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Using echo reading and tracking simultaneously during small group read alouds with preschool children

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USING ECHO READING AND TRACKING SIMULTANEOUSLY DURING SMALL GROUP READ ALOUDS WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

by
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A Thesis

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Diane Knoll, my father, Joseph Knoll, and my sister, Pam Knoll.

Acknowledgments

Mom and Dad: Thank you for being there for me throughout this process. Most importantly, thank you for being the most amazing parents. You have never steered me wrong in life and because of you I became the hard working, determined person I am today. Thank you for giving me every opportunity to achieve my goals.

Pam: I don't even know where to start. I definitely would not have made it through these past two years without all of your support, guidance, and sense of humor. The laughs you gave me while struggling through my homework made all the difference. You have truly been my rock, both during this process and in life!

Adam: You have been by my side since the start of this program. Thank you for hugging me when I cried and reminding me that there were "only a few weeks left" more times than I can count. Thank you for putting up with me!

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Abstract

Erica M. Knoll
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The purpose of this study was to observe what skills, social and academic, are positively affected when echo reading and tracking print were incorporated simultaneously into small group read alouds with preschool children. A group of four preschool students participated, each of varying levels and abilities. The students took turns echo reading a line of print while pointing to the words at the same time. The techniques were used one day per week over the course of four weeks. Each week, a different book was used and paired with two extension activities. Data collection included anecdotal note record sheets, behavioral checklists, recordings of the read aloud sessions, and teacher observations. The findings of this study suggested that when using echo reading and tracking during read alouds, there was an increase in the students' social skills (engagement, focus, patience, turn taking abilities, and respect for peers). The findings further suggested that there were academic gains in the students' concepts about print. Ultimately, the study concluded that incorporating echo reading and tracking print into small group read alouds may enhance preschool students' social behaviors when working in a group, as well as increase their print awareness.

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Chapter I

Scope of the Study

A small group of preschool students gather on the floor in the book area, eager to see what book will be read today. They are all lying on their bellies with their eyes open wide while one shouts, “Rosie!” I smile and confirm that today we will be reading *Rosie's Walk*.

“Who can tell me what they think this story will be about?” I ask. All sorts of words and phrases come my way. They all start pointing to the cover while my students from last year start telling the whole story and my newer students embellish on individual objects; a fox, a chicken, a tree. “Let's read the story and find out what happens,” I say. As we read the story together we discuss the pictures and make predictions about what will happen on the next page. We comment on why the fox is unable to catch Rosie and all of the things that stand in his way. We laugh as we see the rake hit the fox in the nose and the bees chasing him away from Rosie. New adventures are born when the students are then asked to extend the story and draw a picture of what they think the fox did next. Did the bees catch him? Did he come back to try and catch Rosie? Did he go straight home?

“The fox got Rosie,” one girl responded.

“The fox went to a cave,” said a little boy.

“The fox hurt his toe on the rake when he was running,” another boy decided. The possibilities were endless and it really made the students think.

This was quite a successful read aloud considering it was the first one of the school year. The students were engaged, they answered both text based and open ended

questions, they commented on the pictures and interacted with the story, and they enhanced their critical thinking skills by extending the story. I'm often amazed by how much gets done during one short read aloud. This format is continuously used throughout the school year, using different extension activities, to enhance the literacy skills of my preschoolers. I always want to ensure that they are receiving well rounded knowledge about books. What more do they need when they are not yet reading?

Story of the Question

The answer to the above question came about while working with my tutee for my Diagnosis of Remedial Reading Problems graduate course. I was required to use different forms of assessment in order to see where exactly he was struggling with literacy. Since he could not yet read, Marie Clay's (2005) emergent literacy assessments were most helpful. While administering the concepts about print assessment, I was shocked. Out of a possible twenty-four points, the student had a score of three, one point of which I believe stemmed from a guess. After all of the read alouds done in class each week, I was surprised that he couldn't express the difference between words and pictures. The lack of this knowledge led to him being unaware of reading left to right or what it meant to return sweep. He was able to distinguish between letters, but could not show me a full word. Some of the assessment such as being able to tell that a line of print was out of order or that a word was upside down was not developmentally appropriate for his age. However, in regards to the things he should have known, I couldn't believe his score. He was a student with an IEP for cognitive delays, which could lead to the lack of knowledge, but I felt that this was also very much my fault.

When thinking back about my read aloud process, I realized that I barely made

mention of the print while reading. How were my students supposed to be aware of it if I never called attention to it myself? I quickly reevaluated my teaching practices and thought it was time to test out a new way. I knew I would be following these assessments up with actual lessons upon entering the next graduate course so I wanted to think of ways to work on his concepts about print knowledge.

I decided that I would try calling attention to print by tracking while I read with him. I also asked him to echo read and track print himself so he could physically see and touch the words. I hoped this would help him realize exactly where and what we were reading. I noticed that he really enjoyed doing this and that it helped him with his comprehension and retelling abilities. I only worked with him for a few weeks, but it really opened my eyes to what more I could be doing to enhance my students' literacy skills.

Summer passed and a new school year began. It was time for me to think about what I wanted to investigate for this thesis. I thought about many different topics that interested me in regards to preschool literacy including ELL engagement, large group read aloud engagement, and if flashcards help students learn their letters. Nothing felt right. Suddenly, everything I did with my tutee came back to me. I thought about the concepts about print assessment, how shocked I was, and what I did to improve upon the problem. I then decided to look through our literacy curriculum in more depth to see what it said about concepts about print. I was beginning my seventh year of teaching, so it had been a while since I really read through the materials. It was all second nature to me, or so I thought. Being that it wasn't until recently that I began looping students, I always focused on level one lessons in the concepts about print section. However, the

curriculum has three levels per section. I would move up in the comprehension or phonological awareness sections, but concepts about print always seemed difficult. To my surprise, I found that level two introduces the idea of pictures versus words. I felt embarrassed and ashamed that I lost sight of this over the years by not reviewing the later levels of the curriculum for some time. After reading, I felt as though me calling attention to print alone was not enough and I again remembered how much my tutee enjoyed echo reading and tracking the print himself. This is when the gears really started turning in my head and I knew this was the area that I wanted to research. Many questions started forming in my head: Is echo reading developmentally appropriate for preschoolers? If I use echo reading and tracking, will it improve my students' concepts about print? How about comprehension? If I give each person a turn to read will there be too much wait time? Is echo reading something that should only be done one-on-one or will it prove successful in a small group? I originally wanted my main focus to be improving preschoolers' concepts about print, but after much thought and discussions with my professor, I understood that I could learn so much more if I left the outcome open, with the focus being on the techniques. There, in that moment, my question was born.

Statement of the Research Question

Research shows that using a reading style that references print increases young children's knowledge about print (Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010). It has also been proven that interactive book reading enhances young children's vocabulary skills (Wasik & Bond, 2001). Knowing this, my question becomes: What happens when echo reading and tracking are used simultaneously during small group read alouds with

preschool children?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to look at what happens when two specific interactive reading strategies, echo reading and tracking print, are used during small group read alouds with preschool children. Observations will be made in areas such as concepts about print, engagement and participation, comprehension, and language. Since preschoolers cannot read themselves, reading aloud becomes crucial in developing their literacy skills (Kindle, 2013). When students are read to on a regular basis, they tend to have an increased vocabulary set and understand text better (Rasinski, 2014).

Preschool and younger elementary students who are not actively involved in group read alouds do not retain as much knowledge in literacy areas such as comprehension, vocabulary, and concepts about print as those who are actively engaged. Research shows (Barrentine, 1996; Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009; Vivas, 1996; Wasik & Bond, 2001) that using interactive reading strategies while reading aloud positively affects those literacy skills in young children. Furthermore, interactive read alouds keep conversations between students and the teacher ongoing and allow students to closely observe different aspects of a story, such as character perspectives, that often get overlooked (Barrentine, 1996).

In addition to having positive effects on students, knowledge of interactive reading strategies can lead to improved teaching practices. Read aloud procedures can look different in each classroom so Kindle (2013) conducted a study to determine the effect of providing professional development about interactive reading. The findings showed that upon receiving the training, teachers were more consistent with their

methods and literacy instruction regarding phonological and phonemic awareness, concepts about print, child-initiated interactions, and attention to word meaning were enhanced (Kindle, 2013). These improvements and modifications allow young children to receive quality literacy instruction (Kindle, 2013).

Assisted reading is an interactive technique that involves modeling proper reading practices for struggling students. Assisted reading is often used to help students enhance their fluency. Listening-while-reading activities show the importance of modeling fluency during reading instruction (Rasinski, 1990). Students will have a better understanding of fluency and become more successful if they have a model showing them what good fluency entails (Rasinski 2014).

