the pilgrims and their feelings and fears about a new land. Danielle felt that this would have been a good book to have used in conjunction with a discussion of the recent Olympic Games held in Japan. Her students had asked her why many of the people looked the way they did, and she thought of that while looking at this particular book. She further felt it would work well with a unit on families, Christopher Columbus, or methods of transportation. Bernice also noticed the text's concentration on families and togetherness, noting that children like books about families.

Comprehension level. Nancy and Barbara, who indicated they probably would not use *Grandfather's Journey*, suggested that some older children or those in different communities might relate better to the concepts of change, emotion, culture, and war as introduced in this book than would their young students. They indicated that their kindergarten students might not easily identify with the elements of the story and so it would be "over their heads." Frances also said that it might be difficult for her students to follow. Barbara believes that children need to be able to relate to a book, and the sophisticated way in which this book deals with the major themes she felt would not be effective. Nancy said that it is a matter of exposure. Because her students have not, as a general rule, had this type of worldwide travel exposure, and because they do not really have the spatial concept of our world's lands, they probably would not relate very well to this selection. Helen felt a little differently, commenting that because her students have not, and probably would not, travel to fantastic places, they would probably be very interested because the book deals with a concept so foreign to them (Glazer, 1991).

*Tops and Bottoms* (Adapter/Illustrator - Janet Stevens)

This is an amusing tale of a clever rabbit who outwits a lazy bear. Through deals based on

phrases with double meanings, the rabbit is able to cheat the bear out of some wonderful vegetables. All teachers interviewed were familiar with this book and indicated their intention to continue using it in their classrooms for many reasons. There was some concern on the part of some teachers who had used it regarding their students' ability to easily comprehend the point of the text, but these teachers used effective questioning or rereading strategies to help children enjoy the book's message. Following are the ideas generated by these participants regarding the use of the book *Tops and Bottoms*.

Usefulness for introducing skills, concepts, and themes. Barbara believes *Tops and Bottoms* is an effective book for introducing the letter "B" and the concept of up and down, and she and Bernice both use it to introduce the hibernation habits of bears. Barbara also uses this book in conjunction with similar thematic stories such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper* and *The Little Red Hen* to bring out the point that one should complete his work first and have fun later. She likes the fact that this work ethic is presented in a humorous way (Huck, 1992), one that would entertain the children while teaching them. Danielle uses this book to introduce opposites, tops and bottoms, and parts of a whole. Helen has used it to discuss animals and vegetables and other foods which grow from the ground, and she has used it in connection with a garden study. Danielle and Bernice as well like this book for its use in promoting a discussion of the many types of vegetables of which children may not be aware. Helen has also discussed the working relationship between the bear and the rabbit as well as the fictional versus non-fictional relationships between these two animals. She also indicated that this particular book could be one chosen just for fun! Nancy pointed out that the theme could be used to initiate a discussion relevant to the classroom. Children, after hearing the story, could be approached with the questions, "If you had to share work with the bear or the hare, which one would you want to share work with? Which one would you want to sit beside?" She believes children could learn a lesson about laziness and how others may perceive one if he is lazy. Danielle as well believes this book is wonderful for discussing laziness and its potential effects.

Quality of the illustrations. *Tops and Bottoms* has colorful and "full" illustrations. Helen commented that she could spend three days just discussing the cover and asking the children to talk about what they see and what they think is going on. Barbara commented that the house in the book, from page to page, progressively looks worse, which goes along with the progressive laziness of the bear described in the text (Elley, 1989). She saw this as a good connection to the text. Danielle said that the pictures are her favorite part of this book because they are colorful and full of details, like those of Jan Brett, whose pages, according to Danielle, have "no empty spot." Frances, too, enjoyed the pictures.

Comprehension level. Several of these teachers expressed concern about students not readily "getting" the irony of *Tops and Bottoms* but added that with strategic questioning and post-reading discussion, the children would most likely be able to enjoy the point of the story. Helen

stated that questions such as “What do you think happened?” and “What are the bear and the hare thinking?” may help children comprehend more easily. Helen further suggested that children might more easily comprehend books with which they’ve had difficulty if they are reread later in the year. She said her students get the point of books better by the end of the year after being involved in book studies. Children begin to recognize beginning, middle, and end and realize that some books are just plain silly and some are teaching stories.

So, depending on what time of year you choose a story like this, says Helen, if you reread it again and they remember, they are probably going to have more idea of what the meaning of the story is at the end where at the beginning they are going to look mostly at the pictures and make up their own story.

