Introduction

Reading is a highly valued skill in American education. Learning to read is the fundamental skill needed for all schooling and educational endeavors (Collins & Shaeffer, 1997; Cullinan, 1989; Mandel Morrow, 1997; Schwartz, 1995; Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Every early childhood teacher in America anticipates that the children in her care will eventually learn to read. Research projects and theories abound about how to help children develop the necessary skills. In fact, school districts across America spend millions of dollars to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to better educate them in this regard. Without a doubt, one goal in every district’s repertoire places emphasis on improved reading abilities for students.

Many of these professional development opportunities focus on reading abilities and stress the importance of reading aloud (Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987; Jobe & Hart, 1991; Stewig & Sebasta, 1989; Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991) as one means of accomplishing the goal of improved reading achievement (Cullinan, 1989; Doake, 1985; Holdaway, 1979; Snow, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Wells, 1986). In fact, a controversial but much-publicized sentence in Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) states: “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (p. 23). As one might expect, community programs and public libraries also support reading aloud to children (Butler & Clay, 1987; Schwartz, 1995; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Trelease, 1985). Most textbooks used in teacher education classrooms highlight the significance and value of reading aloud to students in the classroom.
Reading Aloud

(Bromley, 1992; Butler & Turbill, 1987; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Neuman & Roskos, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1997; Schickedanz, 1999; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Consequently, parents and teachers alike have been informed through many sources about the importance of reading aloud (Burton, 1993; Butler & Clay, 1987; Mason, Peterman & Kerr, 1989; McGee, 1998; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Trelease, 1985).

A common part of early literacy practice in many early childhood classrooms is the read-aloud experience (Neuman, 1996; Neuman, 1999; Senechal, 1997). The idea for this study originated when I observed many early childhood teachers reading aloud to young children. I became very concerned by what I saw. Some teachers requested the children remain quiet throughout the story and rejected any child’s attempt to engage in conversation about the story. I observed one teacher who told the children to remain silent unless they had a comment about the book being read. I did not observe many attempts by teachers to actively engage the children in dialogue. I also observed that some children were missing the main ideas and the meaning of the story, assigning incorrect definitions to some words or drawing inaccurate conclusions, especially if their questions remained unanswered or their wonderings left unexplored.

For instance, I observed a teacher reading a book about an animal that hibernates in a den. Fortunately, the teacher stopped reading and asked the children the definition of a den. One child responded, “It is when you go to the dentist.” If this teacher had not stopped to check on the meaning of the new vocabulary word, this young four-year-old child would have left the reading session with incorrect
knowledge and would have drawn an inaccurate conclusion. This astute teacher stopped to assess the level of understanding and to ascertain if any scaffolding or mediation was needed. Indeed it was. A conversation ensued and the misinformation was clarified.

On another occasion, a teacher asked what the word stoop meant, when referring to a set of steps seen in the illustration and word printed in the text. One child answered that her grandmother walks with a stoop. By stopping and discussing the differences between a den and the dentist, and the two different meanings for stoop, the teachers and children in these scenarios collaboratively made meaning from the text within a social situation. Both of these teachers used scaffolding and mediational strategies in a dialogic exchange to clarify the unknown vocabulary words in the social environment of the early childhood classroom.

I made several other observations as an early childhood mentor and educator on numerous occasions throughout the years. From these observations I gleaned that some of these teachers did not know how to conduct a read aloud session that involved dialogue with the children. I felt that some teachers did not have enough knowledge about or were under-estimating the power of a socially constructed conversation. From time spent in many classrooms it became clear that some teachers did not know about scaffolding and mediational strategies as a means to address each child’s needs within each individual Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These teachers also did not plan their read aloud sessions, but casually went to the bookshelf to choose a book when it was time to read a story. Many teachers requested silence while the reading event took place, or allowed minimal conversation, if at all. When
the last page of the story was read, the book was closed, returned to the shelf and often not discussed any further. The reading of the story became a stand-alone event.

Given these observations, I decided to focus this dissertation on the process of socially constructed, collaborative dialogue between young children and their teacher who uses scaffolding and mediational strategies before, during and after the completion of a read aloud session. Given my personal background and educational experiences, I created a study to answer the question, “How does a Master’s level teacher use scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom?”

For the purpose of discussion throughout this dissertation, the term socially constructed meaning-making will be defined as “cooperative dialogue with more knowledgeable members of [one’s] society during challenging tasks, [where] children learn to think and behave in ways that reflect their community’s culture…where mature partners, both adults and children offer guidance to children mastering culturally meaningful activities, and [where] the communication with these partners becomes part of children’s thinking” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 19). Simply stated, during a read-aloud event, a culturally meaningful activity, both adults and children engage in a conversation about the story or related link where topics are proposed, questions are asked, problems are discussed, “difference of opinions are resolved, responsibility is shared between participants, and discourse reflects cooperation, and mutual respect” (p. 20).

As can be expected early childhood teachers use many and varied styles while reading aloud. For example, some teachers require children to sit up straight in their
seats, remain quiet and place their eyes forward toward the teacher when reading aloud (Dickinson & Keebler, 1989; Hester & Francis, 1994). This style of reading aloud may be less than a quality experience for the children involved (Hoffman, Roser & Battle, 1991). In these experiences few attempts are made to engage the children in the process of reading aloud (Wollman-Bonilla, 1994), as the teacher reads the whole text without allowing any interruptions, comments or questions. While meaning making of some kind occurs in all situations, it might be highly compromised, and not lead to the intended gains in literacy learning, such as vocabulary development, concepts of print awareness, development of story sense, and development of oral language skills. In these situations where dialogue is not embraced and valued, it is possible that meaning-making will not be optimized for the young children, and therefore, a high quality learning environment may not be created.

However, I have observed a few teachers who conduct read-aloud sessions that are rich in conversation between the adult and children, and include child-to-child and child-to-adult interactions that focus on socially constructed meaning-making as defined above and purported by several researchers (Englert, Tarrant, Mariage & Oxer, 1994; Hansen, 1998; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Hester & Francis, 1994; Kertoy, 1994; Mandel Morrow, 1997; Meyer, Stahl, Wardrop & Linn, 1994; Moore, 1992; Taylor, 1995).

The length of the read-aloud event also varies with times less than five minutes in duration (Guthrie & Greaney, 1991), to 30 minutes or more, depending on the age of the children and the classroom scheduling restraints (Hoffman, Roser &
Battle, 1993). Due to time constraints and more academic requirements now imposed on early childhood programs, some teachers report the need to relegate reading aloud to a reward for good behavior, or to a few minutes just before lunch or before afternoon dismissal (Burton, 1993; Hester & Francis, 1994). Many early childhood teachers, especially those in Head Start programs and some Universal Pre-Kindergarten Programs (UPK), need to manipulate their daily schedules to provide time for breakfast, snack, lunch, and sometimes a visit from the music or movement specialist. Added to these important but time-consuming activities is the assigned time for each particular class to use the gross motor room or outside playground. All of these essential activities, especially an extended time for uninterrupted play that is centered on exploration and investigation (Gronlund, 2006), need to be scheduled within a short, two-and-a-half hour time frame. Given these prerequisites for quality early childhood programs, it is no wonder little time is left for socially constructed read aloud sessions on a daily basis.

One factor that may have added more pressure on early childhood educators to have children ready for kindergarten is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Since this law was enacted the face of the preschool classroom has changed dramatically.

Preschool classrooms replaced playful learning with practice and drill. Blocks were replaced with worksheets. Both free play and playful learning declined precipitously in U.S. preschools, where they were sidelined as an expendable diversion in favor of early preparation for school testing. (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009, p. 9)
The law was enacted ostensibly “to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility and choice so that no child is left behind” (US Government, p. 1). Under the NCLB law teachers are responsible for a student’s “Adequate Yearly Progress” with little accommodation made for the effects of poverty and lack of resources in the lives of young children. Often, restricted time frames, stricter academic requirements and times set aside throughout the year for high stakes testing reduce the amount of time early childhood educators and children can devote to more developmentally appropriate activities such as reading aloud and sustained, mature, imaginative play that “links foundational capacities such as memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 14). Experts in the early childhood field suggest that rather than narrowing the curriculum and focusing on worksheets and drill, that educators might better reduce the achievement gap in early childhood programs, one goal of NCLB, by paying attention to “proactive vocabulary development and oral language development” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 7). They state:

For children to gain the vocabulary and the advanced linguistic structures they will need for elementary grade reading, their teachers need to engage them in language interactions throughout the day, including reading to them in small groups and talking with them about the stories. Especially rich in linguistic payoff is extended discourse; that is, conversation between child and adult on a given topic sustained over many exchanges. (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 7)

Given this information, extended discourse and sustained conversational
exchanges essential to later school success can be realized when early childhood teachers incorporate time in their daily schedules for co-constructed reading aloud opportunities.

Additionally, even though many early childhood educators acknowledge the importance of reading aloud, they either read aloud infrequently or inconsistently, if they do so at all, often deferring to the strong academic requirements now imposed by federal, state and local school district guidelines. In Neuman’s (1999) study, 20% of teachers did not show any evidence of storybook reading in their daily schedules; 73% incorporated only short times for reading aloud as part of the daily Circle Time activities. A very few teachers in this study, only seven percent, planned more than one read-aloud time each day. In yet another study, Dickinson (1990) found that the frequency of book reading in preschools varies greatly with some teachers reading to groups of children only two or three times per week, while other teachers read to their children seven or more times per week.

When and why a story is read can also provide the child with an implied, unintended message about the value of reading aloud. If a read-aloud story is considered to be a time-filler, a reward for acceptable behavior, is scheduled at the end of the day (Burton, 1993; Hester & Francis, 1994), or at a time when discussion is rushed or not engaging for the children, reading aloud may not hold any merit in the mind of the child. If the teacher does not value reading aloud, the children may also adopt this attitude.

Time constraints coupled with increased local, state and federal regulations indirectly affect the process of socially constructed meaning making when reading
aloud. Teachers feel rushed and pressured to accomplish the more academic skills, because some districts evaluate teachers on the percentage of student improvement each year. This rush and pressure is detrimental to the developmentally appropriate practices because teachers often do not have the time scheduled in their day to adequately discuss and co-construct a story with the children. Since young children are relatively new users of their language, they are still trying to figure out its grammar, syntax, usage and vocabulary. These young children need more time to become familiar with their language instead of less time that can happen in a more pressured, hurried and academically based early childhood program (Genishi & Dyson, 2009).

Developmentally and age appropriate practices include more time to listen to and use language in conversation with peers and adults in both formal and informal environments. In addition to young children having more time to socialize, communicate and problem solve with their peers, another way for young children to become more familiar with their newly developing language is to listen to and converse about stories being read aloud to them by their teachers in early childhood programs.

As is evident, several concerns exist about the process of reading aloud: How and when it is practiced, the quality of the read aloud event in regard to creating dialogue with and among the children and teacher, and the place and role the read aloud event plays in the curriculum. These issues and more will be addressed in the remainder of this document.

The first chapter will address the role that Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory
can contribute to a socially constructed read aloud event. This will include definitions of ZPD, scaffolding and mediation. The second chapter will provide basic background information about reading aloud, its benefits, some drawbacks, the size of the group, the role of interruptions, and re-reading stories as a source of information in an early childhood classroom. Chapter three will describe the qualitative and observational case study research methods used, and chapter four analyzes the data collected to show how a Master’s level teacher skillfully employs both scaffolding and mediational strategies before, during and after reading aloud in a Reggio-inspired classroom. The final chapter summarizes the study, offers strengths and limitations of the study, offers ideas for future research, and links my research study to previously completed studies.

Chapter One

Theoretical Perspective of Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory

When I first entered the field of early childhood education over 38 years ago classrooms looked very different than they do today. The wide variety of Activity Centers did not exist and the teacher was the person in charge and was the “holder and dispenser of all knowledge” (Oyler, 1996, p. 8). Many lessons were teacher-directed and the children merely answered the questions posed by the teacher. Given
this environment, it probably never occurred to a young three or four-year-old child to ask a question, to wonder out-loud about certain phenomena or to ask to explore a certain topic of personal interest. In fact, a colleague of mine tells a story of herself more than 30 years ago. She asked the preschool teacher why butterflies first made cocoons before becoming butterflies. The teacher coldly answered, “Because God made it that way,” instead of engaging the child and the class as a whole in a discussion and socially mediated discovery of the process of metamorphosis.

Early childhood classrooms of today differ greatly from the past and are usually a cacophony of activity. Many classrooms have Activity Centers such as the Block Area, Family Center, Literacy Center, Sensory Tables, Science and Creative Arts Areas, as well as one or two computers (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2006; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005). One or more children can be seen interacting in each of these Centers at any one time. The one or two adults in the room can be seen performing a plethora of activities as well. These include interacting with the children, encouraging a new skill, helping solve a problem, reading a story, and quietly observing or documenting behaviors and conversations between two or more young children. Even though the current early childhood classroom is different than it was three decades ago and is a very active and interactive place, socially constructed reading aloud is not always practiced.

During my tenure as an early childhood teacher, I taught in a school where the philosophy of Piaget was the guiding force. Due to changing times and a changing climate in education, years later that same school espoused the Skinnerian philosophy of Behaviorism as their selected method of teaching. It is only within the last ten
years that Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory began to make in-roads where I taught and within the early childhood field as a whole. I also began to attend professional development workshops on this topic and attended several presentations by Bodrova and Leong (1995), who have written extensively about Vygotskian perspectives on learning. These workshops prompted me to seek out more professional articles and books about Vygotsky’s perspective. I specifically sought out and focused on learning more about what Neo-Vygotskians call “tools of the mind” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996b, p. 3) and the main principles of the Vygotskian Framework (p. 8). Tools of the mind are mental tools that assist humans in “extending mental abilities” (p. 3). Mental tools not only assist humans to “attend, remember and think better” (p. 4) but “actually change the very way we (humans) attend, remember and think” (p. 4). Neo-Vygotskians believe teachers play a critical role in teaching children how to acquire these tools that eventually will be used “independently and creatively” (p. 3) by the children. Teachers assist young children in learning memory strategies, such as following rules, self-regulation, critical thinking and problem solving. By using a Neo-Vygotskian perspective for learning children are not abandoned to learn these strategies and use these tools on their own, but rather are guided through the process of acquisition by more knowledgeable others. The basic principles of the Vygotskian Framework are that “children construct knowledge, development cannot be separated from its social context, learning can lead development and language plays a central role in mental development” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996b, p. 8). When selecting a research topic for my Doctoral studies, I chose the
phenomenon of reading aloud because I continue to observe teachers who prefer that
the children remain silent during a read aloud session, therefore, not allowing any
questions or comments. In these instances, Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory was
not practiced and I wondered if and how the children were able to make meaning of
the text if they were not allowed to comment or ask questions, which negated one of
the Vygotskian principles that “development cannot be separated from its social
context” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996b, p. 8). In contrast to the non-participatory
practice, I have also seen teachers engage the children so abundantly in the discussion
and socially constructed meaning-making about the text that the story was acted out
in the Dramatic Play area, children drew and painted pictures about the story and
conversations about the story spilled out into other areas of play over several days.
These activities can be considered “tool[s] of the mind” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p.
22) because these activities extend the child’s cognitive abilities through participation
in drawing, painting, building, music, creating with clay, and extended conversation
about the story and ultimately change the child’s thinking about the story, alter how
the child remembers the story or change the child’s behavior in response to the story.

Given these two completely opposite scenarios, I chose to explore how
Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory can be applied when reading aloud. Therefore, I
will use the lens of the Social Learning Theory of Vygotsky to try to understand the
process of how meaning is made in one Reggio-inspired classroom when one expert
teacher utilizes scaffolding and mediation while reading aloud with four-year-old
children. I have chosen to use the research of Bodrova, Leong (1996), Berk and
Winsler (1995), who are Neo-Vygotskians because they have conducted more recent
research and have applied Vygotskian principles in present-day early childhood classrooms. Their extensions and applications of Vygotsky’s theory make more sense in the context of the early childhood classroom since Vygotsky’s original theory only delineated ZPD and mediated learning and did not include the concept of scaffolding.

To support this decision to use the information from these present-day researchers, Berk and Winsler (1995) state:

The Reggio Emilia system of early childhood education echoes central Vygotskian themes. …The teacher as a creator of activity settings designed to stimulate dialogue and co-construction of knowledge is reminiscent of the concept of scaffolding. …The practice of creating diverse symbolic representations of classroom activities and concepts through artistic and technological means exemplifies Vygotsky’s belief in the use and internalization of cultural symbol systems as the major route to higher mental functions. Joint teacher-child decision making, adult and peer scaffolding of children’s learning through cooperative projects with integrative themes, and richly equipped settings that foster small-group play are consonant with Vygotsky’s ideas about experiences that promote self-regulation. (p. 145-146)

In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will explain how one of the original constructs of Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory, the ZPD, and an extension of that theory, scaffolding, influenced my thinking while investigating the process of reading aloud with young children. I will then show how ZPD and scaffolding can play a part in meaning-making while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom. I will then continue in this vein by suggesting how the use of the ZPD and scaffolding can
influence classroom conversations about real-life events that occur during story-related dialogue and also how they can influence the teacher’s role in the co-construction of knowledge.

_Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory_

Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory is a very broad theory and includes several constructs. Neo-Vygotskians believe that Vygotsky’s theory would have been more deeply developed had he lived longer. I will only discuss two of these constructs within this paper: ZPD and scaffolding. The concept of scaffolding was not part of Vygotsky’s original theory but was added later by proponents of his theory. I will first present a short overview and provide some background information about Vygotsky’s theory including definitions of “tools of the mind” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 22), mediation and appropriation.

A Vygotskian perspective holds that children within a social situation must be active participants in constructing their own knowledge. Language takes place within this social situation that serves as a key tool for mental development, whether through spoken, signed or gestured language. Language is the primary tool used to "mediate relations between two people" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 20). Vygotsky's theory employs the term "tools of the mind" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 22) because he suggests that humans use language like they do a tool, in order to act upon or to change something in the environment. A technical tool like a hoe digs up weeds or stones to change and ready a garden for planting. Likewise, language, a symbolic tool, changes another person, as well as one's own thinking or behavior on a psychological level. Vygotskian scholars believe that learning occurs within a
meaningful social context mediated by language. These scholars also believe that language is the product of a particular group of people. Since groups of people create their own culture, history and way of life, Vygotsky's principles are often referred to as the Socio-Cultural, Socio-Historical or Social Learning Theory.

In addition to the term "tools of the mind" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 22) mediation and appropriation are two more constructs used by scholars espousing Vygotsky’s principles. Bodrova and Leong (1996) define mediation as the “use of an object or symbol to represent a specific behavior or another object in the environment” and the mediator as “something that stands as an intermediary between the child and the environment and that facilitates a particular behavior. A mediator becomes a mental tool when the child incorporates it into her own activity” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 161). These authors define the term socially mediated as something “influenced by present and past social interactions” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 162). Mediation occurs when two people interact socially in a meaningful, collaborative activity, using the tool of language. Vygotsky insists that this mediation originally occurs on an exterior plane, that is, the social interaction between two people mediated by language. Eventually, this externally created information is transferred from the plane of mediation to an internal plane. Thus, this process is then referred to as the appropriation of those "tools of the mind" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 22): signs, symbols or spoken language. Appropriation of knowledge is “the stage when a child has internalized or learned certain information or concepts and can use that knowledge independently” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 159).

A mediator expedites a person’s development by making the job or behavior
easier to perform. Teachers use many mediators to ease the learning of a new skill. For example, when a child is first learning to read, the teacher may remind the child to look at the first letter of the word for assistance, or a child may use her fingers when learning to add simple numbers (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 69). An example of mediation in an early childhood classroom is when the teacher displays a photographic sequence of the activities of the day to give the children a visual cue in knowing what occurs first, second and third. Eventually, the picture sequence can be removed when the children have appropriated the knowledge that the first activity of the day is group time, second is snack time and third is time for outside play. When a child is first learning to write her name on a paper, an example of mediation could be a yellow highlighted area at the upper left-hand corner of the paper to remind a child where to begin writing her name. After time, practice and appropriation the child will begin writing her name at the upper left-hand corner of the paper without any visual cues. This skill has now been appropriated and will occur independently.

Rogoff (1990), a Vygotskian scholar, used the term appropriation instead of the term, internalization, introduced by Vygotsky. Internalization is the “process of appropriation or learning to the point at which tools used are mental and their use is not visible to others” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 160). For this paper, I will use Rogoff’s term, appropriation, which more clearly and directly defines the process. Similar to Vygotsky, Rogoff also stresses the importance of the child's active participation in the dynamic transferal process so that concepts move from the external to the internal plane. To stress the child's active participation, Rogoff uses the term participatory appropriation, which is the "process by which individuals
transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation" (RogoFF, 1995, p. 150). Rogoff views the child's active participation as the critical piece in this process. Such active participation allows the child to become more adept with each skill.

Rogoff (1995) insists that the person is not separate from any given activity, but rather, is part of that given activity. An active, participating person is inherently involved in her own appropriation of a skill. In Rogoff's (1995) words,

Appropriation occurs in the process of participation, as the individual changes through involvement in the situation at hand, and this participation contributes both to the direction of the evolving event and to the individual's preparation for involvement in other similar events. Appropriation is a process of transformation, not a precondition for transformation. (p. 153)

Rogoff (1995) views development as a "dynamic, active, mutual process involved in people's participation in cultural activities" (p. 153). Therefore, Vygotsky and Rogoff (1995) view development in similar ways, emphasizing the importance of active participation.

*Zone of Proximal Development*

Vygotsky proposed the construct of the ZPD in reaction to standard intelligence and achievement tests. He was not satisfied with the information gleaned from such tests because they revealed only what children had independent mastery of, and did not reveal their potential for learning. Vygotsky himself defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through
problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 56). Bodrova and Leong (1996), present-day experts on Vygotsky's theory, define the ZPD as a "way of conceptualizing the relationship between learning and development" (p. 35). Dixon-Kraus (1995) declares, "this zone represents each child's potential for development beyond his or her current level of independent functioning" (p. 46). Vygotsky purposefully used the word zone in his definition because he believed that development was neither just static nor determined by a singular point on a given scale. Instead, Vygotsky believed development to be in constant flow, or on a continuum. He further maintained that two levels of performance exist within this zone: independent performance and assisted performance (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Morris, 1988).

The lower boundary of the zone is a child's independent level; the level at which a child performs a task independently. The higher level of performance is the level a child reaches given some assistance by a more skilled "other" person, whether an adult or a peer. This "social help of another human being" (Yarochevsky, 1989, p. 129) is one aspect that sets Vygotsky's theory apart from others. Historically, educators have focused on what a child can perform independently. Vygotsky insists that this one-sided view of development is inadequate to describe the process. Therefore, he offers the second complementary side of development: assisted performance. Assisted performance is defined by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) as "sensitive scaffolding of children's learning by teachers who assist children in accomplishing goals in their ZPD" (p. 32) which takes place "in activity centers
where collaborative interaction, inter-subjectivity, and assisted performance occur" (p. 32). Assisted performance includes such things as prompts, hints, clues, rephrasing questions, restating, demonstrating a task, asking a child what she understands, environmental help (such as labels to encourage classification), and explaining a concept to a peer (Bodrova & Leong, 1985). With each new skill learned, a child continually moves uninterrupted within her ZPD, cycling repeatedly between assisted performance and independent performance, until she achieves a certain skill, behavior, or body of knowledge. This achievement of skills is a result of social interaction that occurs within a cultural context, according to Vygotsky.

Vygotsky insists that both levels of performance, independent and assisted, are critical components of his developmental theory. If educators only view a child's independent level of skill development, they may overlook the child's emerging skills, and areas where the child may need some assistance. This short-sighted practice of ignoring an emerging skill could limit or slow a child's future development. Morris (1988) adds to the concept of the ZPD by stating, "Instruction directed beyond the proximal level will tend to be incomprehensible to the student and thus will affect neither knowledge or cognitive ability. The most effective teaching is therefore somewhat, but not too much, in advance of development" (p. 3). Given this information, an educator must be attuned to each child as an individual learner.

In general, each child's ZPD is different and each zone changes from one skill area to the next for each individual child. For example, a young child may be able to stack four blocks independently, but may need assistance in completing a four-piece inset puzzle. Therefore, the ZPD changes continually throughout a child's day.
depending on the activity. Morris (1988) states, "effective teaching learning transactions establish successive ZPDs" (p. 3). These ever-changing ZPDs obviously present a challenge to every classroom teacher who has upward of 15 or 20 children in each class.

Vygotsky was only 38 years old when he succumbed to tuberculosis in 1934. Contemporary educational researchers apply and extend his basic theoretical framework of development. These include Wertsch (1991), Rogoff (1991), Cazden (1993), Campione and Brown (1990), John-Steiner (1990) and Tharp and Gallimore (1998). One such extension is Tharp and Gallimore’s proposal that there are four stages within the ZPD. Their stages include: "Performance assisted by more capable others; performance assisted by self; performance developed, automatized, and fossilized; and de-automatization of performance leads to recursion back through the ZPD" (p. 45).

*Scaffolding*

The term scaffolding was not used in Vygotsky's original theory, but was introduced by Wood and his collaborators, Bruner, Ross and Middleton (Berk & Winsler, 1995) when they expanded his research. This additional term helps clarify Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory. Scaffolding is defined as:

A changing quality of support over a teaching session, in which a more skilled partner adjusts the assistance he or she provides to fit the child's current level of performance. More support is offered when a task is new; less is provided as the child's competence increases, thereby fostering the child's autonomy and independent mastery. (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 171)
The technique of scaffolding is used within a child's ZPD, and again, shifts according to the needs of the child engaged in a culturally meaningful problem-solving activity. As the definition states, the adult or more-skilled other "adjusts the assistance to fit the child's current level of performance" (Vygotsky, cited in Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 171). Once a child achieves the selected goal, the assistance offered by the scaffold is no longer needed and, therefore, is withdrawn. This scaffold or support system is provided within a meaningful social activity.

This notion is applied by Berk and Winsler (1995) who insist, "cognition is always situated in activity, that children's learning cannot be separated from the task in which it takes place, and that people learn best when they are working with others while actively engaged in a problem" (p. 27). Educational psychologist Lauren Resnick (1979) supports this interpretation of scaffolding by stating, "The child does what he or she can, the adult does the rest. In this way, practice on components occurs in the context of the full performance...and the adult's help is gradually withdrawn" (p. 102). Scaffolding, therefore, is a critical piece of the learning process pairing two or more people collaboratively.

Several other educators and psychologists conducted research on other commonly accepted forms of scaffolding. Catherine Snow (1977) described the process of mothers encouraging conversations with their three-to-eighteen-month-old infants. These mothers accepted yawns, coos, laughs and coughs as evidence of conversations with their young infants. After the babies were older than seven or eight months, and more able to make consonantal babbles, the mothers no longer accepted the coos and laughs as evidence of a conversational partnership. Hence, the
mothers raised the expectations as the child's learning progressed. As the mothers withdrew from controlling the whole script, the children became more active participants in the game.

Wertsch (1984) also describes a three-step scaffold technique he employed in a research study. In this study the mother worked with her two-and-a-half year old child to complete a puzzle similar to a model that was also provided. At the beginning of this scenario the child asked the mother where a particular piece of the puzzle belonged. The mother responded by showing the child the model puzzle. By the third try, the child did not request assistance from the mother. Rather, the child independently used the model puzzle to ascertain the correct placement of the piece in question. In both instances, the adult scaffolds the instruction so that the child is successful right from the beginning. Because of this support, the child persists in the given task or goal, until success is reached. The child reaches a new level of learning and eventually assumes the adult's role, eliminating the need for adult help in this particular task. The more knowledgeable other, in these cases the mother, gave visible or audible support to the children. As Neo-Vygotskians would say, the novice, or in this case the children, were "doing at first with help what he or she could very soon do alone" (Cazden, 1988, p. 107). These examples clearly demonstrate the construct of scaffolding, a central component of Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory and help illustrate the importance of another person's assistance.

**Use of ZPD and scaffolding: Real life events dialogue**

Children bring all their past knowledge, interpretations and experiences of real-life happenings to read-aloud events in the classroom. In Hansen's (1998) study,
kindergarteners were able to "hold their theory of the world up to their personal interpretations of story" (p. 126) during and following the reading of *Strega Nona* (1975). In other words, through the give-and-take dialogue between the teacher and children, the youngsters learned from each other and were able to confirm, disconfirm, or extend what they already knew to help them make sense of their world and, therefore, the story. Hansen (1998) found that the children’s spontaneous talk about story ‘matured’ opinions in three ways: knowledge was gained through talk about the story [as one child explained the term evaporation to the group], personal experiences were connected to the story [when the spaghetti flood in the story reminded one child of the flood victims they were assisting through their class project], and risk-taking was eased [when one child was confident in admitting that she could not understand why the story character could not see the ‘magic kisses’] as the children felt the support of the group in learning more about the world. (p. 127)

Even though the children listening to and discussing the events of the story *Strega Nona* (1975) had divergent background knowledge bases, divergent life experiences and divergent interpretations, they were able to make meaning through the give-and-take dialogue and supported or scaffolded each other’s learning (Hansen, 1998).

The children in this study came to refer to their connections between a story and their personal life as "rememberings" (Hansen, 1998, p. 129). With successive experiences, these "rememberings" increase and accumulate and can then be used again and again to facilitate meaning-making during future read-aloud events and every-day experiences. Their ability to make connections is consistent with
Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory because the children were actively participating with one another in the social and cultural environment of the read-aloud story.

The children used language, a higher cognitive function, within a meaningful context to mediate each other's learning. The children experienced support, or scaffolding, from their peers or more-knowledgeable others, as they negotiated their similar and dissimilar viewpoints. They did this using each other's independent and assisted levels of development. Together, as a social group, they were able to make more meaning than would have been possible if attempting this task alone. Therefore, "the social help of another human being" (Yarochevsky, 1989, p. 129) again plays a significant role. This social help also validates the part of Vygotsky's ZPD which states that a person is able to accomplish more or understand more with the help of another person than would be possible if that person worked alone.

Use of ZPD and scaffolding: Text-related dialogue

Meaning-making is the goal of authentic reading experiences (Hansen, 1998; Kertoy, 1994; Many, 1989; McGee, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1990; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1986). A well-known writer and researcher in the area of meaning-making, Wells (1986), believes that meaning is made through a collaborative effort among all the participants in any literary event, especially during a read-aloud event. Meaning-making involves active and collaborative reconstruction of the presented material, or text of the story, using the learner's present view of the world (Englert et al., 1994; Taylor, 1995) that also includes prior knowledge (Hansen, 1998; Johnson, 2003; Wells, 1986). For meaning to occur, the presenting conversation before, during and after reading the story should be "interactional in nature" (Hansen, 1998; Mandel
Morrow, 1990; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1986). That is, in the case of reading aloud, the participants should exchange ideas and information through dialogue. The dialogic use of language, considered a higher mental function, is the key tool referenced in Vygotsky's theory as the mediator and negotiator in the social construction of knowledge.

Of course, meaning can be made by a person reading independently, but first, some outside assistance may be needed, similar to a young child learning how to walk (Cazden, 1988). At first, the young child may need to hold the hand of an adult before walking independently. Children, younger than age five or six, with limited prior experiences and a limited vocabulary, and for the most part unable to read by themselves, benefit from the social interaction and scaffolding which can be used to promote understanding of what is being read. Nystrand (1997) declares,

Discussion and interactive discourse promote learning because they elicit relatively sustained responses from students. By helping students weave various bits and pieces of information into coherent webs of meaning, dialogically organized instruction promotes retention and in-depth processing associated with the cognitive manipulation of information. (p. 28)

Again, the "social help of another human being" (Yarochevsky, 1989, p. 129) can play a critical role to assist young children in making meaning. Englert et al. (1994) concur with Nystrand (1997) when they stress "dialogic interactions have been posited to be an important basis for constructing knowledge in classrooms...using dialogue to make mental processes and strategies 'visible' to students" (p. 165). Englert's et al. study comparing two interventions while reading
aloud concluded:

Comprehension performance is likely to be positively affected when students play an active role in constructing literacy meanings in collaborative formats, when teachers provide access to and promote students’ control of school-based discourses, and when students share in both the cognitive work and the talk of the comprehension process. (p. 198)

In the early childhood classroom, this interaction can be made during every exchange between an adult and child. In the case of teachers reading aloud to children, both the teacher and children can interact and contribute to the conversation to enable the children to socially negotiate the meaning of the story (Wells, 1986). Taylor (1995) and Many (1989) agree with Wells (1986) when they insist "literary meaning does not reside between the covers of a book" (Taylor, 1995, p. 158). That is, meaning is not in the text itself. Rather, meaning is made when there is give-and-take, and an on-going exchange of knowledge (Englert et al., 1994; Hansen, 1998; Taylor, 1995). A conversation that ebbs and flows through comments and questions with all participants taking responsibility for this engagement is essential (Englert et al., 1994).