Echo reading is an assisted read aloud strategy in which a student is asked to repeat a phrase or sentence after the teacher has first modeled proper fluency. Little research has been done on solely using this strategy, especially with preschool students. In accordance with this, only two studies were found on using echo reading, among other assisted reading techniques, to improve literacy skills other than fluency. Nelson and Robertson (2007) found that using echo reading with preschool students helps to increase their vocabulary gains. Eldredge, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth (1996) compared the techniques of shared reading (assisted reading) and round robin reading and found that those who were engaged in shared reading outperformed the other group of students in vocabulary acquisition, word analysis, word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

When tracking print during read alouds, teachers are engaging in print referencing; an interactive reading strategy where they call attention to print. Many

studies have been done to test the effects of print referencing with most using control and experimental groups. In doing this, Justice and Ezell (2002) found that preschoolers in the experimental group (exposed to print referencing) showed gains in all areas of literacy with the highest amount being in print recognition. Several years later, it was determined that when using a print-focused read aloud method for an entire academic year, preschool students showed significant gains in the areas of print awareness, alphabet knowledge, and name writing abilities (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009). Similarly, Justice et al.'s (2010) findings showed an increase in print awareness skills when preschool teachers used print referencing techniques.

With the gap in research when specifically looking at echo reading and improving areas other than fluency through assisted reading, this study observes how it contributes to preschoolers' print awareness, engagement and participation, comprehension, and language development. It is clear from the research (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice et. al, 2009, Justice et. al, 2010) that print referencing has a positive outcome on preschoolers' literacy acquisition. This study will add to the current research by using echo reading and tracking simultaneously and noting the effects it has when reading to a small group of preschool students.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two will review the relevant research in more detail. It is divided into five sections including an introduction, the benefits of interactive reading, modeling through assisted reading, print referencing during read alouds, and a conclusion. Chapter three addresses the study context and design, as well as discusses the methodology and data collection. Chapter four reviews my data analysis and study findings. Chapter five

is the conclusion of the study and discusses limitations and implications for future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

"Reading aloud is often recommended as the most significant activity for adults to support the emerging literacy skills of young children"

(as cited in Kindle, 2013, p. 176).

Reading aloud to preschool children is a crucial part of their school day. It exposes them to several aspects of literacy since they are just learning what reading really means. Simply reading aloud and exposing children to books is important, but using interactive reading strategies helps to enhance the literacy skills learned. Using strategies such as modeling, assisted reading, and print referencing can a positive effect on the learning outcomes of young children.

Chapter two is a review of the literature regarding reading aloud with young children, focusing on using interactive techniques. The first section discusses the benefit of using interactive reading strategies. The second section focuses on modeling through the use of assisted reading techniques. The third section focuses specifically on the print referencing strategy and how it enhances children's' print concepts. The conclusion of this chapter summarizes the literature findings and discusses the positive effects interactive reading strategies have had on young children.

The Benefits of Interactive Reading

Much research can be found on the benefits of reading aloud, as well as doing so using interactive techniques. Reading aloud to enhance young children's learning is not a brand new concept and is one of the most important benefits. It develops improved exposure, learning, and use of various literacy skills including vocabulary, language,

concepts about print, word recognition, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge. Barrentine (1996) argues that "interactive read-alouds encourage children to verbally interact with the text, peers, and teacher. This approach to reading aloud provides a means of engaging students as they construct meaning and explore the reading process" (p. 36). In accordance with this thought, many studies, both older and more current, have shown the positive effects interactive reading has on young students. Vivas (1996) reported the results of her experimental investigation with preschool and first-grade children in which she set out to determine the effects of story reading on language. She found that simply exposing children to a book read aloud, both at school and at home, produced higher scores when being tested on aspects such as language and comprehension compared to those who were not exposed to read alouds. Vivas (1996) argues:

> Reading story books aloud to children, either at home or at school, proved to have significantly positive effects for both preschool and first-grade children. These effects occurred in different aspects of the understanding of language, such as comprehension of stories, memory for sequences, and memory of related elements in the narrative sequences and endings. (p. 212)

Vivas (1996) went on to conclude that focus and expressive language were also enhanced by reading stories aloud.

In a study done by Wasik and Bond (2001), 127 four-year-olds from low income families and four teachers were used to explore the effects of interactive book reading on language skills of at-risk preschool students. Two of the teachers were trained to use interactive strategies while reading including defining vocabulary words, providing

students with the opportunity to use those words, ask open ended questions, and provide students with the opportunity to talk and be heard. Books, props, and materials were provided for the teachers. The remaining two teachers in the control group were given the same materials and read the books aloud the same number of times, but they were not trained to use interactive strategies. The results of Wasik and Bond's (2001) study showed many positive effects of using the interactive strategies, as noted below:

> Children whose teachers provided multiple opportunities to interact with vocabulary words learned more book-related vocabulary compared with children who were exposed to just the books. Through the interactive book reading, the teachers introduced vocabulary words in a meaningful context. Also, children were given the opportunities to talk and ask questions about the stories. (p. 247)

They further explain that the extension activities provided students with repeated opportunities to use the vocabulary words, something the control group lacked. All children were assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—III (PPVT-III). Students from the intervention group scored better on the PPVT-III than those students who were in the control group.

Similar to these findings, a meta-analysis done by Mol, Bus, and de Jong (2009) concluded several benefits of interactive reading with children. They found "children's oral language as well as print knowledge benefited from interaction before, during, and after shared reading sessions" (Mol et al., 2009, p. 998). Furthermore, they reported that enhanced expressive language was a great benefit due to the eliciting and reinforcing of verbal responses. They continued to say that older kindergarteners were able to expand upon their alphabetic knowledge and that students who are at-risk benefit most from

interactive reading strategies (Mol et al., 2009).

Another benefit of interactive read alouds is enhanced interactions between the student and the adult, text, and peers. Wasik and Bond (2001) state, "Book reading provides the context for rich conversations between a child and an adult. During book reading, interactions frequently go beyond the text of the story and invite dialogue between the adult and the child" (p. 243). Similarly, Barrentine (1996) says that it is necessary to keep interactions on-going. Barrentine (1996) further explains:

> Throughout the read-aloud the teacher can maintain a conversational tone by inviting brief interactions. Ongoing interactions help students notice aspects of the story that they might otherwise overlook, develop an informed perspective on a character, or consider each other's ideas. (p. 39)

A third benefit of interactive read alouds with young children is improved teaching strategies. Kindle (2013) conducted a study to determine if read aloud strategies improved when teachers received professional development on the matter. Throughout her study, it was said that the practices of the teachers varied from classroom to classroom, but interactive strategies increased after receiving the professional development sessions. After the sessions were complete, Kindle (2013) noticed "differences in the areas of phonological and phonemic awareness, concepts about print, child-initiated interactions, and attention to word meaning" (p. 182). She also noted that providing focused professional development impacts the read-aloud methods they use in the classroom. These practices can be imperative for early childhood children to receive quality instruction (Kindle, 2013).

Modeling Through Assisted Reading

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) define assisted reading as a way to "emphasize practice as a means of improving accuracy, automaticity, and prosody as well as the learner's understanding of the text" (p. 9). Furthermore, assisted reading provides students with a vast exposure to print (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Dowhower (1989) further states, "Unlike traditional repeated reading, assisted-reading methods provide learners with a model of fluent reading" (as cited in Kuhn & Stahl, 2003, p. 9). Modeling is a crucial factor when it comes to all literacy interventions; especially fluency. Rasinski (2014) argues:

> Students are more likely to succeed in developing fluency if they have a good sense of what constitutes reading fluency. This can be done by teachers (or other more fluent readers) modeling fluent reading. Reading aloud to students has long been advocated for elementary classrooms. Students who are regularly read to have larger vocabularies, are better comprehenders, and are more motivated to read. In addition, when reading to students, the teacher can help students notice how one's voice can be used to enhance meaning and to make the reading experience more satisfying. Students themselves will develop a better sense of what constitutes fluent reading and can try to make their oral reading approximate the reading produced by the teacher. (pp. 26-27)

Assisted reading means modeling is involved and that model can be a peer, teacher, or technology device in which students can hear recordings of fluent reading (Rasinski, 2014). Rasinski (1990) explored this listening-while-reading approach when he conducted a study to determine its effects on reading fluency. He describes this method as one in which "the reader reads the text while simultaneously listening to a

fluent rendition of the same text" (Rasinski, 1990, p. 147). In his study, Rasinski (1990) compared the methods of listening-while-reading and repeated reading to determine if one was a more effective strategy. He used twenty third graders of various reading levels, placing them in two groups. Both groups had the same treatment cycles, but in a different order. One did repeated reading first followed by listening-while-reading and the other did listening-while-reading first followed by repeated reading. The results showed that neither was to be considered more effective, but that listening-while-reading was just as beneficial as repeated reading. With these findings, Rasinski (1990) reiterates, "Listening-while-reading activities affirm the active role of the teacher in instruction and add considerable importance to the notion of modeling fluent reading within the context of reading instruction" (p. 149).

