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### Choosing Read- Alouds in a Preschool Classroom

Lisa Stang

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# **Choosing Read-Alouds in a Preschool Classroom**

By

Lisa Stang

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science

In Family Studies

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### **Abstract**

There is a lack of current research regarding the reasoning behind why preschool teachers are choosing their literature for whole group read-alouds. The primary purpose of this study is to identify why teachers are choosing their literature and what, if any, activities were conducted in addition to reading the story. The research was conducted using 5 Minnesota School Readiness Programs. A survey was electronically distributed to forty-five preschool teachers and 8 surveys were returned. Results of this study indicated over half the participants chose read-alouds to correspond with an overall classroom theme. An overwhelming 94% of surveys indicated that an activity was performed in conjunction with the read-aloud.

### **Acknowledgements**

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible and to whom I am truly grateful for.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband, Jon, for always ‘leaving the light on for me’, my oldest son, Landon, who kept me company by sitting next to me as we dido homework together, my youngest son, Kolton, for keeping balance in my life, and most importantly, to my twins, Easton and Addley, for guiding me from heaven. I started this program before you were born; now I finish it in your honor. You have taught me so much in your short time here on earth, so I cherish your memory always.

To my college advisors JJ and Brittany: Thank you for being there to answer questions, talk about early childhood, or just talk about life. Your compassion and knowledge shine through, and I am grateful our paths crossed.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Overview

Reading books to young children has been a part of early childhood classrooms for many years. Children adore listening to how pigs outsmart a sneaky, hungry fox, or why a fish finally decides to share his beautiful scales with his friends, or how a caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly. Literature plays a critical role in young children's development. Whole language has become a common phrase in elementary schools over the past few decades. According to Meyer et al. (1994), reading to students has become the cornerstone of the whole language era in education. Read-alouds play a vital role within the preschool classroom. According to Bialystok (2007):

To build up children's sense of self-worth, to make use of their own experiences, their funds of knowledge and the varying literacy experiences children bring to preschool, read-alouds appear to be a key tool that allows children to encounter literature, experience the joy of reading and gain the insight that text represents meaning. (p. )

*What to read and how to read* are two very important questions that early childhood and preschool teachers ask themselves every day. "The reading of literature has a given place in preschools; it is to entertain or offer the children knowledge about the world, about language as well as experiences of the relations between humans and other people's living conditions" (Damber, 2015, p. 256). I believe reading to children moves beyond entertainment. Children have the potential to connect with the characters in the story, relate to them, or learn from them. Informational text provides children with a greater sense of vocabulary, foundational information, and language skills. Non-fiction information books expose young learners to a

different kind of language in addition to building vocabulary and experiences with different content (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013).

Whether fiction or non-fiction, choosing a story can be a simple task or one that takes time and research. There are many things to take into consideration and questions to ask when choosing books intended to engage young learners. What is the overall purpose for the read-aloud? What skills do I want to reinforce or teach with this book? How much time is appropriate for my learners to be attentive to the book? Once the book is chosen, still more considerations are taken into account, such as what activities (if any) precede, accompany, or follow up the book? Some teachers follow a curriculum and have the convenience to follow lesson plans and formats given in the basal. However, in some early childhood classrooms, there is no formal published curriculum for the teacher to rely on. Therefore, when choosing a read-aloud, the questions of *what* and *how* to read books to young learners becomes the responsibility of the teacher.

### **Importance of Study**

Reading to children brings joy to my soul unlike any other aspect of teaching. I find their engagement in the books to be my driving force to ensure I am able to address their interests as much as I can during read-alouds. After being complimented on a project display that was completed by my preschoolers, I began to critically reflect on why I chose that specific read-aloud and produced the activity that preceded it, and how I can continue to create this experience for my students. Justice and Pence (2005) comment on the importance of deeply engaging in the text: “The object of book-reading sessions should not be to get through the book or only to read

the words on the page but rather to create an enjoyable, high-quality, and sensitive interaction” (p. 12).

Read-alouds have the potential to offer countless benefits for young children. “Reading aloud promotes a variety of skills and abilities related to emergent literacy, and in fact, children’s own emergent readings demonstrate evidence of having had books read to them” (Elster, 1994, p. 27). The Commission on Reading (Anderson et al., 1985) states, “The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p. 23). In addition to literacy skills, read-alouds have the ability to promote health in other areas of a young child’s life. Exposing young children to high-quality picture books has many internal benefits. It can nurture moral development, improve awareness of others’ emotions therefore, enhancing empathy towards others (Harper & Trostle Brand, 2010). In addition to fostering emotional health within children, literature can allow children to show outward signs of emotional health. As Harper (2016) states, “Sharing high-quality literature with young children provides a range of language to help them identify, label, and express emotions” (p. 80).