In such settings, children are active conversationalists, not passive listeners. Children are not silenced in these dialogic environments as they might be in other classrooms. Rather, children contribute collaboratively with the teacher and with each other during the reading of the story to construct meaning from the text and to continually build upon each other's comments. Children have a voice in this process. Wells (1986) extends this description by stating that meaning must be "constructed by
children for themselves, through a process of building on what they already know and gradually elaborating the framework within which they know it" (p. 89). Such practice respects and again shows the importance of children bringing their real-life event experiences to the read-aloud activity. Thus, children use their real-life experiences to socially negotiate the meaning of the read-aloud text.

In many early childhood classrooms the children and teachers together construct meaning through conversation and active participation. The children use their knowledge about the real world to fill the gaps not provided by the text or illustrations (Conlon, 1992; Moore, 1998; Sipe, 2000). The teacher, often the more-knowledgeable other, seeks the children's input through dialogue to help them make inferences about the events described in the text. Interestingly, a child can often be the more knowledgeable other, depending on the topic and situation. For example, a young child may have been read to extensively about an animal of interest, such as a badger. When reading stories in school or visiting the zoo, this young child becomes the expert or more-knowledgeable other since her knowledge far exceeds that of the teacher or adult on the topic of badgers. Thus, together within a social context using as many of the children's and teacher's knowledge and ideas as necessary, the group creates meaning collaboratively about a topic.

Englert and colleagues (1994) conducted a study to compare the effects of two different interventions while reading aloud. They found that the intervention that included dialogue, social interactions and scaffolding (POSSE—Predict, Organize, Search, Summarize, Evaluate) created the greatest gains as opposed to the intervention (K-W-L---What We Know, What We Want to Know, What We Learned)
that did not include the socially constructed dialogue. The students in Englert's et al. (1994) POSSE study learned and used strategies that included frequent turn-taking, overlapping talk, self-nomination (volunteering information) and co-narration of the read-aloud story. Rosenblatt (1978) agrees with Englert et al. (1994) and has a unique way of explaining this phenomenon. She contends that literary meaning is "constructed in the 'multiple live circuits' that come during the storybook reading events" (Rosenblatt, as cited in Taylor, 1995, p. 93) in the classroom. To explain this metaphor, Rosenblatt (1978) contends a “literary work is not an object, a container of predetermined meaning. It is, instead, an event that comes into being in the ‘live circuit’ that emerges in the transaction between reader and text” and is not “constituted by the words as uttered sounds or inked marks on the page” (p. 93). These 'multiple live circuits' activate and take on life when the teacher and children work collaboratively to construct literary meaning.

Hansen (1998) and Englert et al. (1994) both used Vygotskian principles when addressing the text itself in a read-aloud event. They allowed the children to participate in the event through give-and-take dialogue, by bringing their past and present experiences to the event, and by allowing the children to construct and reconstruct the meaning of the text for and with each other. They used dialogue, or language, a higher cognitive skill to support the children in making meaning. Once again, meaning was not imposed upon the children by an all-knowing adult, but rather, was created collaboratively.

Vygotskian principles suggest that an exchange of information between two or more people within the social situation of a read-aloud event is one way to negotiate
the meaning of the text, and to construct knowledge. The on-going social interaction and the ebb and flow of the classroom dialogue allow each child to cycle and re-cycle through her own individual Zone of Proximal Development. This continuous flow allows each child to move from the assisted to the individual plane, back to the assisted plane again depending upon the complexity of each concept or skill.

*Use of ZPD and scaffolding: Illustration-related dialogue*

In addition to the text itself, the pictures or illustrations of a child's storybook offer another area for meaning-making through social interaction and discussion during a read-aloud event. When a story is originally read, the illustrations are often the first element on a page to capture the attention of a young child (Conlon, 1992). Photographs and illustrations allow young children the opportunity to connect their own prior knowledge with that shown in the book's illustrations (Conlon, 1992; Moore, 1992; Sipe, 2000). Many's (1989) study examined the interaction patterns and content of exchanges between a mother and her two children while reading two picture books, which were both familiar to the children. After analyzing the data, Many (1989) found that when talking about text, the adult did 54% of the talking but when discussing the illustrations the children controlled 62% of the dialogue, thus possibly showing how a young child is drawn to and finds meaning in the illustrations. Supporting this data, illustrations lend themselves easily to an open discussion between the participants, and "build background and add clarity to the story message" (Many, 1989, p. 58). Young children, ages five, six and beyond, who have trouble learning to read, benefit from the illustrations because the pictures assist them in better answering comprehension questions. This is true even when the
pictures may not always be critical in understanding parts of the story (Green & Olsen, 1985).

Stewig (1992) states "the illustrations are an integral part of a story and as important as the words" (p. 259) themselves. The illustrations can fill in the missing pieces of the written word puzzle, just as the written word can supply the missing pieces to the illustration puzzle. Text and illustrations complement each other in a read-aloud event and both may contribute to the creation of socially constructed meaning. An illustration in a picture book does not divulge all the detailed information at once. Rather, the child makes new discoveries every time the illustration is viewed (Purves & Monson, 1984). Purves and Monson (1984) also feel that the literal translation of the story should not be the goal of the illustrations. Instead, the illustrations should offer multi-sensory input, which influence the temper and aura of the resulting discussion. Nodelman (1988) supports the importance of the illustrations and suggests that beginning readers not only learn to read written text, but also need to learn to read the sign systems of the illustrations. A picture book can be the place where two sign systems converge: "the visual sign system of the illustration's sequence and the verbal sign system of the printed words" (Nodelman, as cited in Sipe, 2000, p. 259).

Stewig (1992) endorses this notion and adds one more critical piece. She promotes teaching children how to delve into their own personal life experiences with illustrations similar to the ways they are taught reading comprehension. For example, in Sipe's (2000) study, first and second grade children discussed and analyzed the illustrations to an even greater degree and more in depth than he originally expected.
The children discussed the sequence of the illustrations, the choice of colors in the illustrations, the artistic medium or media, the style in which both movement and space were depicted, and compared multiple illustrations (p. 264).

However, despite these many benefits of illustrations, Jalongo (1988) cautions readers of picture books for young children to be selective in their choices and to consider such questions as, "Are the text and illustrations synchronized? Are the illustrative details consistent with the text? Does the mood conveyed by the artwork complement that of the story? Are the illustrations or photographs aesthetically pleasing?" (p. 22) and one criterion that is very critical when reading aloud to young children, "Are the illustrative style and complexity suited to the age level of the intended audience? (p. 22). The illustrations in a picture book may also be viewed as inappropriate for young children and elicit out-of-control behavior and laughter, which may cause an unruly disruption in the socially constructed conversation (Moore, 1992; Moore, 1998). Therefore, given the above criteria and suggestions, care needs to be taken when selecting a book with regard to both its text and illustrations when reading aloud.

Martinez and Teale (1993) also conducted a study that focused on illustrations in picture books. They examined the styles of six different teachers engaged in conversations about their books' illustrations while reading aloud. Only two of the six teachers chose to talk about illustrations at all with the children. These two teachers only asked low-level, explicit questions about the illustrations shown on the page. A one word correct answer would suffice in satisfying the adult question, "What color is the car?" This finding is consistent with Dickinson, DeTemple, Hirschler and Smith's
research (1992) that coined the phrase "immediate information," which describes an adult's request for "labels, skill routines such as counting or naming colors, and spontaneous comments about information immediately available on the page, or a rephrasing," (p.330) as well as "where and what" (p. 330) questions. When the teacher accepts a one word correct answer to a "what" question, this is not considered a highly cognitive-type question, nor one that supports and encourages meaning-making.

However, Whitehurst et al. (1988) suggest a different perspective with which to look at this type of request and response exchange. These researchers deem it better to ask a child a "what" or a "yes-no" question, requiring only a one-word answer, than to allow the child to be a passive, non-contributing member of the read-aloud discussion. A one-word answer at least minimally engages a young child and may indeed encourage that child to become a more active participant in the socially constructed conversation in the future. This low-level type of questioning could also be seen as a scaffolding technique that helps the adult in ascertaining the child's current place on the ever-changing learning continuum. By engaging the child at her current level a skilled teacher can then engage in dialogue with the child to move her along to the higher assisted-level of learning.

In contrast to the above examples, Many's (1989) research suggests a different way to examine an adult-child exchange when the answer is a low-level, obvious one. After reading a passage, the readers in Many's (1989) study paused, silently inviting the child to respond to the present illustration. This invitational-type pausing behavior, while having a less-formal quality, provides the child an
opportunity to comment not only on the illustration itself as it relates to the story, but also to relate actual items in the illustration to her own personal life experiences. Many (1989) found this pausing technique allowed the children to converse more freely since they had more control over the topic shifts in conversation. Since the children were allowed “to continue their own line of thought,” this also “enabled them to develop their own logic in relation to the story and the illustrations” (p. 54).

This pausing behavior provides a possible social scaffold to future give-and-take negotiations (Many, 1989, p. 53) and sets the stage for further meaning-making through give-and-take dialogue. By pausing and allowing the child to comment, the adult ascertains how to use the child’s comment to move her most efficiently through her present ZPD. As with the acquisition of other skills this movement through the zone is not unidirectional, but rather changes according to skill and may cycle back to earlier independent or assisted levels. The child in the pausing scenario initiated and controlled many of the topic choices and topic shifts related to the illustrations. A teacher using such a strategy needs to be aware that many of these initiations were unrelated to the text and storyline itself, which is often common with young children (p. 54). But, this type of child-controlled talk allows the child to make meaning from the pictures that were pertinent to her own existence and daily activities, and also bring to the fore any background knowledge.

In addition to using the text and illustrations to facilitate meaning-making, Genette (1980), Higgonet (1990), and Sipe (2000) propose still other aspects of a book. These are called the peritextual aspects. These include the book cover/jacket (front and back), the end pages and the title page. These parts of a book often contain
illustrations, and offer opportunities for socially created meaning-making by all those involved in the discussion. Moss (1996) adds to this list of peritextual aspects and states that the, title, author, illustrator, date and place of publication, the half title page and the dedication also contribute to meaning-making when reading-aloud as these items create further opportunities for socially constructed dialogue on the road to meaning making.

_How Teachers Use Vygotsky’s Theory While Reading Aloud_

As has been shown throughout this discussion, teachers play a crucial role in creating meaning during a read-aloud situation. Educators who espouse Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory in their classrooms do not consider themselves the holders and conveyors of all knowledge. Rather, these teachers act as facilitators as they modify the children's interactions and assist in monitoring the children's understandings through socially constructed discussions. Using these strategies, the adult establishes links between the children's understandings and "more complete, complex meaning" (Cochran-Smith, as cited in Neuman & Roskos, 1998, p. 165). Teachers scaffold or build bridges in the children's learning and in their creation of meaning. Teachers do this in various ways: they restate the question or comment using different words, ask a child to summarize a passage, establish a community of learners or pair multi-age children together.

Palinscar (1986) adds that teachers can scaffold instruction by selecting an appropriate learning task, can render a task simpler to enable a child's success, can organize the task for presentation, can elicit and sustain interest in the task, can model, question and explain to make the task more explicit and can represent
approximations and appropriate approaches to the task (p. 74). Without such scaffolding, meaning may be compromised. The children can be left with misinformation about their world in general, as well as misinformation about the specific story currently being read.

Numerous studies suggest that reading-aloud should be a shared event on the path to meaning-making (Many, 1989; Oyler, 1996; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1986). The activity of reading-aloud, therefore, needs to include both adults and children in the conversation. The adult reader does not just deliver a performance as would an actress reading the lines of a play, as one teacher did in Dickinson and Keebler's (1989) study. Rather than just being in charge or being the performer, teachers can play the role of guide or facilitator during a read aloud session. The adult serves as a mediator to assist in clarifying the messages of the story (Many, 1989) and the adult becomes the "human being" in the phrase "the social help of another human being" (Yarochevsky, 1989, p. 129) to scaffold the meaning making. By listening to the children and their comments and questions, the teacher "gains insight into the connections students are making between the text and their lives, between the text and their current schema, and between the text and other texts" (Oyler, 1996, p. 150). This insight, gleaned by listening to the children, helps give "shape to the text" (Taylor, as cited in Fish, 1980, p. 327) and becomes one more link in the meaning-making phenomenon. These links help a skilled teacher cycle and re-cycle a child through her individual ZPD again with the use of various scaffolding techniques, such as those previously mentioned.

Even though I propose that the role of the teacher is a critical one in moving a
child through her ZPD during a read-aloud event, some teachers do not operate this way in their classrooms. The role played by the teacher in the discussion before, during and after a read aloud, may not always promote optimal meaning-making. The practices of some teachers, such as ignoring questions and comments by the children, or not restating for clarification, can silence the children. If the children are silenced, the discussion becomes a monologue instead of a socially constructed dialogue where meaning is made and where children are helped to move recursively through their independent and assisted planes.

To prevent children from being silenced and ignored while reading aloud, teachers can incorporate a variety of strategies that promote more dialogic participation. First, teachers can select quality books that fit the vocabulary levels, developmental levels, and interests of the intended audience of children. Selected books should have illustrations that are pleasing to the children and those whose text and illustrations complement each other (Jalongo, 2004), as the illustrations are the first part of a book to catch a child’s interest and, therefore, often encourage participation (Conlon, 1992). To further encourage active participation teachers can also “help children construct the essential message of the story, interject questions that extend children’s understanding of the book, relate the story to children’s experiences and revisit the story” when requested (Jalongo, 2004, p. 56). Jalongo also suggests that books be connected to the curriculum, lend themselves to storytelling and dramatization and have the appropriate amount of new vocabulary words. Young children “enjoy learning new words” (p. 56) and also “delight in learning new words and putting together known words to form a new meaning or to play on the words”
To promote dialogue while reading aloud Fisher (1995) also encourages teachers to “check on children’s knowledge and understanding…link [present story] with a previous work…encourage prediction…focus attention on particular features of the text…invite comparison of one text with another…and encourage evaluation of the text” (as cited in Jalongo, 2004, p. 62).

Dickinson and Tabors (2002) suggest the technique of extended discourse. Extended discourse happens when teachers:

Talk with children in ways that build on what they say and that which takes their words beyond the here and now and enhances the development of oral language…and requires the use of several sentences to build a linguistic structure, such as explanations, narratives, or pretend talk. (p. 12)

Teachers can also arouse children’s curiosity and interest in a book by bringing to the fore children’s background knowledge through oral discourse prior to listening to the read aloud (Jalongo, 2004; Nekovei & Ermis, 2006). Nekovei and Ermis (2006) tell of a preschool teacher in south Texas who did this very thing. The teacher set the stage for interactive participation while reading aloud by scripting content the children already knew about the season of Fall. She and the children subsequently took a nature walk around the school neighborhood to “activate prior knowledge and to develop background knowledge” (p. 94) and to enable the children to “participate in the read-aloud to the fullest extent” (p. 94).

Early childhood teachers can also embrace and institute the Project Approach (Helm & Katz, 2001) and the Reggio Emilia Approach (Cadwell, 1997) in their
classrooms to promote more dialogic participation while reading aloud. Both these approaches to learning allow for the young children themselves to be partners with the teacher in deciding what to study, how the study evolves, how long the study or investigation continues and often even assist in selecting the books to be read aloud. Most children who learn through the Project Approach and Reggio Emilia Approach have a personal investment in their learning, are motivated to share their thoughts and ideas with others, often teach their peers what they already know about a topic and “take [the] initiative and responsibility for the work undertaken” (Helm & Katz, 2001, p. 5).

Reggio teachers and children engage in dialogue, a key component of Reggio preschools, throughout their day together, whether in large, medium or small groups, which also includes reading aloud sessions. The role of the teacher is to:

Ask good, open-ended questions that stimulate children’s thinking and provoke discussion—to facilitate, orchestrate, and gently guide so that the conversation does not stray too far from the subject, so that every child has a chance to participate, and so that children consider the matter at hand with all their attention and interest. (Cadwell, 1997, p. 62)

The curriculum imbedded in both the Project Approach and Reggio is “language and literacy rich, includes many relevant opportunities to talk, listen, and ask questions, [and] be read to.” (Helm & Beneke, 2003, p. 7). Children who are immersed in these styles of curriculum delivery “develop their critical and creative thinking ability, [have learned] cooperation, interaction and negotiation among children” (Cadwell, p. 62) and therefore, are more likely to become confident,
contributing, dialogic members when reading aloud.

Rogoff (1990) identifies Vygotsky as one of the theorists who stressed the importance of small group conversations that are so prevalent in classrooms where the Reggio Emilia approach is adopted. Rogoff writes that according to Vygotsky’s theory, “children’s participation in communicative processes is the foundation on which they build their understanding” (p. 195-196). Rogoff stresses further:

As children listen to the views and understanding of others and stretch their concepts to find a common ground; as they collaborate and argue with others, consider new alternatives, and recast their ideas to communicate or to convince, they advance their ideas in the process of participation.

It is a matter of social engagement that leaves the individual changed.

(p. 195-196)

As mentioned earlier, dialogue is a keystone in Reggio-inspired classrooms and these conversations become critical for meaning making while reading aloud. Teachers and children collaboratively probe, question, inform, discover, express, extend, imagine, empathize, connect and garner a new understanding or meaning through these discourses (Cadwell, 1997).

In contrast to adopting the Project Approach or Reggio Emilia philosophy where children help select and direct learning, a common scene in many early childhood classrooms presents the teacher as a leader at the center of attention and the holder of all knowledge during a read-aloud event. In fact, the adult has often chosen the book to be read with no input from the children (Oyler 1996; Taylor, 1995). The reading adult remains in control of the conversation (Many, 1989). In this scenario,
the adult-controlled atmosphere impinges upon the creation of adult-child socially constructed meaning-making. For example, in many classrooms teachers continue to value and promote the common practice of the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) model (Oyler, 1996). In the IRE model, the teacher initiates a question, the child responds with an answer and the teacher evaluates a child's response as either right or wrong (Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mehan, as cited in Oyler, 1996). In such an instance, a child may feel intimidated or discouraged if the teacher deems her answer as wrong. Again, the adult does not consider the child’s background knowledge nor does she use any scaffolding techniques, such as hints, prompts, rephrasing or restating a question. The teacher merely evaluates the child's response and does not mediate a child's meaning-making through a conversation employing scaffolding within the ZPD.

Fortunately, in some instances, this commonly held vision of an adult-centered venue is starting to change. For example, Dickinson et al. (1992) found that children, age four and above, control the topic and selection of the book to be read more often than do younger children when being read to at home. But, for such a philosophical, social and pedagogical change to occur in schools requires that teachers turn over some of the control during read-aloud sessions to their students (Oyler, 1996; Many, 1989). It is well-documented that children learn better when they are interested in a topic and help select a topic to explore (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Jones & Nimmo, 1994; Katz & Chard, 1995; Wurm, 2005). It is important for teachers and students to share authority as the students help direct the atmosphere during and after a read-aloud event. In this way, children learn that
meaning is not static, but rather it ebbs and flows and is an outcome of social negotiation (Taylor, 1995). The students, therefore, become producers and sharers of knowledge as they concomitantly share their expertise. When such sharing takes place, adults help children cycle back and forth between the assisted and independent levels of learning prescribed by Vygotsky's theory.

In this type of classroom, opportunities continually increase for more socially created conversations. The children's knowledge is also more likely to be valued, shared and validated. In fact, several researchers hold the belief that the more children talk and participate, the more they also learn (Burton, 1993; Vygotsky, 1934; Wells, 1986). These resulting conversations call forth concepts and information commonly left unspoken in an adult-controlled classroom. In an atmosphere that values children's knowledge, children bring forth ideas that need to be discussed and explored. During discussion and exploration children enhance their learning and meaning-making abilities. Children learn that meaning does not exist in the text, but rather meaning emerges from the text (Taylor, 1995). Fish (1980) refers to this phenomenon as "making text" (p. 92). In this model, children construct meaning from the text in a communal environment where everyone takes responsibility for the task (Englert et al., 1994).

In an early childhood classroom where Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory is practiced, teachers "look at the learners in their classrooms not as empty vessels to be filled" (Oyler, 1996, p. 151), but rather with a "sense of wonder and openness to their way of thinking" (Moore, 1992, p. 4). Teachers who espouse these beliefs view a child through a differently colored lens. This lens can help change a teacher's
behavior from one of control and holder of all knowledge to having an attitude of "admiration and awe over the expertise youngsters bring to any learning task" (Moore, 1992, p. 4). This includes the read-aloud event. When a child's knowledge is respected and validated by the adult and the other children, shared authority during a read aloud event becomes possible and has a greater likelihood of occurring again and again. When expected to share authority during a read-aloud event, children are indeed producers and sharers of knowledge, not just consumers of knowledge. When children are seen as equal partners who share authority during a read aloud event, children and adults alike are more likely to "wonder aloud" (Conlon, 1992, p. 17). These spoken "wonderings" (Conlon, 1992, p. 17) encourage discussion, invite children to ask more questions, and in turn often inspire more open-ended questions to be posed (Conlon, 1992). This type of atmosphere creates a more communal event in the classroom (Taylor, 1995).

However, establishing communal-type events in the classroom may present difficulties. Many (1989) found that some children do not question what they read or what they hear in a discussion. In addition, the children did not know how to pose or ask questions, a skill that may be useful for further meaning-making during a read-aloud session (Dillon, 1984). After studying children's preferences for either adult-stated comments or adult-posed questions during a read aloud event, Dillon (1984) found that children preferred supportive adult-stated comments rather than questions, as a means to facilitate on-going socially constructed discussions. To assist children in learning how to ask questions, a skill deemed important, Dillon (1984) suggests that teachers give students multiple opportunities to practice formulating and asking
questions to become more comfortable and proficient in this skill.

One possible reason why some children do not ask more questions may be partially answered by Wood and Wood’s (1988) research. Their study suggests that children may not ask questions in a classroom because they already know that whoever asks the question is the one in power, or the one who holds authority. Whoever asks the questions controls the flow of the discussion for the next few minutes and some young children may feel uncomfortable with this power. Even though young five or six year old children have only been in school a few short years, they already accept the modus operandi of the classroom. Even when teachers strive to establish an atmosphere for shared discussion and shared authority, the children expect only the adult to ask the questions. The children have already been programmed by their social setting to answer the adult-posed questions and not to formulate and ask their own questions if their previous teachers have not been open to dialogue.

Oyler’s (1996) year-long observational study in an urban first grade classroom examined children's initiations during story reading. Oyler found and analyzed seven types of student initiations while reading aloud informational books. The seven types of student initiations were: Directing Process, Questioning for Understanding, Understanding Text, Personal Experience, Intertextual Links, Claiming Expertise and Affective Response. The children in Oyler’s study directed the process when they told the teacher how to hold the book so that all could see and suggested that the whole book jacket, both front and back be explored. The children asked questions to gain further understanding, not only of the teacher, but also of each other. Lemke
(1990) termed this type of questioning in Oyler's (1996) classroom as "cross
discussion". Children initiated statements about the text that were more interpretive
in nature as well as statements that did not necessarily relate to the text at hand. This
off-target behavior is frequent and expected in early childhood classrooms. Even
given off-target behaviors, teachers can still be guides, facilitators and supporters of
children's learning. A skilled teacher re-directs the conversation using the children's
ideas and input.

A child's personal connection with the story commonly caused a student to
initiate a discussion in Oyler's (1996) study. This initiation served to expand and
encourage other students' comments. These in turn helped to "grow the body of
common knowledge in the classroom community" (Edwards & Mercer, 1987, p. 146).
The children became quite expert in making inter-textual links as they shared
authority during reading aloud. They made connections between other texts, songs,
poems, chants and movies. The children also used their own personal writings to
make comparisons between two different texts. This inter-textual work is the first step
in critical literacy (Oyler, 1996) and an integral part of shared authority within a
community of learners. The inter-textual connections made by the children and adults
support and maintain the widely held belief that the message or meaning is not in the
printed word itself. Rather, the message and meaning lie in the discussion and in the
guiding of the environment in which participants construct meaning through socially
interactive give-and-take (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Burton, 1993; Cazden, 1988;
Conlon, 1992; Dickinson et al., 1992; Englert et al., 1994; Hansen, 1988; Katz &
Chard, 1995; Kertoy, 1994; Mandel Morrow, 1990; Many, 1989; Moss, 1996;
Palinscar, 1986; Rogoff, 1994; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1986). All of these various roles and approaches to interacting played by the teacher with students and reading-aloud are considered crucial by Vygotsky in the development of children as participating, active learners.

In this chapter, I explored Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory and defined ZPD and scaffolding. Following this, I conducted a detailed discussion of how ZPD and scaffolding, influences meaning-making while reading-aloud in an early childhood classroom. Throughout this discussion I stressed the importance of meaning-making through collaborative, socially constructed dialogue between all participants during a read aloud event in an early childhood classroom. I proposed that Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory adequately provides for this give-and-take constructive environment. Vygotsky believes that learning occurs within a meaningful social context mediated by language. Therefore, I then considered how meaning can be made through socially constructed dialogue in real-life events and when discussing both the illustrations and text when reading aloud. I concluded this chapter recognizing how teachers use scaffolding and mediation while reading aloud and then discussed the importance of dialogue in Reggio-inspired early childhood classrooms.
Chapter Two

Research Related to Reading Aloud

My first memories of listening to a story read by an adult was listening to books read aloud by my mother while me and my four siblings sat snuggled on the couch. To the best of my recollection, we always talked about what was happening in the story. Since an age range of ten years existed between the oldest and youngest of us five, we often had the opportunity to learn from both the more and less-experienced listener. As a mother, teacher and now grandmother, I always thought it quite different, actually odd, when adults asked young children to be quiet when a story was read aloud, as I remember the wisdom, knowledge and personal feelings shared during the discourse of a read aloud. These past and present experiences along with the many readings and observations I have made during more than three decades as an educator have all led me to the place I find myself at presently: the exploration of socially constructed read aloud stories. This literature review along with my own life experiences will guide this discussion and the research I will ultimately undertake regarding reading aloud in one Reggio-inspired early childhood classroom. The content of this literature review will be the lens through which I observe both the classroom teacher and students selected for this study.

In this chapter I will first discuss the characteristics of reading aloud, followed by parental and teacher impact and differing views of the benefits of reading aloud. I will continue with the research on sustained and interrupted reading, single and repeated readings and end with a discussion of small and large group read aloud sessions.
Characteristics and Common Practices of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a simple, yet powerful event. In this section, I will define the read-aloud event by explaining its characteristics including book selection, emotional components and language development inherent in this practice. In both the home and classroom, the activity of reading aloud is practiced when a more accomplished reader, usually the adult, reads a story out loud to one or more children. Children can also read stories out loud to each other once they have acquired sufficient skills, but for the purposes of this paper, only adults reading to children will be addressed.

The book selected for a read-aloud event plays a critical role in this process. This chosen book usually presents at a higher level of difficulty than the child can read independently (Bromley, 1992; Hall & Moats, 2000; Jordan, Snow & Porsche 2000; Many, 1989; Schwartz, 1995). This practice aims partially to hold the children’s interest, to present to the listener a more cognitively challenging vocabulary and enriching experience (Chomsky, 1991), and offer a vocabulary that is not necessarily heard during everyday conversations (Meyer et al., 1994). In addition, books are selected for the content that will be shared.

Children's literature, especially fiction, allows children to experience all of life's emotions through conflicts inherent in the stories. Feelings of the human heart, love, hate, joy, sadness, exhilaration, disappointment, anger and fear are just a few emotions aroused in children through listening and participating in a story read aloud to them (Rosenblatt, 1985; Trelease, 1985). Children listen and interact as they personalize the feelings aroused by the stories (Golden & Guthrie, 1986; Mosenthal, 1987; Nell, 1988; Sadowski & Goetz, 1985; Sadowski, Goetz & Kansiger, 1988) and
relate them to their everyday lives. In this way, meaning can be made through socially constructed conversations about the stories and incorporated into the lives of the children (Hansen, 1998; Trelease, 1985; Wells, 1986).

Read-aloud stories inherently contain a different literary register than that found in casual oral exchanges (Meyer et al., 1994). During a read-aloud event, children listen to the very language they will come to use for reading and writing in everyday life (Glazer, 1989; Routman, 1991; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Trelease, 1985). A child's listening vocabulary, which is acquired before reading and writing, is a key component that influences a child's reading vocabulary (Durrell & Hayes, 1969; Trelease, as cited in Schwartz, 1995). Listening comprehension is usually two to three years ahead of reading comprehension (Harris & Sipay, 1977; Trelease, as cited in Schwartz, 1995).

While reading aloud can provide many needed elements to set the stage for meaning-making, the sole act of reading aloud is not a magic potion. The magic occurs when the child is actively engaged in the process (Meyer et al., 1994). Trelease (1985) insists,

> The very purpose of literature . . . is to provide meaning in our lives. That, of course, is the purpose of all education. . . . Literature is considered such an important medium because, more than television, more than film, more than art or opaque projectors, literature brings us closer to the human heart. (p. 9, 10)

Therefore, engagement by the participants in the read-aloud process is an all-important ingredient.

Parents and teachers alike play a crucial role in reading aloud and literacy
development (Allison & Watson, 1994; Bus, van IJzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995;
Dickinson et al., 1992; Hall & Moats, 2000; Hockenberger, Goldstein & Haas, 1999;
Jordan et al., 2000; Manning, Manning & Cody, 1988; Moore, 1992). In this section,
I will briefly mention the impact parents have in regard to reading aloud and explore
more in depth the impact teachers have in socially constructed meaning-making in the
early childhood classroom. The manner in which teachers read aloud to children, in
other words, the styles (Heath, 1982; Taylor, 1995; Teale, 1984) used in interacting
with children during the read-aloud event, can be a crucial component to meaning-
making, the primary goal of all reading events (Mandel Morrow, 1990; Martinez &
Teale, 1993; Nielson, 1990; Taylor, 1995; Wells, 1986). This premise will be
explored throughout the remaining pages of this document.

*Parental and Teacher Impact on Reading Aloud*

Many parents of young children view reading aloud as a worthwhile activity
in the home even before their children reach school age (Collins & Shaeffer, 1997;
Manning et al., 1988; McNeill & Fowler, 1996; Panofsky, 1989; Payne, Whitehurst &
Angell, 1994; Schwartz, 1995; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Trelease, 1985). Children
who are read to at home usually arrive at school with a greater eagerness to learn and
to read (Clark, as cited in Burton, 1993, p. 33) and are usually better able to retell
stories. The ability to retell leads to better comprehension and concept of story
structure and vocabulary development (Burton, 1993; Hall & Moats, 2000; Schwartz,
1995). Wells (1986) conducted a longitudinal study finding that the number of stories
a child listens to is a strong indicator of later success in reading. Whether parents are
aware of this research information or not, some parents set aside a considerable
amount of time each day to read aloud to their children (Clarke, 1976; Mandel Morrow, 1983; Prater, 1985; Sakamoto & Makita, 1973). Other parents manage to eke out only a few minutes for reading aloud daily, perhaps after dinner or before tucking their young children into bed at night (Dickinson, et al., 1992). Still other parents and children never have the opportunity to share a read-aloud event for a variety of reasons too numerous to elaborate upon in the parameters of this paper.