Echo reading is a type of assisted reading in which the student repeats a phrase or sentence after a teacher models it with proper fluency. Echo reading is a technique most often used in the elementary grades to improve fluency. Little research was found specifically on using echo reading with students in order to improve print knowledge, engagement, or fluency. With that said, Robertson and Davig (2002) wrote a book and created a program titled *Read with Me!* They discuss several interactive reading strategies which include echo reading. Furthermore, a study conducted by Nelson and Robertson (2007) focused on echo reading with preschool children and the effect it had on their vocabulary skills. It was determined that using the echo reading increased the vocabulary gains of preschool children compared to children who were not exposed to the technique.

Another form of assisted reading is shared reading. Cunningham and Allington

(1994) explain that shared reading "relies heavily on teacher-supported oral reading as a major instructional vehicle to improve students' overall growth in reading" (as cited in Eldredge, Reutzel, & Hollingsworth, 1996, p. 202). A study done by Eldredge et al. (1996) compared the techniques of shared reading and round robin reading. Four classroom teachers and seventy-eight second graders were used for this study. Two classroom teachers were trained in using the shared book reading experience (SBE) while the other two used the traditional turn taking style of round robin reading (RRR). Both groups read the same set of books. Eldredge et al. (1996) found that "students in the SBE group outperformed children in the RRR group on all measures of reading growth: vocabulary acquisition, word analysis, word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension" (p. 218). They also state, "The results of the experiment indicate that the SBE is effective in reducing young children's oral reading errors, improving their reading fluency, and increasing their vocabulary acquisition" (Eldredge et al., 1996, p. 221).

Print Referencing During Read Alouds

Print referencing refers to calling attention to and discussing print while reading aloud to children. Zucker, Ward, and Justice (2009) stress that "daily classroom read-alouds provide a versatile context for supporting a range of emergent literacy skills" (p. 62). Ezell and Justice (2000) expand upon this thought by stating, "Most adults view read-alouds as a time to discuss story meaning or comprehension skills and rarely take advantage of opportunities to talk about print-related skills" (as cited in Zucker et al., 2009, p. 62). In order to implement print referencing appropriately, the teacher uses both verbal and nonverbal cues. Verbal cues include questioning, requests and comments (How many words are on this page? Show me where I should start reading. These words

are the same.). Nonverbal cues include tracking print from left to right and pointing to the print while reading (Zucker et al., 2009). Zucker et al. (2009) continue to say:

> A central goal of print referencing is to engage emergent readers in conversations about print that foster metalinguistic awareness. When adults use print referencing in read-alouds, they promote children's metalinguistic awareness by encouraging children to consider written language (i.e. print) as an object of attention while also modeling specific words one may use to talk about and negotiate forms and functions of written language. (pp. 63-65)

Many studies have been done on print referencing during read alouds in the classroom, several of which were conducted by Laura M. Justice. She has worked with several other researchers to determine the effectiveness of print referencing with young children. In an earlier study, Justice and Ezell (2002) tested the impact of read aloud sessions with a focus on print awareness in preschool children from low income homes. Thirty preschool students were used for this study and were both pre and post tested using six informal measures: print concepts, print recognition, words in print, letter orientation/discrimination, alphabet knowledge and literacy terms (Justice & Ezell, 2002). The students were divided into ten groups, each of which participated in twenty-four reading sessions. Five of the groups maintained a print focus (experimental group) while the other five had a picture focus (control group). Upon completion of the study, it was concluded that gains were made by using print focused read alouds with at-risk preschool students. While there were improvements in all measures, the most gains were seen in the areas of Words in Print and Print Recognition (Justice & Ezell, 2002).

Seven years later, Justice et al. (2009) used twenty-three teachers and 142

preschoolers to determine the effects of using print referencing techniques. Fourteen teachers used print referencing while nine teachers used their normal style of reading. All classrooms read the same stories the same number of times. Justice et al.'s (2009) findings determined:

> Preschoolers' participation in print-focused reading sessions for an academic year resulted in educationally significant gains in children's print concept knowledge, alphabet knowledge, and name-writing ability as compared to preschoolers experiencing reading sessions in which teachers used their typical reading style. (p. 76)

In a similar study, Justice et al. (2010) determined that "preschool teachers who embedded explicit references to print during regular whole-class read-alouds significantly increased children's print knowledge compared to teachers who did not" (p. 513). Fifty-nine preschool classrooms were used for this study. Thirty-one teachers were randomly assigned to use specific print referencing techniques during 120 read alouds while the remaining twenty-eight used their regular reading strategies. In addition to the above, Justice et al.'s (2010) study showed gains in language as well when using print referencing during read alouds.

Lovelace and Stewart's (2007) study used five four-to-five year old preschool students with language impairments to explore the effectiveness of non-evocative print referencing on their print awareness. Each student was provided scripted input on twenty print concepts during read aloud language intervention sessions. A response to these inputs was not required. It was concluded that the preschool students did learn the print concepts that were presented to them during their sessions. The learning continued as the

inputs were repeated (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007). This study explored the positive effects of print referencing even when a response is not warranted due to language impairments.

Conclusion

After reviewing the research, it is clear that interactive reading techniques such as assisted reading and print referencing enhance young children's learning of essential literacy skills. Interactive reading allows students to connect and respond to a story both personally and interpersonally (Barrentine, 1996). Research has shown (Eldredge et al., 1996; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice et al., 2009; Justice et al., 2010; Lovelace & Stewart, 2007; Rasinski, 2014) that specific techniques such as echo reading, modeling, shared reading, and print referencing prove to be effective in improving the literacy skills of young students. Such literacy skills include, but are not limited to vocabulary, language, concepts about print, alphabetic principle, name writing, memory, sequence, and comprehension. It has been found that through modest adjustments, preschool (as well as elementary) teachers can improve the way they read to their students and improve their print awareness (Justice et al., 2010). The goal of this study is to combine two interactive strategies (echo reading and tracking) and observe the outcome when used with a small group of preschool children. This will be a positive contribution to the current research.

Chapter three will discuss the study context and design. The methodology, as well as data and research collection will also be addressed.

Chapter III

Research Design/Methodology

Research Paradigm

There are two major paradigms of educational research: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research refers to questions about a variable and can have a cause and effect format. The inquiry is specific with the researcher assuming an objective role and the results involving means and standard deviations. The purpose behind quantitative research is often to prove effectiveness when it comes to teaching by formulating and testing hypotheses.

Qualitative research refers to asking more general, open-ended questions and is conducted in a natural setting. This type of inquiry uses more informal methods during a study such as "observation, interviews, and document/artifact collection" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44). Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) describe qualitative methods in more detail saying:

> In addition to documenting classroom practice and students' learning, they also systematically document from the inside perspective their own questions, interpretive frameworks, changes in views over time, dilemmas, and reoccurring themes. Ideas about what count as data and analysis in practitioner research are often different from those of traditional modes. (p. 44)

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher assumes a subjective role as a participant and the results are reported non-numerically. The overall purpose of qualitative inquiry is to promote change and improve the educational experience of the students.

When comparing quantitative and qualitative research, Smith (1983) offers insight through the perspectives of realists and idealists. Smith (1983) states:

> According to the realist position (quantitative), researchers should express themselves in a neutral, scientific language. To idealists (qualitative), the idea of neutral, scientific language in untenable because what is constituted as real can be expressed only with the language of everyday life. (p. 9).

Teacher research is a type of qualitative research that can be simply defined as "research that is initiated and carried out by teachers in their classrooms and schools" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 2). More specifically, "Teacher-researchers use their inquiries to study everything from the best way to teach reading and the most useful methods for organizing group activities, to the different ways girls and boys respond to a science curriculum" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 2). The overall goal of teacher research is to "create the best possible learning environment for students" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 3). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) suggest the power of teacher research:

> It is important for teachers to partake in inquiry because it not only creates a better learning environment for students, but also enhances the school, profession, and community as a whole. When practitioners engage in inquiry, they typically work from expanded rather than narrow views of teaching and learning. This includes conveying knowledge to students, but it also includes representing complex knowledge in accessible ways, asking good questions, co-constructing curriculum, forming relationships with students and parents who have widely varying abilities and backgrounds, collaborating with other professionals,

interpreting multiple data sources, and posing and solving problems of practice. (p. 10)

Teacher research emphasizes the importance of learning from other teachers and using previous research as a guide for improved teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teacher inquiry is about what drives one to be a better teacher. What could be done differently that could improve the quality of teaching? What challenges are faced due to meeting the needs of all students and how can they be provided with more equal opportunities to learn? Inquiry is what causes these types of questions and what then leads to enhanced teaching and further research.