*Working Cotton* (Writer - Sherley Anne Williams; Illustrator - Carole Byard)

This book attempts to depict, through the eyes of a child, the experience of the members of a family as they all go into the cotton fields to pick cotton. The text, which is written in the dialect of the characters, seems to portray both the unstoppable positivism of childhood while still reminding the reader of the difficulties and burdens involved with such an experience. Only one teacher was familiar with this book, and four indicated that they would consider it for use in their classrooms. While there were positive comments from all teachers regarding this book, there was one major concern with respect to the text. Following are the ideas generated by these participants regarding the use of the book *Working Cotton*.

Quality of the illustrations. Several teachers commented on the beauty of the pictures in *Working Cotton*, and Helen said that as she looked through the book for the first time at a conference, the illustrations piqued her interest.

Relationship to other books. *Working Cotton* could be compared with similar stories. Helen said that as she began previewing the book, she saw similarities between it and Slawson & Ray’s *Apple Picking Time*, a story about how members of a whole town work together to pick apples from the orchards. Though the two books’ settings and the purposes of the characters are different, each depicts families working together, and Helen brought this out after reading the book with her students. Barbara also liked the book’s ability to teach the differences in families, what work they do, and how they live. In connection with the study of harvesting food, Helen led her class on a field trip to a local orchard, and her reading of *Working Cotton* (Williams) naturally evolved into a discussion of the connection between the children’s experience and the experience of the characters in the book.

Usefulness in introducing related units of study. Helen once used *Working Cotton* to lead into a discussion of plants, growing cotton, weather and types of soil necessary to produce certain crops, and hands-on activities involving cotton. Danielle shared that she could use the book not only to discuss seasons and the growing of cotton but also to discuss the five senses: smelling cotton, touching cotton, etc. She has used real cotton to plan activities with her class before, and

she laughed when relating that her students often think that cotton just starts out in a bag in WalMart!

*Working Cotton* could also be used in conjunction with a discussion of famous Black Americans, slavery, or the plantation system. From her discussion of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, Helen led the children into a mini-lesson about people of long ago, how some people owned other people, and how many of these “slaves” worked on huge plantations. As she got into the book *Working Cotton* (Williams), she discussed with her students the differences between slaves and people paid to pick cotton, as the characters in this book were, but she also shared with them that some slaves were treated well and some were not. Finally, she reminded them that there were black Americans enslaved, but there have also been White Americans and others, such as St. Patrick, who were slaves for a period of time. Frances also felt this would be a suitable book for use with her unit on Harriet Tubman and slavery. Although these particular characters were not slaves, *Working Cotton* helps to illustrate the difficulty of the work slaves had to do.

Emotional characteristics. The difficult life of the speaker in *Working Cotton* could be used to prompt a discussion between students and their teacher. Danielle said that she would discuss the fact that the child in the story might not have had the opportunity for an education and that they (her students) should feel blessed to be able to attend school. Bernice described this story as one she could imagine and “feel.” She said that it stirred up her emotions, and she believes it would touch her students, whom she describes as “sensitive characters.” According to Huck (1976), “The words of picture books are as important as the illustrations, and may help children develop an early sensitivity to the imaginative use of language.”

Cultural theme. The depiction of a specific culture can promote children’s awareness of cultures other than their own. Bernice believes children need exposure to many forms of books which may depict different cultures of people. She said, “We don’t need to use all fairytales; sometimes we need something that is a little bit different from the norm. Kids like different stories too.” Finazzo (1997) agrees with this, stating that multicultural literature can offer insight into differing family structures and experiences, and Woodson (1995) suggests that books focusing on different cultures can help teach children tolerance and diversity. Helen explained that she can offer her children access to books dealing with a wide variety of cultures simply by choosing good books because the expansion is taking place among authors:

I think first a book draws my interest and through the years of teaching there are a wider variety of books available, so when you see a book and you pick it up, if it happens to be a book about Spanish Americans or Afro-Americans or Japanese Americans or whatever, you read the story to see if it has a good story.

A good example to illustrate Helen’s point is her use of Jordan’s *How A Seed Grows*.” Helen uses this book in the spring because her students plant gardens, and this book discusses how a seed uses water, nutrients from the soil, and sunlight to become a plant, flower, or tree. The

character: a young, African-American girl. By simply choosing a good book, Helen has offered her children cultural variety, a discussion of which could be prompted by students' questions.