Most early childhood teachers have learned about reading aloud to young children in their college classrooms. However, some of these same early childhood teachers use the read-aloud experience as a “treat” instead of incorporating it into their daily lesson plans (Nielson, 1990). In Neuman’s (1999) study, 20% of teachers did not show any evidence of storybook reading in their daily schedules; 73% incorporated only short times for reading aloud as part of the daily Circle Time activities. A very few teachers in this study, only 7%, planned more than one read-aloud time each day. Dickinson and Tabor (2002) found similar statistics in one research study about early language and literacy development. They found a wide variety in the amount of time allocated each week for reading aloud with four-year-old children. Twenty-five percent of the teachers reported planning for more than 15 minutes, whereas 17% of the teachers planned to read aloud 15 minutes or less per week (p. 16). Given these statistics, it seems that reading aloud is not given a high priority by many early childhood teachers. Dickinson and Tabor (2002) suggest that a disconnect exists between teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and their way of organizing classroom time. The findings in this particular study suggest “many preschool teachers may lack well-articulated systems of belief that link understanding of the
nature of language and literacy development with notions of effective classroom practices” (p. 16).

In addition to believing that reading aloud must be built into daily lessons as a deliberate focus, many researchers conclude that reading aloud must be supported by techniques within a social learning context to promote and construct meaning-making (Burton, 1993; Cazden, 1998; Englert et al., 1994; Hanson, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1990; Mandel Morrow, Rand & Smith, 1995; Martinez & Teale, 1993; Moore, 1998; Oyler, 1996; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Taylor, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). In a social learning environment, whether at home or school, if meaning-making is negotiated and constructed, a desirable multitude of literacy skills are advanced. These include: concept development, vocabulary development and listening comprehension (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Elley, 1989; Feitelson, Kita & Goldstein, 1986; Mandel Morrow, 1990), improved oral language capacity (Dickinson & Tabor, 2002), decoding and reading comprehension (Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita & Goldstein, 1997), and a sense of story structure and narrative (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990).

Even though the importance of a social learning environment has been adequately documented (Burton, 1993; Cazden, 1998; Englert et al., 1994; Hanson, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1990; Mandel Morrow, 1995; Martinez & Teale, 1993; Moore, 1998; Oyler, 1996; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Taylor, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978), some parents, teachers and researchers continue to hold differing views about this concept. This group of people promotes reading a story aloud from beginning to end with no interruptions or social interactions. This non-interactive style is practiced for two reasons: to allow the text to speak for itself (Hanson, 1998) and to help young
children learn to stay on task and not interrupt. Such educators believe that the required focusing skills of an uninterrupted read-aloud will lead to greater success later in the primary school classroom where time-on-task is highly valued (Hall & Moats, 2000). Clearly, there are different ways to implement reading aloud in an educational setting.

_Differing Views: How Beneficial is Reading Aloud?

As is true with most topics, at least two viewpoints exist. This is consistent with the topic of reading aloud to young children as well. In this section, I will discuss both the benefits and questions that continue to be discussed in the educational field in regard to reading aloud and meaning-making. Some benefits I will discuss include a child’s motivation, love of learning, language development and social/emotional aspects as well as a child’s exposure to the printed word. Some questions that remain center on the connection that reading aloud holds with a child’s later reading successes and the quality of the read-aloud event itself.

Many teachers take for granted the simple act of reading aloud to children. Reading aloud, however, is not merely speaking the words as they appear on the page. It has the potential for being much more. Reading aloud engages children on many different levels of literacy learning. First, a child must be exposed to reading aloud (Burton, 1993; Strickland & Morrow, 1989) and have access to books (Neuman, 1999). Exposure to reading aloud and access to books help most children gain the desire to read (Mason & Blanton, 1971) and may lead them to acquire a lifelong love of literature (McGee, 1995).
For example, Neuman (1999) tested the theory that access to books would increase literacy competency for young economically disadvantaged children. Through sought-after state funding, she was able to inundate child care centers with quality children's books, provide staff with training, redesign classroom environments to give children greater access to books, and show adults and children how to adapt conversations to include more literacy related content. The children in the intervention group scored higher than the control group in four out of six assessments. They also continued to show gains in literacy development six months later in kindergarten. This intervention group wanted to be read to more frequently and to spend more time engaged in “pretend reading” during free-choice time. These children also gained a clearer sense of how the abstract symbols of print and writing worked in context. The study concluded that access to quality books was indeed critical in becoming literate and, therefore, an important prerequisite to maximize the benefit of meaningful reading aloud. After children have access to books and exposure to reading aloud they often desire to learn how to read themselves.

This desire and motivation of children to learn to read themselves (Betts, 1944; Huck, as cited in Hansen, 1998) is most effective when adults read aloud on a daily basis (Hansen, 1998; Wells, 1986). Young children who have been read to at home often come to school with an increased desire to learn to read (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1975). Additionally, these children are more apt to develop a life-long love of literature (McGee, as cited in Hansen, 1998) and are likely to experience success in beginning reading upon arrival at school (Durkin, 1974-75). Children want to discover for themselves the joys and adventures they can experience through
another's voice. Listening to quality children’s literature (Dressel, 1990) can awaken a new curiosity, enlarge a child’s view of the world, and help give meaning to the surroundings encountered in everyday life and events (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hansen, 1998).

A strong desire to learn to read can be the key ingredient in becoming a competent reader (Burton, 1993; Trelease, 1985). Trelease supports this further when he says, "What you make a child love and desire is more important than what you make him learn" (p.6). Therefore, if teachers and parents instill in children the desire and love of reading, the first hurdle to becoming a competent reader is often overcome (Burton, 1993; Clark, 1984; Snow & Ninio, 1986). Becoming a literate person is also a source of power for children as they soon realize that being literate can open many doors for them (Burton, 1993) in both the educational and social milieu.

If a child has access to books, develops a desire to read, (Mason & Blanton, 1971) and sees adults reading, most likely she will become hooked on the pleasurable activity (Mendoza, 1985) of listening to stories read aloud, which has innumerable benefits. Benefits of reading aloud can be divided into three categories. These include emotional and motivational levels, oral language development, and concepts of print.

On the emotional and motivational levels of reading aloud, children learn to appreciate and love books (Holdaway, 1979); they establish affective bonds with the reader (Bus, 1993); they increase knowledge about innumerable topics; they visit familiar worlds (Hall & Moats, 2000; Taylor, 1992) and also visit imaginative worlds far beyond their own physical boundaries. Reading aloud also demonstrates to
children that reading has a purpose, creates a community of readers through enjoyment and shared knowledge, and makes complex ideas available to children (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Included in the emotional benefits of reading aloud is the level of a child’s personal involvement. In addition to satisfying a child’s emotional needs (Bus, 1993; Conlon, 1992; Golden & Guthrie, 1986; Nell, 1988; Sadowski & Goetz, 1985; Sadowski et al., 1988) reading aloud often allows children to incorporate the “story’s language into their own language” (Hade, 1988, p. 477). When a child and adult cuddle up close in soft surroundings they experience the unfolding of the story together and a special bond is often created. Children also identify reading as a pleasurable activity in this emotionally warm environment (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Hall & Moats, 2000; Wahlberg & Tsai, 1983) that can encourage them to be life-long readers instead of school-time readers (Schwartz, 1995).

The benefits of reading aloud included in the category of language development are that children discover the differences between oral and decontextualized book language (Snow, 1983), children develop a richer vocabulary (Burroughs, 1972; Fodor, 1966; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Hall & Moats, 2000; Ninio, 1983; Templin, 1957; Whitehurst et al., 1988), children experience an adult demonstration of adult phrased and fluent reading, children develop a sense of story (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), children listen to and become familiar with the ebb and flow of the language found in books (Hall & Moats, 2000; Pappas & Brown, 1987a, 1987b; Snow & Goldfield, 1983; Watson, 1989), and children development oral language skills in general (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Greiner, Karp, Shablak &
In addition to the emotional, motivational and oral language development enhanced through reading aloud children also discover the conventions of print (Clay, 1991). Skills enhanced through conventions of print are that children become familiar with the printed word itself (Mason, 1992), children discover directionality if an adult moves her finger along the words from left to right (Jalongo, 2004), children learn that books have authors, illustrators and publishers (Snow & Goldfield, 1983; Moss, 1996; Taylor, 1995), children realize that print is stable (Conlon, 1992), and that it remains the same throughout repeated readings (Schickedanz, 1986; Snow & Ninio, 1986). Children also develop knowledge of written language syntax, develop knowledge of how texts are structured, expand their own linguistic repertoire and learn about inter-textual ties (Beach & Hynes, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Children realize that the written word has its own patterns and rhythmic flow (Neuman, 1999), they learn how the written word conveys meaning (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Sulzby, 1985), and they establish a repertoire of known texts to use as a basis for writing and other activities through rereading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Even though the benefits of reading aloud to children to promote language and literacy skills have been proclaimed by many, some skeptics remain. Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) question whether the case for reading aloud has been proven. For example, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) challenge the following statement published in *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985): "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading
aloud to children" (p. 23). Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) reviewed thirty years of literature pertaining to reading aloud, but found only 31 research samples conducted over a three-decade span. This is approximately only one study per year. In addition to this being a small number of studies, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) question the reported results. They feel "the variability of correlational results from sample to sample was considerable" (p. 296). Prior to their study, they also held the belief that reading aloud to young children helped promote language and literacy skills. They summarized their study with these words:

Although these ethnographic and case studies contain many accounts of children's apparent learning of specific aspects of literacy skill through prior exposure to particular experiences [i.e. reading aloud], it is difficult to establish definite cause-and-effect relations from such descriptive and anecdotal reports. (p. 246)

Therefore, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) remain inconclusive after completing their research study and conclude their meta-analysis by stating that much more research is needed to more accurately identify the benefits of reading aloud to children.

Bus et al. (1995) agree that reading aloud may not be the answer to improved reading and literacy skills. Even though Bus’s et al. (1995) research supports the idea of literacy being passed down from generation to generation through the vehicle of reading aloud (Nielson, 1990), they suggest caution to parents and educators. Bus (1995) and her colleagues believe the adult-child dyad must be a secure one in which the adult is sensitive to the individual issues presented by the child. If the child is not
comfortable with the reading adult, the read-aloud experience could be less than optimal. Under these circumstances, the pleasurable, comfortable, friendly and secure environment assumed to be present in every read-aloud event might not be created. This situation, therefore, "may affect the child's emergent literacy skills and interests negatively" (p. 18) instead of positively. If this less-than-positive scenario is created, a young child may resist listening to a story and may protest active participation in the read-aloud event, thus reducing the opportunities for socially constructed meaning-making.

In addition to a secure relationship, several other researchers offer a cautionary word about the relationship between reading aloud and reading achievement. Meyer et al. (1994) contend that the quality of the interaction during a read aloud is the critical piece that leads to a positive correlation. Hoffman et al., (1993) question the quality of the actual reading of the text itself in classrooms. They argue that the quality of reading is often very poor. If this is true, reading aloud may not contribute to a student’s socially constructed meaning making and literacy growth. The interaction between parent and child during a read-aloud session at home may also lack in quality when “adults select the story or book, focus the child’s attention on particular objects, and expect the child to respond as spectator and respondent” (Heath & Thomas, 1984, p. 52), thus eliminating any co-construction of meaning.

Meyer’s et al. (1994) study also suggests that reading aloud to young children may not be the panacea for reading achievement and success that many Americans were led to believe it could be. Their study of kindergarten-age children in two small
towns in the Midwest found that the time teachers spent reading to children was not the magic potion. Instead, the amount of time spent by the children actively engaged with print was the key to becoming successful readers. When children spend time with print, engaging in activities such as sound-letter relationships and actual word reading, they were better able to decode words. Meyer et al. (1994) maintains that these decoding skills, not necessarily the activity of reading aloud, led to higher reading achievement. Meyer et al. (1994) concluded that the further one moves away from actual engagement with written text, the lower the correlation to reading achievement.

Research on Sustained and Interrupted Readings

For some professional educators, an issue exists as to the efficacy of allowing young children to interrupt an adult after a read-aloud session has begun. In this section, I will explore the benefits and concerns about sustained (Barrantine, 1996; Mandel Morrow, 1990; Neuman, 1999) and interrupted reading aloud (Dyson, 1987; Nikola-Lisa, 1992; Oyler, 1996). These include the author’s role, the purpose of the interruption, classroom rules, the timing of the meaning-making discussion and the mediational strategies used by the teacher. This concern of sustained and interrupted readings is more prevalent in the formal classroom environment, where a greater number of children are present. The casual environment of the home (Mandel Morrow, 1990), where only two or three children may be listening to a story, presents a different dynamic.

Oyler’s (1996) work endorses earlier research by Dyson (1987) and Nikola-Lisa (1992) in support of allowing interruptions. These researchers suggest that what
some teachers see as "digressions" (p. 150), when a child interrupts a story with a question or comment, could actually be seen as an active attempt at meaning-making. These authors claim that teachers can garner much information and gain a fresh perspective of the thinking processes of their students from the connections that the interrupting children are trying to make. They propose that the children are trying to make links between their own lives and the story being read or between one text and another text previously read. In addition to aiding adults in learning about the children, interruptions can lead to increased comprehension and improved competence in storytelling as well as improved decoding skills for the children (Rosenhouse et al., 1997). Conlon (1992) adds that comments or questions posed during a read-aloud actually help children make the story more “personally meaningful” (p. 16).

In contrast to the educational benefits of interrupting, Mandel Morrow (1990) found that when children are allowed to interrupt, their comments might often seem extraneous. Therefore, the teacher must spend precious time re-directing the conversation back to the story theme. Neuman (1999) believes that children should be encouraged to listen to the whole story from beginning to end before asking questions or requesting clarifications to enable the children to “hear the language and rhythm of the text” (p. 295) and to savor the aesthetic qualities of good literature (Barrantine, 1996; Neuman, 1999). Hansen’s (1998) research reveals similar thoughts. In this study, the teacher who read stories without interruptions feels it is “the author’s responsibility to make thoughts clear and the children’s responsibility to work out problems in understanding after the text has been read” (p. 219).
Green and Harker (as cited in Nielson, 1990) suggest a different angle to the position on interrupted vs. sustained reading. They find that the timing of the conversation is a key factor. The teachers in this study give the children a brief introduction to the story and intermittently read and discuss the information with them. They do not wait until the end of the book to have a separate discussion. The teachers purposefully stop reading to hold meaning-making conversations with the children mid-story. Neuman (1999) offers yet another perspective. She suggests that re-reading a story can achieve goals similar to that of the interrupting behaviors. The goals that can be achieved through re-reading, according to Neuman (1999), include “helping children to attend and to understand language patterns, the structure of stories, and the functions of language apart from the present, on-going events” (p. 295). Additionally, Mendoza (1985) decided to go directly to the source, or the initiators of the interruptions, the children themselves. A majority of the children surveyed do not like having a read-aloud story interrupted and do not feel comfortable interrupting the read-aloud story themselves with a question or a comment.

Sipe’s (2000) research contributes yet another interesting aspect to this issue. He finds that two-thirds of children’s questions were asked during the reading of the story, while only one-third were asked after the reading was completed. Sipe (2000) does acknowledge the merits of reading without interruptions, allowing children to experience the story “as a unified whole” (p. 272). However, he feels that this practice, when done exclusively, can lead to fewer questions being posed for discussion. Thus, this practice could even result in a decreased degree of
understanding or meaning-making by the children. Young children by nature focus on the here and now. If their questions or comments have to wait until the end of a story, the questions may not be asked at all (Sipe, 2000). This could lead to misunderstandings or incorrect information on the part of the young children.

Mandel Morrow (1990) conducted a study about children’s comprehension/meaning-making and responses to literature. In this study, she speculates that long-held behavioral rules often prevent children from freely and openly making comments or asking questions while participating in a whole group read-aloud event. This viewpoint is further examined in a study by Dickinson and Keebler (1989). This study looks at variations in preschool teachers’ styles of reading books aloud. One of the three teachers, Petra, required both proper posture of the children sitting on the floor and complete silence on the part of the participants. She was labeled by the researchers as giving a performance style of reading aloud. While she modulated her voice to display the drama and feelings of the characters and used facial expressions, she did not ask any questions. Following Petra's lead, the children did not ask any questions or make any comments either. Petra remained in control of the experience and chose not to indulge in any encouraging conversation to promote socially constructed meaning-making during the story. Neither did she use any scaffolding or mediational strategies with the children to promote understanding.

On several occasions, Petra did digress from the text, but these digressions were to comment on a child's behavior, and not to engage the children in conversation about the text. In fact, Petra ignored two questions posed to her during the read-aloud session, never acknowledging the child's inquiries. The questions asked by the child
clearly showed a misunderstanding about the text. Petra never clarified the child's mistaken understanding. Clarification of this misunderstanding would have greatly helped this child with meaning-making. The authors of the study state: “When the stories were over, Petra left the story world behind…the story was left an unanalyzed experience” (Dickinson & Keebler, 1989, p. 366).

The time of day a story is read aloud can influence whether it will be read with or without interruptions. The selected time can give the child a silent, unintended message about the value of reading aloud. If a read-aloud story is considered to be a time-filler, a reward for acceptable behavior, at the end of the day (Hester & Francis, 1994) or at a time when discussion is rushed or not engaging for the children, reading aloud may not hold any merit in the mind of the child. If reading aloud does not hold any merit, the child may not feel compelled to ask a question or engage in dialogue.

In a study conducted to examine children-at-risk’s verbal responses during a read-aloud, Burton (1993) determined that all three teachers in her study only used the read-aloud story as a transitional activity. These transitions occurred either after lunchtime recess or directly before the afternoon dismissal. At these transitional times of the day, the teacher may feel pressure to be on time for the next activity. These teachers also stated that they felt pressure from the school administration to cover the curriculum, and that expending the time needed to have a conversation about the story “robbed time from other content areas” (Burton, 1993, p. 95). Given these administrative requirements, time to ask questions, seek a clarification or engage in dialogue during a read aloud may not be a priority. Under these circumstances, with the read-aloud event given secondary status by the teacher, the students may not give
it any value either. This practice of squeezing a read-aloud session into a busy schedule limits the time needed for extended, socially constructed, collaborative dialogue that could integrate scaffolding and mediational strategies to enhance meaning-making.

In Burton’s (1993) study, even after receiving training on mediational strategies to use before, during and after a read aloud session, the teachers remained reluctant to totally incorporate the new strategies. Burton defines mediational strategies as:

Those strategies used by the teacher during storybook read-aloud sessions to create connections with the story and to engage the children in conversation about the story. The strategies are designed to engage the students with the text before reading, to help them make the connections during the reading of the story, and to extend this interaction to their own experiences after the reading of the story. (p. 12)

Instead of using these new strategies the teachers reverted to asking the types of questions posed by many basal readers, questions they felt more comfortable asking. The teachers asked questions that had a right or wrong answer, or that had a one or two-word answer. The questions were not open-ended, thus limiting the depth of the children’s thinking skills. However, upon reviewing the audiotapes of this study, Burton (1993) did find an increase in the mediational strategies used before the reading of a story. Despite this small change, these teachers continued to be reluctant to interrupt a story once it began or to use any of the during-reading strategies gleaned from the trainings. Similarly, only a small increase in the number of after-
reading strategies was noted.

Research on Single and Repeated Readings

It is quite common to hear a young child request another and yet another reading of the same story. In this section, I will explore the benefits of repeated readings, such as increased comprehension of more complex information, increased negotiation skills and shared authority, the possibility for more elaborate discussions, increased inter-relatedness between stories, increased vocabulary acquisition and a more in-depth familiarity with language as a whole. Snow (1984) adds that repeated readings offer a child “recurrent context in which previous conversations can be remembered and used by children to extend and elaborate their own conversational repertoire” (p. 209).

Although adults sometimes do not see the value of re-reading a story and often feel bored with repeated readings, Dennis and Walters' (1995) research, along with that of several others (Beach & Hynes, 1996; Conlon 1992; Soderberg, 1971), suggests that it is incumbent upon adults to listen to the child's request. Repeated readings possess the potential to increase a child's comprehension and depth of processing (Martinez & Roser, 1985) changing the level of discussion (Snow, 1983; Snow & Goldfield, 1983) from item and event elaboration to motive and cause issues, and from mere counting and naming objects to discussion of the meaning of the illustrator’s colors, and sounds in subsequent readings (Teale & Sulzby, 1987). Snow (1984) insists that even though the story is the same for the adult reader, the story “becomes a richer and more interesting story to the child with each successive reading” (p. 210).
Taylor (1995) agrees that there is indeed great benefit inherent in children's reiterative requests. Her study conducted in a kindergarten class, finds that in addition to increased comprehension, meaning-making often changes with each reading (Beach, 1996; Marshall, 1987; Rogers, 1988). Repetitive readings allow children to "make more sense" (Taylor, 1995, p. 161) of stories, especially those with complex story lines. This position is particularly borne out in Martinez and Teale’s (1993) research on teacher-reading styles. One teacher in this study felt that the story line of Strega Nona (1979) was quite complex. To assist the children in meaning-making, this teacher highlighted the story line with the children via recap and review procedures as well as through multiple readings of the same text.

Taylor (1995) found additional benefits for children who participate in multiple readings and discussions. These children use information from previous readings in subsequent dialogue. They become more familiar with the words, the story line and the story structure and, therefore, glean support via the "recursive nature of literary meaning-making" (Langer, 1990; Lytle, 1982; Taylor, 1995; Viehoff, 1986). This recursive nature allows children to read not only that particular story, but also other stories independently. In fact, repeated readings give some children more confidence to become independent readers (Sulzby & Teale, 1987) and help them move through the stages of “engagement and conceiving responses, which lead to connecting, interpreting and judging responses” (Beach, 1987, p. 486), which are higher level skills.

Taylor's (1995) work also supports the earlier studies of Martinez and Roser (1985) and Mandel Morrow (1988) who found benefits to multiple readings. These
authors deduce that, with multiple readings, children's conversations are more elaborate, more intricate and focused more on meaning-making. Taylor, additionally, takes her research one step further. She compares responses to repeated readings among several stories, not just one story. In instances with multiple stories, she finds that the "growing complexity [of children's responses] was only sometimes apparent" (p. 162). Taking into account each child's individual differences, she finds that each child's road to more complex understanding is different. Some children move from pointing to the illustration in the initial reading, to discussing the illustrator's techniques and medium in subsequent readings. Other students do not seem to advance to deeper complexity at all. Even after repeated readings, they are still just pointing to the illustrations. Taylor (1995) finds student responses varied from book to book. She surmises, "such variation is to be expected in a classroom where literary meanings were negotiated rather than imposed and where diverse responses were encouraged" (Taylor, p. 163).

When literary meaning is negotiated through dialogue between both children and adults during multiple readings and not imposed by any one individual, there is often disagreement about the meaning of some parts of a given text. This difference in perception is to be expected and should be seen as beneficial. Since both the students and the teacher participate in dialogue about the text, many viewpoints are brought to the fore during each subsequent discussion. This "polyvocal" (Taylor, 1995) nature of the dialogue allows many voices to be heard, even though all the participating voices are not in agreement at all times. Listening to divergent views of peers and adults during multiple readings brings richness to the conversation that
would not be possible if the meaning-making were imposed instead of negotiated.

Many teachers prefer to be in charge during a read-aloud session and control all the conversational interchanges. This self-assumed power by the teacher affects how children themselves become effective meaning-makers and producers of knowledge, rather than merely consumers of knowledge. Oyler's (1996) study addresses this issue by pointing out the difficulty some adults have in allowing children to initiate and be in control of the conversational floor. Historically, the adult style of shared authority has not been a common practice in many classrooms (p. 157). Therefore, teachers may feel uncomfortable releasing so much sovereignty to the children. This newer, more democratic style of negotiation requires attitudinal, classroom managerial, and pedagogical changes, as well as restraint by the teacher (Oyler, 1996).

However, Edwards and Mercer (as cited in Oyler, 1996, p. 158) suggest that when teachers sit back and restrain from controlling the conversation, that some educators may assess this behavior as disengagement from negotiated meaning-making on the part of the teacher. However, this is not the case and Oyler (1996) believes differently. She insists that when an adult sits back and adopts a facilitation style of promoting interactions among children, she is able to distill a better understanding of her students’ ideas than when she alone held all the authority. This facilitation style can be beneficial in providing a more clear insight into the students’ thoughts and beliefs for the teacher.

Taylor’s (1995) study supports the above research concerning control of the conversational floor, but admits restrictive parameters established by one teacher. In
this study, the teacher and students very actively contested who was in charge during the read-aloud discussion. This study consisted of multiple readings, which occurred over a five-month period. The children were very involved as active participants, meaning-makers and negotiators during the first two readings.

This active participation, however, changed dramatically in subsequent readings of *Machines at Work* (Barton, 1987). By the third reading, the teacher quickly turned to "print governed reading" (Sulzby, as cited in Taylor, 1995) to quell some of the children's interactive behaviors and comments that the teacher deemed too disruptive, thus, adding a restrictive component to open, negotiated meaning-making. As a result, student-to-student interactions that dealt with bodily functions, falsetto voices by the children, and other behaviors that brought forth laughter by the children, were highly discouraged by this particular teacher. As long as the children stayed on topic as meaning-makers and negotiators, the teacher allowed the children to be active participants. But, when the interactions changed to what the teacher deemed as extraneous or inappropriate, such as using falsetto voices and laughter, the teacher again assumed control of the conversation by turning to print-governed reading instead of negotiated reading. After encouraging negotiated meaning-making, this teacher reverted back to the behavior that historically has been more comfortable for many teachers, that of being in charge again when she felt she was losing control.

However, from a Bakhtinian (Bakhtin, as cited in Taylor, 1995) point of view, comic and humorous musings and chatter emphasize the multiple voices imbedded in a text, and also allow unique ideas to be put forth. As Taylor's (1995) research suggests, a more comfortable, welcoming atmosphere may have been created
by child-to-child, laugh-creating initiations. Such laughter always brings a new and different child’s voice to the fore. This new voice is often a particular child who was not previously heard during the interactive, meaning-making conversation in this classroom. Therefore, multiple readings of the same story may provide children with the needed level of security and knowledge to actively participate in conversational meaning-making (Jalongo, 2004).

Research on Small and Large Groups

In this section, I will discuss several characteristics of the early childhood classroom that indirectly affect the formation of large or small groups relative to reading aloud. Often, preschool and kindergarten classes, which often meet for only two and one-half hours per day (Nielsen, 1990), have upward of 15 to 18 children. The enrollment in some classes often reaches as high as 20 children with only one or two adults. Given these high child-to-adult ratios and time limits, small group read-aloud sessions can be rare indeed, if they happen at all. Jalongo (2004) suggests that the size of the read-aloud group for an early childhood classroom should only be twice the age of the children involved. This guideline would limit the size of a group of three-year-olds to six children, a group of four-year-olds to eight children and so forth.

However, Cohen (1968) and Feitelson et al. (1986) found that whole group story reading, even in large classrooms, showed an increase in children's comprehension, decoding ability and vocabulary development. In their study, reading aloud to whole groups of young children proved to be a very viable and valuable
practice. Critical skills needed for literacy development showed improvement despite
the size of the group. Hansen’s (1998) research also showed that children benefit
from large group read-alouds because there are more children with more experiences
and personal interpretations from which to draw upon in the discussions.

Several other studies acknowledge the fact that social interaction between the
reader and listeners through dialogue contribute to active meaning-making even in
large groups (Bloome, 1985; Conlon, 1992; Flood, 1977; Heath, 1982; Ninio &
group read-alouds, he does continue to pose questions. He believes that by virtue of
the size of the groups in whole-group read-alouds, each child may not have as many
opportunities to contribute her ideas and participate in meaning-making dialogue.
Children who participate in large group read-aloud sessions may also view their own
personal interactions and comments as extraneous and unnecessary and, therefore, not
contribute. Quite possibly, they may expect others to do the conversational and
socially interactive work for them. If children feel their participation is not expected
due to the large size of the group, the resulting meaning-making could be less than
optimal for all the children.

Several studies show that storybook reading in small groups (three children to
one adult) has more educational benefits than whole-group read-alouds (Hanson,
1998; Harms et al., 2005; Mandel Morrow, 1990). Children in small groups extend,
repeat and elaborate on what other children say (Mandel Morrow, 1990). These
children are more prone to use words, phrases and nonverbal gestures that their peers
more readily understand (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978).
Palinscar’s (1986) study about listening comprehension also lends support to small group read-alouds. She contends that the practice of “reciprocal teaching” can be easily embraced by small-group cohorts. Palinscar (1986) delineates four characteristics of “reciprocal teaching” that lend themselves to small group scaffolded instruction: prediction, question generation, summarization and clarification (p. 77).

The small group setting also offers children a more supportive environment for risk-taking (Hanson, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1990). The actual ideas brought forth can be challenged or attacked, rather than the child who articulates the ideas (Hansen, 1998; Wells, 1986). To further support risk-taking, the ideas children suggest for discussion are not evaluated as being "right or wrong" (Hanson, p. 131). Rather, the topics are simply brought forth as possible points of discussion to be delved into more deeply as the small group sees fit. With a smaller number of children in each group, such as 4-6 children per group, each child naturally is afforded more turns to speak than if there were 15-18 children eagerly awaiting a turn to speak as would happen in a large group session.

This type of environmentally controlled style of reading to small groups of children provides an atmosphere where respect for each other's ideas is honored, along with the "diversity of responses" (Mandel Morrow, 1988, p. 13). Even children who exhibit a shy and passive role in whole, large-group read-alouds participate more actively in a small group environment (Mandel Morrow, 1988). Hansen (1998) believes this is because these shy and passive children are able to effectively practice the strategies observed and borrowed from the times when they were engaged in large
group readings. The skills learned in large group settings are then transferred to the small group read-aloud environment. In general, the research suggests that children in small group read-aloud sessions are in a more comfortable, safe place. This comfort zone allows children to connect more easily with the information gleaned from the dialogue and apply it to their own personal lives and to the world that is familiar to them.

In this chapter I discussed the characteristics and common practices of reading aloud, parental and teacher influences on reading aloud, and differing views about the benefits of reading aloud. I then discussed research pertaining to sustained or interrupted reading, single or repeated reading and information about the size of the reading group. All these factors can influence the quality of a read aloud session.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This section describes the qualitative and observational case study research methods used to examine how a Master’s level teacher uses scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in a Reggio-inspired classroom. I define a case study, describe the selection criteria of the school and teachers, report on the setting where the study took place, including an account of the distinctive features of Reggio Emilia, the attributes of the research, ethical issues involved in such a case study and a synopsis of the overall plan and time line. I then recount the process of data collection that included observing, note taking, audiotaping, interviewing, transcribing, and coding and finally an in-depth description of the Reggio-inspired classroom environment.

Case studies, especially qualitative case studies, prevail throughout the educational domain (Merriam, 1998). Educational researchers who implement qualitative studies in their chosen field or subject area most often use the five characteristics set forth by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). These authors define qualitative research as that which takes place in a naturalistic setting, uses descriptive data, focuses on a concern for process, analyzes data inductively and holds a concern for meaning. I conducted an observational single case study, a specific type of qualitative research because as a researcher, I was interested in “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Specifically, I was interested in understanding how one teacher uses scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in a particular pre-kindergarten classroom. Therefore, the single case study approach was the appropriate qualitative choice.
Several definitions exist as to what constitutes a case study. Yin (as cited in Merriam, 1998) defines a case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 27). Miles and Huberman (as cited in Merriam, 1998) define a case study as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 27). According to Stake (2000), a “case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.” Stake (2000) adds that case study research is “one way of doing social science research” and “helps researchers to understand complex social phenomena” and best answers “how” or “why” questions (Stake, 2000, p. 438). Merriam (1998) states further that:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system, such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. (p. 19)

I chose a case study approach because the act of reading aloud is a social phenomenon where the focus of concern lies in the process, as outlined by the above researchers, and as defined in my over-arching question: How does a Master’s level teacher use scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud? I addressed
this question through “holistic description and explanation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29) and “interpretation in context” (Cronbach, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Yin (1994) expands this definition by stating, “A case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (p. 28). Stake (1995) offers this clarification,

The case could be a child. It could be a classroom of children or a particular mobilization of professionals to study a childhood condition. The case is one among others. … An innovative program may be a case. … The case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing. (p. 28)

In studying the process of reading aloud in one classroom, it is impossible to separate the act of reading aloud from the context in which it occurs, the classroom itself. Stake (as cited in Merriam, 1998) insists “that knowledge learned from case study is different from other knowledge…. Case study knowledge is more concrete, more contextual, and more developed by reader interpretation” (p. 32). Stake’s words help illuminate another reason for choosing the single case study approach. The data gleaned from the study was very detailed and concrete, and garnered within the context of a preschool classroom. As the researcher I then interpreted this data that can then be used for program improvement, or for future research studies. At the site where this research took place, the director of the program was interested in expanding the Reggio-inspired philosophy to other classrooms. This case study and its resulting data and analysis are a possible source of information for program extension and improvement at the Wicklow Hills Preschool. The framework of a case study design offered me the opportunity to explore in depth one teacher in one
classroom, where the process of reading aloud rather than the product was explored, and where discovery of the characteristics embedded in this process was key rather than confirmation of any act, deed or quantity.