For the purpose of this study, the qualitative teacher research paradigm will be used to both conduct the study and collect data. The analyses of what qualitative and quantitative research means provides a rationale for why qualitative is the best approach for this study. My question is open and will be the basis of the study. Methods such as observations and anecdotal notes will be used to determine what happens when two reading techniques are used simultaneously during small group read alouds with preschool children. Furthermore, teacher research is best suited for this study because my research will be taking place in my own classroom. I will be observing the literacy skills and behaviors of preschool students while using echo-reading and tracking strategies during small group read alouds. This inquiry stemmed from my own teaching which is the basis of teacher research. My goal is to see if the quality of small group read alouds can be improved and become more beneficial to the students; another main factor of teacher research.

The qualitative tools used throughout this study include observations, recordings

of students using the strategy, as well as their answers to comprehension questions, discussions with students, anecdotal record documentation charts, literacy and behavioral checklists, and my teacher journal.

Procedure of Study

After deciding on an inquiry question, I thought about which students would be best suited to participate in the study. Being that a small group was the best setting, I planned to choose four students. When deciding which students I would put into my small group, I thought about factors such as developmental level, behaviors, social skills, and attention span. I wanted the students to represent the class as a whole because my ultimate goal is to improve the quality of small group read alouds overall, not just for those four students. I chose students of different ages, levels, and skill-sets in order to observe what happens with a variety of students.

The week before beginning the study, I assessed the students using Marie Clay's (2005) Concepts About Print assessment. This is not a testing or evaluative study as previously mentioned, but I wanted to have a baseline as to my students' awareness of print at this point. I will be observing much more than just their print skills, but I felt as though it would provide me with some valuable information before beginning the study.

Upon completing the student selection process, I began my study. The first week happened to consist of only three days and I thought this would be a good time to collect some data on their existing literacy skills and behaviors. I read aloud *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle using my normal reading techniques: simply reading, asking questions, and allowing the students to comment on the pictures. Anecdotal notes are taken throughout the day on a regular basis so I explained that the notes I was taking

were no different. I also explained that if I was recording, it was for me to listen back to the discussions later to remember what we talked about.

I began using the echo-reading and tracking techniques during the second week while reading *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle aloud. On Monday, I introduced the book and asked the students questions about the front and back covers. I explained that we were going to try something new together and that they were going to help me read the story. I expressed that I wanted them to repeat the line of text, while pointing to the words, after I finished reading. I then modeled with the title page to ensure they knew what I was asking them to do. We went through the entire story with the students taking turns being the one who echoed my reading. Questions were still asked and students were able to comment on the story as they saw fit. On Wednesday, the students reviewed the story with me using normal techniques such as asking questions about what they remember happening. They were then asked to draw their favorite part of the story. On Thursday, the students used paper plates, yarn, and spider rings to create their own very busy spider webs. As they were completing these extension activities, discussions about the story were had.

During the third week, echo reading and tracking techniques were used once again with the story *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Charles Shaw on Monday. I reminded the students of what we did last week and explained that we would be doing that again. As always, comprehension questions were asked, predictions were made, and students commented as they chose. On Wednesday, the students once again reviewed the story with me and discussed what they remembered. Then, they were given the opportunity to recall what the cloud sometimes looked like. They took turns drawing what they

remembered on my iPad. We then compared what they drew to what was in the story, discussing similarities and differences, as well as if they missed anything altogether. On Friday, the students were given blue construction paper and white finger paint. They were directed to put the white paint on one side of the paper in any way they choose. They then folded their paper, with assistance, reopened it and discussed what their homemade cloud looked like.

During the fourth week, the techniques were used while reading *Llama Llama Time to Share* by Anna Dewdney. On Monday, the students read through the story by echo reading and tracking print. As with the previous weeks, I asked questions and gave them opportunities to comment on their own. On Tuesday, the students reviewed the story with me and were then asked to complete a First, Then, Next, So chart. They were provided with the chart with the headings that also had numbers for a visual reference to the word since they cannot read (First 1., Then 2.., Next 3..., So 4....). They were also given four pictures that were to be placed in proper sequence in the columns. The pictures were discussed to ensure meaning before glue sticks were passed out. Conversations took place about the story while the chart was being completed and the group completed the chart together taking one column at a time. On Wednesday, students were asked to draw a picture of a time when they shared with their friends at school. We discussed how this relates to the plot of the story while they were drawing. The students were off for Thanksgiving on Thursday and Friday which is why the lessons were condensed to three consecutive days.

During the fifth and final week, the students used the techniques while reading *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood. On Monday, they completed the echo reading and

tracking activities while answering questions and discussing the story. On Wednesday, the group worked together to complete a felt story of *The Napping House*. They recalled the sequence of the story, using the book as a guide, to build the felt story. On Friday, the students were asked to draw their favorite part of the story and share it with the rest of the group.

Data Sources

I used several qualitative resources to obtain data throughout my study. I started by creating anecdotal record charts. I made four different charts to focus and organize my observations: print awareness, participation and engagement, comprehension, and other. These charts were used to write various notes about what the students did and said in regards to those aforementioned learning areas. I was then able to look back to my notes and analyze what was happening in each session, as well as the similarities and differences between each read aloud. In addition to the read aloud, these charts were also used during the extension activities in order to see if there were any changes in work or discussions. Academic and behavioral checklists were also created and used for a quick analysis of what was happening during the small group read aloud. Similar to the anecdotal notes documentation charts, I created four checklists: comprehension, participation, engagement, and concepts about print. These checklists were used to see if there were any enhancements in literacy skills and/or behaviors when using the echo reading and tracking techniques. In addition to these, discussions throughout the read alouds, along with the students using the techniques were recorded using my iPad and phone in order for me to listen back at the end of each day. The last method of data collection was my teacher researcher journal. This was used to reflect upon each session

and look at my practices as well as the students' responses to my method of teaching.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the study was used to determine what happens in regards to student behavior and performance when echo reading and tracking are used during small group read alouds with preschool children. Through using my charts, checklists, and recordings, I was able to see areas that improved due to using these techniques, as well as areas in which they had no effect. I was also able to view the similarities and differences based upon age and developmental level of the students. The recordings were a tool in which I was able to relive the sessions with my students and note anything I may have missed while it was happening. These were noted in my journal. My research journal was used as a means to reflect upon my own practices and to look at patterns and student responses. It gave me a chance to write through the process of teaching using new techniques and how that worked for me, as well as the students.

Context

Community. Pemberton Township is located in Burlington County, New Jersey. According to the 2010 Census, there is a population of 27,912 people. Of this population, 67.53% are White, 20.49% are African American, 11.92% are Hispanic or Latino, 0.37% are Native American, 2.89% are Asian, 0.13% are Pacific Islander, 3% are from other races, and 5.59% are from two or more races. There are 9,997 people who have households and there are 7,078 families. In regards to the makeup of these households, 30.6% have children under the age of eighteen, 48.8% are married couples living together, 15.7% are female only, with no male present, and 29.2% are non-family

residences. The average household side is 2.74 and the average family size is 3.22 people.

As of 2010, the median household income was $63,309 and the median family income was $73,757. In terms of gender, males earned an average income of $49,446 while females earned an average of $38,713. The per capita income for Pemberton Township was $26,240. According to the Census, 7.9% of families and 10.7% of the entire population were living in poverty.

District. The Pemberton Township School District consists of ten schools: one early childhood education center, seven elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. According to National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2012-2013 school year, a total of 4,880 students were enrolled throughout the district. Of these 4,880 students, sixty were considered English Language Learners and 865 had an Individualized Education Program (IEP). There were 442 certified classroom teachers and the student-to-teacher ratio was 11.04.

School. The Pemberton Early Childhood Education Center (PECEC) currently houses over 500 preschool students in thirty-seven classrooms. The school day runs from 9:10 until 3:40 for students and 8:35 to 3:55 for teachers. Before and after care (Wrap Around Program) is available to those who need it from 6:00 until 9:10 in the morning and 3:40 until 6:00 in the evening.