### **Statement of Problem**

Teachers strive to ensure that their classrooms are rich in activities that promote learning experiences to enhance a child’s development. Preschool teachers often create active play areas, sensory table exploration, creative play opportunities, and quiet book corners for their students to explore within their classrooms. By providing children with social-emotional literature, young children are able to learn skills in areas of their development that extend beyond whole language. “Picture books can provide the framework for building empathy, tolerance, and

friendships, and reinforce social-emotional, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills in young children” (Harper, 2016, p. 80).

Preschool teachers are tasked with providing meaningful activities that encompass gross motor, fine- motor, academic content, and social- communication, adaptive, math, social emotional and literacy experiences, all within the time frame of two or three hours. Finding enough time to engross students in literature might seem like a difficult task or be considered a ‘waste of time’. Teachers may find themselves reading only the words on the pages, providing little to no connection to the text. Children should be exposed to a variety of books and read-aloud techniques. “Teachers often get into a pattern of reading *to* children, and not *with* them” (Meyer et al., 1994, p .69). The goal of a reading to children should not be focused solely on reading the words written on each page, but instead our focus should be centered on creating a truly enjoyable interaction between the children and high-quality literature (Justice and Pence 2005).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the current study is to determine why preschool teachers choose their literature for class read-alouds. The genre of literature chosen will also be documented. In addition, this study will examine what activities (if any) precede, accompany, or follow the read-aloud. The research question is, how do preschool teachers decide what books to read during class read-alouds and are there activities that accompany the chosen literature?

## **Conceptual Framework**

In the 1970's, the emergent perspective on literacy was based around the notion that learning is an ongoing, emerging process, beginning at birth. "This perspective was the heart of the Whole Language Movement, which encouraged educators to teach reading and writing in the context of real text such as quality children's literature, and for authentic purposes" (Fellowes & Oakley, 2014, p. 10). Providing young children with opportunities to engage in a wide range of quality literature, along with providing genuine extension learning activities, is the basis for this research.

Children begin school with a range of different experiences with literature. Their contact with books can range from very little exposure time to having books be part of their daily lives. Some may have been read to since infancy and others may have rarely held a book in their hands. In the 1990s a new outlook on literacy was emerging, the socio-culture perspective. Oxford University Press (2019) concludes the following:

Thanks to the socio-culture perspective, early childhood professionals have come to appreciate the importance of finding out about, valuing, and building upon literacy practices that occur in the home. They realize that they need to find ways to build bridges between home and school literacies. Furthermore, they value diversity and the importance of contextual factors in literacy learning. (p. 8)

Therefore, it is critical that teachers be aware of this diversity and expose students to a wide variety of literature and literature experiences.

## **Conclusion**

High quality read-alouds within preschool classrooms are of unquestionable importance. As McCormick (1977) states, “Preschool age is a particularly important time for reading aloud to children, since most children cannot read books for themselves at this age” (p. 543). Read-alouds provide children with benefits including increased vocabulary, language development, and the ability to connect with the experiences from the text. Preschool teachers should not only read *to* children, but read *with* them, making the read-aloud an engaging, captivating experience. Boyd (2008) affirms, “While teachers typically decide what will be read aloud in class, they must align their selections with students’ interests and needs to fully realize the potential of read alouds to entertain, engage, and inform” (p. 30).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Overview

Love for literature is a lifelong enjoyment. Proficient reading is a skill learned in the early elementary years and consists of many underlying skills that are taught from infancy. “There is a direct correlation between learning to read and being read to. Books help children develop print awareness and, as they learn from both fiction and nonfiction books, they soon discover new worlds to explore” (Willis, 2019, p. 5). For preschool teachers, who may have some students with rich literature backgrounds and some with very little exposure to literature, “read-alouds fill the gap by exposing children to book language, which is rich in unusual words and descriptive language” (Kindle, 2009, p. 202). Book language and oral language are very different; exposing children to both forms of language is important. “Through a read-aloud, teachers can model reading strategies and demonstrate the ways in which language of the book is different from spoken language” (Hendrick & Pearish, 2003, p. 6). By reading books to children, parents and teachers offer early literacy advantages (Elster, 1994). Lane and Wright (2007) recommend that teachers maximize the effectiveness of their read-alouds by considering the following factors: the amount of time children are expected to actively listen to the text selection, and the method by which the read-aloud is conducted.

Ample research shows evidence of the benefits of reading aloud to children. Researchers have demonstrated that better listening comprehension, improved word recognition, and exposure to syntactic development are a few of these benefits (Morrow & Grambrell, 2002). Children’s receptive and expressive vocabularies also benefit from interactive reading experiences (Barclay, 2014).