The heart of my research did not focus on where a read-aloud story is physically delivered to the listening children, how the words are articulated by the reader, what kind of picture books make good read-aloud stories, or the quality and importance of picture books in the lives of young children. Instead, the focus of the case study was on how the teacher and children engage in the process of making meaning of the text and illustrations while participating in the phenomenon of reading aloud using scaffolding and mediational strategies. Therefore, given that I investigated the process of socially constructed meaning-making using scaffolding and mediational strategies during read-aloud events, my study meets the criteria for a case study.

One setting, with a small sample, within a bounded time frame, was observed, rather than multiple settings, with a large sample and extended time for observation, which could possibly “dilute the overall analysis” (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). The information gathered from conversations and interactions during read-aloud events was recorded through field notes and audio-recordings because “people, places and conversations [are] not easily handled by statistical procedures” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). I will now discuss the completed research case study using the above guidelines set forth by Bodgan and Biklen (1998).

Selection Criteria
This case study took place in a naturalistic setting, specifically, one Reggio-inspired pre-kindergarten classroom, in a private school located in upstate New York. Wicklow Hills Preschool is a private school in an economically stable middle-class suburb situated within a neighborhood of tree-lined streets interlaced with cement sidewalks. The town’s center is only a few blocks away. This allows the children and teachers to walk to several stores and to take advantage of near-by public transportation for field trips. This school attracts families and children from 14 surrounding suburbs. The Pre-school itself is part of an educational environment serving 448 students from age three through Grade Six. The school has a Principal who oversees Kindergarten-Grade Six and a separate Director who oversees the Preschool Department of 133 children. This school recently was awarded Middle States Accreditation. The classroom where I observed had 18 children registered all of whom are four years old. They attend school four half-days per week for two-and-a-half hours per session (12:00 noon - 2:30pm). I observed in the Monday through Thursday afternoon class for three weeks for the two-and-one-half hour session.

The school educates children from several diverse backgrounds including African, Asian and Eastern European, although most of the children (98%) are Caucasian. Both the teacher and assistant in this particular classroom are also Caucasian. The parents of the children bring their Pre-Kindergarten children to school daily as school bus transportation is provided for K-6 grades only. Many of the Preschool children also have older siblings who attend Wicklow Hills Elementary School. This Preschool is a highly sought after educational setting due to its Reggio-Emilia philosophy.
Both the teacher and teacher assistant in the selected classroom are well versed in the Reggio Emilia philosophy. They both have attended numerous conferences, workshops and colloquia to advance this mind-set and way of life in their classroom. Both of these early childhood professionals have also presented professional development opportunities locally and state-wide and have opened their Reggio-inspired classroom to others who are in pursuit of more information about this topic.

The teacher in the classroom, Ms. Terrance (all personal and institutional names are pseudonyms), holds a Master’s degree, teaches five full days per week, and has been teaching for over 19 years. She is a member of a local Reggio Emilia study group, has earned professional development credits regarding Reggio and has presented numerous workshops on the aspects and philosophies of Reggio-inspired schools. She has traveled extensively to view and attend presentations about Reggio and The Hundred Languages of Children, an exhibit designed by teachers and staff of the Reggio schools in Italy as a “visual documentary on their work in progress and its effects on children” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 9). Ms. Seneca, the teaching assistant in this classroom, earned an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood and held a teaching position for 15 years prior to a change in district educational requirements. Ms. Seneca is also well versed in Reggio Emilia and has given multiple workshops locally and state-wide espousing its tenets.

I chose this specific classroom after observing five pre-kindergarten classrooms and teachers at Wicklow Hills Preschool because it met all the criteria I established for the study: a high-quality program that follows national criteria established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a teacher who
holds at minimum a Bachelor’s degree with a focus on early childhood, an interactive literacy-based program, an environment where literacy is valued and many books are read, and a classroom where conversations between and among the children and adults are promoted throughout the day, especially before, during and after the reading of a picture book. This chosen preschool is a Reggio-inspired school, ascribing the philosophy that states, “the curriculum is child-oriented and teacher framed…a negotiated curriculum” (Wicklow Hills Preschool Parent Handbook, p.2). As stated, this Reggio-inspired preschool is one where the curriculum is negotiated with the children, as is the socially constructed “meaning-making” during read-aloud sessions. Therefore, this classroom is one where I found, identified, described, collected and analyzed data focused on the main question, “How does a Master’s level teacher use scaffolding and mediational strategies to make meaning while reading aloud?” Because the selected classroom follows a Reggio-inspired curriculum, this is a unique environment in the early childhood field, not only in New York State but also throughout the United States. Therefore, the data gleaned from this experience is also unique, adding to the knowledge base in the area of early literacy. After exploring the literature on early literacy and reading aloud, no studies were found that looked at the process of using the social constructs of scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud, specifically in a Reggio-inspired classroom.

According to New (2000), a Reggio-inspired classroom is one that espouses “not so much an approach as it does an attitude” (p. 341) as for the participants it becomes a way of living, thinking and being. Moreover, the Reggio Emilia approach has become well-known globally over the past 30 years as “this system has evolved its own
distinctive and innovative set of philosophical and pedagogical assumptions, methods of school organization, and principles of environmental design” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 7). This view of early childhood education,

Fosters children’s intellectual development through a systematic focus on symbolic representations. Young children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through all their available ‘expressive, communicative, and cognitive languages,’ whether they be words, movement, drawing, printing, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, or music. (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 7)

This approach embodies “highly collaborative problem-solving” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 7) skills as the parents, teachers, children and community-at-large develop strong relationships and partnerships where “education is seen as a communal activity and sharing of culture through joint exploration among children and adults who together open topics to speculation and discussion” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 7).

The learning and teaching in a Reggio-inspired classroom is considered to be an “open-ended spiral” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 10) where children are encouraged to take their time to discover and rediscover, draw and re-draw, think and re-think, discuss and re-discuss, explore and re-explore, construct and deconstruct, to marvel at and to marvel again at their own and others’ topics of interest. The children, teachers and parents working together in reciprocal relationships in Reggio schools do not have a sense of hurry, but rather relish and engage in the process intentionally and collaboratively. Teachers are partners, nurturers, guides, listeners, observers and researchers (Cadwell, 1997). Parents are partners as well as providers of new ideas and skills and not as
“threats but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 269). Children are seen positively as protagonists, collaborators, negotiators and communicators where they can “wonder about, question, feel and imagine” where they can “make their thinking visible through their many natural languages” (Cadwell, 1997, p. 5).

One final, but critical fundamental aspect of Reggio-inspired schools is that of the emphasis on documenting the teaching and learning process. Documentation is viewed as communication and consists of transcriptions of both the children’s and teachers’ thought processes, photographs of activities and representations of thoughts in a variety of mediums. These documents act as historical records, assist parents in understanding their children’s learning, serve as self-evaluation tools for the teachers and show the children that their work is valued by many members of the community (Cadwell, 1997, p. 6) as the documentation is displayed in books or large panels.

Reggio Emilia itself is a town in northern Italy bisected by the Po River and surrounded by the Apennine Mountains in the south and the Alps in the north. Reggio Emilia is one of the largest and most prosperous regions in Italy and one whose history bears strong support for services and education for families and children since 1820. This support continued into the 1940s after the city was destroyed in the First World War. The citizens of Reggio Emilia, under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, viewed the devastation as an “opportunity…to rebuild educational programs for young children and to ‘redefine the image of the child’” (Kenney, 2007, p. 9). The citizens of Reggio Emilia used money expended by the Italian government to “restore a sense of community lost during the war…and to build a school for the children as an investment in the future”
(Wurm, 2005, p. 7), hence the creation of the Reggio schools, proclaimed by many today as the best of early childhood programs in the world” (Wurm, 2005, p. 1). As co-founder with the Reggio citizens, Malaguzzi held degrees in both pedagogy and psychology and challenged the citizens of Reggio Emilia “to look at children as competent, co-constructors of their own learning” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 75). This phrase could be considered a cornerstone of the Reggio philosophy, as the children become adept, masterful and collaborative as active participants in their own learning as described above.

The teacher for this study was selected because of what Merriam (1988) refers to as a reputational-case and an ideal-typical-bellwether-case situation. A colleague, Kieran Owens, who is herself a well-known early childhood professional, recommended this particular teacher to me. Kieran has been an early childhood educator for over 38 years, has presented numerous professional development workshops with a focus on the Reggio Emilia philosophy of early education, and for the last ten years has been the Director of Wicklow Hills Preschool. Kieran has served on both the local and state levels of the NAEYC and recently was recognized for her many contributions to the early childhood field. While selecting the research location for this investigational case study, I followed Merriam’s (1988) guidelines. I “developed a profile of an instance that would be the best, most efficient, most effective, or the most desirable of some population and then found a real-world case that most closely matched the profile” (Merriam, 1988, p. 50). I feel strongly that the selected classroom and teacher best fit the criteria which allowed me to investigate the process of using scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom offering a unique perspective given
the Reggio-inspired curriculum which “places conversations at the center of the curriculum” (Cadwell, 1997, p. 62).

I also selected a pre-kindergarten program instead of a kindergarten class because pre-kindergarten programs have more freedom with curricular choices and activities. I also chose this program because it does not involve the “over-academicization of early childhood education” that Lewin (as cited in Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 44) warns about. Wicklow Hills Preschool Parent Handbook states that, “Play is a fundamental part of our program, as it is play that enables children to learn cooperation, problem solving, language and mathematics and to develop curiosity, self-esteem, strength and coordination, self-direction, and values” (p. 2). At present fewer New York State mandates and curricular requirements apply to pre-kindergarten programs than to those in the higher grades, thereby, granting the teacher more control over daily activities and choices.

Attributes of the Research

In this section I list the source of the questions I addressed while conducting the case study investigation and discuss three attributes of the research, trustworthiness, credibility and transferability. As stated previously, the one major over-riding question is, How does a Master’s level teacher use scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom? The questions I asked in the Semi-structured Interview appear in Appendix G. Additionally, I used some of Ms. Terrance’s responses to my questions to formulate other inquiries that built on my original questions.

Before leaving the research field I attempted to ensure the quality or
trustworthiness of the case study. Trustworthiness is the “judged criteria of a qualitative research study based upon the appropriateness of the data gathering and analytic processes and their resulting interpretations” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 694). To check on the trustworthiness of a study Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest asking oneself, the researcher, one critical question, “are the findings of inquiry worth paying attention to … worth taking account of?” (p. 290). According to these same authors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) trustworthiness includes “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (p. 247). In carrying out qualitative research, Creswell (2007) suggests that at least two of these procedures be used to insure trustworthiness. Therefore, I used two aspects of trustworthiness: credibility and transferability.

I assured credibility in my study by being in the field for a “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) to build trust with the children and teacher, to learn the cultural aspects of the classroom and to achieve the purpose of this case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation and triangulation are two more aspects of credibility. Persistent observation is the ability “to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Therefore, it was important to investigate the process of reading aloud using scaffolding and mediation in depth to assure these criteria.

Triangulation was achieved because I used a variety of data collection modes: teacher and children interviews, observations in the form of an Observational Protocol Journal and a Member Checker, the classroom teacher herself. The classroom teacher was able to listen to a replay of our interviews and read all the transcribed data that gave
her the opportunity to confirm the information, correct any errors and add any further information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider the use of a member checker as “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314).

I assured transferability in my study by writing a “thick, rich description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). I accomplished this by “providing a word-picture of the setting, people, actions and conversations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p, 121) as I observed them, and by writing a “complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). I used as many descriptive words as possible, was as specific as possible, and provided as much detail that was needed to achieve the goals of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This thick description appears in the Data Analysis chapter of this document.

*Ethical Issues Involved in Case Study Research*

This section addresses the topics of vulnerable subjects, risks involved, confidentiality issues, demographics, parent and teacher consent and statistical analysis connected with the study of the process of using scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud to young children.

In accordance with RSRB’s Guidelines for Investigators (2007), children are “vulnerable” subjects. Nevertheless, the nature of this study only required that the children participate in their normal everyday read aloud session and participate in the conversation at will. No child was forced to participate in the conversation about the read aloud story.

The conversations with the children and the interviews with the teacher did not solicit any personal information that could be used to identify the respondents.
Readers of the report will not be able to attribute discussion to any particular child. The name of the school, the pumpkin farm, the store, the classroom teacher and assistant has been held in confidence in the final report, as pseudonyms were used for these throughout the study.

The adult teacher consented both verbally and in writing to have her classroom and teaching practices the subject of this research. All the parents of the children in Ms.Terrance’s class were given Consent Forms and all 18 were returned providing consent. These forms identified the purpose of this study and sought their consent for each child’s participation. I personally distributed the forms, answered questions and collected the Parent Consent Forms. The children in this program are brought to school by their parents. This practice allowed me to have personal contact with each one of them. Copies of these forms appear in the Appendix A of this document.

Prior to audio-recording the read-aloud story and accompanying discussions, names of the children were de-identified by assigning a pseudonym to each child in the classroom, maintaining each child’s gender and ethnic background. These pseudonyms were used when I transcribed the audiotapes so that the children cannot be identified. All post-read-aloud conversations or focus groups with me were held in Ms.Terrance’s classroom and lasted approximately ten minutes. I kept the conversations of all participating children confidential and their assigned pseudonym was used in the transcriptions. I did not solicit any personal information that could be used to identify the respondent. Readers of this document will not be able to attribute discussion to any participant. I shared the audiotapes and transcriptions with the
classroom teacher to gain further understanding, elicit an alternative interpretation or gain clarification of a transcribed segment.

Photographs of the classroom do not include any children, only the room arrangement and pertinent realia, such as a class schedule. I removed the names from any child-produced work before photographing it. I secured all this data in a locked home office and password-protected computer.

As the participant observer I collected and coded the data. I analyzed the qualitative data that included teacher interviews, audiotapes of the stories read aloud, transcriptions of the conversations before, during and after reading aloud, daily reflective journal, field notes, daily schedule, list of the read aloud stories and their text scripts, and physical artifacts of the children’s, such as drawings, dictations, constructions, child-and-teacher-created curriculum webs, photographs and photo copies of children’s work and other realia.

**Overall Plan and Timeline**

I began this case study investigation on September 29, 2009 with the first three days serving as a ‘get-acquainted’ time period. During these days I met with the parents individually or in small groups, informed them of the study, passed out Parent Consent Forms and sought permission to include his or her child in the study. I began formal observations on the fourth day (October 5, 2009) of being a Participant Observer, or Day One. The actual Time Line for this study is listed in Appendix H. Following is a broad outline of my plan.

- Met again with the Principal, Director of Early Childhood Programs and the classroom teacher to talk about logistics.
• Got Acquainted--I informally observed three afternoons in the classroom before any official data was collected to allow the children and teacher to become comfortable with another person in the classroom and with the tape recorder (Pre-Day 1, 2, 3 or Sept. 29, 30 and Oct. 1, 2009).

• Distributed and Collected Parent Consent Forms--During the three-day get-acquainted time I distributed the Parent Consent Forms to inform the parents of my daily presence in their child’s classroom and to share with them the details of my study.

• Began official audio-taping of read aloud sessions and focus groups, transcribed data, wrote the Observational Protocol Journal on October 5, 2009.

Began taking photos of the classroom arrangement and environment including activity centers, daily schedule, child and teacher produced curriculum webs, children’s drawings, writings and artwork. (Continued throughout study)

• Collected other artifacts such as the Parent Handbook, fliers about school events, list of picture books read during read aloud sessions to whole group, small groups. (Continued throughout study)

• Interviewed the teacher formally at least weekly after session 3, 6, 9 and 12.

• Conducted informal interviews with the teacher as needed.

• Had the classroom teacher read the transcriptions weekly, after sessions 3, 6, 9 and 12.

• Returned to the classroom to confirm or disconfirm any information that remained unclear or where questions remained (Post-Day 1, etc.) as needed.
• Analyzed and coded data throughout the study.

• Wrote dissertation using data analysis.

Data Collection

For this study, I was a participant observer, as well as the primary person responsible for data collection and analysis. I observed 12 full afternoon sessions (four days a week for three consecutive weeks) to see how literacy was practiced, and specifically, how meaning was constructed between and among all participants using scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in a Reggio-inspired classroom. I audiotaped and transcribed the teacher reading aloud ten picture book stories and one felt board poem/song in a large group and one book in a small group setting of five children. I also audiotaped and transcribed both formal and informal teacher interviews and child focus group interviews. The Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for the first formal teacher interview appears in Appendix G.

Before I began the official audiotaping of the read-aloud stories, I spent three preliminary days in the classroom to allow the teacher, children and myself to become acquainted with each other. Creswell (2007) refers to these periods of time for collecting field notes and observing as “observing as an ‘outsider’ and then by moving into the setting and observing as an ‘insider’” (p. 130). As is often the case, especially with young children, the presence of a new person and recording devices influence behaviors and interactions; hence the importance of get-acquainted days. The three initial preliminary days (Pre-Days or “outsider” days) were very informative as well regarding the nature, interactions and relationships present in the classroom. I was grateful for these preliminary days as the tape recorder was not working adequately at first, and this
additional time also allowed me to ascertain the appropriate place to sit, observe and record. In this document, the time spent conducting preliminary (outsider) and official (insider) research will be called Pre-Day 1, 2, 3, Day 1-12, respectively. The days when I returned to the classroom to confirm information will be referred to as Post Days 1, 2 and 3.

After the initial three get-acquainted or preliminary visits, my role changed, and I commenced the official collecting of field notes and audiotaping, as an “insider” (Creswell, 2007, p. 130) or participant observer. I did this in an attempt to record as natural a setting as possible with reduced interest in both the participant observer and the presence of the tape recorder on the part of the children. I determined the placement of the tape recorder to ensure technical clarity after two visits to the classroom. I placed the tape recorder on the small table positioned about six feet from the group conversation and listened through an ear piece to ensure quality and continued recording. During the preliminary and official days in the classroom, as both an “insider and an outsider” (Creswell, 2007, p. 130), I wrote descriptive and reflective field notes daily in an Observational Protocol Journal.

This Observational Protocol Journal (predesigned form, Appendix I) served as a “method for recording notes in the field” which was both descriptive and reflective as suggested by Creswell (2007, p. 131). Creswell created a two-column format for “notes about experiences, hunches and learnings” (2007, p. 134). Merriam (1998) similarly suggests that this field note journal be used to include “ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions and reactions” (p. 110) to the observational data. In the Descriptive Notes column of this Protocol, I included the times and summaries of the activities as they occurred in
chronological order, delineated personality and physical aspects of the teacher and
children, along with any other visitors to the classroom as they interacted with each
other, and any special activities happening throughout each day, such as physical
education or outdoor play, in addition to the read-aloud event itself.

Several photographs of the classroom itself, which includes activity centers,
projects, group and storage areas appears in Appendix K to refer to as needed. A detailed
description of each Activity Center also appears below to provide the reader with a
written “thick, rich description” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316)
by “providing a word-picture of the setting” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p, 121). In the
Reflective Notes column of this Protocol, I included my own reactions, feelings,
comments and any questions that needed to be clarified or expanded upon. In this
Observational Protocol Journal, I specifically listened for and noted events and
interactions using scaffolding, mediational strategies, interruptions of the read-aloud for
clarification and discussion, retelling of the story, the occurrence of open and close-
ended questions, vocabulary discussions, children’s behavioral issues or requirements,
and any redirection of the topic as necessary.

Many photographs were taken of the classroom environment and selected
photographs appear in Appendix K. A daily schedule and list of activity centers, as well
as child-and-teacher-produced curriculum webs, drawings and writings were gathered as
data. The Observational Protocol Journal, which included descriptive and reflective field
notes, the transcribed audiotapes, teacher interview responses and additional artifacts
that I gathered were used as descriptive data that Bodgan and Biklen (1998) proclaim to
be the cornerstone of a qualitative study. A list of picture books read during the study
I interviewed the classroom teacher using informal, conversational interviews (Sanders, Ed., 1997) and formal interviews. The informal interviews took place prior to the children’s arrival at school or while the children were attending physical education class, which served as the teacher’s planning time. The formal interviews took place in the classroom itself where I posed open-ended questions on a one-to-one basis with the teacher as follow-ups to the read aloud stories of that day. These formal interviews took place on Day 1, 3, 6 and 12 as listed in Appendix H. The first formal interview was the Semi-Structured Interview which elicited information about the teacher’s educational training and background, her educational philosophy, the establishment of the classroom environment, her theories about literacy, her attitude or mind-set regarding Reggio Emilia, and more specifically, her views about reading aloud to young children. As expected, these primary questions then lead to other related inquiries. A list of the questions I asked the teacher in the Semi-Structured Interview appears in Appendix G.

During the process of data collection and after each read aloud story by the teacher, I engaged the children in a discussion or focus group dedicated to the story just read. The children acted as informers for my data as I began each discussion with the same inquiry, “What was today’s story about?” I continued the discussion dependent upon the children’s answers, comments and interactions, posing open-ended questions throughout. A copy of the focus group questions appears in Appendix J.

I also employed the services of a “participant checker” (Hansen, 1998, p. 71; Taylor, 1995, p. 70), or “member checker” (the classroom teacher herself). I used the participant checker to read and verify the field notes or Observational Protocol, as well
as the transcripts. She evaluated whether “meaning-making of the participants is [was] presented within a plausible, coherent account” (Hansen, 1998, p. 71) within these aforementioned documents. The verifications or clarifications of the member checker served as another source of data that I considered and analyzed.

When transcribing the audiotapes of the teacher and children’s conversations I had planned to use a modified version of a two-column format suggested by Ochs (1979, p. 59). When planning my study I originally chose this format and adapted it so the transcriptions, which are the “researcher’s data” (Ochs, 1979, p. 45), as efficiently as possible would indicate the overlapping conversations so often present when young children communicate. However, when I started transcribing the audiotapes using the two columns, reading the conversational exchanges became a struggle and confusing for the reader. The physical eye-sweep movement required to move back and forth from column to column created a disjointedness and interrupted the flow of the dialogue. Therefore, I wrote the transcriptions in the traditional top-to-bottom, left-to-right progression to facilitate reading the text. I used two of Ochs’ (1979) symbols for verbal transcriptions, and one non-verbal transcription code from Bloom (1974). The list of these symbols appears in Appendix F.

Time-wise, I left the research field after completion of the 15 days as outlined in the Time Line in Appendix H. I left the research field only after certain criteria had been fulfilled. These include: “exhaustion of resources; saturation of categories; emergence of regularities; overextension” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 350), or “going too far beyond the boundaries of the research” (Sanders, 1997, p. 7). The goals of the research project were accomplished as expected during the 15 days at the site and enough strong, in-
depth data were available for triangulation (Sanders, 1997). In qualitative research it is often difficult to leave the field after data collection has been completed as close relationships and attachments between all the participants are commonly formed. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that the researcher ease out of the field situation slowly, but that the quality of this transitional time leaves open the possibility for returning if more data are deemed necessary. I eased out of the research site by gradually reducing the length of time I spent in the classroom, and have gone back three times to gather more information (Post-Days 1, 2, 3).

Organization of the Data

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) offer a detailed definition of data analysis. According to these authors, data analysis is “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials…to increase [one’s] understanding of them and to enable [one] to present what is discovered to others” (p. 157). This involves “working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important, what is to be learned and deciding what to tell others” (p. 157). Before beginning the data analysis portion of this task, I read in-depth all the collected data and became very familiar with its contents. To continue the process I used the data analysis spiral suggested by Creswell (2007). This spiral has several loops: the data management loop, where I organized the data into folders; the reading or memoing loop, where I wrote notes or phrases in the margins of the transcripts and field notes; the describing, classifying and interpreting loop, where I assigned codes or categories to the collected data, identified themes from the data, tried to make sense of the data, and developed
generalizations; and finally, the representing or visualizing loop, where I presented an in-depth picture of the case in narrative form (Creswell, 2007, p. 148-157). Data analysis in this study has been both “open-ended and inductive” (Creswell, 2007, p. 224) and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

I categorized the read-aloud and focus group transcriptions, field notes (Observational Protocol Journal) and Member Checker notes using a variety of codes. These are outlined below. I developed a set of codes prior to conducting the research that consisted of two main categories and four or five sub-categories for each. These appear below.

**Codes for Scaffolding (4 sub-categories)**

- Relational—teacher to child, child to teacher, child to child
- Questioning---open-ended, close-ended
- Print/illustration---intertextual, concepts of print, decontextualized, vocabulary, syntax, vocabulary
- Personal Experiences---past, present

**Codes for Mediation Strategies (5 sub-categories)**

- Curriculum related---science, social studies, math, health etc.
- Cues---physical, visual
- Questioning---open-ended, close ended
- Print/illustration---story structure, re-reading
- Behavioral---redirection

Other codes were developed according to the “particular research questions and concerns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 171) that I discovered while in the field. This
coding was a recursive process that changed and evolved as the meaning also evolved and was discovered. After the data were collected, coded and analyzed the first time, I returned to the classroom to “verify the findings, gain additional information and seek alternative explanations to already documented and coded field notes” as Moore (1992, p. 45) suggests and what I refer to as Post-Days, as previously mentioned.

I abided by Bogdan and Biklen’s (1998) caution that none of the data collected is unimportant and should be treated as such. Ultimately, the job of the ethnographer conducting a qualitative study is to make sense of this otherwise seemingly disjointed information. At the beginning of the study all of the information seemed to be just that, disjointed. But with every day spent in the classroom and with every reading of the notes, journal entries and interviews, themes began to emerge and I started to view the information in a more organized, systematic and meaningful format. I also realized that this is the place where the process, rather than the product, and the search for meaning in the study took root.

After beginning to code the data according to the two main categories of scaffolding and mediational strategies, and the four or five sub-categories, respectively, I found that more codes were needed to sub-divide these categories even further. I added hands-on-experiences to the scaffolding category, and added repetition, probing, negotiating, pausing, organizational, clarifying conversations and reviewing to either the scaffolding or mediational strategies categories as I saw fit. When reviewing the documents and transcriptions, I color-coded the two main categories of scaffolding (turquoise pen) and mediational strategies (pink pen). Since I decided to report the data according to before, during and after the read aloud
sessions, I assigned these abbreviations (Before-BF, During-DR and After-AF) to the appropriate data.

As I read and re-read the transcribed conversations, I found that the categories I created and assigned to certain conversations, before, during and after the read aloud event, often overlapped. For example, an open-ended question could be coded as either scaffolding or as a mediational strategy. To review, scaffolding is defined as,

A changing quality of support over a teaching session, in which a more skilled partner adjusts the assistance he or she provides to fit the child’s current level of performance. More support is offered when a task is new; less is provided as the child’s competence increases, thereby fostering the child’s autonomy and independent mastery. (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 171)

Mediation, as defined for this study,

is the use of certain signs or symbols in mental processing. It involves using something else to represent behavior or objects in the environment. The signs or symbols can be universal or specific to a small group, such as a…classroom, or they can be specific to a particular person. (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 21)

These authors continue the explanation by stating, “A mediator facilitates the child’s development by making it easier for the child to perform a certain behavior” (p. 69).

For example, an open-ended question posed to a child by the teacher, such as, “Tell me about the cows we saw at the farm” can be a scaffold if the teacher is trying to ascertain if the child knows the defining characteristics of this particular farm
animal. Depending on the child’s answer, the teacher can give the child more verbal support or clues to answer the posed statement. This same open-ended question coupled with a photograph of a cow can serve as a visual mediational strategy to assist a child in understanding the characteristics of the cow, since the photo provides the additional cue or information to answer the open-ended probe. The photograph of the cow can also be a scaffold, giving “more support when the task is new” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 171) if the young child has not had a lot of experience explaining the characteristics of a cow, and “making it easier for a child to perform a certain task” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p.69), that being, telling about the cow they saw at the farm. To support this finding of overlapping categories, Bodrova and Leong (1996) state, “Overt mediators function as scaffolding, helping the child make the transition from maximum assisted performance to independent performance” (p. 70).

Consequently, many overlaps occurred when I classified or coded the data, as the above example indicates.

As was just mentioned, during the actual data collection phase and while reviewing parts of the research related to reading aloud, I decided to report the findings in three parts. These are scaffolding and mediational strategies that occurred before, during and after the read aloud events. Due to the extensive volume of examples of scaffolding and mediational strategies observed, recorded and transcribed in Ms. Terrance’s classroom, this three-part division appeared to be the most efficient, clear and concise way to report the data. Burton’s (1993) study that explored mediational strategies and Robinson’s (1991) study that explored the structure of reading aloud in the Kindergarten curriculum also reported their data
according to conversations that occurred before, during and after the read aloud sessions. Thus, these two previous studies provided the model and the framework for data reporting in my study.

Every time I entered the classroom the environment exuded a sense of peace and calmness. The classroom is quite large (24 feet X 33 feet) with ceiling-high windows along two sides. This light and airy atmosphere allowed the outside seasonal accoutrement to be an integral part of the classroom and extended learning environment. For example, the brilliant fall colors of changing leaves, falling leaves and bare branches provided numerous opportunities for conversations and language development probes. When winter arrived these same glass apertures served as vehicles through which lively nature-based conversations about birds, squirrels, habitats and various forms of precipitation were sparked. During the first interview with Ms. Terrance she mentioned how fortunate it was to have such large open expanses of glass as this attribute fits with the design of schools in Reggio Emilia. For example, teachers and architects in Reggio Emilia, Italy work collaboratively to plan classrooms to ensure that there are “lots of windows, natural light, and the ability to feel the outdoors while inside” (Wurm, p. 29). When Wurm taught at the schools in Reggio Emilia for two years, and later wrote of her experiences there, she stated:

The environment sets the stage for children’s living at school, as the primary aesthetic experience… It is open, airy and clean…. This communicated immediately the implicit value of children and embodied the image of the child and the stated vision of Reggio schools. (p. 35)
In the middle of the classroom stood a large branch that fell from a neighborhood tree. This large branch when transferred inside was set into a pail of heavy sand and served as the residence for several found bird nests, acorns, pinecones, leaves and a bee hive. With the approaching December holidays the tree provided branches for each child’s ornament made at home with their parents. When the children brought these self-made ornaments to school each child told how they made the ornament and what they used to create the holiday decoration. This practice promoted creativity, a sense of self-esteem and an opportunity to use sequencing skills as each child reiterated the creative process for the other children and teachers.

The tree was surrounded by a low (about two feet off the floor) square table whose center had been removed to hold the tree trunk. The flat table surface surrounding the tree held science and nature-related objects to explore. These included leaves, a set of deer antlers, smooth and rough tree branches, pieces of tree bark and rocks and stones of various sizes and configurations. Magnifying glasses, microscopes, rulers, measuring tapes and scales were placed on the table surface to encourage exploration and discovery by weighing stones, rocks and shells. Beneath the table were more items such as a large piece of driftwood, a basket of pinecones, and an animal skull.

The block area, an integral part of every early childhood classroom, was quite extensive and took up one corner of the room with two bookcases out-lining its borders. One bookshelf stored natural wooden tree logs, multi-sized unit blocks, hollow blocks, a set of primary blocks, small, colored inch cubes, a set of large, long, heavy tubes, baskets of hand puppets, small people, small animals, traffic signs, tools
and various sized drums, six large wooden trucks and a globe. The other bookshelf housed items such as colored foam blocks, three foot long foam pieces, colored wooden blocks, baskets of shiny stones, small pieces of lumber, wooden arches and tunnels, a set of small wooden rectangles, triangles, and half circle shapes (window blocks) with see-through colors inserted within the shape. On the two top shelves of this book case were several glass bottles which held colored stones, shells, marbles, a conch shell, a dried gourd marimba, a trio of glass vases set in an artistic grouping surrounded with raffia, two framed photographs of Peruvian women, postcards from Venice, Italy, a papier-mâché bird set in a real nest, a large live plant and a framed photo of women and children of the world. Over this bookcase hung a wreath of colorful fall gourds and leaves.