According to the NJ School Performance report, during the 2012-2013 school year, 50.1% of students were Caucasian, 28.2% were African American, 15.4% were Hispanic, 4.1% were Asian, 1.4% were American Indian, and 0.8% were Pacific Islander. English and Spanish are the two most spoken languages at PECEC. 90.9% of students

speak English and 6.7% speak Spanish. In terms of gender, there were 258 males and 235 female students enrolled. The National Center for Education Statistics estimated that approximately 160 students qualified for free lunch and 55 qualified for reduced-price lunch during the 2012-2013 school year. In regards to student data and achievement, there are no standardized test scores to report, but the state does look at the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) scores, Child Observation Record (COR) assessment progress, and teacher evaluations.

Classroom. Ms. Knoll's classroom is considered a preschool multi-age inclusion class. It currently consists of eleven students, but can have a maximum of fifteen students. Of the eleven students, six are girls and five are boys. The racial makeup of the class is six Caucasians, three African Americans, one Hispanic, and one bi-racial student. At this time, four students are three years old, five students are four years old, and two students are five years old. Three students in the class have IEPs. Two are for speech delays and one is for both speech and social emotional delays. Two students have been referred to the Preschool Intervention and Referral Team (PIRT), which is not a Child Study or classification team, but rather a means to gain strategies for a child in need. One referral is due to receptive language and cognitive concerns and the other is in regards to a lack of social skills. In addition to the students, there are two teachers, one general education and one special education, one 6 ½ hour aide, and one school helper aide in the classroom.

Students. Four of the eleven students in the class will be used for the purposes of this research study. Emily is a five-year-old girl who is above average academically and socially compared to the rest of her peers. Heather is a four-year-old girl who is on target

both academically and socially. Eric is a three-year-old boy who is on average academically, but below average socially. He is the previously mentioned student who was referred to PIRT for social skills. Marcus is a four-year-old boy who is below average academically and average socially when compared to his peers. He is the student who was referred to PIRT for receptive language and cognitive concerns. These students were chosen in order to represent the multi-age, multi-level preschool class.

These students, as well as the rest of the class, partake in a daily routine that is consistent each day and is as follows: arrival/breakfast time, greeting time, small group time, planning time, work time, cleanup time, recall time, large group time, lunch, outside time, rest time, snack time, and dismissal time. The HighScope curriculum used allows for many opportunities for students to engage in social interaction and exploration in order to promote academic achievement, social maturity, and independence.

Chapter four is divided into individual case studies of each student who participated in the study. I analyzed all data, before and after the study began, and reported the findings for each student. Chapter five provides a summary of the study findings, as well as conclusions and implications for future research.

Chapter IV

Case Studies

Chapter four discusses the results of my study. I looked through all sources of data (my teacher journal, literacy and behavioral checklists, anecdotal note record sheets, recordings of sessions, and exit interviews) to determine the most important, consistent findings. I chose to report these findings by focusing on each participant individually. I then follow up with key data that was apparent across all students in the group. As the context section of chapter one explained, I chose four students of varying cognitive and social skill levels in order to represent my entire preschool classroom. Each student brought something unique to my research and was affected in different ways. I felt as though their academic and behavioral skill sets are common among all preschool, and even kindergarten and lower elementary classrooms, and I wanted to report my findings in this way. As chapter four continues, it is divided into five additional sections: The Eager Student, The Easily Distracted Student, The Average Student, The Processing Student, and The Group as a Whole.

The Eager Student

Eager preschool students are those who are always first to answer questions, who often shout out the answers, and who have high participation rates. Many times, the eager student lessens the chance of other students participating. Emily is a five year old student who enjoys coming to school, helping her peers, and learning. She retains new information quickly and is always ready to teach what she knows to others. She is considered to be an above average preschool student and one who is a role model for her classmates.

When reviewing the data from week one, prior to introducing the echo reading and tracking techniques, I wrote that Emily answered all general questions directed to both her and to the entire group, she often called out the answers, and she participated with every page and question. When listening back to the session on my iPad, I often found myself asking Emily to give someone else a turn to talk. I reflected upon this in my journal stating, "Although Emily's actions show that her retention/comprehension skills are intact, her constant quick responses seem to be overshadowing the others. By asking her to give someone else a turn, I hope I am not diminishing her self-confidence" (journal entry November 3, 2014).

I introduced the idea of echo reading and tracking print during week two while reading *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle. When looking at my anecdotal record sheet (see Appendix A), I wrote that Emily always jumps in to answer questions. Although the problem appeared to be continuing, I noticed when listening to the recorded session that I did not have to provide her with as many reminders to give others a turn to answer. I attributed this to the fact that by asking each student, one at a time, to echo read and track print with me, it forced her to focus on whose turn it was and when it was appropriate to answer. I did emphasize that whoever is helping me read is the one who will answer the question. I also reminded her that if I say a child's name, that is the child I want to answer. She obliged when asked, but sometimes could not help herself and answered questions for other students before they could even try.

The following week, I saw a vast improvement in Emily's patience and ability to wait. I observed her eagerly answering questions when it was her turn to echo read and track, but giving others a chance to answer first when it was not. To lessen confusion, I

made sure to use students' names when asking questions and this seemed to help her control her impulse to answer. I reflected upon this in my journal by stating, “Today Emily showed much improvement in her ability to let others answer questions. When a question was asked to another student, she just looked at them and waited. If they didn't know an answer or didn't respond, she would say 'I know' with her hand up or waving before shouting out the answer. I'm feeling that this is helping with her self-control while keeping her confidence high. I do let her help when others want it or if I feel she could add great insight to a question. This also helps her to feel good” (journal entry November 10, 2014).

By the end of the study, Emily rarely shouted out an answer when it was directed to another student. She was always willing and eager to help them or add to their answer, but she gave them their fair chance to think and produce an idea. When a question was directed to the entire group, she was still the first one to answer in most cases, however, the individual turn taking provided with the echo reading and tracking really helped her to focus on when she should and should not answer a question.

Eager preschool students are great in many ways because they usually have high skill sets and increased retention abilities. They always want to help and prove what they know because feeling smart makes them feel good. However, these students can also be overpowering and hinder the abilities of the other students. My data shows that using the echo reading and tracking techniques during read alouds helps to set boundaries and limits in regards to answering questions, allowing the eager students to show their knowledge, but also have respect for others.

The Easily Distracted Student

Easily distracted preschool students are ones who have lower attention spans. They may or may not have a true interest in learning, but their surroundings are often too overwhelming, preventing them from focusing on the task. Eric will be four years of age in one month. He loves coming to school, but his attention span limits the amount of time he can attend to an activity. Lesson plans need to be modified based upon his interests in order to keep him at the table. Even when playing, he moves from one area to the next frequently without truly completing a task.

During the first week of the study, I noted Eric's read aloud behavior as squirmy, with his eyes wandering on his anecdotal note record sheet. I observed him rolling on the floor while I was reading, as well as him watching and listening to what the other two small groups were doing. I also wrote down that he never answered questions unless they were specifically directed to him. Furthermore, he didn't independently comment on anything read. When listening back to the session, I noted in my journal that he needed several reminders to look at the book and listen. It was easy to see that he was not able to focus his attention on the story.

Eric's focus changed the following week when the echo reading and tracking techniques were introduced. I noted that he did not look around as much and was less distracted. On my behavioral checklist (see Appendix B), I was able to mark that he sat relatively still; something I could not check during week one. He still only answered questions when he was asked directly, but when listening to the session, I noted in my journal that “Eric did not need any reminders to pay attention and his answers to my questions were more on target. He did not roll on the floor or look to see what the other

groups were doing" (journal entry November 10, 2014). When thinking about what this meant, I further reflected that he "seemed engaged in the story because he had to wait for his turn to read" (journal entry November 10, 2014). Eric really liked taking his turn to read and track the print and by him having to wait for this turn, he was able to focus on the pages, as well as listen to the other students read, comment, and ask questions about the story.

As the weeks passed, I noticed this to be a consistent finding. Eric was able to focus on the story as long as he was waiting for his turn. The involvement in the story kept him interested and engaged. In the final week, Eric was even asking me, "Am I going to have a turn?" He no longer looked to see what the other groups were doing and his eyes were always on the book or whoever was speaking. Although the study was finished, I wrote about an instance in my journal regarding the week after my study was complete. I introduced a new book and because it was longer, it was not conducive to the echo reading techniques. However, I didn't want to completely shy away from the methods after seeing how well it worked so I told the group that I would start and they would help me finish. During the beginning when I was the only one reading, Eric was back to looking around the room, slouching in his chair, and going under the table. Later, when I said it was time for them to help, he was back upright and waiting for his turn. This really showed me that the techniques were what kept him focused. He truly benefited from interacting with the story.