The following literature review includes research and scholarly articles. Description and discussion of that address the tasks of preparing and selecting books for read-alouds, along with researchers' conclusions about activities or conversations that should be incorporated in classroom read-alouds prior to, during, and after the reading.

### **Preparing and Selecting Purposeful Read-Alouds**

Finding time in a typical busy preschool school day to dig into a story can sometimes seem challenging. Grabbing and captivating the attention of four- and five-year-old children might seem like an even bigger task. However, Hargrave and Senechal (2000) reveal studies have shown preschoolers make gains in expressive language even when the duration of the story readings is short. Stories that motivate or captivate children's attention are typically chosen for read-alouds (Fisher et al., 2004). It is important for teachers to select their books knowing in advance the intent of the discussion that will follow the read-aloud (Morrow & Gambrell, 2004), as well as their instructional goals for each specific read-aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007). One common theme in much of the literature is that read-alouds promote and extend children's vocabulary. Kindle (2009) organized a study focusing on teachers' practices for developing vocabulary within read-alouds. She conducted teacher observations and interviews and concluded that read-alouds are instructional events and require as much planning as any other academic lesson. She goes on to add, "Books should be selected with vocabulary in mind, previewed, and practiced" (Kindle, 2009, p. 209). Leung and Pikulski (1990) share similar findings: "Repeated reading aloud of storybooks, combined with retellings and discussion, encouraged preschoolers' incidental learning of vocabulary" (p. 231). Choosing books that aid in determining critical thinking questions can encourage children to express their own personal



understandings and perspectives in order to enrich class discussions (Hoffman, 2011; Pantaleo, 2007; Wiseman, 2011). Another aspect of selecting read-alouds is a books' ability to "stretch imaginations" and "extend understanding" (Boyd, 2008, p. 30). While teachers often do this independently, Boyd (2008) suggests that occasionally giving students the power of selecting read-alouds has many benefits: "If teachers elicit student involvement in a classroom discussion about what read aloud to select, they not only capitalize on students' interests and preferences, but motivate students to be more receptive to the selection" (p. 30).

In many respects, variety is the spice of life. The same holds true when choosing read-aloud texts. Reading aloud to children from a variety of books gives them opportunities to be exposed to the syntactic patterns of the language they will encounter when reading independently (McCormick, 1977). By exposing children to a variety of texts and literature genres, teachers broaden the framework for appreciating all kinds of books (Butler, 1980). Research shows that reading aloud informational books tends to result in more extended dialogue (Justice & Pence, 2005). Picture books with large print guides teachers to discussions not only about alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness, but also about plot, setting, characters, and sequence of events, all important aspects of narrative language (Barclay, 2014).

Along with developing academic skills associated with reading books, children also learn social skills through literature content. "Sharing high-quality picture books with children may heighten their awareness of emotions, enhance their sensitivity to other's feelings, promote empathetic behaviors towards others, and foster moral development" (Harper & Trostle Brand, 2010, p. 225). This type of high-quality literature also exposes children to language needed to successfully identify, label, and express emotions (Harper, 2016). Along those same lines,

children's literature is a great platform for inviting children to relate to characters who may be facing similar moral or behavioral challenges (Roberts & Crawford, 2008).

### **Activities Involved with Read-Alouds**

There are countless activities that can precede, accompany, or follow up a read-aloud session. Through a variety of experience including discussions, craft projects or group activities, teachers can extend read-aloud experiences beyond the covers of the book (Lane & Wright, 2007) Prior to beginning a read-aloud, a common teaching method is to have children listen to the title of the story and look at the cover of the book in order to predict and have a conversation about what they think the text might be about. "Children enjoy talking about characters, making predictions, repeating playful phrases from the books, and generally laughing and interacting while reading" (Cahill, 2004, p. 61).

Research suggests that narrative language is linked to social and academic success, according to Barclay (2014). She also states, "As children listen to, talk about, and retell stories they've heard repeatedly, they develop the ability to tell and retell real or imaginary events in their own past, present, or future" (p. 78). A teacher's role during a read-aloud is to not only read the words on the page, but also to interact with students while doing so. "During read-aloud experiences, teachers can lead children in talking about basic story elements: characters, setting, and order of events" (Morrow et al., 2009, p. 79). A common read-aloud strategy is to ask comprehension questions during or after the story. Barclay (2014) encourages teachers to take that notion one step further: "Carefully constructed higher level questions prompt children to develop more thoughtful responses, to speak about feelings and ideas, and to observe story events, details, and relationships that they might otherwise have missed" (p. 78). Providing

adequate time for children to talk, reflect, and make predictions about the text is a complex skill that requires practice and patience. Teachers can give students the time to authentically respond to the text while still guiding students as they learn how to appropriately relate their experiences and questions in a way that is related to the story (Maloch & Beutel, 2010; Sipe, 2007).