Use of dialect. The realistic language in *Working Cotton* was of concern to two teachers. The dialect of the text is written realistically as that of a young, southern African-American child, and these teachers feel that this book might best be used with older children for several reasons. First, young children might giggle at or make fun of the dialect, unintentionally embarrassing or offending children who speak or whose families speak in this way. This concern affects these teachers' teaching practices as well. When a student makes a statement in Non-Standard language, these teachers, rather than saying "That's wrong; you shouldn't say that," choose to restate the question in Standard English or answer the question in Standard English, thus modeling the Standard usage of words. Also, these teachers feel that kindergarten children just beginning to learn the basics of a Standard English may become confused about what is Standard and Non-Standard if they have access to read-aloud materials containing dialect which is Non-Standard. Presenting them with two dialects while attempting to teach them that only one is actually Standard might prove to confuse them at this young age. These teachers feel that older children might better be able to view the dialect of a particular culture more clearly with regard to a people and a historical background. One teacher commented that this is not a matter of avoidance of a cultural piece but rather postponement to an age level more appropriate for the reality of the text. Other teachers stated that the language is positive because it is realistic (Kurtz, 1996), that it is written "just the way they talk," and that perhaps it could promote a discussion of language across time or how one's speech depends upon the area in which he or she has grown up.

Comprehension level. One teacher expressed concern that her students might not be able to follow the language or the storyline as written in *Working Cotton*. She and the others who have a concern with the language made the point that with so many books to choose from, they probably would make a choice of which they were more sure.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Through my interviews and think-aloud sessions with the participants of this study, I heard myriad examples of factors which influence their selection of materials for readaloud sessions in their elementary classrooms as well as a variety of strategies used to enhance those readaloud sessions. These teachers all have a firm belief in the power of reading aloud, and I believe they clearly illustrate a desire to make the readaloud session a positive and strong one for the students in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER IV: REFLECTIONS

Through this inquiry, I have had the opportunity to hear the ideas and thoughts of six kindergarten teachers regarding the factors that influence their selection of trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their classrooms. The data suggest that these teachers are not only using reading aloud to help children learn but that they are also using a variety of books and reading strategies particularly and thoughtfully chosen in order to enhance and enrich those reading sessions. In some instances, overwhelming triangulation occurs, suggesting that these teachers' ideas may be consistent with those of others in the field. However, there are some clear questions raised by contrasting views in the data, questions which promote thinking about implications for education and the need for further inquiry. Therefore, in this chapter dedicated to reflections, I will first address my observations regarding these six participants. Then, I will discuss issues of discrepancy between the data and the literature, differing opinions within the data, and resulting implications for education and recommendations for future research. Finally, I will address an interesting reflection regarding children's favorite trade books.

### Observations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Building a Foundation for Results

##### Humans as Participants

Though there are many specific observations I will discuss with regard to the participants of this study, there is one point which needs readdressing: the issue of teachers as decision-makers. According to Clark and Yinger (1979), “. . . the thinking and behavior of teachers are guided by a set of organized beliefs, often operating unconsciously” (p. 259). As we look at the data generated by the guiding questions which drove this study, we must remember that the factors which the participants suggest as influential in their process of book selection result from other, perhaps unconscious, stimuli. Calderhead (1984) suggests that “Real-life decisions . . . are made within a context of influences and constraints. Factors beyond our control may limit the options available to us or determine how we perceive these options” (p. 3). The point to consider here is that this inquiry focuses on human actions, and those may be difficult sometimes to understand. Teachers' own characteristics may influence their decision-making which will in turn affect their processes and consideration of alternatives (Borko, Shavelson, and Stern, 1981). The findings in this study are based on the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of participants who have been influenced by myriad other forces throughout their lives. While we may look at what factors these teachers feel influence their choices, we may not be aware of what previous influences, outside of those acknowledged by the participants, may have played a part in forming their beliefs. However, because this study sought to find out what kindergarten teachers think about reading aloud and

trade books, and because each of the six participants is a professional in her field, I believe the data collected is worthy of addition to the existing body of knowledge. Further, I believe the occurrence of triangulation regarding a number of concepts adds to the validity of this study and the responses of the participants.

### Reading Aloud

The results of this study show that these kindergarten teachers recognize the potential of reading aloud to impact their children and that they are making use of it as a powerful teaching tool. Helen commented during her interview that even if one lived in a box, if he had a book, he could “live the whole world.” Helen shares this personal respect for books with her students by reading aloud to them every day and discussing all the different purposes and uses for various types of writing. Danielle, wishing more of her students had relatives willing to take time to read to them, engages in storytime each day with her young students, hoping to instill in them the desire to read on their own. Bernice, recognizing the “kid” in herself, throws her being into each story she reads in order to help her students develop the kind of love for books that was inspired early on in her. Frances seeks the advice of her own young children in order to determine if a book will “reach” her students during storytime, and Nancy and Barbara share ideas with one another about which readaloud books have promoted the most enriching experiences in their classrooms. All six of these teachers, whose backgrounds and educational experiences differ, use reading aloud in their classrooms on a daily basis. But more importantly, they each exhibit a personal love for books and for reading, so the readaloud session necessarily becomes more than simply an activity.