When students are easily distracted, it is often hard to teach them. They need more differentiation and scaffolding in order to keep their interest and maintain attentiveness. My data suggests that the use of the interactive strategies echo reading and

tracking can help these students focus on what is being read aloud. This will then lead to the student needing less one-on-one attention during group read alouds.

The Average Student

Average preschool students are ones who are on target in all areas. They like coming to school and they make plenty of friends. They socialize and they share with others. They handle conflicts well and are not at all aggressive. Average students focus on a lesson and complete it entirely, doing what they are asked. They are not always jumping at the chance to participate, but will readily do so when necessary. Heather will be five in one month and is by all means an average preschool student. She comes to school with a joyful attitude, is confident about her abilities, and always wants to help out. She takes on the teacher role whenever possible with her friends, but can be shy at times when working with adults. She answers questions appropriately and often enjoys participating, but will back down if someone is talking over her.

During the first week of the study, I noted that Heather remained focused on the story and sat still while looking at all of the pages. She answered many questions, although most were when she was asked directly. When she did attempt to jump in, she stopped talking because others were speaking as well. She waited until they were finished and then she commented. Sometimes, time did not allow for her to say everything she wanted. I thought about this when reflecting in my journal and wrote, "Heather loves to learn and share her knowledge with others. She tries to jump in, but Emily always seems to get the answer out first. This seems to sometimes keep her quiet. I think she needs to be asked more direct questions so she can also get her thoughts out" (journal entry November 3, 2014).

During the third week of the study, I really began to notice a difference in Heather's participation. We were reading *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* by Charles G. Shaw and by giving her an individual turn to echo read and track the print, she was able to then comment on what she just read and answer questions. She also began to feel more comfortable adding to what others were saying. She still held back a little if someone else was talking, but became more confident to add more. For example, in the anecdotal note record sheet, I noted that when asking the group what they thought it was if it wasn't spilt milk, Emily immediately answered, "A shadow." Heather then opened up and said, "I think it is a shadow too. From the sun." Prior to this read aloud, she would have simply let Emily answer and we would have moved on. When reflecting, I wrote, "Heather seems to be coming out of her shell when using the techniques. I like that she is embellishing upon others' thoughts and ideas. Taking turns using the techniques is allowing her the opportunity to think and provide adequate answers that she always had in her head, but was not given the opportunity to share" (journal entry November 18, 2014).

When reflecting further upon the conclusion of the study, this remained a consistent finding. Heather opened up more because she had the floor to speak when it was her turn. In accordance with this, she provided more details within her answers and the turn taking allowed her the opportunity to talk without being interrupted.

Average students sometimes fall through the cracks because teachers know their capabilities and lower students need more attention. Using the interactive techniques during my read alouds helped me provide Heather with the means to express her knowledge and get her voice heard. I was able to hear more of her thoughts, how she

processes information, and what she can do with that information in more depth than with my normal read aloud strategies.

The Processing Student

Processing preschool students are those children who simply need more time. This mostly applies when it comes to answering questions. These students often need the question to be repeated or rephrased in order for them to provide a logical answer. Marcus is a four year old student who loves coming to school. He is socially on target with the rest of his peers, but he has some auditory processing concerns that hinder his learning and retention at times. When asked a question, he sometimes answers off topic or not at all. However, when the question is repeated and/or rephrased, he can usually produce the correct answer with time.

What I noticed most with Marcus during the first week of the study is that he struggled with producing an original thought. His answers to questions often mimicked ones already given. I noted that he did not comment about the story on his own; he only answered questions. Quoted from my journal, "Marcus has the knowledge and ability to answer questions appropriately, but he needs more time to process the question. He copies others' answers if he is not asked first and does not attempt to think of his own or add to their answer" (journal entry November 3, 2014).

As time went on, I noticed Marcus began to expand upon other students' answers. For example, when reading *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* during the third week, Marcus stated that he thought it was also "a shadow" (mimicked from Emily's idea), but then added that it was a shadow "from the moon." This was a play on Heather's previously mentioned expansion, but he was able to change the idea to make it his own. Later,

during the fourth week of the study, Emily read a sentence about a character feeling sad in *Llama Llama Time to Share* by Anna Dewdney. Heather stated that she was sad because she didn't want to play with Llama's toys. Marcus added, "She can play somewhere else." This was a turning point for Marcus because he was able to take someone else's thought, think about it, and produce a new idea related to the topic.

Students who need more time to process can be hard to scaffold for when completing a group lesson. Time is always a limitation, but that is exactly what these students need. My data shows that by using the echo reading and tracking techniques, Marcus was able to have the time he needed to process information. I believe that the time allotted for him during his turn helped him, not only because he was the only one reading, but also because he got to hear the line of text twice; once from me and once from reading himself. Furthermore, when it was his turn, he was the only one answering which forced him to produce an original thought. That, coupled with giving him time, allowed him to give a logical answer. He still repeated others' ideas at times, but the data shows improvements in this area and shows that using the interactive techniques provide students with extra time while still maintaining the rest of the group.

The Group as a Whole

When reviewing the data and looking at the students individually, it was apparent that the techniques positively affected their social behaviors in a small group context. However, when looking at the data in terms of findings consistent across the entire group, it was their academic skills that stood out; specifically in regards to their concepts about print. There may not have been the exact same improvements in all areas among all students, but there was a definite increase in print awareness across the board.

Before beginning the study, I administered Marie Clay's (2005) Concepts About Print assessment (see Appendix C). Although it is intended for children ages five and above, I wasn't using it for testing purposes, but rather a baseline in order to see if improvements were made. Emily had a score of eleven, Heather had a score of eight, and Eric and Marcus both scored three. This showed me the areas in which they already know and what could be worked on in the future through the use of the echo reading and tracking techniques.

When reading aloud, using the interactive strategies, and thinking about the concepts about print assessment, I focused on a few aspects to see if the echo reading and tracking would help. These areas included calling attention to print and punctuation. Author and illustrator vocabulary was also discussed. Before the study, Eric was the only one who was unable to identify that the words contain meaning and that this is where one should start reading. By the end of the study, all students were able to point to the words when asked where to start reading, including Eric. The students calling attention to print on their own was impressive and quite an improvement. While reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, Emily stopped me before I even started, pointed to the title, and said, "What does this say?" While reading *It Looked Like Spilt Milk*, Heather pointed to the words on a page and said, "Ms. Knoll, you didn't read this part." When discussing the cover and title of *Llama Llama Time to Share*, Emily asked, "What does this title say?" and pointed to the author's name. Although three out of the four students already had the ability to distinguish between pictures and words, it wasn't until implementing echo reading and tracking along with our everyday discussions, that they brought print to my attention and asked me what words and phrases said.

With all of the observations and notes taken for my data, I concluded that punctuation was the area in which all students improved most. They really enjoyed learning about and looking for punctuation marks while reading. We focused on the period and question mark. Quotation marks were introduced, but not enough for any retention to take place before the study concluded. During the third week of the study, punctuation was becoming more widely discussed. When coming across a question mark, I asked the group as a whole what it meant.

"Somebody is asking a question," Emily responded.

"Yes. Someone is asking a question. When someone asks a question, we have to give an..." I asked.

"Answer!" Heather shouted.

Moving along, we began discussing the period. I asked what it was and I got the unanimous response of "a dot."

"It does look like a dot. This dot is called a period. What did we say a period means?" I asked.

"Stop," Emily responded.

"Right. We have to stop reading when we see a period. Then we can move on to the next sentence. If I read without stopping like this [proceeded to read the entire page without stopping], what is wrong with that?" I asked.

"You're going too fast," Heather replied.

This showed me that although my students cannot read on their own to put the period into use, they still understand the meaning when echo reading. Also, without them tracking while echo reading, they weren't able to become aware of punctuation or point it out

because they didn't know exactly where I was reading.

The above quotations show that Emily and Heather retained the most information, however as the fourth week approached, I saw Eric and Marcus getting into the conversations as well. While reading *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, I posed a question directly to Eric.

"What is this [pointed to a question mark]?"

"Question mark," Eric replied.

"That is a question mark. What does a question mark mean when we are reading?" I asked.

"Asking something," he said.

It was a short and simple answer, but an improvement nonetheless. When looking back at the Concepts About Print assessment from before the study began, Eric did know what a question mark was, but when asked what it meant he said, "You have to talk." The above answer shows more of an idea about what a question mark really means. Later on in the session, Heather pointed out a period, using the correct term. At that point, Marcus pointed to another period on the page and said, "That means stop reading." Throughout my time working on the study, punctuation is what the students called attention to most.