In addition to read-alouds being a stand-alone structured lesson, Lane and Wright (2007) recommend that read-aloud activities should be integrated throughout the curriculum whenever possible, and that teachers should align curriculum goals to the read-aloud text in order to make learning more meaningful and connected. Harper (2016) suggests extension activities for teachers in order to facilitate discussions, extend vocabulary development and enhance comprehension skills: Venn diagrams, open-mind portraits, and theme-designed art projects. Research by McGee and Schickedanz (2007) has demonstrated the following activities also benefit children after a read-aloud has been conducted: dramatizing or retelling the story, reading books with similar topics, inviting children to play with props resembling objects or artifacts from the story, and encouraging children to use new vocabulary throughout the day.

## **Conclusion**

The research compiled within this chapter is replete with professional suggestions to consider when selecting literature for read-alouds and determining what activities should be conducted alongside the story. Embracing early literacy should be a passion of early childhood educators. Researchers have established that read-alouds prove to be an effective way to introduce the joy of literature and the art of listening into the lives of young learners (Morrow, 2003).

In the next chapter, details will be provided of the study in order to answer the question of how preschool teachers select and carry out read-aloud activities within their classroom. Many aspects will be discussed including research design, research question, setting, participants, data collection and procedures, and data analysis of the current study.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **Purpose of the Study**

Read-alouds have the potential to foster many developmental skills for young children. Preschool classrooms are the primary location for children to be exposed to skills that help them grow, develop, and thrive in the school setting. Adequate literature and literature-based activities provide the foundation for children to enjoy the art of reading, interact with the text, and encounter different learning opportunities. The purpose of this study is to identify why preschool teachers select literature for their read-alouds and what activities (if any) are presented prior to, during, and after the read-aloud is conducted. The type of literature chosen for the read-alouds is also documented.

### **Research Question**

To address the purpose of the study, the following research question is posed:

How are read-alouds selected and carried out within a preschool classroom and what type of literature is being read during these read-aloud times?

### **Research Design**

A survey research design was chosen using electronic distribution methods to gather the information from preschool teachers. This research included five rural school districts. The survey instrument used open ended questions along with multiple choice options. There was also a section to add additional information if needed. Teachers were asked to complete the survey using data from three read-aloud sessions. The researcher gathered information regarding the title and author of the literature, why it was selected, and what, if any, activities accompanied the read-aloud.

### **Setting and Participants**

The five schools involved in this research study were located in a Midwestern state. The districts range in size from servicing 80 to 600 preschoolers. The preschool programs involved in this study enroll children who are four years old and have the intention of attending kindergarten the following academic year. Classroom sizes within these five districts range from 13 to 20 students and include both regular education students and children currently on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Each class has one general education teacher and one paraprofessional. Depending on student needs, classrooms might also include special education teachers and additional paraprofessionals.

The participants in this study are eight licensed preschool teachers with experience ranging from three years to 18 years.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection method used is Google Forms. This is an online tool developed for creating and delivering surveys, obtaining responses, and analyzing results. The survey was pilot tested with three individuals with experience in a preschool classroom. After making revisions-based changes or suggestions that emerged from the pilot test, the survey was distributed via email to the School Readiness Coordinators in each of the five districts. The Coordinators then forwarded the survey to their Preschool Teachers. Follow-up emails were sent two and three days after the original survey to encourage and increase the response rate.

**Data Analysis**

Upon resubmission, multiple-option questions and closed-ended questions were gathered and quantitative data were collected and tabulated electronically and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data collected from open-ended questions were examined for patterns and themes that would help form conclusions of the research.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Overview**

The purpose of the survey was to obtain information regarding the reasoning behind preschool teachers' choices for read-alouds. In addition, teachers were asked if there were any activities that accompanied the read-aloud prior to, during, or after the story. Field testing was completed prior to the final research survey to ensure adequate reliability and overall content. Field surveys were sent out to three early childhood teachers. Minor content changes were made to the survey. Participants were asked to submit the survey using three stories, including title and author, therefore, each response produced three read-alouds to be used for data collection. The survey was sent to 45 potential participants. Eight of those completed the survey. The results of the responses obtained through the survey are explained below.

### **Demographic Results**

The participants surveyed were preschool teachers who teach in the School Readiness program which services children one year prior to entering kindergarten. The survey was sent to teachers in three rural towns and one larger city. All teachers are working in an independent school district in the upper Midwest portion of the United States. All participants in this study speak English and teach in a classroom where English is the primary language.