### Book Selection

In addition to believing in the readaloud concept itself, each of these teachers exhibits the desire to choose, according to her own personal perceptions, quality literature. Data from this study suggest that these teachers consider (1) their purpose for reading; (2) their students’ needs and desires; (3) characteristics of the books themselves; (4) a book’s potential to enhance the classroom studies by providing an opening for discussion of sensitive or emotional issues or supporting students’ acquisition of skills; (5) issues of controversy or concern; and (6) the recommendations of others when selecting books. When these teachers select books, they do so thoughtfully and cognizantly. In no interview did I find a response to suggest that any of these teachers simply picks up a book without thought to use for a readaloud session. By their own admission, time is quite dear to them as they seek to cover may required elements and skills, and so they use the books to enhance these lessons. Even those books which are read “just for fun” are specifically chosen. Also, all of these teachers have personal collections of children’s books in their classrooms to which their children are given daily access. During the think-aloud sessions as these teachers pulled out stacks of books to which they made references, they discussed them in quite a familiar tone. Not only do these teachers possess large libraries, they are impressively aware of what is on their shelves and select carefully those books which are used in the daily

readaloud session.

### Use of Readaloud Strategies

Finally, each of these teachers makes consistent use of enriching and enhancing activities before, during, and after the readaloud session. From Nancy's reenactment of a temper tantrum to Helen's trip to the local orchard, example after example exhibits these teachers' desire to make the reading experience exciting, meaningful, and applicable to the lives and knowledge of their students. These strategies may be as simple as changing a vocabulary word right in the middle of a reading or engaging in an extension activity designed to relate a storybook to a recently discussed historical event. Consequently, some of the strategies may happen in the interactive setting, and some of them may be planned during the preactive decision-making stage of the teacher. The interesting point is that each participant gave specific examples of things they do in order to help ensure a positive reading experience for the children. To their discussion of *why* they choose certain types of books, they added a discussion of *how* they use those selections.

I believe that the actions of these teachers suggest that they view reading aloud as a meaningful activity and that they attempt to make the experience enriching for their students by selecting quality books and using strategies designed to allow the highest potential for literacy growth. Moreover, I believe their clear love, either stated or implied by years of service at this grade level, for children of this age adds to their desire to promote a wonderful readaloud experience.

### **Implications and Recommendations Related to Observations**

As stated before, the results of this study illustrate the occurrence of many positive elements with regard to the current use of readaloud sessions and the selection of trade books for use in those sessions. Further, the instance of triangulation with regard to many concepts provides a more valid basis on which to consider this data. However, the questions raised by contrasting views lead to consideration of the possible implications for education and the resulting recommendations for further inquiry.

#### Reading Aloud

The data resulting from this inquiry suggest that these teachers are not only using reading aloud to help children learn but that they are also using a variety of books and reading strategies particularly and thoughtfully chosen in order to enhance and enrich those reading sessions. This concept, though positive, suggests a possible negative implication. Because reading aloud has been proven by study after study to have a positive impact on student learning and because six respected professionals have all deemed it a commonplace occurrence in their classrooms for a variety of reasons, there is reason to believe that all teachers, and especially those with the earliest chance for intervention, should recognize the value of and uses for this very powerful tool. Hoffman et al.'s study of the "modal" versus the "model" was conducted in 1993, so as late as that year researchers saw evidence that many teachers were including reading aloud time during the day



but that it was not being used to its full potential. Perhaps an updated study needs to be conducted to determine whether the majority of teachers continues to expose children to readaloud sessions which are not an integral part of the instructional day and are not being used to their full potential or whether the sessions mirror more closely those evidenced in this particular inquiry. Perhaps the results would indicate a shift toward the type of reading “model” that Hoffman et al. desired and that I saw evidenced by these participants. However, if the evidence still suggests findings similar to those found by Hoffman et al. in 1993, there would be indicated a need for staff development regarding reading aloud and its potential to promote student literacy. Research might also investigate the extent to which pre-service teachers are being trained with regard to the use and style of readaloud sessions and the selection of appropriate materials for those sessions.