At the end of the study, I gave the students an exit interview (see Appendix D) to see how they felt about what they did during small group time. Due to their age, the questions were simple and specific. The answers were pretty consistent between all four students. They all stated that they liked helping me read. When asked what they liked best (reading, tracking, or both), they all responded both. When asked if they like listening to stories more when they can help me or when I read by myself, they all said

when they can help. Different responses came when asked the question, “What did you learn?” However, all involved punctuation, confirming that this was the most improved area of literacy when using the interactive techniques. The answers were as follows:

“We start at the top, then the middle, then the bottom. We go to the next sentence. The period means stop reading,” Emily responded.

“Question marks. Someone is asking a question,” Heather replied.

“The other person has to give an...” I added.

“Answer,” Heather finished.

“Question marks. You're asking a question. A period means stop reading,” Marcus stated.

It took more specific prompting to get an answer from Eric, but he ultimately stated, “Question marks.” I then ended the interview by asking them if they thought they were good readers and why. They all said yes. Emily's reasoning was, “Because I'm smart.” Heather said, “Because I'm a great reader.” Marcus responded, “Because I'm a good reader like Heather. I'm good at reading because I'm four.” Eric stated, “Because I read.” This showed me that giving them the opportunity to echo read and call attention to print helps to develop self-efficacy toward reading.

Conclusion

These four students were chosen to represent the varying levels and abilities of the students in my preschool classroom. The data shows that using echo reading and tracking interactive techniques have a positive impact on both social behaviors and academic skills. When the students have individual turns to read, track, comment, and answer questions, they are given the opportunity to express their knowledge at their pace

and in their way. The strategies also help to maintain focus for those students who need to be engaged. This makes it conducive to all learning types and levels. From an academic standpoint, calling attention to print while reading aloud helps students to become aware of the words and that they contain the meaning. Additionally, the strategies allow them the chance to practice the skills themselves. The data shows an increase in print awareness, along with punctuation. The discussions had in each session were more focused and academic as well. This, in turn, could lead to enhanced learning in other areas.

Chapter five summarizes my findings, as well as addresses the limitations and implications for future research.

Chapter V

Further Reflection, Limitations, and Future Research

In this final chapter, I will summarize my findings and draw further conclusions by expanding upon the information discussed in chapter four. Also, this chapter will address the limitations of the study, as well as implications for future research.

Summary

Upon the conclusion of my research, I found that my students showed both social and academic improvements after using the echo reading and tracking strategies during read alouds. Within the five weeks that the study was presented, four of which incorporated the interactive techniques, the students were each given the opportunity to showcase their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Socially, students were able to remain focused and engaged, wait patiently for their turn, and respect their peers. Academically, students demonstrated gains in their print awareness, specifically in regards to calling attention to print on their own and understanding punctuation. Looking at the students individually gave me a stronger idea of how the strategies used can help preschool students of all levels and abilities.

Each student brought their own strengths and weaknesses to the group. Their unique personalities coupled with their individual skill sets caused the echo reading and tracking techniques to affect them in different ways. As chapter four stated, I divided the results into case studies specific to each student in order to represent my entire preschool class. The divisions were as follows: the eager student, the easily distracted student, the average student, and the processing student. These general classifications represent the social skills and behaviors common to most preschool classrooms.

When using echo reading and tracking with my group, I found that the eager student was able to gain more self-control and give other students their turn to talk. She became more of a role model and helper rather than the one always shouting out the answers. Her knowledge was amazing, but by each student having individual turns, she learned the appropriate time to share that knowledge. The easily distracted student was able to remain focused and engaged throughout the entire read aloud. Waiting for his turn to read and track gave him something to look forward to and even helped him learn to listen to others. He paid attention which gave him more of an ability to comment and answer questions. The procedure of using the techniques gave the average student a chance to share her ideas without being talked over. Over time, she became more confident discussing her thoughts and adding to what others were saying. Lastly, the processing student was awarded enough time to truly think about what he wanted to say. He had time to answer questions appropriately without someone else shouting out the answer first. Also, the turn taking involved with using the techniques helped him to produce original thoughts, therefore enhancing his critical thinking skills.

When reviewing the data with an academic mindset, it was clear that improvements were made in the area of print awareness. The students began calling attention to print without being prompted. In addition to tracking for the study, the students would point out the title before I could and ask me to read words they noticed I skipped. Furthermore, the students truly enjoyed learning about punctuation. They retained this information pretty quickly and would often point out different punctuation marks (specifically the period and question mark) while they were reading and tracking. They were able to tell me that a period means “stop reading” and a question mark means

"someone is asking a question."

Incorporating echo reading and tracking print into my read aloud procedure gave my students the opportunity to enhance their social skills, especially those revolving around turn taking. While working on these social skills, they were also increasing their knowledge about print. Socialization is just as important as academics for preschoolers so having my students echo read and track print during read alouds was an effective way to bring both of those skills together.

Conclusions

After reviewing the research discussed in chapter two, I found that my study supports the previous findings, as well as extends them. My research concluded that using interactive reading techniques can enhance both social and academic skills. Furthermore, while all of the research found that interactive techniques work for large group read alouds, my research showed that these techniques can be effective in a small group setting as well.

Social versus academic skills. As previously mentioned, my research study showed the positive effects echo reading and tracking can have on preschoolers' social behaviors. Each student with individual needs had different outcomes when using the strategies. The research found for the review of literature provided information in regards to academic skills only. Zucker et al. (2009) state that "print referencing refers to techniques educators use to increase emergent readers' knowledge about and interest in print by highlighting the forms, functions, and features of print during read alouds" (p. 62). Several studies (Justice et. al, 2009; Justice et. al, 2010; Wasik & Bond, 2001) found that using interactive reading techniques positively affect preschoolers' language and

literacy skills. My research showed this as well, but extends it with the overall conclusion that when the students are so young, using techniques that involve turn taking, such as echo reading, can help students gain self-control, increase their engagement, and provide sufficient time for students to share their knowledge individually within a read aloud.

Small group versus large group read alouds. When testing the effects of interactive reading strategies, such as print referencing, researchers did so with a large group of students. The strategies proved effective in enhancing the skills of preschool students. Wasik and Bond (2001) conducted a study in which preschoolers in the intervention group received interactive book reading techniques and those in the control group did not. The students were read to in a whole group and results found that "children whose teachers provided multiple opportunities to interact with vocabulary words learned more book related vocabulary compared with children who were exposed to just the books" (Wasik & Bond, 2001, p. 247). Justice et al. (2009) also used whole group instruction for their research on print referencing and found that "children whose teachers use a print referencing style showed larger gains on three standardized measures of print knowledge: print concept knowledge, alphabet knowledge, and name writing" (p. 67).

A large group was not conducive to my study due to the echo reading technique. It would not have been developmentally appropriate to have each child wait for all of the others to take their turn. Therefore, I chose a small group format. Only four students participated in the study in order to limit the wait time. My findings showed that the students were able to wait without getting distracted or frustrated and because of the

small amount of students, they were able to focus on what others were discussing. The results of my study also showed gains in concepts about print and overall print awareness. This was a good extension of the research already provided because it showed that the use of interactive read aloud strategies also work with smaller groups of students.

Limitations

The main limitation affecting the study was the length of time. The span of this study was five weeks, however the first week was used strictly to observe and note behaviors when normal read aloud procedures were used. Therefore, the interactive read aloud techniques used within this study were only in place for four weeks. Preschool children need several weeks of consistent practice in order to truly retain information so a longer time frame would have been ideal. It would have given me more time to focus on specific aspects of literacy that were observed (i.e. punctuation). In regards to the social aspects observed, a longer period of time would have allowed me to see if the behaviors remained consistent or if they got tired of using the techniques. This is something that happens often in preschool when new ideas begin to get old.

A minor limitation of the study was resources. Due to the age and attention span of my students, a book with short lines of text needed to be used. A book that was too long would go beyond the time frame of the small group lesson and the students would begin to lose focus simply because of the length. Many of the curriculum books provided by the school were too long, therefore leading me to look outside of that selection.

Another limitation was my experience as a teacher researcher. This was the first time I was truly conducting teacher research and was unaware of exactly how much

needed to be done to obtain data. I didn't always have time to reflect in my research journal when I wanted and some of my data tools needed to be modified. Knowing this now, future research can run more smoothly and I can focus more on the students and the study with the preparation already in place and running smoothly.

Implications for Future Research

Upon reviewing my data and drawing conclusions about what happens when echo reading and tracking are used simultaneously during small group read alouds with preschoolers, I noticed two areas that could be further researched by others in the field. The first area would be the time frame. It would be beneficial to others who may be interested in continuing research with the preschool age group to do so over a longer period of time. This would allow the researcher to go into more depth regarding specific aspects that my study observed. For example, I noticed an increase in patience and engagement, however it would be interesting to see if this changes as the techniques become more familiar. Moreover, I noticed significant gains in concepts about print, but a longer span of time would allow for a deeper look at specific skills. Lastly, although read alouds occur daily, time only allowed for the strategies to be used one time per week. Increasing the length of the study would give the students more time to practice, which would then provide the researcher with more conclusive data.