The housekeeping area was set up with a wooden stove, refrigerator, cupboards, ironing board, dolls, a scale, two telephones, a high chair, a basket of gourds, a green plant, a stand-up mirror, several recipe books, and dress-up clothes such as aprons, purses, hats, fancy dresses, a man’s suit coat, a brief case, a wicker picnic basket, ballerina tutu, pajamas, shoes and boots. These were accented with items from Native Americans, China, India and Japan. The child-sized table was set with a cloth table covering, cloth napkins and pottery plates, bowls, cups and tray created by Ms. Seneca’s daughter. A glass vase adorned the center of the table with fresh flowers inside.

The portable light table held colorful, acrylic shapes and colored tissue paper that the children could manipulate to explore the concepts of reflection, perspective and symmetry. The children used these same objects on the near-by over-head
projector, along with a set of colored paddles where they could mix and blend colors. In this same area was a set of mirrors that allowed the children to experiment and create their own prisms. Underneath the light table was a two-pan balance scale where the children could compare and contrast the weights of various materials. In Reggio-inspired schools light is seen as a special material to be explored, discovered in its various stages, modified according to each child’s creativity and used as a focus for many investigative conversations.

The art area held baskets with fabric swatches, rolls of colored tape, yarn, raffia, glue, wooden rolling pins, magazines, sticky-backed shapes, pipettes, buttons, sequins, pompoms, found objects, string and ribbon. The crayons and markers were assembled according to color and stood upright in clear heavy glassware and the scissors stood up-right inside a ceramic flowerpot. The paper supply was varied with the large construction paper lying flat on the second shelf, while the smaller sheets of colored construction paper stood vertically inside metal dividers. To enhance this creative area was a large roll of paper, newsprint, and recycled items such as plastic and styrofoam containers, fabric, netting, shredded raffia, egg cartons, clean yogurt containers and toilet and paper towel tubes. This basket of recycled materials changed continually as the children brought in new items from home. Next to this bookcase, three easels with jars of paint were mounted on the wall in an effort to conserve classroom space.

The contents of the sensory table changed according to the themes being explored. At times it contained water, modeling foam dough, strips of newsprint,
acorns, pinecones, ears of dried corn stalks and then kernels of corn after the children skillfully plucked the corn kernels from the ears.

The manipulative area consisted of puzzles, colored inch cubes, beads for stringing, alphabet lacing cards, Geo Snaps, Gears, Geo Links, pegs, peg boards and nuts and bolts. Ms. Terrance changed these small motor choices monthly.

The literacy center held pencils, stamping cubes, strips of colored paper, writing paper of varied sizes, envelopes, stamps, greeting cards, postcards, clipboards, foam letter shapes, a calculator, an office adding machine, stencils, picture rollers, several books about artists and a personal writing portfolio for each child. A large floor vase containing peacock feathers on one side and a large, ceramic vase holding an array of colorful, silk flowers on the other flanked this bookcase. Above this bookcase, situated between two windows hung another basket, and under this were many CDs to use in the listening area and several pillows to cuddle with. A box of books sat adjacent to the writing table, which held a ceramic pencil holder, a pad of notepaper, a hole punch, a stapler and another green plant. On the back of this bookcase hung a map of the world.

In the meeting area, where the children and teacher gathered for the daily read aloud stories was a low, two-person futon, piled with soft pillows. The teacher sat on this couch and the children congregated on a large, green circle-shaped rug in front of her. On the walls of the classroom children’s’ framed art work was exhibited along with reprints of Monet’s Waterlillies and Cassatt’s Child in a Straw Hat. Ms. Terrance and Ms. Seneca invest much time into displaying the children’s art work. Each piece is always placed inside a wooden frame to give a sense of dignity and
respect to each child’s creation. “The walls of the preprimary schools speak and document. The walls are used as space for temporary and permanent exhibits of what the children and adults make come to life” (Malaguzzi, as cited in Edwards et al. 1998, p. 175).

Suspended from the ceiling was another large tree branch from which child-made creations and streamers blew in the wind when the windows were open, or when a person walked past. The teachers at Wicklow Hills again reflect the mind-set and attitudes of a Reggio-inspired school by believing in and adhering to the statement, “The ceilings are used to host as many different types of aerial sculptures or beautiful mobiles, all made with transparent, colored, and unusual material, built by the children and set up by teachers” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 173).

Immediately out side this classroom door at Wicklow Hills Preschool is a table with a spiral-bound notebook displaying documentation of recently completed projects. This notebook not only serves to educate, inform and communicate with the parents and other passers-by about the children’s learning, but also validates the learning process itself. Documentation boards prominently appear in the hallways leading to the entry doors and show the high regard teachers have for the children’s work. These contain photographs of classroom projects and investigations relating the children’s and teachers’ conversations, collaborations and thinking processes. To explain further, Carlina Rinaldi (1994) states:

Documentation is the process of gathering evidence and artifacts of what happens in the classroom. Documentation is not only the process of gathering evidence and artifacts, but also a physical collection of evidence and
artifacts, the reflection on and analysis of the collection, and the presentation of that collection, or part of it, in a way that makes children’s learning visible to the children, to the teachers, to other adults including families and visitors. (as cited in Wurm, 2005, p. 98)

I feel that it is important to report on the physical attributes of this classroom space that I captured through photographs, and which are considered data, because it fulfills many of the criteria required to be considered a Reggio-inspired environment. The environment and contents of the classroom where I conducted the research for this project is very different from the majority of Pre-Kindergarten classrooms seen in most communities around the United States. The environment is considered so extremely critical in Reggio schools that it “educates the child” and in fact is called “the third educator” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 177), along with the teacher and assistant. Reggio educators “see space as having educational content, that is, as containing educational messages and being charged with stimuli toward interactive experience and constructive learning” (Filippini, as cited in Edwards et al., 1998, p.164).

The environment in Reggio schools is carefully and meticulously planned and constructed and the creators “give great attention to the beauty and harmony of design” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 168). When a new school is planned or when an existing school is modified, the teachers meet diligently with the architects to choose the correct materials, shape, structure and design to ensure that the final building communicates the appropriate message to the community, parents, students and teachers. The architects and teachers choose room layouts, materials and placements
that ensure the natural, unobstructed flow of light from the outside to the inside. A large, open, uncluttered, hospitable space which includes many natural materials is highly valued and strictly planned for so that children feel a “sense of well-being” (p. 163) and have a space that “favors learning and exploration” (p. 163), one that “encourages social interaction” (p. 164) and “an atmosphere of discovery and serenity” (p. 167).

Even though the building where I collected my data is a pre-existing structure, the teachers took great pains to re-create the classroom space to ensure these high quality Reggio standards. When the classroom was scheduled for a face-lift, the Wicklow Hills teachers were able to select the new floor covering and the color of the paint to cover the walls. It is fortuitous that the Wicklow Hills building already had ceiling-high windows on two sides to allow the free-flow of light from the outside into the classroom or as Malaguzzi, a co-founder of Reggio schools describes it, “the flood of light, the continuity between inside and outside” (Malaguzzi, as cited in Edwards et al., 1998, p. 164). The teachers and children adorned the space with natural items such as wickers baskets, glass bottles, ceramic mugs, plates and vases, cloth napkins and tablecloths, rugs and selected pieces of famous artwork.

In this chapter I defined a case study, described the selection criteria of the school and teachers, reported on the setting where the study took place, including an account of the distinctive features of Reggio Emilia, the attributes of the research, ethical issues involved in such a case study and a synopsis of the overall plan and time line. I then recounted the process of data collection that included observing, note taking, audiotaping, interviewing, transcribing, and coding and finally an in-depth description of
the Reggio-inspired classroom environment.

As a researcher using qualitative case study methods, I was “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). As a participant observer in Ms. Terrance’s Reggio-inspired preschool classroom, I attempted to observe with an open mind and an open heart, and to ascertain how Ms. Terrance made sense of her world and experiences. I did not want to assume I knew the reasons for a certain statement or action taken by the teacher. Given the fact that I brought 40 years of experience in early childhood education to this case study research, this would have been an easy route to take. However, I often reminded myself to query Ms. Terrance herself and to discuss her actions and decisions and to clarify the collected data. I was mindful to balance my wisdom and insights gained over 40 years with that of being non-judgmental or presumptuous.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis
This chapter analyzes the research data collected to examine how a Master’s level teacher uses scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in a Reggio-inspired classroom. For clarity, the reporting and analysis will be divided into three parts. First, I will report on the strategies used by Ms. Terrance immediately prior to reading a story, next, those strategies used while the text is actually being read, and finally, those strategies used after the conclusion of a read aloud session. For further clarity, and due to the vast number of scaffolding and mediational strategies used by Ms. Terrance, I have selected and will report on the exemplars of each technique from the coded data. I will use the transcribed conversations or scenarios extracted from the coded data to illustrate these scaffolding and mediational techniques. To support the analysis of the data, I will include segments informed by the literature that correlate to reading aloud with young children. Some of the selected scenarios in this chapter are rather lengthy, but I draw upon the words of Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Merriam, 1998) to support my decision to include such protracted examples.

Qualitative researchers do not measure. Rather, they do what anthropologists, social scientists, connoisseurs, critics, oral historians, novelists, essayists, and poets throughout the years have done. They emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there. (p. 22)

Using these words as a guide, I offer the reader much description, length and detail in the hopes that images will be evoked that create the sense of having been
there personally in the classroom of Ms. Terrance as co-construction of knowledge with the children takes place while reading aloud.

**Using Scaffolding and Mediation Prior to Reading Aloud**

This first section will show how Ms. Terrance used scaffolding and mediation prior to reading a story. I will use the data coded as: organizational, behavioral or redirectional, visual and physical cues, print/illustration, teacher and child relationships, personal experiences and background knowledge, reviewing and probing.

As with most young children, time is needed to settle down and get ready to listen to the actual story. Ms. Terrance used a variety of settling or focusing techniques that I coded as organizational under the larger category of mediational strategies and in the sub-category of behavioral. I will give several scenarios of how Ms. Terrance settled the children for listening. The capital letter “T” refers to the teacher speaking and each child’s name precedes his or her comments.

The first scenario is from the book *Rumble in the Jungle* (2001) written by Giles Andreae and illustrated by David Wojtowyc. The book is a collection of poems telling about the lives and antics of 13 jungle animals. Ms. Terrance used this book to compare and contrast the habitats of jungle animals with those appearing in a book read previously called, *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (1981), by Verna Aardema. Ms. Terrance read *Rumble in the Jungle* twice. The first time she focused on selected animals or those that were similar to Kapiti Plain’s animals, and the second time, she read about the animals that did not live in the habitat of Kapiti Plain. Moss (1996) points out the importance of comparing texts by stating, “As students listen to or read
thematically related texts, they are encouraged to use intertextual links to generate meaning…with each new text readers apply an evolving literary databank of prior literacy experiences” (p. 28).

Below are several mediational strategies, organizational, behavioral and cues used to settle the children to listen to the story.

T: If you can see my book put our finger on your nose. (T. touches nose.)

T: I have a little story today not a big story. (Refers to the day before when she read a Big Book.)

Eric: I can’t see.

Martha: I can’t see.

T: We don’t have a lot of room. Move so there’s room for other friends. Back up a little. Andrew, can you move over closer to (unclear). Can you make pretzel legs like your friends?

Valerie: I can’t see.

T: There’s nothing to look at yet. Be sure you can see my book; this is where I’ll be holding the book. (T. holds book at shoulder level facing the group.)

T: Andrew, scootch back so you can see and have room for your legs.

In this scenario Ms. Terrance made sure the children were sitting and had an unobstructed view of the book. She visually showed them where she would be holding the book (at her shoulder level), and asked the children to show their readiness by physically placing a finger on their nose. By showing the book placement and asking the children to touch their noses to indicate readiness, the teacher guided the children using mediational cues to focus intentionally on the words
of the story about to be read. Vygotskian scholars stress the need for children to learn to focus deliberately, as it is considered a “higher mental function” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 73). These researchers go on to state, “The ability to attend deliberately is a necessary skill for learning because the thing that is most attention-grabbing may not be the most important characteristic of what the child is learning about” (p. 73). In any early childhood classroom there are many things to distract a child, such as the block center, art area or science area, especially if the child had just been beckoned from that area to come listen to a story.

The second scenario illustrates how Ms. Terrance settled the children for listening to the story, *The Fire Station*, (1983) written by Robert Munsch and illustrated by Michael Martchenko. In this story two mischievous children manage to board a fire engine unbeknownst to the fire fighters. When the fire bell rings these children are transported to a fire as they hide undetected in the back seat of the rig. When the fire chief finally discovers their hiding place, he drives them home, but the children are not recognized by their parents because they are covered in purple, green, yellow and blue soot from the fire. The multi-colored, messy children add humor to the story for the young listeners.

T: I picked a story today, *The Fire Station*, because we have some visitors coming this week and they are called…

Andrew: They are called fire trucks…

T: And firemen are coming.

Andrew: Firemen are in the fire trucks.

T: That’s right. Eric?
Eric: When we…when we were driving we saw ummm we saw the firemen’s house, we saw the garages for the…for the fire trucks.

T: You did? Well, this book that I picked to read today is about the fire station. Eric, that was perfect. What I need you to do is scootch up so you can see my story, but not too close that you’re squishing your friends.

Sally: I can’t see.

T: There’s nothing to see yet. It’s best to help you see, if you want to sit over there, Valerie, you can see better. Valerie, how are your pretzel legs?

Claire: I can’t see.

T: Then move back where you were before. Everyone look down at your pretzel legs.

Again, this scenario illustrates how Ms. Terrance took the time to settle the children to ready them for the task of listening with intention. She told them the reason for this particular book selection and tried to make sure there were minimal distractions by eliminating the activity of “squishing your friends.” Vygotskian scholars contend that “children cannot attend deliberately without contextual support from mediators” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 74) and that children need mediators that are specific to each situation. In this scenario, and in fact all read aloud sessions, sitting with pretzel legs is the external behavioral mediator to inform the children that a story is about to begin and that their attention needs to be focused on the reader and the text.

As is often the case, some children need more mediators than others. Several times Ms. Terrance had Ryan and Claire move closer to her, so that they could be “the toe sitters” for the day. The children’s “job” during the story was to keep Ms.
Terrance’s toes warm by sitting as close to her feet as possible. By changing the location of these two children, Ms. Terrance offered them the additional mediational support of physical proximity so that they could more deliberately attend to the story.

The boys and girls in Ms. Terrance’s class knew several children’s’ authors and illustrators. This was due in part to the extensive reading and related conversations surrounding books and other literate activities that occurred in this room. During one of our interviews Ms. Terrance told me about her love for children’s literature and the conversations that develop before, during and after reading the text. She said,

I love the conversation. I love when they get something. I like it when they play off each other. I let things go a little bit before I rein them in to get back on topic again. When I read a book, it tends to take me awhile. I went to a workshop once where the presenter said to just read the book all the way through without stopping. I just can’t do that. It is so hard. I need to stop and ask a question or spark a conversation. I also tell the children any connections from the book that relate to our activities of the day or week. If the author and illustrator are the same as in another book, we have a back and forth conversation about that too. (Interview, Oct. 2009)

As was just mentioned, prior to reading each text the teacher habitually discussed the title, author, illustrator and other peritextual aspects including the dedication and any awards granted for a book’s exceptional qualities. These practices are scaffolding techniques as Ms. Terrance activated the children’s prior background knowledge, linked their past and present personal experiences, and recalled other
books previously read. In support of conversations and discussing peritextual aspects while reading aloud, Berk and Winsler (1995) offer these thoughts. “Children transfer the understanding and skills they have gleaned from dialogues with others to their own literacy-related discourse. In these settings, they converse not just with themselves but also with the narrative text” (p. 118).

Thorp and Gallimore (1988) also point out:

A literate life involves continuous interaction with written materials. Time, space, and resources for carrying out discourse with text should be made available early in a child’s development. Eventually, dialogue with others speaking through text becomes the most common activity setting for learning, offering a lifetime of occasions to acquire new knowledge and symbolic tools. (p. 118)

Ms. Terrance certainly, without fail, provided the young four-year-old children in her care with early exposure to many aspects of literacy during her well thought out and carefully planned daily read aloud sessions.

Below are several examples of transcribed texts delineating how Ms. Terrance addressed the above-mentioned characteristics of literacy such as the title, author, illustrator or photographer. Prior to reading The Fire Station, (1983) this discussion took place.

T: All right, this book is called The Fire Station and it’s written by Robert Munsch and on the back of this book is a picture of him. He is the author; do you see him there? Is he a boy or a girl?

Theresa: A boy.
Joyce: A man.

T: A man, he’s a man an older boy, right?

T: Now here is the person who is the illustrator and he drew the picture. His name is Michael Martchenko. Isn’t that a long name? What do you think the story might be about?

In the above scenario Ms. Terrance mentioned that there was one author and one illustrator for this book, which is a very common occurrence. In the next example, Ms. Terrance points out that Eric Carle is both the author and illustrator for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969), and tells the children the reason she is reading this particular book today. Getting the children excited about a book adds to creating a love for the written word, promotes a life-long love of reading and creates a special relationship between the children and teacher that will be evident from this example.

Reading aloud also demonstrates to children that reading has a purpose, creates a community of readers through enjoyment and shared knowledge, and makes complex ideas available to children (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The children and Ms. Terrance definitely share a special bond and have established a feeling of community about the author, Eric Carle. When asked, the children could name four or five other books written and illustrated by this author, which reveals more intertextual scaffolding. In fact, the bond created this day by reading the Eric Carle book not only connects them to their fellow classmates, but also couples them with many other readers around the world by being part of the record-breaking contest.
T: Today is a very special day. We’ve read this author before. His name is Eric Carle. Here’s a picture of him. It’s kinda tiny. Do you see him? (T. points to small photo on back of book.)

Margaret: Yes.

T: And there he is.

Adam: Why is it small?

T: I don’t have a big picture of him. That is Eric Carle and he wrote the story and drew the pictures of the book we are going to read today.

Adam: That’s cool.

T: It is cool. I want you to look, look at the book. Look at the picture that he’s holding. Do you see that?

Kathryn: Yea.

T: Does anybody know what that is?

Tyquan: A caterpillar.

Christina: A caterpillar

T: It’s a caterpillar. This is the book we are going to read and this is the picture of the book we’re going to read. Isn’t that silly?

Brandy: My aunt has that book.

Many children yell out: Me too! Me too!

T: Now I am going to tell you a very funny thing. Today is not caterpillar day. That’s not why I’m reading this book. Today is not Eric Carle Day. That’s not why I’m reading it. Guess why I’m reading this book. Wait till you hear this!

Emma: Because it’s a special day.
T: Yes, it’s a special day.

Sally: It’s a special day.

T: It’s special because teachers all over the world are reading this book to children today.

Carrie: hhhhmmpmm

T: And they… Eric Carle wants to see if he can have one million people read this book to children today. So you are the lucky children. And we’re hoping that there are one million teachers and moms and dads who are reading this book today. If you have ever heard this book before, put your finger on your nose. (Almost all the children touch their noses). If you have ever heard of this book, put your finger on your nose. If you have this book at your house put your finger on your nose. Wow, a lot. You may be able to help me out with this. It’s called what?

Many children call out: A Very Hungry Caterpillar!

T: I already said his name, but do you remember who wrote this book? And drew the pictures?

Many children call out: Eric Carle!

T: Eric Carle, yup. Now this book comes with a CD and you can put this on our stereo and Eric Carle will read this book to you. Isn’t that silly? I’m going to read it today. A different day we can listen to him read it. Do you think it would be neat to listen to him read his own book that he wrote?

Many children: Yea, yea!

T: Do you think it will be different or the same as when I read it?

Theresa: The same.
T: The same?

C: Ms. Terrance, I have two books that come with a CD too.

T: You do? I sure love them. OK.

In addition to Ms. Terrance discussing the title, author and illustrator of each book with the children, she also discussed the medium used to illustrate the selected books. With Eric Carle books, they discussed his choice of watercolors for the illustrations and in fact, experimented themselves with watercolors to imitate Eric Carle’s techniques.

In this next example she chose a book that used photographs as the visual medium. She invited the children to investigate the visual images to discover and define, through a socially constructed conversation, this different medium. Ms. Terrance deliberately exposed the children to the various ways illustrations are designed. She did not just read the story without referencing the special illustrations, nor did she tell them which medium was used. Rather, she presented the question and allowed the children to figure it out, after offering several cues or probes.

Following is the selected conversation before reading Pumpkins (2006) written and photographed by Ken Robbins. This book is a set of photographs showing a number of activities that take place in the Fall of the year. These include a cornfield with geese flying overhead, a wagonload of pumpkins ready to sell at the farm market and children choosing their Halloween pumpkin from the pumpkin patch to carve into jack-lanterns at home. The photographs in the middle of the book show the stages of growth of the pumpkin seeds and how they are collected from the Fall pumpkin only
to be planted again in the Spring to grow into the next year’s crop of Halloween pumpkins.

T: Are these pictures what somebody drew…or painted? (T. points to the pictures.)

Andrew and Ryan: Me…I want to.

T: Did someone?

Adam and Emma: Paint…paint.

T: I don’t think these pictures are painted.

Many children: (Chatter amongst themselves.)

T: Hold on one second we have way too many conversations going on right now. I want you to look at these pictures and tell me how they were taken.

T: I’m going to give you a hint. It’s not a drawing…it’s not a painting.

Claire: I know.

T: What’s your guess?

Claire: Somebody…somebody must have “taked” the picture of them.

T: With what?

Martha and Brandy: A camera!

T: They took a picture with a camera, that’s exactly how they did it. Did we take the pictures?

Many children answer: No, no, no!

T: Then we can’t say we took the pictures, right?

Carrie: Somebody else did.

T: Somebody else did. All right, here we go. Let’s read.

In the next three examples, Ms. Terrance used more scaffolding techniques in
the print/illustration category of coding. She did not just begin reading the text with the first words of the story, but, rather investigated with the children, the whole book from front cover to back cover to glean as much information as possible about various aspects of literacy. Several researchers, Genette (1980), Higgonet (1990), and Sipe (2000) support this practice of discussing the peritextual aspects of a book. These include the book cover/jacket (front and back), the end pages and the title page. These parts of a book often contain illustrations, and offer opportunities for socially created meaning-making by all those involved in the discussion. Moss (1996) adds to this list of peritextual aspects and states that the, title, author, illustrator, date and place of publication, the half title page and the dedication also contribute to meaning-making when reading-aloud as these items create further opportunities for socially constructed dialogue and scaffolding as happened in Ms. Terrance’s classroom on a daily basis.

In the story, *Fall Changes* (2001) the children discuss to whom the book is dedicated and in the two stories after that, *It’s Pumpkin Time* (1999) and *The Fire Engine Book* (1989), they discover along with the teacher how the front and back pages when completely opened form one large picture. The book *Fall Changes* (2001) is also a set of photographs showing how the weather starts to become cooler, how children need to dress in warmer clothes, how days become shorter, how crops are ready to be harvested, how animal activity changes and how leaves change colors and eventually fall from the trees. The conversations follow.

T: OK, now this book is called *Fall Changes* (2001). And it’s by Ellen Senisi. Now, look at this picture right here. Sometimes when authors write books they dedicate it to
someone really special and this one says that they wrote this book to Marian. Look at Marian. Doesn’t she look like a Grandma? (T. points to picture of older woman on front inside cover of book.)

Tyquan, Ryan and Kathryn: Yea, yea!

T: Whom do you think she’s holding on to?

Brandy: A cat.

Valerie: A kitty.

T: She looks pretty happy.

Margaret: She’s taking a picture.

T: Why do you think they’re taking a picture?

Theresa: Because…they are together.

T: Because they’re together. What are they doing with their faces? Look at their faces.

Eric and Adam: They’re smiling.

T: They’re smiling, go cheeeeeeese in that picture.

Eric: Sometimes my Dad says, say macaroni and cheese!

Teacher and Children: (Laugh out loud. Lots of laughter.)

Eric: Beeee q…u….i…e…t!

T: Eric, are you saying be quiet because you want to hear the story?

Eric: No, sometimes…sometimes…my mom says be quiet.

T: OK, let’s hold our talking for the story.

T: OK, are we ready?

Many children: Yea, yea.
The story It’s Pumpkin Time (1999) by Zoe Hall shows through painted paper collage technique the sequence of how a pumpkin seed grows into a pumpkin, with all the various stages of bud, flower, small green pumpkin, medium-sized yellow pumpkin and finally a full-grown orange pumpkin. When the front and back of the book are fully opened, another peritextual aspects of picture books, it shows a whole pumpkin patch.

Following is the transcribed text extracted from It’s Pumpkin Time (1999) by Zoe Hall.

T: OK, are you ready?

T: We saw this in another book we read. When we open this up big, what do you see? (T. opens front and back of the book and shows to the children.)

Joyce: A whole pumpkin.

T: A whole big pumpkin patch.

Ryan: There’s a dog in the pumpkin!

T: There IS a dog in the pumpkin. It’s called It’s Pumpkin Time.

T: What’s on that page?

Andrew: Seeds.

T: Seeds, right? This must be a well-loved book. Look how much…I’ve been reading it for years and it’s a little bit ragged around the edges and it’s ripped. Now, look at this.

The Fire Engine Book (1989), similar to It’s Pumpkin Time (1999), has a front and back cover that when opened fully, shows a complete picture, in this case, the whole fire engine. Following is the transcript of The Fire Engine Book (1989).
T: Good afternoon everybody. Are you ready for a story?

T: We have some visitors coming tomorrow that are going to visit preschool.

Eric: (unclear)

T: The firefighters are coming tomorrow and I found this story that has all the fire …it’s called The Fire Engine Book and I has a lot to do with what firefighters do when they are doing their job. So I want to read that, so scootch up. (Several children laugh.) Emma, Valerie, move here because you’re tall.

T: This is called The Fire Engine Book and that looks like it might be the front of the what?

Brandy: The fire truck.

T: And you know what I noticed when you open up this book? Something happens, what happened?

Tyquan: There’s three firefighters.

T: Here’s the front of the fire truck and what happens when you open this book? What does this book make?

Andrew: The back of the fire truck.

T: It’s a fire truck, the whole fire truck from beginning to end, right?

Kate: Right.

T: You can see everything they are doing on the fire truck right now. Sometimes when they do this on a book you’ll be able to see this same picture inside the story. I don’t know if it’s true for this story, but I want you to keep your eyes looking out for that, OK? Sometimes authors do that and sometimes they don’t. We’ll have to see, all right?
This next scenario occurred when the students and teachers were exploring a series of books about the changes that happen in the fall of the year. Ms. Terrance pointed out another peritextual characteristic, that being a Caldecott winning book. This story tells about all the uses people have for trees, such as a source of shade, protection and breezes, and a place to climb and on which to hang a hammock for rest.

T: OK, today’s book is about changing too. It’s about changing too and it’s about a tree. And the name of the book is called A Tree is Nice. Is that a neat kind of a title? And I want you to look here at the circle. Do you know what that circle is?


T: A quarter?

Eric: A big quarter.

Andrew: I think it’s a…(unclear)

T: Why do you say it’s a quarter, Eric?

Eric: It’s from the library.

T: Why do you think it’s from the Library?

Eric: Because some books have a sticker on them from the library.

T: OK, yup, they do. And this is a medal. This book won a prize.

Eric: A medal?

T: A medal. The picture of the medal it won is right on the book and they gave this book a medal because it is such a good book for children and words and the pictures go together very well. That’s why.

Ryan: Do they rhyme?
T: We’ll see if they rhyme. It’s called a Caldecott Medal and they give that when books are good and their pictures and the words go together. And, let’s see…and later we can decide if this is a good book and we can…should we give this book a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down or maybe somebody different should have won. Let’s see.

T: Yes, now there’s words and this is the title *A Tree is Nice*. And the person who wrote the book is Janice Udry and the person who drew the pictures is a man, and his name is Marc Simont.

Margaret: Marc Simont.

T: Now, you have to really be paying attention to the pictures in the books because you might see something interesting.

In addition to this book being a Caldecott Medal winner, the illustrator, Marc Simont, also designed each page to alternately depict black and white illustrations, with each alternate page consisting of pastel watercolors. Ms. Terrance prepared the children through a verbal mediator; “You have to really be paying attention to the pictures in the books because you might see something interesting.” Two children also used their background knowledge when they commented about a library and a medal. I will discuss the use of background knowledge as a scaffold and mediator in another section of this dissertation.

Prior to reading the text of stories Ms. Terrance devoted time to talking about the peritextual aspects of a book and also the scaffolding techniques of reviewing and probing. She reviewed the book, *It’s Pumpkin Time* (1999), not only to prepare the children for another book, an intertextual link, about Fall and pumpkins, but also to activate and develop their memory and sequence skills. Some children also need to
discuss a topic more than once. By reading four or five books about Fall, and reviewing the sequence of how a seed grows into a pumpkin, the children were able to review the sequence verbally with the help of their social group. Each child’s response about the process of growing a pumpkin built upon, or scaffolded, each other’s knowledge until the whole sequence had been established and agreed upon by all the children.

Vygotsky scholars again stress the importance of socially constructed knowledge, as was evident when the children discussed the sequence of a seed growing into a pumpkin. This notion is applied by Berk & Winsler (1995) who insist, "cognition is always situated in activity, that children's learning cannot be separated from the task in which it takes place, and that people learn best when they are working with others while actively engaged in a problem" (p. 27). The children in Ms. Terrance’s class were indeed engaged in the problem of figuring out the process of a seed growing into a pumpkin. The children also negotiated with each other about the color of the various sizes of pumpkins.

T: If you are ready, you are sitting on your bottom with pretzel legs. I can see your eyes and your mouth looks like this. (T. closes her own mouth.) Now last week we read this story. Do you remember what it was about? (T. reviewed book It’s Pumpkin Time, 1999.)

Valerie: A pumpkin. And a dog.

T: And what happened, what were they doing?

Valerie: The pumpkin growed bigger.

T: What did they do first with the pumpkin?
Valerie: They planted it.
T: Who wants to tell me what came next?
Eric: They watered it.
T: Then what happened?
Tyquan: The next day it growed.
T: It grew. What else, Kathryn?
Kathryn: The vines…
T: The vines did what?
Kathryn: The vines grew.
T: Margaret, what else?
Margaret: Then they dressed up.
T: Then they dressed up?
Margaret: They dressed up because it was Halloween.
T: They dressed up because it was Halloween. Do you know that…what something came next, Emma?
Emma: …they turn yellow.
T: What turns yellow?
Emma: The pumpkins.
T: The pumpkins turn yellow. When does the pumpkin turn yellow…when it is Halloween? Wait, it’s Emma’s turn. When does it turn yellow?
Emma: umum…at the end.
T: Does…is the pumpkin yellow at the end…when you pick it?
Many children shout out: No, no!!
T: What color is it when you pick it?

Many children shout out: Orange, orange!!

T: It’s orange when you pick it, so it’s yellow before it turns orange, right? What color is it before it’s yellow?

Valerie: Green

T: Green, right?

Eric: I already knew that.

T: You already knew that?

Eric: I carved a tooth out.

T: You carved a tooth out? This story here… the story we are going to…this book here is also about pumpkins and we have never read this book before and it is a brand new book in the afternoon class. (T. refers to the book, Pumpkins (2006), by Ken Robbins, which they are about to read.)

As mentioned prior to this vignette, Ms. Terrance was trying to develop the children’s memory skills by reviewing the book It’s Pumpkin Time (1999). Adults often believe that children have fantastic memories because they can recite words from many songs or poems. Yet, when a young child is asked to remember to hang up her pack back after school, this memory task is not accomplished. The development of deliberate memory, a higher mental functioning (Bodrova & Leong, 1996), is another task completely and must be stressed when children are young. After the preschool years “children are expected to take responsibility for their own memory” (p. 75), and “activate their memory at the right time” (p. 75). If children have not practiced deliberate memory skills, they will not be able to access the information
when called upon. Therefore, Ms. Terrance practiced deliberate memory skills with her class of children concerning the pumpkin seed sequence.