### **Survey Numeric Results**

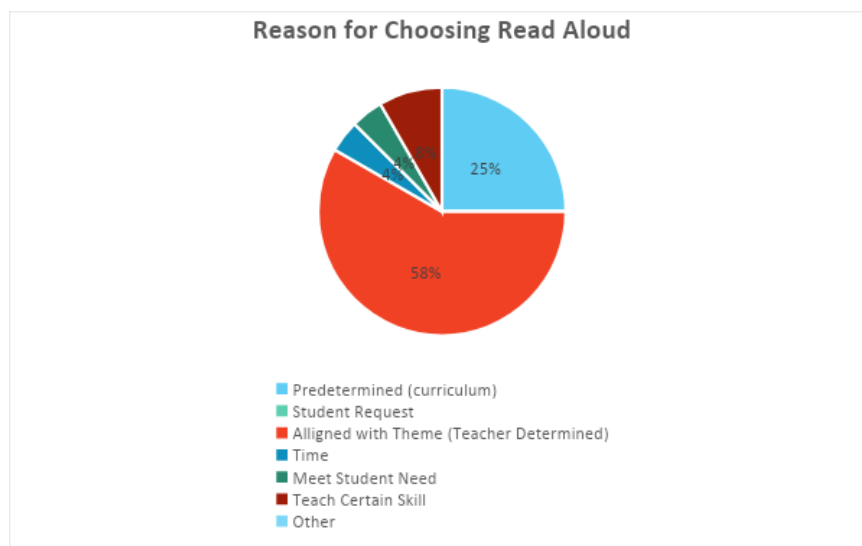
The research participants were asked to choose three stories to complete the survey. A list of the title and author of all 24 stories can be found in Appendix A; some will be referenced in Chapter Five.



Participants were asked their reason for choosing each read-aloud, Table 1 displays those results. Survey participants were given six options for choosing their read-alouds. The last option in the survey under this question was “other”, if the reasoning behind choosing the story was not listed. Over half (58.3%) of the read-aloud selections were chosen based around an aligned classroom theme and were teacher-determined. In 25% of the responses to this question, the story was predetermined from a curriculum. Teachers chose a read-aloud to focus on a certain academic skill such as rhyming, counting, or letter identification 8.3% of the time. In two read-aloud scenarios, teachers chose the story because of a time restraint (4.2%) and to focus on a specific student need (4.2%) such as divorce, being a new student, or anxiety. The other two possible options for choosing a read aloud were student requests and an option for the participant to choose another reason not mentioned. As shown in the chart, there were no student requests and no other categories listed by the participants.

### Figure 1

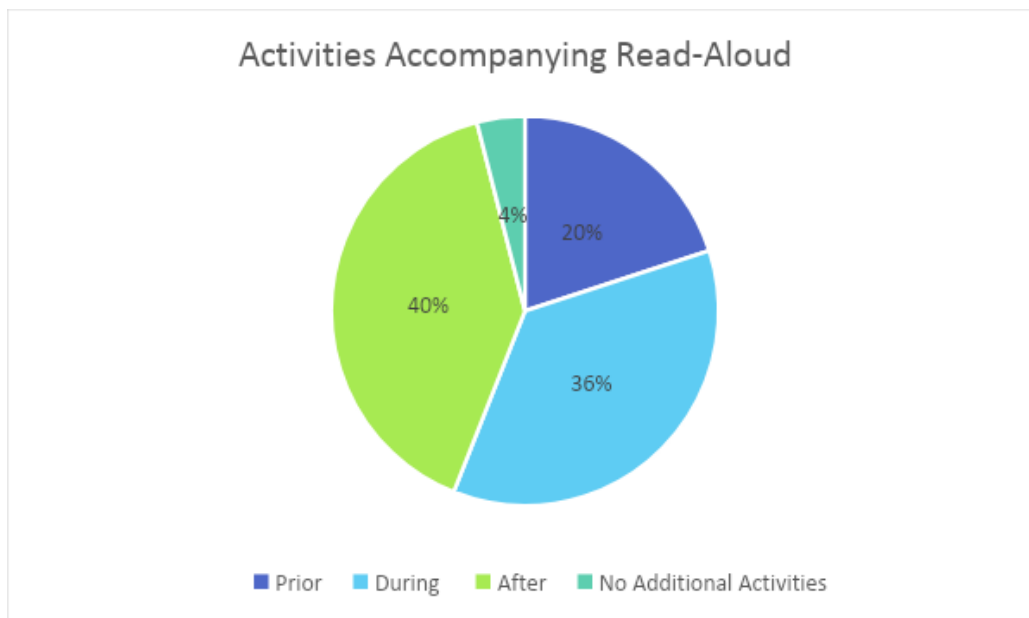
#### *Reason for Choosing Read-Aloud*



For each read-aloud they listed, participants were asked, “In addition to the read-aloud, were any of the following present?” The four possible answers to this question stated that activities present were prior to, during, or after the read aloud; the other possible choice for this question of the survey was that there were no additional activities. Table 2 illustrates the results from this question. Conducting an activity after the read aloud session occurred in 40% of the responses; an activity happened during the read-aloud 36% of the time; connection or activity was made prior to the read-aloud in 20% of the responses. In 4% of the responses, participants reported that no activities accompanied the read-aloud.