#### Reading Aloud with Higher Levels

Another implication involves not just the concept of reading aloud but also its use with levels other than kindergarten. Kimmel and Segel (1988) suggest that books which children find difficult to handle may become more inviting when read aloud. Bernice believes that any book may hold children’s attention if it is read with emotion and excitement. If children seem to enjoy so much the readaloud session in kindergarten, as evidenced by these teachers’ comments, and if the results of these sessions can promote literacy growth, couldn’t readalouds be a part of the school day for children of all ages? Further, to what extent is reading aloud being used in middle and high schools, and would more teachers accept its use as a part of their challenging curriculums? What would teachers look for in books at higher levels as text becomes more lengthy and the frequency of pictures diminishes? What factors would influence their choices, and how would readaloud strategies be adjusted for the change in student age and ability? Trelease (1985) suggests that an early love of reading may produce a lifelong reader and lover of books, and Helen believes that if she can show children that books are a normal part of their everyday existence, they will turn to books throughout their lives for information, emotional support, and entertainment. If so, wouldn’t children exposed to positive early reading experiences still find satisfaction in continued reading sessions at higher levels? It would be interesting to follow some of the students of these six teachers who seem positively affected by the reading experience to see if this love endures throughout their academic experiences and beyond.

#### Reading Aloud: My Personal Experience

I have made a habit of reading aloud to my students--grades nine through twelve-- on many occasions. Just as the participants of this study considered their students’ desires and needs, so too do I as I read aloud to them. Sometimes, my selection is a fictional story in their required literature text. As Bernice does, I try to throw myself into the story, reading the expression in the text and punctuation of the story in order to model the rising action and use of emotion. I also stop periodically to ask questions or encourage predicting. Sometimes, I read orally from my students’ assigned novel to get them involved in the story so they will continue to read. Also, I listen to my

students' desires. They love mystery stories, so I often select one novel by a mystery writer. As I watch their reaction to my reading aloud, I see evidence of Danielle's feeling that children just love to be read to. I have seen the direct effect of reading aloud on my students, but my book choices are made for reasons much different than those of the kindergarten teachers participating in this study. This thinking leads me to an area ripe for current researchers: Could reading aloud be effectively used with older children? Is it currently being used? What are the results, and what types of books are being chosen? SOL's are now of crucial importance in the upper grade levels; Could reading aloud be used to enhance literacy for older students as it is for elementary students?

### **Issues of Discrepancy Between Literature and Results**

This section will cover two main areas addressed by the literature which were not specifically noted by the participants during the interview or think-aloud sessions: use of scary books and books which promote gender equity. Further, I will discuss one issue covered in the literature--the use of the Bible in the classroom--which promoted two different viewpoints from the participants.

#### **Use of Scary Books**

As regards the use of scary books, a specific definition of which does not occur in the literature, Storr (1976) believes that children need access to fear, pity, and evil. Throughout the six interviews and think-alouds, these six teachers made no reference to their specific use of, or avoidance of, books with scary pictures, characters, or themes. There may be several reasons for this. First, none of the four books in the focused book review had characteristics which one might label "scary." Therefore, this particular activity did not prompt any response from the teachers regarding their view on the issue. Secondly, it is possible that these teachers have not encountered any materials, even during the Halloween season, which they felt were particularly too scary or promoted an inappropriate level of evil or terror. Further, they may not have had an instance where a student was bothered by a scary theme or illustration in a book or where the illustrations or text in a book dealing with scary elements were beyond their perceived maturity level of their students. In Maurice Sendak's popular book *Where the Wild Things Are*, a favorite of many of these teachers' students, the main character, Max, is called a "wild thing" by his mother, whom Max threatens to eat. That night Max sails to a land where wild things ". . . roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws . . ." " But Max tames them; they are frightened and make Max "king of all wild things." Danielle's discussion of *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak) with her class brought about an excited discussion regarding using one's imagination, and Bernice's use of the same book promoted a discussion of what types of pets might be better for Max. Perhaps it is because many children see television shows and movies which depict dreadful characters and tense storylines that the "scary" trade books with which they come into contact do not hold the same capacity to frighten as perhaps they might have years ago. Or, perhaps many trade books which contain traditionally

scary elements are softened by their cartoonish characters or illustrations. Even Helen, who owns thousands of books, has met myriad authors, and has been to a number of conferences regarding children's literature, did not mention scariness as an element of concern when she selects books. As a matter of fact, she stated that she had not yet come into contact with a children's book which she would deem unsuitable for the classroom. Danielle stated that she was aware of some parents' feelings that certain books contain demonic references and undertones, but she said she had never noticed such references in any of the books which she had read or used.

Perhaps, since this concept was addressed in the literature, further research could be conducted using a variety of books which contain "scary" elements, such as those pertaining to Halloween, those including illustrations which are more surrealistic than cartoonish, or those containing stories which resemble the classic fairytales dealing with wicked stepmothers or angry witches. If a focused book review using carefully chosen books were conducted, researchers would have access to teachers first-hand viewpoints regarding books that contain certain "scary" elements and perhaps their interpretations of the term "scary." Further, it would be interesting to conduct some type of non-invasive inquiry to determine teachers' or other researchers' tendencies to support Storr's (1976) belief that children need access to fear and evil and that bravery cannot exist if one foresees no danger or threat. It would also be interesting to note the feelings of teachers of older students to determine their feelings regarding the use of more mature "scary" books such as the *Goosebumps* series.