This next vignette illustrates the scaffolding technique of resurrecting children’s background knowledge along with past and present personal experiences. The teacher began the conversation by creating a relational bond by asking if anyone had ever had a “frog in his or her throat”. The children thought this phrase was very funny, so humor was added to the personal bonding experience as well, especially when Andrew decided to cough just like Ms. Terrance.

Children bring all their past knowledge, interpretations and experiences of real-life happenings to read-aloud events in the classroom. In Hansen's (1998) study, kindergarteners were able to "hold their theory of the world up to their personal interpretations of story" (p.126). In other words, through the give-and-take dialogue between the teacher and children, the youngsters learned from each other and were able to confirm, disconfirm or extend what they already knew to help them make sense of their world and, therefore, the story. Hansen (1998) found that the children’s spontaneous “Talk about story ‘matured’ opinions in three ways: knowledge was gained through talk about the story, personal experiences were connected to the story, and risk-taking was eased as the children felt the support of the group in learning more about the world” (p. 127). The children in Hansen’s study came to refer to their connections between a story and their personal life as "rememberings" (p. 129).

Ms. Terrance settled the children by using an excited voice to prepare them for the listening mode by pleasantly warning them that they would really want to see these pictures! She started by asking them to compare the view outside the classroom
window with the illustrations in the book. This technique linked the children’s past and present knowledge bases. Through socially constructed back and forth conversations and by using probes and questions, Ms. Terrance assessed the children’s prior knowledge about the season, the colors of the leaves, the results of blowing wind and bending branches. She artfully reawakened the children’s background knowledge to prepare them for the next story. Moss (1996) reminds educators:

> Readers make sense of text by bringing prior knowledge to the text. The quality of the reading experience is determined in large part by the nature of this prior knowledge and how the reader uses it during the reading process.

> Before reading a story aloud, the teacher introduces questions that prompt background information and invite children to make predictions and pose questions about the story. (p. 37)

As is evident in the transcript, Ms. Terrance often repeated or confirmed the children’s words during the socially constructed conversations. The act of repeating is a verbal mediator that helps to scaffold the information. This practice not only assures that all the children remain connected and hear the same comment, but it also assists those children who need the information said more than once, as if often consistent with young children’s development. Hearing a word said more than once is crucial for vocabulary development as young children need to “learn about three thousand words per year to keep up with the demand” (Anderson & Nagy, as cited in Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 166). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) continue by stating, “Students should experience words in repeated, meaningful encounters” (p. 166). By repeating
words and statements Ms. Terrance provided the children with multiple opportunities to listen to meaningful words and conversations in context.

Following is the conversation for Fall Changes (2001), by Ellen Senisi, to show evidence of humor, repetition, probing and activating children’s prior knowledge.

T: Now I want you to move up close so you can hear my voice, because there’s a frog in my throat.

Many children: There’s not a frog in your throat! (Children laugh.)

T: Not really, it’s just an expression. Have you ever heard anyone say that before? They have a frog in their throat.

Andrew: (Coughs.)

Andrew: I have a little cough.

T: I have a little cough and that’s what’s making my voice like this.

Ryan: I don’t have any room.

T: Then move so you have room and can see. You’re really going to want to see these pictures! Find a comfortable spot.

T: Look out the window, stay right there and look out the window. (Several children start to stand up.) Do you see anything that’s the same with this book?

Theresa: It looks like it’s Fall.

T: It looks like it’s Fall.

T: And then look at this picture.

Many children call out: Fall. Fall!

T: Do you see anything that’s the same in there?
Many children call out: Leaves…leaves.

T: What do you notice about them? Like the leaves outside of our window?

Many children contribute: They’re different colors, they’re changing colors.

T: They’re different colors, they’re different changing colors, right?

Carrie: And they fall down from the trees.

T: They fall down from the trees. What makes them fall down from the trees?

Carrie: I know, the wind.

T: The wind?

Claire: And the branches are falling.

T: The branches are falling. Why are the branches falling?

Adam: Cause they’re bending.

T: Whose bending them?

Adam: God.

Eric: The trees.

Emma: Nobody.

T: The branches are bending, and sometimes they do bend, but what makes them bend? Anybody know?

Many children shout out: The wind!

T: The wind does.

Ryan: And sometimes when you cut the trees a little bit they bend.

The next vignette is a rather lengthy one. This selection illustrates how the back and forth socially constructed conversation between the teacher and students tried to solve the problem regarding the source of the photographs. The children were
stimulated by each other’s comments and were prodded to think more deeply as Ms. Terrance challenged the original answers to her probes. She did not entirely negate any answers given by the children, but rather, restated her questioning to lead them to discover the source for themselves. She also used open-ended questions, or those that could not necessarily be answered by a “yes” or “no” response. She used probes such as “What do you think?” and “How?” which encourages higher level thinking skills. Ms. Terrance did not just give the children the answers; rather, she guided and facilitated the students thinking skills by starting with their current level of understanding and supported it through to the next level.

In the Reggio philosophy, teachers are “groomed not to directly answer the questions the children pose…but ask them what they think first. If a child has a question, she more than likely has a hypothesis as well” (Wurm, 2005, p. 84). In a conventional classroom, children are often not asked to contribute their opinion or their thoughts. Freire (as cited in Wurm, 2005) refers to this type of education as “a drive-through education in which, when children ask us something, we hand them neatly packaged answers to fit our understanding of both the question and what we think they need to know as the answer” (p. 85). While asking a child about their thoughts is contrary to conventional practice, it is the modus operandi of the Reggio-inspired classroom, evidenced by Ms. Terrance’s long, extended, facilitated conversations with the children.

T: Now today we are going to make Nutley Farms out of the recycled stuff that comes in from home and that’s going to be able to sit out on this big huge board over here on this table. And there are a lot of really cool things over there to build with. But I
thought before we started our building we would talk about building stuff, OK? And I have some pictures of what people use when they are building things. You’re going to love these. I’ve been collecting these for years, but I’m going to show you this one first. This is a picture of our school almost 100 years ago. (Teacher shows an aerial photograph of their school.)

Joyce: That’s long ago.

Ryan: I want to see.

T: I’m going to show you, hold on. Sit down and I’ll show everybody. This here, right here is the school.

T: Now, how do you think someone took this photograph?

Children: (Silence.)

T: Where do you think the camera was?

Andrew: Because he took a picture.

T: Yes, someone took a picture. Where do you think the camera was?

Carrie: At the store next door.

T: Do you think the picture was at the store next door? If the camera was at the store, don’t you think the picture would be very, very close to the store? And look how far away the store is. Really, really far away from the camera.

Carrie: It’s really, really tiny.

Claire: It’s small.

T: So the camera must have been really far away. Do you see how it’s taken from way, way, way up high? Where do you think the camera might have been?

Brandy: At a different school.
T: At a different school?
Martha: Yea.
T: Where do you think the camera would have to be to get this high?
T: Could I take this picture?
Sally: Yea.
Christina: It’s invisible.
T: Maybe not. How else could we get a picture way up in the sky, Tyquan?
Tyquan: The teacher.
T: How could a teacher get way up high in the sky like that?
Tyquan: A ladder.
T: A ladder.
Adam: A cape.
T: A cape? I don’t know about a cape, that would have to be magic.
Kate: An airplane.
T: An airplane, maybe, where else, Carrie?
Carrie: A helicopter.
T: A helicopter.
Margaret: An airplane.
T: An airplane. What do you think?
Andrew: God took the picture.
Eric: You could climb up…you could climb…if you’re a super hero.
T: We could climb if we’re a super hero, but we’re not. OK, here is a picture from way up high and here is another picture of a map way up high. (Teacher shows the children an aerial map.)

Many children: Whoa, whoa, wow, wow!

T: I know! Pretty cool, right?

Tyquan: That’s like a map.

T: It is like a map. What do you think that is? (T. points to a long blue line.)

Theresa and Brandy: A river!

T: It could be. Why do you think it’s a river?

Carrie: Because there’s lots of water. A map can help you when you don’t know a thing…where to go…and that river is the top of the water and there’s ice.

T: Why do you think it’s water?

Kate: Because…because…water is always…needs water because it’s wet.

T: OK, but if you look right here, why do you think it’s water? (T. points to blue line again.)

Martha: Because it’s made out of (unclear)?

T: Does it look like it’s made out of (unclear)?

Many children: No, no.

T: What does it look like?

Many children: (Unclear).

T: Maybe. What do you think these are? (T. points to shapes on map.)

Christina: Trees.

T: Why do you think they’re trees?
Christina: Because they’re big.

T: OK, they’re big. Kathryn, why do you think?

Kathryn: Because they’re green.

T: Because they’re green.

T: Let’s see, what do you think that looks like?

Margaret: A school.

T: It could be a school.

Tyquan: A hotel.

T: It could be a hotel. It’s big isn’t it?

Many children: Yea, yea!

T: What do you think this might be?

Eric: A church.

T: It could be a church. What do you think, Brandy?

Brandy: A school.

T: It could be a school.

Brandy: My own school.

T: I’m going to show you one last one before I show you my book. What do you think that’s a picture of? (T. shows a large blueprint of a building.)

Andrew: Maystone’s.

T: Why do you think it’s Maystone’s?

Andrew: Because I see an ‘M’.

Many children: I saw that…I go to there…(Children chatter.)

T: Hold in, it’s Andrew’s turn. Why do you think this is Maystone’s?
Andrew: Because it’s small.

T: OK, where do you see the ‘M’ on here?

Andrew: In the middle (Points to the blueprint.)

T: Here? Here? (T. points to blueprint.) Is that Maystone’s?

Many children: No, it’s not. I see…I’ve been there before. (Children chatter.)

T: This is the picture of the Maystone’s before it was built. This is someone’s picture of Maystone’s. This is what they wanted Maystone’s to look like.

Brandy: There’s an ‘A’ right there. (Child points to letter A.)

T: It is. There are more letters all across the top. So that is another kind of a picture we use when we want to build. This is called a blueprint.

The final example of scaffolding and mediation used prior to reading a story is about a silly song that Ms. Terrance taught the children for the first time. “The Pumpkin Song” (Hall, 1980) was part of a project theme the children and teachers had been exploring in-depth for two weeks about Fall and its related activities.

Teaching according to project themes is a mediational strategy in itself as these inherently connected topics link a variety of stories, songs, poems, fingerplays, art, block building, hands-on activities, field trips, dramatic play, classroom visits from experts, and socially constructed conversations. Children need these purposefully connected links, which address all five senses and all curricular areas, to help integrate the information and construct their world.

Two experts on project-based learning, Katz and Helm (2001) state, “Projects provide contexts in which children’s curiosity can be expressed purposefully, and that enable them to experience the joy of self-motivated learning. Well-developed projects
engage children’s minds and emotions and become adventures that teachers and children embark on together” (p. 2). While teaching “The Pumpkin Song” (1980) to her children Ms. Terrance linked the pictorial sequence of growing a pumpkin from seed to the previously read story, Pumpkins (2006), by Ken Robbins. The photographs in this book were used as visual mediators for those children who still relied on this guide. The goal of learning and singing the song was to re-create on a flannel board the developmental growth sequence of a pumpkin using pieces of cut-out colored flannel for the green vines, black seeds, yellow flowers, green pumpkins, yellow pumpkins and finally full-grown orange pumpkins. The children were actively engaged in this re-creation as each was given a piece of flannel to add to the ever-evolving scene on the large flannel board as the song progressed. Humor is added to the song as black bugs appear on the pumpkins vines, along with apples and watermelon. Of course, gales of laughter erupted when the children insisted that apples and watermelons did not grow on pumpkin vines! Active engagement by all the children in creating the flannel board pumpkin picture provided an opportunity to review the sequence of the developmental stages of pumpkins and served to build positive relationships among the children as they cooperated and took turns to create a group project.

In the previous section, I showed how scaffolding and mediation were used by Ms. Terrance prior to reading a story in a Reggio-inspired preschool classroom. The techniques I chose to highlight through selected vignettes were coded as: organizational, behavioral or redirection, visual and physical cues, print/illustration, teacher and child relationships, personal experiences and background knowledge,
reviewing and probing. I also selected pieces from the literature linked to reading aloud to support the data analysis.

**Using Scaffolding and Mediation While Reading Aloud**

In the next section of this document, I will show how Ms. Terrance uses scaffolding and mediation during the process of actually reading the text to the children. I will use the selected data coded as: Scaffolding, with the sub categories, clarifying conversations, pausing, negotiations, probing, and open and close-ended questioning and the second main category, Mediation, with the sub categories, children writing texts, negotiations, probing, repetitions, curricular, and open and close-ended questioning. Again, the main categories of scaffolding and mediation often overlap as has been explained previously.

During the actual reading aloud of the text, Ms. Terrance clarified the content of the socially constructed conversations with the children multiple times. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) is a story about the progress of a hungry, little caterpillar who eats his way through a variety of food items until he is full. Satisfied from eating all the food, he forms a cocoon around himself, goes to sleep and at the appointed time, emerges as a beautiful butterfly. One time while reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Ryan thought that the piece of Swiss cheese in the illustration was a waffle instead of cheese. Ms. Terrance helped to clarify this confusion via this conversation.

Ryan: That looks like a waffle.

T: Does that look like a waffle, Ryan?

Ryan: Yea.

T: You know it looks like a waffle, but up here it says it is a piece of Swiss cheese.
Ryan: Because it’s yellow.

T: Yes, Ryan, waffles sometimes look yellow, but the words tell us it’s a piece of Swiss cheese.

In this example, Ms. Terrance showed the children how the written word can sometimes clear up a confusion. She continued by saying that the words and illustrations in a story must match each other. This is consistent with what is known from the research that "print carries a message" (Neuman et al., 2000, p. 20) and that in quality children’s literature, the “illustrations [need to] complement the text” (Jalongo, 2004, p. 11).

The next example shows how Ms. Terrance helped to clarify a conversation when the group was nearing the end of a story about constructing a house in preparation for building their own farm market in the classroom after visiting nearby Nutley Farms. The story, Building a House (1981) by Byron Barton, contains simply drawn illustrations of the process and tools needed to build a house, starting with digging the hole, building the basement cement walls, adding the roof, electricity, plumbing and windows, through to completion, when the new family is about to move into the newly constructed home, where this vignette begins.

T: Now, someone is coming up the road. Do you know who that might be?

Eric: The people who will live there.

Martha: The people in the orange car are going to live in the house.

T: And what’s this truck here?

Kathryn: A moving van.
T: And what’s inside? It is a moving van, it says right here, “moving van.” What’s inside that moving van, does anybody know?

Emma: Stuff from their old house.

T: Everything they had in their old house.

Ryan: They’re going to knock the house down.

T: Do you think these guys are going to knock the house down?

Ryan: Yea.

T: Why would they do that after they just build it?

Ryan: It doesn’t have any nails on it.

T: It doesn’t have any nails on it? Did they use nails to put this house together?

Tyquan: Yea.

Andrew: Yea.

T: I remember them using a tool.

Valerie: A hammer.

Theresa: They used a hammer.

T: I remember nails and there’s a hammer right there. (T. checks back on the pages, shows the match between the picture and the words.) Do you think they built this house with nails?

Kate: No, no.

Carrie: Yes, yes.

T: Yes, or will it fall down pretty easily!

Claire: No nails.

Adam: Yea, they used nails.
T: It’s pretty strong right?

T: OK, here they come. And Kathryn, what was inside that moving truck?

Kathryn: All the things from their old house.

T: All the things from their old house. Did you ever have a moving van come to your house?

Kathryn: No, but my grandma did.

T: Did she have the same thing come, a moving van, to put all the stuff in the van?

Kathryn: Yes.

T: Cool, I wondered how you knew that?

In this scenario, Ms. Terrance and several other children not only clarified the use of the nails for building the house which Ryan was questioning, and showed the children the printed words for “moving van,” but also highlighted the personal background experiences of Kathryn who had seen her grandmother’s house packed into a moving van. This conversation also forged an adult-to-child relationship bond, one of the coded categories of scaffolding, as Ms. Terrance wondered out loud as to how Kathryn knew about moving vans.

When reading aloud to young children, adults often pause at selected places in the text to ascertain if the children know the next word or phrases. This is especially common when reading predictable books, or when a text has been read numerous times to the children, as is the case with Ms. Terrance reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) by Eric Carle. Many of the children had heard this book read repeatedly at home as well. The purpose of this pausing strategy is not to specifically test the children to see if they remember by rote the next word, but rather, to provide
an opportunity for the children to “gain a sense of accomplishment as more
independent readers” (Jalongo, 2004, p.102) and to “provide support to new readers
by capitalizing on their prior knowledge…and by using a repetitive and rhyming
pattern” (Jalongo, 2004, p.102) that is familiar to the children. Additionally, in this
case, the support of all the children in the group responding to the pauses en masse
can be a successful way to scaffold, or bring a particular child who may be struggling
with this task, to the next level of literacy and understanding.

The children also used the learned strategy of reading the illustrations, not
necessarily the words of the text, to confirm their responses when Ms. Terrance
paused anticipating their answers. This picture reading skill points to the importance
of having the illustrations and text match and also offers another area for meaning-
making through social interaction and discussion during a read-aloud event. When a
story is initially read, the illustrations are often the first element on a page to capture
the attention of a young child (Conlon, 1992). Photographs and illustrations allow
young children the opportunity to connect their own prior knowledge with that shown
in the book's illustrations (Conlon, 1992; Moore, 1992; Sipe, 2000). In addition,
Stewig (1992) states, "the illustrations are an integral part of a story and as important
as the words" (p. 259) themselves. Nodelman (1988) supports the importance of the
illustrations and suggests that beginning readers not only learn to read written text,
but also need to learn to read the sign systems of the illustrations. Ms. Terrance
artfully provided the children with many opportunities to read the sign systems of the
illustrations.
Below are two examples of how Ms. Terrance used pausing as a scaffolding technique while reading aloud to the children. The first vignette is from The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) by Eric Carle, and the second is from Building a House (1981) by Byron Barton.

T: *On Monday he ate through one _______.* (Text of the story in italics)

Many children: Apple (children picture reading)

T: *On Tuesday he ate through two _______.*

Many children: Pears (children picture reading)

T: How many apples?

Many children: One.

T: How many pears?

Many children: Two.

T: *On Wednesday he ate through _______.*

Many children: Plums (Children picture read.)

T: Let’s see.

T: Three plums, but he was still _______.

Eric, Andrew, Martha and Claire: Hungry (Children remember this response from prior multiple readings of the story.)

T: What comes next?

Many children: Strawberries, plums (Children picture read, but disagree on response.)

T: *On Thursday he ate through _________.*

Many children: Four, five, four, five.
T: Some people say four, some people say five. Let’s count together. One, two, three, four, five. (T. points to each fruit creating a 1:1 relationship.)

T: How many strawberries?

Many children: Four.

T: Four strawberries.

T: *But…*

Many children: He was still hungry.

T: What fruit comes next?

Many children: Orange.

T: How do you know it’s an orange?

Brandy and Valerie: Because it’s orange.

Sally and Kate: Because it’s round.

T: Let’s see. *On Friday, he ate through ______.*

Many children: Five oranges.

T: Let’s double check and see if it’s five.

T. and children together: One, two, three, four, five. (T. points to each piece of fruit.)

T: Were we right?

Many children: Yea, yea.

T: *But…*

Many children: He was still hungry.

T: *On Saturday he ate through ______.*

Ms. Terrance uses pausing as a technique from *Building a House* (1981).

T: Have they started building yet? (T. shows the first page of the book.)
Many children: No, no, no.

T: *A machine digs a big...*(Text of the story in *italics*)

Many children: Hole, hole, hole.

Eric: A big hole for the house.

T: You think that’s where the house is going to go?

T: *They put up walls and...*

Andrew, Joyce, and Margaret:...and the windows.

T: And the windows. Did you see the windows? (T. points to the illustration of the windows.)

T: *They built a...*

Tyquan: Roof.

T: *Carpenters put in windows and...*

Claire, Christina, and Sally: Doors, doors, doors.

T: Boy, they’re busy working. Do you think this happens all in one day?

Many children: No, no, no.

T: No, it does not. It looks like it does because we are reading the book, but it does not all happen in one day. How many days do you think that it takes to build a house?

Brandy: A hundred.

T: A hundred?

Many children: 10, 11, 7, 12, 124.

T: More than one hundred? OK, who comes next?

Many children: The painters, the painters.
T: The painters paint inside and…

Adam, Martha, Theresa: Outside, outside.

As is evident from these selected examples when Ms. Terrance paused while reading the text, the children showed their literary knowledge of the connection between the illustrations and the written text. This example also shows how the group as a whole negotiated and co-constructed the knowledge surrounding the number of fruits appearing in the illustrations of The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969), and in discussing how many days each thought it took to complete the construction of a house. Ms. Terrance attempted to help solve the controversy over the number of fruits by providing both a physical and visual cue mediator and scaffold for the children. She pointed to each fruit with her finger and verbally said the word for that specific number. This practice helped to clarify for the children the number of fruits pictured by creating a number name for each fruit thereby creating a 1:1 relationship with the objects. Each child also had a different opinion as to how many days it took to build a house. Yet, each respected the other’s ideas, learned that different opinions and ideas can co-exist and that each child is free to voice an opinion without ridicule. To underscore this idea Malaguzzi (as cited in Edwards et al., 1998) states,

The children realize that the world is multiple and that other children can be discovered through a negotiation of ideas. Instead of interacting only through feelings and a sense of friendship, they discover how satisfying it is to exchange ideas and thereby transform their environment. (p. 94)

Also in the above vignette the teacher accepted each child’s answer in a positive manner without embarrassing a child for giving a response that might seem
outrageous to an adult. This on-going positive acceptance of the children’s responses by Ms. Terrance also helped to solidify the favorable relationship between her and the children. Ms. Terrance allowed many children to shout out their responses, never silencing anyone. She showed confidence in her behavior management skills by allowing the children to be active participants in the conversation and gave them as much sovereignty as needed to negotiate the text. She could have chosen to close down the conversation and tell the children outright how many fruits were pictured. Rather, she chose to engage them to discover the answer together and to also reinforce the 1:1 math concept. This practice of offering sovereignty to the children is supported by Oyler (1996) who believes that when an adult sits back and adopts a facilitation style of promoting interactions among children, she is able to distill a better understanding of her students’ ideas than when she alone held all the authority. This facilitation style can be beneficial in providing a more clear insight into the students’ thoughts and beliefs for the teacher. I believe this to be the case with Ms. Terrance and her practices. In one of our interviews Ms. Terrance talked about the benefits of engaging in conversations throughout the day and especially during a read aloud event. She reports,

That’s the fun of it, trying to figure out the kids. You’re figuring out their interests, their strengths, what they like to do, how they like to learn. It gives you a lot more information about the child. I feel like I know them better using the Reggio-inspired approach. Because you’re focusing more on their thinking rather than their skills. It’s more critical-thinking-based rather than can a child cut on a line or something like that. (Interview, October, 2009)
The next category of scaffolding that I will discuss is probing. In the Reggio-inspired classroom this practice is called provocare or provocazione. An English translation would be “to stimulate or to challenge” or a “thought-provoker” (Wurm, 2005, p. 9). As stated in Ms. Terrance’s interview she thrives on exploring the children’s ideas and interests through conversational exchanges. Cadwell (1997), an author, researcher and practitioner of the Reggio-inspired curriculum, supports this practice and states, “The teacher’s role is to ask good, open-ended questions that stimulate children’s thinking and provoke discussion—to facilitate, orchestrate, and gently guide…so that children consider the matter at hand with all their attention and interest” (p. 62). The following vignette is a short example of how Ms. Terrance used the scaffolding technique of probing during the reading of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) after the caterpillar stuffed itself with cake, ice cream, sausage, pie, watermelon, a lollipop and a cupcake.

T: Do you think he’s still hungry?


Carrie: No, he’s sick.

T: It says he feels sick. At night…

Andrew: He has a tummy ache.

T: Why does he have a tummy ache?

Many children: Because he ate too much!

T: *The next day was Sunday again. The caterpillar ate through one nice green leaf, and after that he felt much better.* (T. reads text.)

T: Why do you think that made him feel better?
Kate: Because he…the leaf was yummy.

T: For you?

Kate: No, for the caterpillar.

T: For caterpillars, right? Do caterpillars really eat all this kind of silly food? (T. refers to the junk food eaten by the caterpillar earlier in the story.)

Many children: No, No!

T: Do they really eat these kinds of leaves?

Many children: Yea. Yea!

T: Do you think they eat fruit?

Many children: No, no!

T: I don’t know either.

The above vignette also shows Ms. Terrance using both open-ended and close-ended questions as part of the probing process. An open-ended question is one where there is no right or wrong answer, but, rather, one that “invites thoughtful and expanded answers” (Epstein, 2007, p. 28) and asked when the teacher “wants to learn what children think” (p. 28). Ms. Terrance did this when she queried the children as to why the caterpillar felt sick and about the leaves and fruits eaten by the caterpillar. A close-ended question is one that is answered by a short one-word answer, such as “yes” or “no” and one where the adult already knows the answer. When a teacher asks a close-ended question, she usually has only one correct answer in mind. This technique, while necessary in some situations, can often end the conversation especially if the answer provided by the child is different from what the teacher was seeking.
This next exchange is an example of a close-ended conversation. Ms. Terrance asked the question about the plant while pointing to the parts of the plant in the illustration. She already knew the answer to the question, “What part of the plant is that?” and expected only one correct answer. The act of pointing to the illustrations is itself a mediational strategy as it provides the visual as well as verbal cue simultaneously.

T: What part of the plant is that?

Ryan: The leaf.

T: The leaf. What part of the plant is that?

Joyce: The vine.

T: The vine, right? The leaves are growing on the vines.

In this instance, Ms. Terrance used close-ended questions to check that all the children knew the parts of the plant, a goal from the science curriculum. She also wanted to introduce the new vocabulary words especially if these words were unfamiliar to some of the children. This type of close-ended question is considered a low level question cognitively, as it only requires a one-word answer. Dickinson’s et al. (1992) research coined the phrase "immediate information" to describe these low level, intrinsic questions, that describe an adult's request for "labels and skill routines such as counting or naming colors (p. 330). However, this low level-type of questioning is also a scaffolding technique that helps the teacher ascertain each child's current place on the ever-changing learning continuum. This was actually the case with Ms. Terrance’s close-ended questions, as there were two children in the classroom who required extra assistance with language acquisition. She skillfully
engaged each of these children at their own current level and attempted to move them along to the next higher level of learning.

Earlier in this dissertation I wrote about many of the benefits of reading aloud. Several such benefits are that children “develop a sense of story, develop a knowledge of written language syntax, increase their vocabulary, expand their linguistic repertoire, develop knowledge of how texts are structured and create a community of readers through enjoyment and shared knowledge” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 22). Ms. Terrance attempted to reinforce many of these concepts when she planned a lesson requiring the children to dictate the words of a story they had not previously heard, merely by viewing the illustrations. The children brought to the fore their prior life experiences to complete this task. The following vignette is quite lengthy but it eloquently displays the children’s sense of story and knowledge of how texts are structured while creating a community of readers who enjoy their time together to develop the text of the story.

The activity in this scenario is an example of both verbal and visual mediation. The teacher along with the children discussed the photographs and composed words that were congruent with each photo. At the same time the teaching assistant wrote the children’s dictations on an easel for all to see. This vignette is from the story *Pumpkins* (2006) by Ken Robbins.

T: This story here…the story we are going to…this book here is also about pumpkins and we have never read this book before and it is a brand new book in the afternoon class. But instead of me reading the words to it, I thought we would make up a story for this book, OK? So I want to show you what I’ve done with the book.
Ryan: We wroted the book.

T: We’re going to tell the story of the book. OK, on this page, do you see over here? Underneath this piece of paper, there’s some words, and they are the words that the author wrote and I covered them up. And on all the pages I covered up all their words. See them? So…our job is to make our own words for the story, OK? Do you think we can do that?

Many children: Yes, yes.

T: OK, let’s try it. How should we start our book? What should we say about this front page?

Kathryn: Because they’re lots of pumpkins on the page.

T: On this page?

Kathryn: Yea. Cause we can talk…so we can start…so we can say this book is a pumpkin book.

T: OK, all right. If we’re telling the story who is the author of the book?

Many children: I am, I am. I want to be the author.

T: We are! We’ll all be the authors cause we are telling the story. Now, who is the illustrator of the book?

Christina: Me!!

T: You are? Did you draw the pictures, Christina?

Many children: (Children laugh.)

T: Are these pictures what somebody drew…or painted?

Ryan and Andrew: Me…I want to.

T: Did someone?
Kate and Valerie: Paint…paint.

T: I don’t think these pictures are painted, do you?

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: Hold on one second we have way too many conversations going on right now. I want you to look at these pictures and tell me how they were taken.

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: I’m going to give you a hint. It’s not a drawing…it’s not a painting.

Emma: I know.

T: What’s your guess?

Emma: Somebody…somebody must have “taked” the picture of them.

T: With what?

Adam and Eric: A camera.

T: They took a picture with a camera, that’s exactly how they did it. Did we take the pictures?

Many children: No, no!

T: Then we can’t say we took the pictures, right?

Carrie: Somebody else did.

T: Somebody else did. All right, here we go.

T: What should we say about this picture?

Valerie: That…that…the pumpkin is growing so big.

T: Is it? When you write a story…when you’re telling a story…

Valerie: No, I see a corn field.

Margaret: A pumpkin patch.
T: We really need to look at the pictures and decide what we’re going to say about that page, don’t we, Margaret? Do you see a pumpkin patch in this picture?

Many children: No, no!

T: Not yet. So maybe it would not be a good idea to talk about a pumpkin patch yet.

Valerie: I think it’s a corn field.

T: Really? Adam what would you like to say about this picture?

Adam: They’re not doing Halloween yet, because the trees have to be…(unclear)

T: It’s not Halloween in this picture? How do you know it’s not Halloween?

Adam: Because it’s…

T: It’s Adam’s turn. If you want a turn, I’ll know you want a turn when your hand is up.

Adam: (unclear)

T: OK, what else do you want to say about this, Carrie?

Carrie: Ummm…

T: You need to be looking at the pictures.

Carrie: The pumpkins…

T: Carrie, stop right there. Stop right there. Is there a pumpkin in this picture? Should we even say anything about a pumpkin yet?

Many children: No, no!

T: What should we say about this picture here?

Joyce: There’s just a corn field.

T: There’s just a corn field. What should we say about the corn field?

Theresa: Because it’s already growing.
T: OK. There is a corn field and the corn is already growing.

Adam: There’s birds up in the sky and you can hear them.

T: Is there anything else you want to say about the birds?

Tyquan: How you make…

T: I didn’t understand you. Can you make it louder?

Tyquan: Um. Um.

T: Do you want to think about it?

Tyquan: Yea.

Kate: They’re in a triangle, pyramid.

T: Why do you think they are doing that, Kate?

Kate: Because one is in the line that way and one is in the line that way and that’s how they fly.

T: That’s how they fly in this picture, right? OK. Now tell me about this page right here.

T: What do you want to say?

Andrew: (unclear) That picture right over there. (Child points to picture.)

T: This picture right here? (T. points to picture.)

Andrew: No, that picture is in the back.

T: The picture on the front or on the back, Andrew?

Andrew: That’s the front.

T: That’s the front and that’s the same picture. Brandy, what do you want to say?

Brandy: The pumpkins are…(unclear)

T: What can we say about the pumpkins, Kate?
Kate: (unclear)

T: Sally, what do you want to say about the pumpkins?

Sally: Um, um.

T: You want to think for a minute?

Sally: Yea.

T: Let’s see, Kate you had a lot to say. I’m going to have somebody else take a turn.

Brandy, what do you want to say about this?

Brandy: The pumpkins are on the tractor.

T: Is there any reason why you think they are on the tractor?

Brandy: Because pumpkins always do that.

T: OK, Tyquan?

Tyquan: Because the tractor…something takes them all to the pumpkin farm…they’re going to take them out.

T: OK.

Adam: I have one more thing to say. The pumpkins are in the baskets.