The second implication for future research would be the grade level of the students. My research concluded that echo reading and tracking have positive effects on preschool students in a small group setting. Another teacher researcher may want to see if this translates the same way in kindergarten or first grade when guided reading groups are introduced. Generally, echo reading is used one-on-one to help struggling readers,

but given the results of my study, it may prove to be a new method for conducting guided reading. Using older students may also produce a change in results in regards to comprehension. My findings did not show an increase in comprehension; however, elementary age students have the skill sets to provide information in a variety of ways that preschoolers cannot. They can complete story maps, answer questions in writing, or provide a thorough retelling. With more options for extension activities, the researcher could gain a better understanding of how interactive read aloud techniques correlate with comprehension.

Conclusion

To summarize, using interactive read aloud techniques like echo reading and tracking print can help to enhance both the social and academic skills of preschool students. When doing so in a small group, students begin to develop patience and self-control. They respect others who are speaking and each student is awarded the opportunity to speak and produce original thoughts. Academically, an increase in print awareness can be seen through the use of these techniques. Introducing preschool students to specific concepts about print, as well as teaching them how to work cooperatively with others in a group, prepares them for what is to come in kindergarten when they will truly learn how to read. This study suggests that preschool teachers use these interactive techniques when reading aloud to their students in order to provide them with the foundation they need to begin the reading process.

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Appendix A
Anecdotal Note Record Sheet

Student #1: _____	***Student #2: _____***
Student #3: _____	***Student #4: _____***

Appendix B
Behavioral Checklist

(Place a √ next to each item that applies)

Book Title:

____ Sits relatively still while reading

____ Listens to others echo read

____ Looks at the print and pictures while reading aloud & listening

____ Echo reads as asked

____ Points to print while echo reading as asked

____ Answers questions appropriately

Other Notes:
_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C
Marie Clay's (2005) Concepts About Print Assessment

Administration instructions for *Follow Me, Moon*; *No Shoes*; *Sand* and *Stones*

Say to the child: *'I'm going to read you this story but I want you to help me.'*

COVER

Item 1

Test: For orientation of book.

Pass the book to the child, holding it vertically by outside edge, spine towards the child.

Say: *'Show me the front of this book.'*

Score: 1 point for the correct response.

PAGES 2/3

Item 2

Test: Concept that print, not picture, carries the message.

Say: *'I'll read this story. You help me. Show me where to start reading. Where do I begin to read?'*

Read the text on page 2.

Score: 1 point for print. 0 for picture.

PAGES 4/5

Item 3

Test: For directional rules.

Say: *'Show me where to start.'*

Score: 1 point for top left.

Item 4

Test: Moves left to right on any line.

Say: *'Which way do I go?'*

Score: 1 point for left to right.

Item 5

Test: Return sweep.

Say: *'Where do I go after that?'*

Score: 1 point for return sweep to left, or for moving down the page.

(Score items 3–5 if all movements are demonstrated in one response.)

Item 6

Test: Word-by-word pointing.

Say: *'Point to it while I read it.'*

Read the text on page 4 slowly but fluently.

Score: 1 point for exact matching.

PAGE 6

Item 7

Test: Concept of first and last.

Read the text on page 6. The child must NOT continue word-by-word pointing.

Say: *'Show me the first part of the story.'*
'Show me the last part.'

Score: 1 point if BOTH are correct in any sense, that is, applied to the whole text or to a line, or to a word, or to a letter.

PAGE 7

Item 8

Test: Inversion of picture.

Say: (slowly and deliberately) *'Show me the bottom of the picture.'*
(Do NOT mention upside-down.)

Score: 1 point for verbal explanation, OR for pointing to top of page, OR for turning the book around and pointing appropriately.

PAGES 8/9

Item 9

Test: Response to inverted print.

Say: *'Where do I begin?'*
'Which way do I go?'
'Where do I go after that?'

Read the text on page 8 now.

Score: 1 point for beginning with 'The' (*Sand*), or 'I' (*Stones*), or 'I' (*Moon*), or 'Leaves' (*Shoes*), and moving right to left across the lower and then the upper line, OR 1 point for turning the book around and moving left to right in the conventional manner.

PAGES 10/11

Item 10

Test: Line sequence.

Say: *'What's wrong with this?'*

Read immediately the bottom line first, then the top line. Do NOT point.

Score: 1 point for comment on line order.

PAGES 12/13

Item 11

Test: A left page is read before a right page.

Say: *'Where do I start reading?'*

Score: 1 point for indicating the left page.

Item 12

Test: Word sequence.

Say: *'What's wrong on this page?'* (Point to **page number 12**, NOT the text.)

Read the text on page 12 slowly as if it were correctly printed.

Score: 1 point for comment on either error.

Item 13

Test: Letter order. (Changes to first or last letters.)

Say: *'What's wrong on this page?'* (Point to **page number 13**, NOT the text.)

Read the text on page 13 slowly as if it were correctly printed.

Score: 1 point for any ONE re-ordering of letters that is noticed and explained.

PAGES 14/15

Item 14

Test: Re-ordering of letters within a word.

Say: *'What's wrong with the WRITING on this page?'*

Read the text on page 14 slowly as if it were correctly printed.

Score: 1 point for ONE error noticed.

Item 15

Test: Meaning of a question mark.

Say: *'What's this for?'* (Point to or trace the question mark with a finger or pencil.)

Score: 1 point for explanation of function or name.

PAGES 16/17

Test: Punctuation.

Read the text on page 16.

Say: *'What's this for?'*

Item 16

Point to or trace with a pencil, the full stop (period).

Score: 1 point.

Item 17

Point to or trace with a pencil, the comma.

Score: 1 point.

Item 18

Point to or trace with a pencil, the quotation marks.

Score: 1 point.

Item 19

Test: Capital and lower case letters.

Say: *'Find a little letter like this.'*

- *Sand:* Point to capital T and demonstrate by pointing to an upper case T and a lower case t if the child does not succeed.
- *Stones:* As above for S and s.
- *Moon:* As above for P and p.
- *Shoes:* As above for W and w.

Say: *'Find a little letter like this.'*

- *Sand:* Point to capital M, H in turn.
- *Stones:* Point to capital T, B in turn.
- *Moon:* Point to capital M, I in turn.
- *Shoes:* Point to capital M, I in turn.

Score:

- *Sand:* 1 point if BOTH m and h are located.
- *Stones:* 1 point if BOTH t and b are located.
- *Moon:* 1 point if BOTH m and i are located.
- *Shoes:* 1 point if BOTH m and i are located.

PAGES 18/19

Item 20

Test: Words that contain the same letters in a different order.

Read the text on page 18.

Say: *'Show me "was".'*
'Show me "no".'

Score: 1 point for BOTH correct.

PAGE 20

Have two pieces of light card (13 cm x 5 cm) that the child can hold and slide easily over the line of text to block out words and letters. To start, lay the cards on the page but leave all print exposed. Open the cards out between each question asked.

Item 21

Test: Letter concepts.

Say: *'This story says:*
Sand: "The waves splashed in the hole".
Stones: "The stone rolled down the hill".
Moon: "The moon followed me home".
Shoes: "My shoes were by the river".
I want you to push the cards across the story like this until all you can see is (deliberately with stress) *JUST ONE LETTER.'* (Demonstrate the movement of the cards but do not do the exercise.)

Speak deliberately. Stress the item.

Say: *'Now show me two letters.'*

Score: 1 point if BOTH are correct.

Item 22

Test: Word concept.

Say: *'Show me just one word.'*
'Now show me two words.'

Score: 1 point if BOTH are correct.

Item 23

Test: First and last letter concepts.

Say: *'Show me the first letter of a word.'*
'Show me the last letter of a word.'

Score: 1 point if BOTH are correct.

Item 24

Test: Capital letter concepts.

Say: *'Show me a capital letter.'*

Score: 1 point if correct.

See page 47 for quick reference to scoring standards for this task.

Appendix D
Exit Interview

1. Did you like helping me read?
2. What did you like the best? (Prompt [if needed]: Did you like helping me read, pointing to the words, or both?)
3. What is something you learned? (Prompt [if needed]: We learned about reading, words, and punctuation. What can you tell me about what you learned?)
4. Do you like listening to stories better when you get to help me read or when I read by myself?
5. Did you like listening to your friends read?
6. Do you think you are a good reader? Why?