### Gender Equity

Another topic which was addressed in the literature but not referred to by these teachers was the issue of gender equity. The *Feminists on Children's Media* (1973) suggest that a large percentage of children's books promote stereotypical views of women's roles, a viewpoint supported by Stewig and Higgs in a 1973 study. As regards my particular inquiry, none of the six teachers interviewed pointed out that she perceived a problem with the way women are depicted in the books chosen for readalouds. The closest comment was made by one teacher who saw a problem with sexual harassment involved in the situation of a group of firemen fighting over who would get a glass of water for the beautiful "victim" in a children's book on fire safety. While it is true that the firemen were male and the victim was female, this teacher's concern was with the sexual concept promoted by the book. Studies by Luke et al. (1986) and Jipson & Paley (1991) suggest that because teachers are choosing books by mainly male authors and with male main characters, they are supporting a distorted view of the female in today's society. Are female teachers, as Luke et al. (1986) suggest, "actively participating in their own exclusion"?

Helen makes the point that authors are becoming more and more open to the concepts and ideas about which they write, the types of characters and settings they use, and the emotional subjects on which they focus. Perhaps the problems that the *Feminists on Children's Media* (1973) and Stewig and Higgs (1973) saw twenty-five years ago are not as evident in children's literature

today. In 1973, Stewig and Higgs analyzed 154 picture books in order to reach their conclusions regarding the unrealistic depiction of women in picture books. Perhaps a current study could analyze a similar number of picture books to see if this bias still exists and if, perhaps, teachers are participating, even unconsciously, in the selective tradition feared by Luke et al.(1986).

#### Use of Religious Books

Another issue is that raised by Helen's indication that she shares with her students any book which is brought in by one of students. She commented that she would share even the Bible. Huck (1976) indicates that sharing the Bible with children is very important, stating that "Whatever our religious persuasion or non-persuasion, children should not be denied their right to knowledge of the traditional literature of the Bible" (230). Of course, her feelings were expressed in a book published in 1976, and over the past 20 years there has been increasing controversy related to the inclusion of religious materials in the public school setting. Five of the participants of this study indicated their tendency not to include the use of religious books due to this concern and the fact that policies are in place which limit their choice in the matter. Because this is a political matter rather than just an educational one, it would be difficult to suggest that teachers consider this matter and make their own changes, but there does exist the possibility that if children are denied access to the Bible due to political constraints, their knowledge of a rich piece of literature connected to our history will go undeveloped. Because Helen noted the flexibility afforded her with regard to her religious materials, it would interesting to investigate the degree to which use of the Bible or other religious materials as historical pieces of literature is taking place in elementary schools in this country.

#### **Differing Opinions Within the Data**

The majority of the data resulting from this study suggests that that these teachers are thinking along similar lines with regard to factors which influence their selection of books for readaloud sessions. For example, these teachers each mentioned their tendency to choose books with short but meaningful text and clear applicability to a required unit of study. However, there are two concepts related to the focused book review which prompted a difference of opinion of the part of some participants: teachers' perceptions of their students' comprehension levels and access to non-standard dialects.

#### Teachers' Perceptions of Their Students

With regard to the book *Grandfather's Journey* (Say), several teachers felt that the text's handling of issues such as war, change, and internal emotion might be too difficult for their children to grasp. They based their feelings on their perceptions of kindergarten students as a whole, noting that perhaps older children or those in different communities might better relate to the concepts introduced. Frances felt that her students would have difficulty following the text. Nancy and Barbara were more specific, commenting that their students, for the most part, lack

exposure to other countries and people, and so because they could probably not relate to the characters and setting of this selection, it would not reach them. Helen, on the other hand, suggested that her students probably would enjoy the book because they had not traveled to faraway lands and unfamiliar places. We see here a set of opposites, some teachers deciding not to use a book because it contains unfamiliar elements while another selects it for the very same reason. These teachers all enjoyed the book and appreciated its strengths, but not all of them felt it would be an appropriate choice for this age level, and each of these teachers' decisions was based on her perceptions of her own students, perceptions formed from her experiences with past students (Glazer, 1991). Research supports the fact that teachers often select books which they feel will best fit the needs and attention levels of their students based on their experiences with other students of the same age. If these teachers' experiences with students suggest to them, intuitively perhaps, that *Grandfather's Journey* is too sophisticated for the kindergarten level, the literature indicates that they are acting in a logical and appropriate manner (Glazer, 1991). But does this difference in teachers' perceptions of their students and their accompanying book selections detract in any way from the possible richness of the readaloud sessions of some students?