T: OK. What do you want to say about the picture, Kathryn? I heard you say something.

Kathryn: There’s pumpkin seeds. They’re small.

T: Ok, yes, they’re small. Andrew?

Andrew: They’re putting the seeds away for they’re wanting to grow pumpkins for…a whole week.

T: OK. Emma, what do you want to say about this picture? What’s happening in this picture right here? (T. points to picture.)
Emma: (Silence.)

T: If you look at the picture, what’s happening? You don’t know? Christina, what’s happening in this picture?

Christina: (Silence.)

T: You don’t know either? Eric, do you have something to say about this picture?

Eric: They cut them then they growed them.

T: They grew here or they grew there? (T. points to picture.)

Eric: They were growing there.

T: And then what?

Eric: Then they were big and then they were seeds and then they were growing into pumpkins.

T: Do we see any pumpkins yet?

Many children: No, no!

T: Where are the pumpkins?

Emma: Inside the yellow thing.

T: Inside the yellow thing? What’s the yellow thing?

Emma: I don’t know.

Eric: Seeds.

Kate: A seed.

Kathryn: I know. A flower.

Carrie: It’s a yellow rotten egg.

Tyquan: It’s an egg, a yellow egg.

Carrie: Um…it’s a yellow pumpkin seed.
T: OK, a yellow pumpkin seed.

Valerie: I think it’s a yellow chicken egg.

T: OK, Emma?

Emma: A pumpkin seed.

T: You think this is a pumpkin seed right here? Is that what you think?

Emma: Um…a yellow egg…a leaf.

T: OK. (Many children chatter.) Andrew, what do you want to say?

Andrew: It’s…the yellow thing…it’s a…the yellow thing on top…and then…it’s like to get water from the ground.

T: You think that helps get water from the ground?

Emma: I have a good one. Maybe it’s something like inside an ice cream cone.

(Children laugh.)

T: Emma, maybe it’s an ice cream cone? Everybody’s ideas are OK. We don’t really know because we didn’t take the picture. All right. We can keep wondering when we’re making up the story, so if someone says something that is kinda silly, that’s OK.

Kathryn: I think it’s corn.

T: OK, you think it’s corn.

Kathryn and Brandy: Pumpkin flowers!!!

T: Pumpkin flowers. Look at how it started, and then what’s happening?

Claire: It’s growing like a pumpkin.

T: What Margaret?

Margaret: It’s growing like a pumpkin, pumpkin flowers.
T: It’s growing like a pumpkin, and what can you tell me over here?

Children: Silence.

T: Anybody can tell me about this picture, Christina?

Christina: They look like dandelions…they look like dandelions…because they are yellow.

T: OK, they do look like dandelions. OK, what happened next?

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: I need a hand raised. I’m not going to be able to hear. Adam.

Adam: It’s almost turning yellow.

T: Yes, it’s almost turning yellow. OK, hands down, we’re going to turn the page. Emma, what do you want to say?

Emma: It’s a pumpkin patch.

T: Yes, it’s a pumpkin patch.

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: What do you think what’s happening here?

Andrew: There’s a little pumpkin seed right there. I can see the words under the cover. I have cool eyes.

T: You can see the words underneath? You do have cool eye sight. That’s why I talked about covering up the words because I knew somebody would wonder about there being words underneath the paper.

Many children: I can see them. I can see them.

T: OK. All right. OK, what is happening on this page?

Valerie: They’re all getting happy.
T: Now are these regular pumpkins?

Joyce: No.

T: Are all pumpkins orange?

Many children: No. No!

T: They’re not are they? What other colors do you know pumpkins can be?

Many children: Green…green…yellow, yellow…purple, brown, grey.

T: How big are these pumpkins?

Adam: Huge!

Andrew: They could be brown.

T: There could be brown pumpkins.

Ryan and Claire: Black, grey.

T: They could be grey.

Kate: Purple.

T: Kate did you ever see a purple pumpkin?

Kate: No, but I think sometimes they could be purple, like…

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: If you can hear the sound of my voice, put your finger on your ear. (T. puts finger on own ear.)

T: How big is this?

Margaret: Not big.

T: How do you know it’s not very big?

Christina: Because it’s really little.

T: How do you know it’s just little?
Brandy: Because it’s growing.

T: Is there anything else in the picture that helps you decide?

Many children: (Unclear)

T: Hold your hand out like that and close your eyes and think of a pumpkin that can fit in your hand. Would it be a big pumpkin?

Many children: No.

T: It could only be little, right?

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: OK, now what do you think is going on in this picture?

Valerie: They’re big.

T: Could you hold these pumpkins in your hand?

Many children: No, no, no!

T: No, you could not.

Many children: (Children chatter.)

T: Why do you think there’s a number seven on this pumpkin?

Ryan: Because it’s huge.

T: Because it’s huge, why else?

Carrie: And it’s seven pounds.

T: And it’s seven pounds?

Kathryn: Because it costs seven dollars.

T: Because it cost seven dollars, that might be an idea. What’s your idea Andrew?

Andrew: It’s a little…bigger than your hand and…(unclear).

T: Look at what carried these pumpkins away. What do you see?
Tyquan: A truck.

T: They couldn’t even carry them with your hands.

Martha: You can’t hold it with your hands. It’s big. It’s like…

T: OK, this is the very last page that we are going to look at. Who has something they want to say about this page?

Emma: I do.

T: Emma, what do you want to say?

Emma: My sister…

T: Is it something about the story?

Emma: Sometimes pumpkins are little and big.

T: Carrie.

Carrie: There’s so many pumpkins.

T: There’s so many pumpkins. Martha?

Martha: They’re lined up…in a…line.

T: Right here? OK. It does look like they’re in a line. Yes, Andrew.

Andrew: Those…those pumpkins on each side…I told my mom that I wanted a baby.

T: Is your comment about the pumpkins?

Andrew: No.

T: How do you know? Because he has it in his hand.

Andrew: He can pull it in the cart.

T: He can pull it in the cart. If this is the end of our story what do we say at the end?

Many children: The…end!

T: The end, OK. Um, let’s see. It is almost time to go home.
Even though this vignette is extremely long it exemplifies many mediational strategies. The very act of having the children write their own words to a picture book challenges and stretches their concept development on many levels. Mediation occurs when two people interact socially in a meaningful, collaborative activity, using the tool of language (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). The children and teacher in this classroom definitely interacted socially through conversation in the meaningful activity of writing the text as they collaborated as a group to complete a given task.

The photographs served as visual mediators to assist the children in writing the words, as the photographs expedited the children’s development by making the task easier to perform. The children more than likely could not have written such a connected, cohesive text without the photographs as a guide or cue, thus the importance of visual mediators. Berk and Winsler (1995) remind early childhood educators, “Children transfer the understanding and skills they have gleaned from dialogues with others to their own literacy-related discourse. In these settings, they converse not just with themselves but also with the text narrative” (p. 118). In creating the text for this story the children brought to the fore all their prior knowledge and daily experiences connecting them with other stories that had been read to them over time.

Several times Ms. Terrance reminded the children to look at the pictures to be certain their words matched. Through this task the children developed knowledge of written language syntax and developed knowledge of how texts are structured (Beach & Hynes, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The children realized that the written word has its own patterns and rhythmic flow (Neuman, 1999), and learned how the written
word conveys meaning (Harste et al., 1984; Sulzby, 1985). When the children saw the assistant teacher writing their own words they discovered the conventions of print (Clay, 1991) and directionality (Jalongo, 2004). The assistant teacher started writing at the upper left hand corner of the paper, wrote from top to bottom, left to right, used capital letters, periods and commas.

At the beginning of the vignette, the children already knew that their story needed to have an author and illustrator (Snow & Goldfield, 1983; Moss, 1996; Taylor, 1995). The children realized that print is stable (Conlon, 1992) when their own class-written story was read aloud to them the following day. Ms. Terrance was also very conscientious about giving many children a chance to participate in writing the words and made sure the children respected and accepted each other’s contributions, however silly they might be. Ms. Terrance encouraged each child to create a personal, physical and visual mediator with his or her own hands when they discussed the size of the pumpkins in relation to the bale of hay in the photo. As is evident in most of the shared vignettes, “the children mediate each other’s learning” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 129).

The set-up of Ms. Terrance’s early childhood classroom illustrates how mindful she is of the importance of a literate environment. Her daily practice of reading aloud to the children including extensive conversations is just one example of this focus. She fostered and strongly supported a socially collaborative atmosphere where the:

Sociocultural theme of extended opportunity for discussion and problem solving in the context of shared activity is evident. The teacher serves not just
as a skilled moderator of dialogue but also as a designer of a highly
literate environment in which all learning activities serve as social contexts in
which children experiment with and use oral and written language. The
classroom typifies the more all-encompassing notion of the ZPD as the social
system in which children learn through collective, interrelated zones that are
mutually and actively created by teachers and children. (Moll, as cited in Berk
& Winsler, 1995, p. 127)

The next mediational strategy I will discuss is that of repetition. Most people,
not only children, need concepts reviewed and repeated more than one time to fully
grasp an idea. This is true for reading aloud as well. Ms. Terrance acknowledged this
fact and planned accordingly by reading the story, The Fire Engine Book (1989), two
times. The first time she read the book was to prepare for the visit of the fire fighters
the next day. The goal for the second reading was different. This time Ms. Terrance
urged the children to pay attention to the tools the firefighters used and wore. This
urging or guidance, a mediational strategy, explicitly connected the fire fighters’ visit
with the read-aloud story, giving the children a job to focus on during the socially
constructed conversation.

During the second reading of this book, the children enjoyed “an increased
comprehension of more complex information, increased negotiation skills and shared
authority, increased inter-relatedness between stories, increased vocabulary
acquisition and a more in-depth familiarity with language as a whole” (Neuman,
context in which previous conversations can be remembered and used by children to
extend and elaborate their own conversational repertoire” (p. 209) and the story “becomes a richer and more interesting story to the child with each successive reading” (p. 210).

This vignette illustrates the social construction of knowledge during the second reading of The Fire Engine Book (1989).

T: There were a lot of tools in this book that I thought we could look at again because fire fighters know about a lot of different tools and there’s a lot of different tools that they use. I was wondering if we could...when the firefighters come and when we get to go look at their fire truck, if we could look for some of these tools out on their truck, or maybe they might be wearing some of these tools. So what I want to do is show you some of those tools.

Brandy: I saw the fire truck this morning.

T: Some of our friends did see the firefighters this morning so they’re going to get a chance to see them again. Look at this page. This page had a lot of different tools that the firefighters used, OK? There’s this one. Does anyone remember what this one is called? (T. points to picture.)

Emma: I forgot.

Brandy: When you jump out the window.

T: Yup, it’s used when you jump out the window, but do you remember what it’s called? What the name of it is?

Sally: I don’t know.

T: OK, think for a minute. Valerie, do you remember?

Valerie: The people go in it.
T: Yesterday somebody called it a trampoline, but it was not a trampoline. It was called a...life...(T. pauses to see if children will remember.)

Andrew: A life net.

T: Yes, a life net. Andrew, you got it. That’s a life net.

Eric: (unclear)

T: Oh, they didn’t. Does anyone remember what kind of a tool that is?

Carrie: An axe.

T: An axe. What about this tool? (T. points to picture.)

Adam: A flash light.

T: It’s a flash light. Now here is a tool that goes from here all the way over to this side.

Many children: A hose.

T: A hose. Now what about this one?

Andrew: A ladder.

T: Easy stuff, now what about this one? Do you remember?

Kate: An air tank.

T: It looks like an air tank but it’s not exactly...

Kathryn: It’s a fire extinguisher.

T: Yes, it’s a fire extinguisher. Does it look like the air tank that goes on their mask?

Many children: Yea, yea!

T: Yes it does, yes it does. Now do you remember what this is called?

Ryan: A mask.

Andrew: The mask protects their faces from the smoke and fire.
T: Do you have an idea, Eric?

Eric: um, um, yea it’s a mask. That’s what they protect their face from the fire, so they can breathe inside the fire.

T: So they can breathe inside the fire.

Eric: When they’re fighting the fire.

Brandy: It’s for when the smoke comes in their eyes.

T: It helps for when the smoke comes in their eyes, so it doesn’t go in their eyes, right? OK.

Valerie: It’s so your eyes don’t get burned.

T: I’m going to look at a page and I want you to raise your hand if you see a tool that a firefighter uses. Raise your hand. Don’t shout it out because if you shout it out I can’t even pay attention to you, OK? You don’t see any tools yet, so put your hands down. You can’t even have it in your head yet. Are you ready? If you see a tool a firefighter uses raise your hand.

Adam: A hose, but it isn’t a rubber hose.

Tyquan: It’s a water hose.

T: What else do you see?

Brandy: Ex…ex…estin…tinguisher.

T: Extinguisher, that’s a hard word to say isn’t it?

Tyquan: It starts with all the letters.

T: Extinguisher, do you know what it starts with? See if you can see it in your head.

Eric: I want to say I see a tool, that one. (Child points to the picture.)

Tyquan: “H” H…ex…tin…gu…sher.
T: There is an H in there maybe. You know, that’s the hose that Adam was talking about, that’s a metal hose.

Joyce: How about? (unclear)

T: Hold it. Eric just pointed to a tool that we did not talk about on that page.

Eric: I think I know…a bell.

T: Eric just pointed to this right here. He said that was a tool for a firefighter. Do you think a bell is a tool for a firefighter?

Many children: No, no!

T: Yes, it is a tool, but why is it a tool?

Margaret: It rings so you can hurry up and fight the fire.

T: So you can hurry up and fight the fire or if they’re driving on the road and other cars hear that bell, what are the other cars going to do?

Many children: Stop. Stop!

T: They’re going to stop and let that firefighter through, right? Good spying eyes there Eric, we didn’t even talk about that one. OK, we have time for one more page. Let me see if I can find one more that you might be challenged by. OK, here’s a good one. If you see a tool, raise your hand.

Carrie: Ladder.

Emma: A hose.

Kate: A ladder.

Carrie: I see a…a fire fighter dog.

T: Well, that’s not the firefighter dog; it’s what the firefighter dog sits on. A li…a life…
Brandy: A life net.
T: A life net, very close.
Theresa: Water.
T: Do you see water right over here? Why is that a tool to use?
Theresa: It’s not.
T: Is water a tool? Do firefighters use water as a tool?
Many children: Yea! No! Yes! No!
T: Yes, it is a tool. What do they use the water to do?
Many children: Put the fire out.
Joyce: I see the firefighter holding…
T: You see a firefighter holding a tool, what is he holding?
Joyce: He’s holding a…that thing right there.
Andrew: A knife.
T: This is very interesting. What do you think he might use it for?
Claire: To cut the edges…of the window.
Kate: To see if everybody is safe.
Theresa: To get the smoke out.
T: How are they going to let the smoke out with that tool?
Tyquan: They can put it in the window and the smoke will go out.
T: OK, when they put it in the window.
Tyquan: The fire will go out.
T: What will go out?
Tyquan: The smoke.
T: We have a few minutes before the firefighters come. I want you to be looking and keep the tools in your head, OK? They will teach you all about being safe around fires and things that kids should do, things that adults should do to help you be safe with fire, OK?

Tyquan: Are the firefighters coming now?

After listening to and discussing the story the second time the children were better prepared for the firefighters’ visit. They acquired a richer vocabulary, by adding the words life net, axe, fire extinguisher, air tank and gas mask to their lexicon. They also learned a different meaning for the word tool, as both water and a bell were discussed as critical tools for firefighters.

The next and final category that occurred during a read aloud story is coded as curriculum-related. Early childhood teachers who support developmentally and age-appropriate practices incorporate and integrate as many content area subjects as possible throughout the day. These include: language and literacy, science and nature, social studies, math, health, safety and social skills. As a practitioner of the Reggio-inspired curriculum, Ms. Terrance blended together these subject areas to a high degree while reading aloud to the children. Because there were countless examples of curriculum-related dialogue while reading aloud, I will only share one or two in each subject area.

Ms. Terrance planned a read aloud event daily for about 20-25 minutes at the beginning of each session, a critical attribute for language and literacy development. This read aloud story then established the focus for the remainder of their time together, often expanding the activities to other related books and week-long projects.
I have already mentioned the importance of book knowledge, that being, knowledge of the title, author, illustrator, dedication, front and back covers. Knowledge of concepts about print (CAP) was also mentioned, that being, directionality, book handling skills, letter and word discrimination, and the meaning of punctuation (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

While reading aloud Ms. Terrance also talked about other literary concepts, such as poetry, rhyming words, similes, phrases, and the use of small or large, highlighted or bold letters that stretch or flow through the illustrations on the pages of a book. All of these appear in the book, *Rumble in the Jungle* (2001) written by Giles Andreae. I selected this vignette because it also shows how the preschool science and social studies curriculum were incorporated. The text and illustrations include a variety of animals and habitats, part of the early childhood curriculum. During other classroom dialogue, the children and teacher discussed the animal habitats found at the zoo on their recent visit, and also compared the habitat from another book just read, *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (1981) by Verna Aardema.

T: This book is called *Rumble in the Jungle*. Is that a silly name? And it’s written by Giles Andreae. And someone different drew the pictures. The illustrator is... This is a hard name but I’ll try it, David Wojtowyc. The pictures in the book are pretty funny. And the book is about a jungle and when I read this book, the pictures in this book are not like our other one, the Kapiti Plain habitat, are they?

Many children: No. No.
T: It’s not like a jungle habitat, our Kapiti Plain habitat, but I noticed though there are some animals that live in our habitat. When I read the story I noticed that each animal has a poem about it. Does anyone know what a poem is?

T: Kate, what is a poem? (Kate raises her hand.)

Kate: (Child does not answer.)

T: Do you know or do you want to think about it for a minute? You want to think about it more a minute.

T: Andrew, what’s a poem?

Andrew: I need to think about it more.

T: Some times, in a poem…Sally, do you know what a poem is?

Sally: It’s a cage that an animal lives in.

T: It’s a what?

T: That may be a kind of a poem. Let’s see.

T: The poems I’m talking about here you can hear some rhyming words. Does anybody know what a rhyming word is?

Carrie: I do.

T: Hold on I want quiet hands (T. tries to hear Carrie as she quiets the rest of the children who are yelling out answers).

T: If your hand is not up and quiet I can’t call on you.

Carrie: A rhyme is like how, chow. It’s like…it’s like fox in a box, leak and speak

T: That’s right. Put our hands down now. (Many children raise their hands to talk.) Is cat and bat a rhyme?

Many children: Yes, yes.
Claire: Cat and bat.

T: If these two words rhyme put your finger on your nose----snake and cake.

Ryan: Snake…cake.

Many children: No, yes. (Several children yell out, yes, no.)

T: You have to listen to rhyming words with your ears. That’s how you’ll know if it’s… if they sound the same. That’s right that’s kind of a silly word but it still has the same sound.

T: OK, Rumble in the Jungle.

T: I put some book markers here of some animals in our story that are in our habitat so that will remind me where to go in our story.

Carrie: A giraffe is on the title page and a giraffe is in our habitat.

T: But is a giraffe in our habitat and let’s see if we can find him.

Many children: No. No.

T: (Starts reading the text.)

T: Do you see they’re hiding? Let’s see who we can find. What kind of an animal is that?

Many children: Lion, lion, lion.

T: A lion. (T. continues reading about lion) What’s she doing…what’s he doing with his mouth?

Many children: Roar, roar, roar.

T: Even if you didn’t know it was a lion you can tell because of the roar and the RRRRR’s. It makes a sound like a groaning lion. Now do you see this lion is kinda in our habitat. What’s in this habitat?
Valerie: In a jungle.

T: It’s like our habitat that we’re building of Kapiti Plain. It’s like our habitat. There’s not a lot of trees. Is there a lot of trees like a jungle in this picture?

Margaret: No.

T: There are little short trees and a lot of grass in this jungle.

T: What animal is this? (T. turns the page.)

Adam: An ostrich.

T: Adam thought it was an ostrich, but it’s not. He’s thinking though.

Joyce: It’s an emu.

T: It’s an emu, mmmm?

Christina: It’s a flamingo.

T: Emma, what did you just say?

Emma: A spoonbill.

T: A spoonbill? Hmmmmm. Any other guesses? Carrie has a quiet hand…what’s your guess of this animal?

Carrie: A flamingo.

T: Why do you think it’s a flamingo?

Carrie: ‘Cause it’s all pink. Its legs are pink and its feet are pink, its neck pink…head is pink, its cheeks are pink…everything else.

T: You know what, we don’t know for sure because it doesn’t tell us.

T: Here’s the next one.

Many children: Zebra, zebra.

T: (Continues reading text.)

Theresa: They’re kissing. (Children laugh.)

T: Look over here. What do you see in this book? Did you see something very tiny; they’re hiding on this very first page? What do you see?

Kate: A caterpillar.


T: Some sort of a bug. What is the bug doing?

Ryan: A ladybug.

T: You see in this book in this book there’s a tiny thing going on like they are hiding. Just like we saw them hiding in this very first page that we read, OK?

Brandy: Eating the leaf, a caterpillar.

T: How do you know it’s a caterpillar?

Brandy: I see a bite.

T: Do you see the bite she’s talking about? Do you see there’s also a teeny tiny word ‘cause it’s a teeny tiny bug? It says mmmunch, mmmunch.

Many children: Munch, munch. (Children laugh.)

T: So when you’re reading a book or listening to a book you need to keep your eyeballs really big and open. Carrie, will you be able to see?

Carrie: I know what it is wh…?

Eric: (unclear) What is it?

Adam: We can guess all we want but the author doesn’t tell us.

T: I don’t know if we can get through this page…(T. acts scared.)

Many children: A snake, a snake!
T: When I ask you about a book I can’t have you yell like that. I’m so close you can hear me and I can hear you.

Ryan: Boa constrictor.

T: (Continues reading text.)

T: A special kind of a snake. Do you see what he’s saying? (T. points to the string of s’s coming out of the boa constrictor’s mouth.)

Many children: Sssssssssssss.

T: What is the giraffe saying, let’s see.

T: (Continues reading text that talks about the giraffe being so tall it can touch the clouds.)

Many children: (Laugh about giraffe touching the clouds.)

T: Do you think that might happen with a giraffe? Is he tall enough to touch the cloud?

Many children: No, no, no!

Carrie: But the cloud can climb up the giraffe.

T: We have one more animal in our habitat. Does anyone know what animal this is?

Eric: A deer.

Tyquan: Reindeer, a tiger.

T: You changed our mind, now you say it’s a tiger.

T: Brandy has the quietest hand ever.

Brandy: A bull.

Kathryn: A gazelle.

T: Why a gazelle?
Kathryn: ‘Cause it has horns.

T: Emma, Do you have a guess? What do you think it is?

Emma: A bull.

T: Carrie, do you have a guess?

Carrie: A jumping deer, a jumping fold deer. It jumps really high and it has horns.

T: That’s the word we’re going to read right now.

T: Kathryn is correct because it is a gazelle. There it is. It’s a gazelle.

Margaret: What’s a gazelle?

T: Let’s read and find out what is a gazelle.

T: (Continues to read text about a gazelle.)

T: Do you think the gazelle can really jump as high as the sky?

Many children: No, no, no!

T: When you’re the author you can really say what you want, right? So he decided to say it that way. All right, now the rest of the animals in the book are animals that live in the jungle, so we can do those a different day. But right now we’re talking about another kind of a habitat so that’s why I picked those animals from the book to read about today. Tomorrow we’ll read about the other animals.

The vignette from the story The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) mentioned earlier, incorporated math concepts from the early childhood curriculum when the teacher and children counted the number of fruits to create the 1:1 relationship. Math terms such as huge, tiny, big, little, small, tall, short, long, large, enormous, and weight were part of the dialogue when discussing the pumpkin, fall and firefighter books.
The science and health curriculum was also addressed when reading the *Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969). The children and teacher talked about the sequence of the egg, caterpillar, cocoon and butterfly. During this time, they compared healthy foods and junk foods. The hungry caterpillar ate foods from each of these categories. Reading aloud many of the fall-related books, such as, *Fall Changes* (2001), *A Tree is Nice* (1956), *It’s Pumpkin Time* (1999), and *Pumpkins* (2006) all addressed the science curriculum. The four seasons, weather and temperature, and appropriate clothing selections were central in these dialogues.

Social studies concepts were addressed when reading *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (1981), as the story told of the indigenous animals that live on the plains of Africa. In the story *Building a House* (1981) the children learned about constructing a house and the jobs required to do so, such as the carpenter, bricklayer, plumber, electrician, painter, and moving van workers. Prior to reading the story they viewed blueprints and talked about the job of the architect. The visit by the firefighters addressed not only the social studies curriculum as the children realized both men and women can become firefighters, but it also addressed the health and safety curriculum. The firefighters had a lengthy discussion with the children about making an exit plan with their families, how to call 911 in an emergency and how to Stop, Drop and Roll if a fire occurs in their home.

The children practiced social skills every day. They took turns talking during a read aloud, stayed in their own area on the carpet, not invading another’s personal space, took turns using the tape recorder, cooperated when making the Kapiti Plain
mural and re-creating the Nutley Farms diorama, respected each other’s opinions during dialogic exchanges, and used manners by saying “please and thank-you”.

Jalongo (2004), a teacher, writer and editor reminds early childhood educators regarding the importance of including picture books as an integral part of their curriculum. She states,

A common teacher misconception is that sharing picture books is a separate activity to be reserved for a storytime of a few minutes a day. Actually, teachers who are successful in promoting literacy infuse picture books into their entire program, by making their classrooms and centers places where books are shared, recommended, connected with all curricular areas, and supportive of the goals of diversity. (p. 136)

To further support curricular integration with picture books, Jalongo goes on to say, “When teachers set aside time for literature, present books in an engaging way, set children’s expectations for books, and extend literature into other curricular areas, they let children know that books are important” (p. 139). Ms. Terrance possessed a unique ability to do this, as I illustrated in all the sample vignettes. She used innumerable scaffolding and mediational techniques, far too many to include in this dissertation. She skillfully established a literate environment for the children in her care.

In this section, I discussed the scaffolding and mediational techniques Ms. Terrance used during the reading of a picture book. I selected vignettes to exemplify the coded categories of clarifying conversations, pausing, negotiating, probing,
questioning, repeating or reviewing, children writing their own text, and those related to curriculum.

**Using Scaffolding and Mediation After Reading Aloud**

In the next and final section of this chapter, I will address the scaffolding and mediational techniques Ms. Terrance used after each read aloud session was complete. The coded categories for this section are: hands-on experiences (HOE), children reading aloud (CHR), visual (V), organizational, (ORG) and focus group questions (LQ). The scaffolding and mediational strategies often overlap, providing no clear boundaries between them. Again, the examples of these strategies used by Ms. Terrance were too numerous to mention, so selected vignettes will be shared.

The first two examples illustrate how Ms. Terrance used hands-on experiences to scaffold and mediate the children’s learning. The first one occurred when preparing the mural about Kapiti Plain, and the second example was when the class created a diorama of Nutley Farms and also re-created it in the block corner.

On one particular day, the teacher and children finished reading *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (1981) for the second time. Now they were ready to start making the mural, complete with scenery and animals. Ms. Terrance discussed with the children which parts they wanted to make. The children formed their working groups around the classroom and commenced with their tasks. One worktable held a variety of recycled materials, such as cardboard tubes, small pieces of wallpaper and wrapping paper, ribbon, yarn, plastic containers and tops, cotton balls, pom-poms and empty thread spools, from which the children could create the animals and
geographical features for the mural. A large piece of brown paper (8 feet long by 3 feet wide) was laid on the floor on which children would paint the background. Three children painted blue and white clouds, while two others painted the low hills and grassy plain.

Other children chose an animal to make for the mural. Ms. Terrance urged these children to draw their selected animal first before making it from the recycled materials. This urging served as both a visual and physical scaffold. Bodrova and Leong (1996) support this practice and state,

The use of graphical representation is also promoted in the Vygotskian paradigm. Children are encouraged to draw and redraw their conception about how things look and work. They move back and forth between the real object and their graphic representation, modifying it as they notice more and understand more. The drawing captures what they understand so they can look at it and see if it matches what they see when they return to look at the object.

(p. 77-78)

Following is a dialogue between Ms. Terrance and several children about drawing the animals before constructing them using the art materials.

Tyquan: I’m going to make a giraffe.

T: Take a look at the big book and go to the animals that we’re making for our habitat. Go look at the pictures. What animal might go good in our habitat?

Valerie: A cow.

T: We did have some cows in our habitat. Carrie, would you go over to the Kapiti Plain book? Go put it on the floor and find the cow in our story. There is a giraffe in
the animal basket. Maybe you can use one of these to draw from, Tyquan. You can take the giraffe over to the table. Ask Carrie if you need the book. Come here Brandy.

T: Joyce, what do you need? You want to make an elephant? I thought you were making a monkey.

Joyce: I’m making an elephant.

T: You changed your mind. OK, you want to look at the elephant then. Look in the basket to find the elephant.

Many children: (Children chatter as they work.)

T: Sometimes it helps if you look at an animal, Valerie.

T: You’re making the purple cow. Do you need a purple piece of paper?

If you need paper in our classroom, this is where it is. I want all the animals to be made on paper first.

Sally: I can’t look at the paper. I can only… I act out like a monkey. (Sally jumps up and down imitating a monkey.)

T: Joyce, you’re ready to draw our elephant?

T: How many legs do you need on that cow, Tyquan?

Tyquan: Two.

T: I thought you needed four.

T: Here’s a little container to put your things in. (T. hands Tyquan a plastic container for his materials.)

Andrew: We can pretend there’s another one on that side. (Talk to Tyquan about the legs on his cow.)

Claire: Do you want the eyes right here?
Tyquan: I was drawing the nose.
Claire: You can draw right here.
Tyquan: No, I can draw the hair.
Claire: Mine’s going to be a girl giraffe.
Andrew: We forgot over here. (Points to Tyquan’s drawing.)
Eric: Oh, yea. Kate, what color paper would you like?
Andrew: There’s the eyeballs, right?
T: You finished drawing the giraffe. Now use the junk to make the giraffe to put on our mural.
T: What part of the giraffe is that?
Claire: The body, the neck.
T: What will be the neck? What will be the body?
Claire: (Picks a cardboard tube from the pile of recycled materials)
T: Will that be long enough for a neck?
Claire: I need to cut it.
Eric: I need to glue mine on the board.

This example shows not only how Ms. Terrance encouraged the children to draw their selected animal before constructing it from the recycled materials, but it also shows how the children offered ideas for each other’s creations, mediating the learning for their classmates. Ms. Terrance observed several children at a time, being part of two or three conversations simultaneously, assuring each child received the needed feedback at the appropriate time. One child, Sally, bravely stated that looking at the figurine or photo of her chosen animal, the monkey, did not help her draw that
animal. She needed to pose and act like that animal, providing herself with her own personal physical scaffold or mediator. This action acknowledged that children’s learning styles differ and all are accepted in this classroom.

The next example of a hands-on experience after listening to a read aloud story happened when the class re-created their own Nutley Farms. The first one they built in the block area using unit blocks, pipe cleaners, sticks, small shiny stones, colored inch cubes, tree wedges, wooden trucks, cotton balls and scarves. The second one they created on a large piece of plywood, approximately 3 feet wide by 4 feet long. The children split into small groups and worked on their selected activity.

Eric started making a tractor using a shoe box, initially with only two wheels. He then put on a farmer hat retrieved from the dress-up area. When he discovered that the tractor could not move with only two wheels he secured two more round pieces of wood from the recycled materials and attached them to the shoe box with glue. The teaching assistant, Ms. Seneca, observed the children as each started to work on their part of the project. She casually asked the children an open-ended question, “What are you working on?” Many responses ensued.

Theresa started making a slide similar to the one at Nutley Farms. When she had difficulty attaching the slide to the legs Ms. Seneca suggested she ask a friend. Consequently, several girls began working together using an oatmeal box, half a paper towel tube, cut length-wise to make the sliding area. They then stapled together two longer paper towel tubes to form the legs. Later, Ms. Seneca asked if anyone had an idea on how to make the straw jump similar to the one at Nutley Farms. Kathryn decided to make the straw jump and got a shoe box and cut green strips of paper for
the straw. Brandy made another straw jump with styrofoam squiggle shapes. Martha used orange paper to cut small round shapes to make pumpkins for the pumpkin patch and attached green pipe cleaner for the vines. Margaret made a pen for the animals using small cardboard triangles with holes in them found in the recycling bin. Claire and Carrie made a house for the pigs using a small box and proclaimed it was for small pigs. They cut grass from green raffia. Margaret said the small pigs needed to stay warm so she made a roof for the pen from shiny gold paper. Ryan said he was making a slide for the pigs. Ms. Seneca asked if that was real or funny. Ryan responded that it was funny.