## Figure 2

### *Activities that Accompanied the Read-Aloud*



## Narrative Responses

At the end of each read-aloud literature selection survey, participants were given the opportunity to add any additional comments regarding the read-aloud. In Chapter Five, some of

these narrative responses will be used to further clarify the discussion of the results. For a complete record of the raw narrative data, please refer to Appendix A.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the participants in this electronic survey generally choose their own read-alouds for their preschool students. Their responses also indicate that, preferably, activities associated with the story are conducted either during or after the read aloud session. Surprisingly, a student requesting a story to be read during read aloud time did not appear in any classroom. Results of this study will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Overview**

The primary purpose of the present study was to gain insight as to why preschool teachers are choosing certain literature for their students. In addition to the “why” question, this study gathered information on any activity linked to the read-aloud. The findings of this study indicate the primary reason for choosing a read-aloud stems from classroom themes which, in this study, were selected by the teacher. Furthermore, when asked if there were any additional activities that accompanied the read-aloud, results indicate that teachers are conducting an extension of the read aloud in some manner, whether it be prior to, during, or after. In other words, it would be rare to observe a teacher choose a story, read it, and move on to the next part of the preschool day without any connections, discussions, or activities.

### **Discussion of Numeric Findings**

Based on the collection of data retrieved from the survey, it is apparent that teachers are conducting read-alouds with their students with a predetermined objective in mind. Many of these read-alouds (58%) are reported to be part of an overall classroom theme such as winter or fall. The remaining large portion of the results in Table 1 convey that read-alouds are part of a curriculum, which will often provide options for additional extensions or activities. As noted in Table 2, the collected data indicates that over 75% of additional activities are conducted during or after the read-aloud. It is a widely known best practice for a teacher to take breaks during a read-aloud to ask comprehension questions and check for adequate understanding of the content. In only two of the 24 read-alouds were there no additional activities accompanying the

read- aloud. The findings of this study also specify there were no student-requested read-alouds: all the literature was chosen either from a curriculum or by the preschool teacher.

### **Discussion of Narrative Findings**

Based on the collection of narrative data, there seems to be a connection between literature and social skills. Survey participants stated their purpose for choosing a certain read-aloud was to foster friendships, discuss good and bad classroom choices, and teach acceptance of skin color. In addition to social skills, teachers reported choosing their read-aloud to help connect literature written by the same author. Although not part of the original research study, I noticed that of the 24 conducted read-alouds, all of them were fictional stories.

### **Study Limitations**

In the current research study, participants were only asked to mark if an additional activity was performed. In future studies, it would add more insight if the participants listed what activity was conducted and the reasoning for it. This would greatly enhance the results and give better insight to how teachers are extending literature to create better understanding and deeper connections through additional activities. A deeper understanding as to why teachers are choosing read- alouds would allow for more purposeful connections between the literature and audience. Results have shown that more than half of preschool teachers are choosing read-alouds that coincide with an overall theme. More extensive questions in the survey focused on linking the read- aloud with best practices would allow for a deeper understanding in this area.

A second limitation to my study was the lack of response from potential participants. The survey was sent to 45 preschool teachers; only eight chose to complete the survey. Of these eight, results indicated the same story was used by multiple teachers. This could mean the results

came from the same district whose teachers use the same curriculum, limiting results and narrowing insight potentially gained from this study. Another explanation could conclude that certain books are more popular during a specific time of year. In addition to the lack of participant responses, information about the participants was minimal. The survey did not ask for any information regarding the teachers' years of experience in preschool, educational background, or student makeup. Although the overall focus of this research was to investigate why teachers are choosing read-alouds, background information on the participants would be helpful when evaluating results.

Finally, a very important topic in today's schools is focused around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants were asked their reason behind choosing a read-aloud. One of the options was "meet student needs". Although diversity, equity, and inclusion could fall under this survey category, an additional question in the survey would have allowed for deeper awareness to this issue and if it has been addressed or even woven into the read-alouds we choose to expose our students to.