To answer this question with regard to Nancy and Barbara, I looked more closely at their use of readaloud books in their classrooms. During their think-aloud session, they sorted through dozens of books related to an upcoming unit on spring. As they sifted through the books discussing which they would use, they made reference to fictional books, non-fictional books, series books, personal favorites of the children and themselves, and books dealing with everything from factual information about chicks to concept books focused on social issues such as friendship. Further, many of these books, especially the fictional ones, deal with unfamiliar or make-believe places or people. It is not possible for a teacher to share with her students every trade book available, so realistically she must choose on a daily basis. These two teachers certainly possess and make use of a wide variety of books written in a variety of styles, so their students do have access to a wide range of trade book selections. Through personal observation of their students and professional opinion, they make choices each day about which books can be used most effectively in their classrooms (Vandergrift, 1965). Perhaps Frank's (1973) advice with regard to book selection is pertinent here: ask ". . . not will it damage the young reader but rather, will it benefit him or her and in what way?" If a teacher sees no particular benefit in a book selection but has at her fingertips a number of other choices proven or believed to be effective, and, given the teachers' time limitations and curriculum requirements within the day, wouldn't the best choice be for the book that the teacher believes will work well? Is this concept any different from Helen's tendency not to select "commercial" types of books based on comic characters or television heroes? According to Huck (1976), the publication and distribution of juvenile books in the 1970's comprised a \$150 million book market. The number of juvenile books published in 1970 was

nearly ten times the number published in 1880, statistics which show an increased rate of growth for each decade over a ninety-year period (82), so there are thousands of books to which kindergarten students will never have access. Is this limiting their academic growth? I think not. These teachers indicate their tendency to select, from a wide variety, books which will reach the children with whom they have contact each year. Because these perceptions are based on experience, they are acting with regard to their students and their desire for the most effective readaloud session possible.

Of course, the implication for education rests within the broader scope. A teacher's decision not to use book "A" in favor of book "B" would most likely not impact her students negatively as long as the teacher was attempting overall to share with her students a wide variety of books from the many available. A possible negative implication could exist if a teacher were to choose books, for example, of only one style. All of the participants of this study indicated their belief that their students prefer fiction to non-fiction; however, they all include both fiction and non-fiction in their readaloud sessions. I believe it would be both interesting and worthwhile to investigate to what extent teachers use a variety of genre and literary styles with their students and for what reasons they choose to do, or not do, so.

Another point to remember here is that which was addressed at the beginning of this chapter. Each of these teachers is operating under her own set of influences and constraints. Perhaps this particular selection did not connect with the teachers themselves and so their perception was that it would not connect with their students. Because the conscious and unconscious influences on one's decisions cannot necessarily be determined, these decisions cannot always be clearly explained (Calderhead, 1984). However, the broader picture puts the individual decision into focus. Nancy and Barbara may not choose to read *Grandfather's Journey* (Say), but they do choose to read many, many other books of all types which they feel will impact their children's learning and emotions. I do not believe this decision, which is simply symbolic of the process they go through each time they plan a unit of study, would put their children at any particular disadvantage. I would suggest that if a teacher's goal is to provide an enriching and meaningful reading experience for her children, then she will choose the books that she feels will best meet that goal, and the students will benefit not only from the books but also from the teacher's dedication to a wonderful readaloud session.

#### Access to Non-Standard Dialect

The realistic language in *Working Cotton* (Williams) was of concern to two teachers. The dialect of the text is written realistically as that of a young, southern African-American child, and these teachers feel that this book might best be used with older children for several reasons. First, young children might giggle at or make fun of the dialect, unintentionally embarrassing or offending children who speak or whose families speak in this way. Also, these teachers feel that kindergarten children just beginning to learn the basics of a Standard English may become

confused about what is Standard and Non-Standard if they have access to read-aloud materials containing dialect which is Non-Standard. Presenting them with two dialects while attempting to teach them that only one is actually Standard might confuse them at this young age. These teachers feel that older children might better be able to view the dialect of a particular culture more clearly with regard to a people and a historical background. One teacher commented that this is not a matter of avoidance of a cultural piece but rather postponement to an age level more appropriate for the reality of the text. Other teachers stated that the language is positive and appropriate for the kindergarten child because it is realistic (Kurtz, 1996), that it is written “just the way they talk,” and that perhaps it could promote a discussion of language across time or how one’s speech depends upon the area in which he or she has grown up.