### **New Steps in Research**

This research study only brushed the top surface of a much deeper questions centered around literature in early childhood classrooms. It is important for research to continue to help guide teachers in choosing the most appropriate, literacy-rich read-alouds for their young learners. After reviewing the survey results, it was noted that all of the literature reported from the survey were fictional stories. This insight makes me wonder how many non-fictional books children are exposed to in the classroom. More research needs to be conducted that focuses on the various genre's children are exposed to in the classroom.

As we step out of a two-year pandemic, the young learners in today's classroom have lived a life where masks, COVID, and social distancing are everyday words in their vocabulary. Future research needs to explore the effects this pandemic has had on young children's language development. In addition to possible vocabulary variations, the social-emotional well-being of young children may also be affected by the pandemic.

### **Conclusions**

The results of my research study indicate that preschool teachers choose literature for read-alouds that focuses around a theme such as 'winter' or 'Valentine's Day'. Practical themes such as the ones listed above give young children opportunities to connect with current real-life experiences. For example, during the fall, a preschool teacher might choose to use literature focused on changes in the world around them, such as leaves changing color, weather getting colder, or vegetables ready to be harvested. Focusing on these connections can lead to using both fiction and non-fictional literature with the same observations.

The findings of this study provide practical ideas that can be adapted into my preschool classroom. After compiling the survey results, I examined the current literature I have placed in my classroom book corner and came to the frightening conclusion that there were very few non-fictional books. We will be ordering more classroom literature this spring, and all of the books will be non-fiction. I also started a "please read" bin next to my teaching chair. This bin is for student requested books. When it is time to read a story from the bin, the child must tell me why they would like me to read it. This idea has been well received by the students. I find that more students are engaged in the book corner during choice time and are putting thought into which book they put in the bin.

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## Appendix A: Survey Results: Story, Author, and Narrative Data

### Participant A

Story	Author
The Mitten	Jan Brett
Dog's Colorful Day	Emma Dodd
A Letter to Amy	Ezra Jack Keats

Narrative Data:

### Participant B

Story	Author
Noisy Nora	Rosemary Wells
The Mine-o-saur	Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen
Sneezy the Snowman	Maureen Wright

Narrative Data:

In regard to Noisy Nora:

*I don't care for this book due to the phrase "Why are you so dumb?" I change the words I say the 2 times this appears in the book.*

In regard to The Mine-o-saur:

*I read this book a few times a year. Once in the beginning of the year to set expectations to play time and social skills, and the other times as needed to reteach social skills and expectations. I model appropriate and inappropriate play behaviors with my para prior to the story and talk about good choice/bad choice. During the story I have students determine if the character's actions were a good or bad choice. We do a small group on good/bad choice.*

In regard to Sneezy the Snowman:

*I use this book for critical thinking. Why did he melt? Then we create our own melted snowman and they must come up with a reason for their snowman melting. Some students use the examples in the book (retelling) but many others think of new reasons why (extension).*

### Participant C

Story	Author
Will you be my Friend?	Nancy Tafuri
Snowy Day	Ezra Jack Keats
The Thankful Book	Todd Parr

Narrative Data:

In regard to Will you be my Friend?:

*I love this story because of how it can build friendships. I would use it even if it was not part of the curriculum.*

In regard to Snowy Day:

*I love this story because I can connect other stories by Ezra Jack Keats to it.*

Participant D

<b>Story</b>	<b>Author</b>
Pete the Cat and his Four Groovy Buttons	Eric Litwin
Llama Llama and the Bully Goat	Anna Dewdney
Leaf Man	Lois Ehlert

Narrative Data:

Participant E

<b>Story</b>	<b>Author</b>
Over and under the Snow	
Don't Eat the Teacher	
The Mitten	

Narrative Data:

Participant F

<b>Story</b>	<b>Author</b>
Mouse was Mad	
Groundhogs day off	
How do Dinosaurs get to School	

Narrative Data:

Participant G

<b>Story</b>	<b>Author</b>
Spookley the Square Pumpkin	
Bear Snores On	
The Mitten	

Narrative Data:

Participant H

<b>Story</b>	<b>Author</b>
The Mitten	Jan Brett
The Color of Us	Karen Katz
Over and Under the Snow	Kate Messner

Narrative Data:

In regard to The Mitten:

*It is part of a Jan Brett book study comparing The Mitten, The Hat, and The Gingerbread Baby*

In regard to The Color of Us:

*We read this book early in the year as we are getting to know each other. We discuss skin and what we know about it. I finish with each student creating with paint their skin color and a face.*

In regard to Over and Under the Snow:

*I have a great National Geographic clip that goes along with the fox in the story.*

## **Appendix B: Participant Survey**

Preschool Teachers,

For the following survey, please choose 3 Read-Alouds that you have already conducted in your classroom this school year.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to complete this Thesis survey!

Lisa Stang

### **Title & Author of Read Aloud #1 (of 3):**

—

### **Reason for Choosing the above Read Aloud:**

- Predetermined (curriculum)
- Student Request
- Aligned with Classroom Theme (Unit of Study- Teacher Determined)
- Time
- Meet specific need of student (divorce, new student, behavior, anxiety, etc...)
- Teach certain skill (rhyming, counting, letter identification) not in curriculum
- Other

### **In addition to the Read Aloud, were any of the following present?**

- Activity was conducted PRIOR to the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted DURING the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted AFTER the Read Aloud



- No additional activities were conducted in addition to the Read Aloud

**Any additional comments regarding this Read Aloud?**

—

**Title & Author of Read Aloud #2 (of 3):**

—

**Reason for Choosing the above Read Aloud:**

- Predetermined (curriculum)
- Student Request
- Aligned with Classroom Theme (Unit of Study- Teacher Determined)
- Time
- Meet specific need of student (divorce, new student, behavior, anxiety, etc...)
- Teach certain skill (rhyming, counting, letter identification) not in curriculum
- Other

**In addition to the Read Aloud, were any of the following present?**

- Activity was conducted PRIOR to the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted DURING the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted AFTER the Read Aloud
- No additional activities were conducted in addition to the Read Aloud

**Any additional comments regarding this Read Aloud?**

—

**Title & Author of Read Aloud #3 (of 3):**

—

**Reason for Choosing the above Read Aloud:**

- Predetermined (curriculum)
- Student Request
- Aligned with Classroom Theme (Unit of Study- Teacher Determined)
- Time
- Meet specific need of student (divorce, new student, behavior, anxiety, etc...)
- Teach certain skill (rhyming, counting, letter identification) not in curriculum
- Other

**In addition to the Read Aloud, were any of the following present?**

- Activity was conducted PRIOR to the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted DURING the Read Aloud
- Activity was conducted AFTER the Read Aloud
- No additional activities were conducted in addition to the Read Aloud

**Any additional comments regarding this Read Aloud?**

—

### **Appendix C: Email Letter to School Readiness Coordinators**

Initial Email:

Directors,

In the event I haven't introduced myself yet, my name is Lisa Stang. I work in the Paynesville School District and am working on completing my Masters in Early Childhood Education. I am currently working on my Thesis and am excited to finally send out my research survey! If you could, please forward this email to your Preschool Teachers. I have attached a letter of implied consent. Shortly after I send this email, you should receive the survey in the form of a "Google Form". Please forward that on to your Preschool Teachers as well. I thank you in advance for your assistance in my Thesis research.

Teachers,

Thank you for taking time out of your day to complete my research survey. It is greatly appreciated! I have attached an implied consent form to this email. Please read it before completing the short survey. Every completed survey is greatly appreciated!

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Lisa Stang

Follow Up Email:

Directors- Please forward to your Preschool Teachers:

Good morning teachers,

My students will tell you that my favorite part of being a teacher is Story Time!! I love reading to my students (and my own 2 children). This led me to my Thesis topic of Read Alouds. I am very excited to see the data coming back from the Read Aloud survey! I have received 7 responses, but would love to acquire more. After I compile the data in my Thesis, you will receive a spreadsheet summarizing the data as well. If you have already submitted your response, I thank you! If you are still planning on it, please do so by tomorrow evening.

Sincerely,

Lisa Stang

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### Choosing and Implementing Read Alouds in a Preschool Classroom- Thesis Consent to Participate

You are invited to participate in a research study about how and why Preschool teachers choose literature for read alouds. This study also focuses on any activities or lessons that are administered prior to, during, or following a Read Aloud.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a very brief survey for three read alouds that you have conducted in your preschool classroom. The first question will be the title and author of the story. The other two survey questions are multiple choice options about why you chose that particular story and what (if any) activities you did in relation to that read aloud. The survey will be emailed to you on Monday, January 31, 2022. Data will need to be submitted by Friday, February 4, 2022.

Benefits of the research include reflecting on your Read Aloud choices and activities or lessons that may or may not accompany them. Once the research is completed, a compiled data spreadsheet will be emailed to you with the results of the survey.

Risks and discomforts are in the form of the short time it may take to fill out the quick survey for three different read alouds in your classroom.

Data collected will remain anonymous. Data will be reported and presented in aggregate form. Your name will not be disclosed.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Lisa Stang or JoAnn Johnson (supervisor).

Your completion of the survey indicates that you are at least 18 years of age and gives your consent to participate in the study.

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