Although the difference of opinion regarding the use of *Working Cotton* (Williams) focuses on dialect, I do not believe that this is an issue of teachers’ inclination to avoid the use of multicultural trade books. All of these teachers indicated that they support the discussion of other cultures through books or as a result of the questions of their students. In the absence of specific discussion, they simply support the idea that human beings are equal to one another and should be treated as such. Further, Helen makes the point that because current authors of children’s books are writing on a wider variety of topics and using a wide range of characters and settings, teachers can support children’s access to other cultures simply by choosing from the wide range of books available. These teachers noted, while reading *Working Cotton* (Williams), the beauty of the illustrations and the rich potential of the text to promote a discussion of such concepts as families and the growing of crops. The concern was simply whether the dialect would be, or could be, viewed as specific to a culture and a situation not appropriate for everyday use by all, so the question remains, should the dialect of a particular culture, in this case African-American, be avoided because it is Non-Standard? Would this particular dialect cause perhaps more confusion than other dialects would for children since it is one which they may hear on a daily basis? Further, is Non-Standard dialect a concept which could better be handled by older students who might already have a stronger grasp on the elements of our Standard in English?

The implication for education involves this question of whether a teacher’s decision to exclude the use of books containing Non-Standard dialect could have an impact on students’ views and understanding of surrounding cultures, and whether the inclusion of such books would model an example of language not appropriate for all situations, thus confusing the students. Kurtz (1996) stresses the need for cultural authenticity in text and illustrations in multicultural literature because it may affect the way “. . . children feel about themselves, about people from other cultures, and about books.” So, here is an indication that if cultural literature is not authentic in text, it might actually distort one’s realistic perception of another culture or even his own. Accepting that literature should be culturally authentic, are children at the kindergarten level too young to place the authenticity in context with regard to the universality of a Standard dialect in English? It would be

valuable to conduct research to investigate how other kindergarten teachers view the inclusion of Non-Standard cultural dialect and perhaps the degree to which it is being either included or avoided. It would be interesting, as well, to investigate the extent to which true cultural dialect is being used in children's trade books today as authors approach an ever-widening variety of writing styles, themes, and settings.

### **Additional Reflection**

One very interesting concept arising from the data involves children's favorite book selections. Every teacher interviewed mentioned the *Clifford* series (Bridwell) as one that children consistently love to hear. In an interview for *Canis Max, the Magazine for Large Dog Enthusiasts (1996-97)*, Norman Bridwell was asked, "Is there any message that you hope to convey to children through your stories about Clifford?" Bridwell answered that "Clifford means well, but makes mistakes. He does his best, and his faults are forgiven. Even if he isn't perfect, Emily loves him." It seems that Bridwell approaches children through his books in a way designed to help them grow emotionally. I believe it would be interesting to see a more in-depth interview with Bridwell regarding the various books in his series. Because there are so many books, each could be studied to determine its theme, its style, and its message. Perhaps even some of the issues to which Stewig and Higgs (1973) and Luke et al. (1986) alluded regarding gender inequity could be studied as well to determine whether his and other "favorites" of children depict women as they realistically exist in today's world. Further, I believe it would be interesting to investigate how children determine which books are their favorites. With this information, kindergarten teachers and others might have another factor on which to rely for selection of effective trade books for use in readaloud sessions in their elementary classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

Hoffman et al. (1993) offer a description of the type of classroom readaloud situation they would like to see become the "model":

A well-stocked classroom library and an attractive, accessible display of unit books command immediate attention. The classroom teacher allocates a significant amount of time to storytime (twenty minutes or more daily). She carefully selects age-appropriate children's literature that, because of its texture, topic, theme, craft, or structure, will likely evoke rich response from her children. The teacher may share her personal responses and encourage children to share theirs. The children have opportunities to explore the patterns and linkages within and among texts. Children also compare several authors' interpretations of a theme or topic through discussions that are based on their responses to the stories. Perhaps journal writing, drawing, or paired sharing serve to stimulate children's thoughts prior to small or large group discussion. The teacher gives children opportunities to revisit portions of the text that hold



promise for extended explorations, as well as opportunities to extend personal responses in a variety of ways (p. 502).

I would suggest that the readaloud sessions of the participants of this study mirror very closely Hoffman et al.'s description of the rich readaloud experience. From their collections of books and thoughtful book selection to their reading styles and use of stimulating activities, these teachers seek to make their children's daily readaloud sessions both enjoyable and productive. They are attempting to positively impact their students' learning and literacy each day, and it would be my hope that future, and perhaps more broad, inquiry into the area of children's literacy or book selection would afford researchers even more insight into the power of the readaloud and the wonderful potential of books to impact the lives of children.

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