The children who were making the corn box talked with the ones making the straw jump and decided to arrange them side-by-side in the diorama replicating their positions at Nutley Farms. While chatting about their project, Christina called the farm Nutmeg Farms and Emma shouted back, “No, it’s Nutley Farms!”

The photos of the trip to Nutley Farms were available for the children to view as references. These photographs were visual mediators and included photos of the bales of hay, the slide, the barn, the straw jump, the pumpkin patch and the wagon. Even though there was only one slide at Nutley Farms the children negotiated and decided to make two slides and placed them side-by-side on the diorama.

After about 20 minutes of working, one child, Kate, noticed that something was missing on the wagon that Eric had made. Kate told the teaching assistant about the missing item. Ms. Seneca suggested that Kate go tell Eric himself since he was the creator of the wagon. Kate told Eric that the wagon needed a steering wheel. Eric exclaimed, “Whoa!” and ran to get something from the recycling box to make a
steering wheel. Eric chose on an empty ribbon spool and proceeded to attach it to the front of the wagon with some glue to make the steering wheel, and therefore, a complete wagon!

In another part of the room, three children sat with Ms. Terrance to draw what they saw at Nutley Farms. The drawing paper was divided into three sections simply by creasing and folding the paper. Ms. Terrance asked the children to draw what they saw at the beginning, middle and end of their visit to the farm. A substantial amount of dialogue was exchanged between the teacher and the children as each child tried to select what activities to draw. Ms. Terrance took dictation from each child making sure their words matched their drawn pictures. The tri-folded paper served as the mediator in this instance, making the task easier for each child to accomplish. One child, Tyquan, wrote the numerals one, two and three in the three sections of the paper. When Ms. Terrance asked him the source of this knowledge, he responded, “My brain just knew.”

When the teacher and children decided to make a replica of Nutley Farms in the block area they used verbal, visual and physical mediators. The verbal mediators occurred when they talked about their plans, renegotiated as needed, used classification skills as they built with small, medium and large blocks to create a sturdy structure, and wrote a sign that read “Do Not Disturb”, as this replica stayed in the block area for several days. They used visual mediators when they viewed the photographs taken on their field trip, drew diagrams and placed small stuffed animals in the appropriate pens, similar to the photographs. The physical mediator of regulatory behavior was employed when only four or five children at a time could be
present in the block area for the construction task. The children excitedly waited their turn to contribute to the group project. Bodrova and Leong (1996) remind educators,

As a shared activity, block building fosters self-regulation, planning, and coordination of roles in younger preschool children and facilitates moving back and forth between symbolic representation (drawing) and concrete manipulation in older children. To be a shared activity, block play must include the sharing of the same structure and the use of language to discuss the joint activity. Articulating a plan is the first step. All children are encouraged to describe what they plan to build before they begin using blocks. Through this shared building, children learn to regulate each other, be regulated themselves, and to talk about their ideas. (p. 137)

After completing the construction of Nutley Farms in the block area and photos were taken for future discussions, the children used their creation for dramatic play. They dressed up as farmers, moved small people down the slide made from unit blocks, had the small people play in the straw jump made with styrofoam squiggles and raffia, and moved trucks through the pumpkin patch pretending to be pumpkin pickers. Dramatic play areas in early childhood classrooms help children learn social skills as they dialogue, negotiate, construct, take turns, take on real-life roles, try out different rules, bring their background knowledge to the fore, investigate topics in more depth, often learning new vocabulary, and form stronger community relationships (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Jacobs & Crowley, 2010). Vygotsky (1966/1977) wrote, “Play serves as a tool of the mind enabling children to master their own behavior. The imaginary situations created in play are the first constraints
that channel and direct behavior in a specific way. Play organizes behavior” (cited in Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 125).

The following statement by Vygotsky connects play with the Zone of Proximal Development, a component of scaffolding.

Play also creates the zone of proximal development for the child. In play the child is always behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behavior; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself. Play contains in a concentrated form, as in the focus of a magnifying glass, all developmental tendencies; it is as if the child tries to jump above his usual level. The relationship of play to development should be compared to the relationship between instruction and development…. Play is a course of development and creates the zone of proximal development. (as cited in Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 126)

The next category I will report on is coded as “children reading” or CHR.

These activities happened after Ms. Terrance read aloud The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) by Eric Carle. Ms. Terrance told the children she had the CD of Eric Carle reading the story himself and encouraged the children to listen to the audio during choice time. One child, Martha, started pretend reading a Clifford story to Ms. Seneca, but then asked if she could listen to the Eric Carle CD.

Martha: Can I have the CD?

Ms. Seneca: Do you want to try it without the CD? (One friend, then three friends come listen to Martha)

Martha: I want the CD.

(Ms. Seneca then starts the CD of Eric Carle [EC] reading text.)
Martha: Is this Eric Carle. Is he on the CD?

(Martha talks along with Eric Carle repeating some of the words, pointing to the correct food items, and turning the pages accordingly.)

EC: *On Monday he ate through one apple.* *(Text of the story in italics)*

Martha: On Tuesday he ate two pears.

EC: *On Tuesday he ate through two pears. On Wednesday he ate through three plums. On Thursday he ate through four strawberries. On Friday he ate through five oranges.*

Martha: He was still hungry.

EC: *On Saturday he ate through one piece of chocolate cake, one ice cream cone, one pickle, one slice of Swiss cheese, one slice of salami, one lollipop, one piece of cherry pie, one sausage, one cupcake, and one slice of watermelon. That night he had a stomach ache.*

Martha: A stomach ache.

EC: *The next day was Sunday again. The caterpillar ate through one nice leaf, and after that he felt better. Now he wasn’t hungry anymore—and he wasn’t a little caterpillar anymore. He was a big, fat caterpillar.*

Martha: A big…fat…caterpillar!

EC: *He built a small house, called a cocoon, around himself. He stayed inside for more than two weeks. Then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon, and pushed his way out and...he was a beautiful butterfly.*

Ms. Seneca: How did he turn into a butterfly?

Martha: He started to grow and then the caterpillar came out.
Ryan: He was a butterfly.

Ms. Seneca: When he was in the cocoon what do you think was happening?

Martha: There was shaking and then the butterfly came out.

Ms. Seneca: So he shook when he was in the cocoon?

Martha: Like this. (Imitates the cocoon shaking.)

Ms. Seneca: And that helped him turn into a butterfly?

Martha: Can we do the Eric Carle song again?

Ms. Seneca: Can you do it without the CD?

Martha: I can’t. I want the CD.

Ms. Seneca: Do you want me to help you get started?

Martha: Yea.

Ms. Seneca: In the light of the moon...

(Martha proceeds without the assistance of the CD.)

Martha: An egg dropped on the leaf. He was hungry so he found food. He ate for one apple, two pears, three plums, four strawberries and five oranges and he was still hungry. He ate cake, ice cream, pickles cheese, one…(Teacher assistant tells the word for salami, after Martha pauses hesitantly.) salami, lollipop, one slice of pie, one sausage, one piece of cupcake, mmmm, one piece of watermelon. He ate one leaf and he felt…he felt…he wasn’t a caterpillar; he was a big fat caterpillar. He wasn’t small; he pushed and then ummm, he turned into a caterpillar…a beautiful butterfly. The end.

The first time Martha read the story she repeated some of the words after hearing them spoken by Eric Carle on the CD as indicated above. However, the
second time Martha read the story even though she didn’t have the confidence at first
to read it without the CD accompaniment, she did so after Ms. Seneca recited the first
words of the story. In this instance, Ms. Seneca gave Martha the scaffolding or
mediational support needed to gather confidence to read the story by following the
pictures alone. As is shown by the two readings by Martha, there was a significant
difference between the first and second readings. In the first reading, Martha used the
CD as an auditory mediator and the pictures as the visual mediator.

By the second reading, Martha not only had more confidence in her abilities,
but also became more independent. She was able to eliminate one of the mediators,
the audio CD, and also accepted the scaffolded encouragement of Ms. Seneca. The
original feeling of success leads to more success. The purpose of a scaffold is to give
a child the support needed when a task is new, adjust it accordingly throughout the
learning process, then gradually withdraw that support when the child’s “competence
increases, thereby fostering the child’s autonomy and independent mastery” (Berk &
Winsler, 1995, p. 171). This is exactly what happened with Martha’s reading of The
Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969). She received support from a more competent other,
Ms. Seneca, who then very skillfully withdrew the support at the appropriate time.

After Martha read the book twice, several other children, Adam, Emma and
Kate, asked for a turn. They sat on the couch together, where Ms. Terrance always
sits to read aloud. The children took turns reading and turning the pages. Ms. Seneca
sat on the floor, taking the normal position of the children, to listen to this group of
children read the story using the pictures as a guide. After this group finished their
rendition of the story, Ryan asked to re-tell the story using only the pictures. Ryan
had been sitting on the floor next to Ms. Seneca, but then took the reader’s position on the couch. Ryan commenced re-telling.

Ryan: He would eat one apple, two pears, three plums, four strawberries and five oranges. He ate one piece of chocolate cake, one piece of lollipop, pie, hot dog and a cupcake, watermelon and then when he ate a leaf he felt better. When he got big he got fat. He made a small house and he turned into a butterfly.

In this example, Ryan watched and listened to the other children previously reading the book as they accepted various levels of support. The other children acted as scaffolds and mediators for Ryan, as he benefited from their re-tellings, and then retold the book himself independently. Berk and Winsler (1995) comment on this type of peer to peer scaffolding by stating, “Peer interaction stimulates cognitive development when children reach intersubjectivity—that is, when they work toward common goals by merging perspectives and engaging in truly cooperative problem solving” (p. 132). The children shared the common goal of reading the story with or without assistance by either the CD or the pictures. When the group of children read the story they took turns providing the peer-to-peer scaffold for each other. Each child read what he or she could, while the others chimed in according to his or her own abilities. “This type of activity tends to motivate children, encourages them to coordinate roles, and provides the missing components in an individual’s skills” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 118).

The group re-telling of The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) and Ryan’s individual re-telling were connected. All the children interchangeably and
simultaneously served as novice and expert for each other. Cohen, Kulik and Kulik (1982) explain this concept further.

When a peer expert helps a novice, or gives peer tutoring, there are double benefits for learning. First, peer tutoring helps the novice, who is at a lower level of understanding, by providing individualized support. Second, it helps the expert by requiring that child to be more explicit and consistent. It supports the learning of metacognitive skills for the expert as well as a deeper understanding of content. (cited in Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 119)

As part of the in-depth study Ms. Terrance coordinated about Fall, the teachers, children and parent-drivers visited Nutley Farms. Before the visit, Ms. Terrance and the children created a web of things they predicted would be at the farm. After their visit they reviewed their original web to see whether their predictions were true or not. The act of webbing is a visual scaffold and external mediator. When created a web connects similar objects via circles or lines, therefore, categorizing the items for the children according to their characteristics or attributes. Ms. Terrance included the children in both the original creation of the web and editing the web upon their return from Nutley Farms. Ms. Terrance changed the color of the felt marker used during the editing process. This color change is another source of mediation, as it delineated the predictions from the reality. I will only share the web-editing activity, as inclusion of both would be too extensive and even redundant at times.

The activity of webbing accomplishes several goals in an early childhood classroom. First, it activates children’s background knowledge bringing forward any
past experiences of farm visits, and stirs up any information recently read in books about Fall and its impending changes. Second, it provides an arena for the children to listen to each other and exchange their thoughts and predictions through dialogue.

Third, the activity provides an opportunity for the teacher to model the act of printing for the children. On a large chart in front of the children, Ms. Terrance took their dictation, sounded out words, talked about the beginning sounds and letters of words, talked about upper and lower case letters, modeled the form and shapes of the printed letters, writing from left to right across the chart and accepted any ideas presented by the children. No answer was evaluated as right or wrong. The teacher wrote everyone’s ideas on the chart paper. The change of the felt marker colors from orange to green during editing added another source of scaffolded mediation to assist with comprehension. The web-editing activity follows.

T: Today we’re going to talk about and see…to see if what we thought would be at the farm really was at the farm that we visited.

T: Friends, let’s start with some animals. This is what we put in our farm here. (T. points to the web) We put cows, cages, pens, horses and pigs. Did we see all of those at the farm?

Carrie: No, we didn’t. We missed one.

T: Tell us.

Carrie: I don’t know what it is, but we missed one.

Many children: We missed one.

Adam: I don’t remember what one it was, but it rode on the train.
T: Adam doesn’t remember what one it was, but it was the animal that rode on the train. Anybody remember what it was?

Many children: A cow, a cow, a goat, a goat!

T: My friends, are there any of these animals that we didn’t see? Cows, cages, pens, horses. Did we see cows? Valerie, did we see cages? Were there any cages, there?

Carrie: Yea.

T: My friends, Joyce, it sounds like you’re saying something very important maybe about the farm market. But we don’t know about it because you’re talking only to your friends and not saying it to the whole group so we can write it down here and remember it. Someone over here said we saw bunnies. Right? We better put that on here. Do you see? Do you see how all of this writing is in orange and these are all the things we used to make our farm market before we went. We predicted we would see these. Now, I’m using what color?

Many children: Green!

T: And these are all the changes that we want to make today. OK? So that’s why I’m using two different colored markers. I thought you might want to know, right? So we just added goats and bunnies to the web.

T: Did we see pigs?

Many children: No, no, no!

T: No, there weren’t any pigs there. What about horses?

Ryan: Yea.

Many children: No, no, no!

T: So what should we do with horses?
Children: (Silence.)

T: What should I do with my green marker?

Carrie: Check it off!

T: I’ll check it right off. We didn’t see it did we?

Many children: No, yes, no, yes.

Adam and Eric: Hens…Chickens.

T: Were there baby chickens or were there just big chickens?

Kate: Baby chickens.

T: There were baby chickens, right?

T: I’m thinking that some of you better come over here so you can see my writing and pay attention better. If you’re moving behind my back you can’t see anything, right?

Margaret and Joyce: I can’t see. I can’t see.

T: Brandy, come right up here and then Emma, move over here.

Emma: She’s in my way.

T: You can sit on your knees in the back to help you see.

T: If you’re in the back row you can sit on your knees because no one’s behind you.

T: Any more animals that you saw?

Christina: Cows.

T: We have cows already.

T: Tyquan, do you have one?

Tyquan: We saw…we saw rocks.

T: Is rocks an animal? Carrie, do you have an animal, or are you just moving your arms?
Carrie: Um…um…um…um.

T: What’s the first animal you saw, Carrie?

Carrie: A chicken…a chicken that the mother chicken was laying earlier and then they hatching, but we missed the hatching part. I missed the hatching egg part.

T: There was one animal written down that you could put food in your hand and they would eat food right out of your hand. The cows were one. And there was another one.

Ryan: My hands?

T: It wasn’t a horse. What was the animal right at the beginning that could eat food right out of your hand?

Margaret: The goat, he licked your hands.

Joyce: Then your hands were slimy.

T: The hands were slimy from the goat that was on the train ride.

T: Let’s go to buildings. (T. points to the web). We had doors. You said if that way was blocked you could go the other way. What buildings did you see there?

Ryan: We saw a pumpkin patch.

T: Is that a building?

Theresa: We saw a pumpkin patch.

T: Were there any building that you remember seeing?

Tyquan: We saw…we saw…we saw the roofs.

T: Yes, there were roofs. What kind of buildings are usually on farms?

Children: (Silence.)

T: Do you remember?
Sally: Barns.

T: Did you see any barns? Did you see any red barns?

Brandy: Yes.

Kathryn: No.

T: You did? Where did we have lunch? What is that thing called?

Children: (Silence.)

T: It’s called a barn. There were some barns, but they weren’t the red ones like you usually think.

T: Stones. (T. points to word on the web.) Where were the stones?

Tyquan: In the ground.

Andrew: In the driveway.

T: We have slides (T. points to word on the web.) for the people to slide down and a bridge for the slide because you have to go up it.

Eric: No, stay up.

T: Were there slides at the farm?

Many children: Yeeees, yeeees, yeeees. (sing-songy and continuous)

T: We have a weighing scale for the people to put the pumpkins on and weigh them.

Did anybody see any scales?

Many children: Nooooo, nooooo, nooooo. (sing-songy and continuous)

T: Did anybody see any scales there?

Tyquan: No.

T: Did anybody see scales at the farm market?

Theresa: I saw a scale.
T: OK, some people say yes and some people say no. We took some pictures at the farm market. So we’ll put a question mark there and check that one out and we’ll see if we can see any scales in the pictures from the farm market.

T: And we have people, farmer, holder for supplies and tools. (T. points to word on the web.)

T: Did you see a farmer there?

Kathryn and Brandy: No, no.

Valerie and Sally: Yes, yes.

Kate: We made butter.

T: Was that a farmer who taught you how to make butter?

Kate: Yes.

T: OK, where should we put that on the web? Do we have anything to do with?

T: What do you want to say about making butter?

Theresa: We made butter and put it on some crackers.

T: What else can you tell me about making butter?

Tyquan: And we try to put butter on the cracker and we got to eat it.

T: And we got to eat it. Did it taste good, Tyquan?

Tyquan: Yes.

Joyce: And we got to make butter and we got to smell it and put butter on the cracker.

T: We did. Take your finger out of your mouth and say it one more time.

Joyce: We got to make the butter to melt it.

T: To dissolve it, that’s right.

Adam: When it was time…or the crackers, we were trying to…(unclear)
T: Were there any other people there that we saw?

Many children: Yea.

T: What other people were there?

Andrew: Some people that we don’t know.

Many children: Yea. A lot of people. A lot were there that we don’t know.

T: Who do you think those people were?

Margaret: From other preschools.

T: Yes, some people from other preschools, right?

T: Who else was there that we didn’t know?

Christina: People that were going down the slides, wheeeeee!

Eric: People that were having…cameras.

Adam: Whee!

Brandy: There were kids. There were some kids.

T: There were kids.

Valerie: There were kids that we didn’t know.

T: Friends, did anybody else know of any other people that were there?

T: And we have diamonds that were buried. (T. points to word on the web.) Did anyone see any diamonds at the farm?

Many children: No, no, no!

T: What should I do?

Many children: Check it off! Check it off!

T: Then we have signs, like EXIT. (T. points to word on the web) That means at doors. Did anybody see any signs there?
Many children: No, no, no.

T: We saw no signs?

Children: (Silence.)

T: No one saw a sign?

Adam: I did, I did.

T: What kind of sign did you see, Adam?

Adam: A sign about the pumpkins.

T: Did you all hear what Adam said? A pumpkin sign.

Adam: And a road sign.

Eric: I saw three signs.

T: What were the signs for?

Valerie: When we were driving.

T: Why would they put up pumpkin signs?

Adam: Because you know where the pumpkin patch is.

T: Oh, so you know where the pumpkin patch is.

Joyce: And because so you know…(unclear)

T: And pumpkins need enough space to not be too close to each other. Pumpkins were outside because they need to be cold and the vines don’t get to wrap around the people. Did everyone get to go to the pumpkin patch?

Many children: Nooooo, noooooo (sing-songy and continuous).

T: Let’s not sing it, just answer, OK?


T: Were they close to each other?
Carrie: They were like…(unclear)

T: That could be one that we can check out. We’ll put a little question mark here. We can check it later.

T: Were the pumpkins outside?

Many children: Yeeeee, yeeeee. (sing-songy and continuous)

T: Were there any pumpkins inside?

Many children: Noooooo, noooooo. (sing-songy and continuous)

T: OK, try this with me. Say this, No.

Many children: No.

T: Then stop. Now say, Yes.

Many children: Yes.

T: That’s how I want you to answer. I don’t want you to sing it. And say

Noooooo for a very long time.

T: Let’s try it one more time. Say, No.

Many children: No.

T: That’s it. OK, are you ready? Say, Yes.

Many children: Yes.

T: Perfect, that’s how I want it to sound.

T: So there were no pumpkins inside at the farm? Did anyone go inside at the farm market?

Many children: Yes, no.

T: Were there pumpkins inside at the farm market?

Many children: No.
Adam: There weren’t any pumpkins inside at the farm market because some people could step on them and squash them.

T: Maybe, maybe. Where were the pumpkins?

Many children: Outside! Outside!

T: When you were waiting for the train ride, did you see any pumpkins near the ride?

Many children: Yes, no.

T: Well, let’s think about it.

Eric: I saw…Going to the hayride. Only when we got to the hayride.

T: That’s another thing we can check and see. We’ll see if there was ‘cause we don’t know. OK, our last one is rug (T. points to word on the web) for people to wipe their feet, and for the pumpkins to get dry on the bottom. Did anybody see a rug?

Many children: No, yes.

T: Where did you see a rug?


T: Who said yes they saw a rug, raise your hand? Ryan, where did you see a rug?

Ryan: I don’t know, but I saw one yesterday.

T: Ryan, you weren’t at the farm with us, remember? You had a doctor’s appointment.

T: Sally, did you see a rug? (Sally raises her hand.)

Sally: Yes.

T: Where did you see a rug?

Sally: At the…(pauses)

T: Do you need to think for a minute?
Sally: Yes.

Ms. Seneca: Ms. Terrance, I actually remember seeing one outside because I almost tripped over it and I saw it was in a funny spot, and it was sorta flat and like a big huge piece.

T: Oh, I saw that rug too. Sally, did you see that outside?

Ms. Seneca: I almost tripped on it.

T: It was in a weird spot all by itself.

Sally: Maybe it was a magic carpet.

T: A magic carpet!

Sally: Maybe a magic carpet like Jazmyn.

T: Valerie, turn right around on your bottom. Let’s talk about what we’re going to do today. We are going to do some more discoveries about farm markets. We bought some things and…we brought some pumpkins from the farm market, some gourds from the farm market, we brought home some corn stalks from the farm market. We are also going to…ya know I did want to say something about the science table. There are some very cool and interesting leaves and you can look at them, but you can’t touch them, OK? Those are for looking at, and you can bring over a magnifying glass to look at them but we don’t want to touch them because they might be dirty from the mud at the farm.

Andrew: And they might be poison.

T: They are not poison I know for sure, but they might be dirty because we don’t want to touch the leaves and then put our dirty hands in our mouths. We don’t want to do that.
Ryan: Or you can wash your hands.

T: Right, over and over again. You can wash your hands.

The following statement illustrates the reasons Ms. Terrance used the webbing activity before and after the visit to the farm.

The external mediator of the web facilitates the development of thinking and reasoning. Mediators help children to monitor and reflect on their own thinking and prompt metacognitive skills. Teachers use word maps or concept webs to help children see the relationship between concepts, ideas, or words. Developing the web as the children contribute ideas helps crystallize and sharpen understandings of the relationships. (Bodrova & Leong, 1996), p. 76)

This contribution by Bodrova and Leong (1996) explains precisely the webbing activity Ms. Terrance and her children executed together. The words, circles and connecting lines on the web assisted with relationship formation of the various concepts. Ms. Terrance stressed that people, animals, vegetables, rocks and buildings all belong to different sets, and for this exercise cannot be mixed. For example, when Ms. Terrance asked about buildings at the farm, both Ryan and Theresa answered “pumpkin patch.” Tyquan responded with the word “rock” when the teacher inquired about the presence of another animal at the farm. Placing objects in the correct category is a skill addressed in early childhood classrooms. This was one of many concepts focused on in the webbing activity.

In the beginning of this chapter, I reported on organizational techniques Ms. Terrance used to ensure an orderly flow to the day’s activities. She used them before
reading a story to settle the children to ready them for listening. She also used several organizational techniques after reading a story to disburse the children to their selected center and project work. Ms. Terrance skillfully incorporated categorization and literacy goals when she dismissed them from the group. In the first scenario, below, the children were required to discriminate their place in their family structure, and in the second example, the children were asked to think of the letters in their name. The first scenario followed the review of the web after visiting Nutley Farms.

T: So, what we are going to do is try to make another Nutley Farms, so that is one of the choices and make another farm because now you’ve been to the farm. So now you can go make Nutley Farms from what you remember from the trip. You can look at pictures that we took. We can bring them over to look at. Over in the area where we did them the other day, so over…Sit and look first with our bottoms on the floor.

Emma?

T: There’s more than one choice, so have a seat.

Emma: What am I going to do?

T: Over at this table are the gourds with the magnifying glasses.

Margaret: What can I do?

T: And over at this table here we are going to design a farm market that we can have in our classroom. So we are going to be looking at some farm market pictures, and we are going to be doing some drawing of farm markets that you would like to do in the classroom. OK? So those are your choices. The dress-up center is open, puzzles are open. This center is open. (T. points to the buckets that can be filled with corn
kernels) So, if you want to do bucket fills, they are over on this circle rug only, all right?

Now listen, if you have a sister, you can go play. (No one moves.)

If you have sister you can go play.

If you are the only child in your family, you can go play. If you are the only child, go play.

Sally: I am the only child in my family.

T: If you have a brother, you can go play.

Eric: I have two brothers and they are little.

Ryan: I have two brothers, too.

Eric: We both have two brothers, too.

The next scenario occurred after reading *Building a House* (1981) by Byron Barton.

T: Is anyone going to work over here? Because I have the pictures if anyone wants to build.

T: In the Sensory Table there’s corn and there’s a pail over there that you can use in the Sensory Table. Over at this Table, we are going to do the pumpkins and the measuring and weighing over here at this table again. Over at the Art Table is where we are going to be drawing and if you’d like to do the drawing activity, we’ll talk about the drawing when you come over to the table, OK? So…let’s see how we should break for play. We are not going to do partner play today. We are going to go play where we want to play. But, I don’t want you leaving here like crazy running kids. I know you won’t ever do that, so I’m going to ask you to think inside your head
about your name and what…think all inside your head. So think of your name and the letters in your name, OK? Do you know them? If you know the letters in your name, put thumbs up. If you have…if you have an ‘A’ in your name, go play. (T. uses fingerspelled letter for A as a visual mediator.)

Many children: I do, I do. Me, me.

T: Don’t even tell me. I will see with me eyes. You think inside your head.

T: If you have an ‘A’ in your name, go play.

Many children: I do, I do, me, me.

T: Don’t even tell me, don’t even tell me!

T: If you have an ‘L’ in your name, go play.

Sally: I do.

Emma: Do I?

T: If you have an ‘N’ in your name, go play.

Christina, Brandy and Kathryn: I do, I do I do.

T: If you have…(Many children talk. Some children continue to sit on the green rug even after a letter from their name has been called.)

T: Margaret, do you have an ‘A’ in your name?

T: If you have ‘I’ in your name, go play. (Valerie goes to play.)

T: If you have an ‘R’ in your name go play. (Ryan and Eric go to play.)

Both of these Organizational scenarios required the children to use higher level thinking skills or higher mental functioning, according to Vygotsky (1978). In the first scenario Ms. Terrance asked the children about their place in the family constellation in comparison to their siblings. In the second case, Ms. Terrance
cautioned the children, “I am going to ask you to think inside your head about the letters in your name.” Both of these requests were decontextualized. There was nothing written on the chart, no physical object in the room, or photo in the book to identify or to use as a clue to solve these submitted problems. Rather, the children needed to have background knowledge about their siblings, and the children needed to already know the letters used in his or her name. This is a difficult task indeed for some young four-year-old children. Several children continued to sit on the rug even after a letter of their name had been called. Ms. Terrance used the fingerspelled alphabet as a mediator to assist the children with their responses. In these instances, the children needed to use the higher mental function of logical thinking. Some children had the ability to do so, while others did not.

Logical thinking involves the ability to solve problems mentally using logic and other strategies. Higher mental functions are deliberate in that they are controlled by the person and their use is based on thought and choice; they are used on purpose. The behaviors can be directed or focused on specific aspects of the environment, such as ideas, perceptions, and images, while ignoring other inputs….When children acquire higher mental functions, they direct their behavior to the aspects of the environment most pertinent to solving a problem. (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 29)

The last category I will address is coded as Focus Groups. After Ms. Terrance read each story I talked with the children for an extended three or four minutes. The questions I asked the children appear in Appendix J. I posed the questions to ascertain if the children could retell the story in their own words, thus, indicating some
meaning had been made, to see if the text contained unfamiliar words, and to discover if the children had any strategies for figuring out unknown words and concepts. They indeed had several strategies as the following vignettes indicate. This first vignette occurred after Ms. Terrance read *Rumble in the Jungle* (2001) by Giles Andreae.

Mrs. Loysen (L): Who can tell me what today’s story is about?

Claire: A jungle

L: Tyquan.

Tyquan: Animals at the...at the jungle.

L: OK. Any body else? Kate, what is the story about?

Kate: Animals live in the jungle...some animals do, but not all.

Ryan: Animals.

Andrew: Animals.

L: What happens...what do you do if you don’t understand a word or what’s happening?

Tyquan: You have to listen.

L: What do you do?

Tyquan: You don’t know that you’re not listening.

L: What do you do, Emma?

Emma: You talk to a lot of friends and to your best friend.

Carrie: Of friends...you ask your best friends what’s happening?

L: What do you do, Theresa?

Theresa: If you don’t know you ask somebody.

L: Whom would you ask?
Theresa: One of the teachers. The teacher can help.

Tyquan: Best friend, your mom.

L: What if your mom is not here, what do you do? Emma, tell me what do you do if your mom is not here.

Emma: You ask your friends.


L: Margaret, what do you do?

Margaret: Tell one of your friends.

L: OK, I have another question. If you do not understand a word and Ms. Terrance read a word you didn’t understand, what do you do?

Martha: You ask your friend.

L: OK, you ask your friend and have a discussion.

Joyce: Or you could just look at the word. You could look at the word with our eyes.

Sally: If your mom reads it a lots and read it a lot of time, that helps you read a lot.

L: Like when Ms. Terrance read the story three times.

Eric: You could try if you don’t know the word.

Adam: You could guess if you don’t know.

L: OK, thank you for helping me today. We’ll talk more tomorrow.

The next example is after Ms. Terrance read The Fire Station (1983) by Robert Munsch. The focus group discussion follows.

L: OK, remember my questions from last week? You talked about with Ms. Terrance about what the story was about, so who can tell me what this story was about?
Many children: Fire trucks, firemen, fire stations. And a fire and firemen and cars and fire trucks and fire men one more…firemen.

L: What about the children in the story, what did they do?

Adam: At the end they wanted to go into the jail again, the boy and the boys mouth was open and he called the fireman that they were going back into the fire truck.

L: Oh, cause they might have gone back into the fire station?

L: What else about the children in the story?

Tyquan: They went in the…they were trying…they went in the police station.

Emma: They went in the fire truck.

L: The fire truck, were they supposed to?

Many children: No, no!

Kate: They drove away with them in the back seat.

L: Was that OK?

Many children: No, no!

L: One more question. What happened to the kids?

Kate: The girl, Sheila, went to the front seat before.

L: Now, if you didn’t understand what the story was about what do you do?

Ryan: Ask your friends.

L: You’d ask friends?

Many children: Yea.

L: And how would your friends help you?

Many children: (Children chatter.)

Kate: If your mom just reads it to you lots of times.
L: Oh, if your mom reads it to you lots of times, you understand it wouldn’t you? Do you like it when your stories are read lots of times?

Many children: Yea, yea!

L: Why does that help you?

Martha: Um…you ask your other friends.

L: You can ask other friends. If your mommy reads it to you lots of times, what does it help you with?

Theresa: Reading, reading.

Brandy: No, helping you remember the words!

L: Helping you remember the words, OK.

Adam: You can play I spy if you don’t know what they sound like.

L: Oh, you can play I spy? Were there any words in this story you didn’t understand? Like a word that you didn’t know the meaning of? What one was it? (Carrie raises her hand.)

Carrie: It was…I forget.

L: Did everyone understand all the words in the story?

Kate: It was when they got all dirty, when the kids got all dirty.

L: Well, what word didn’t you understand?

Kate: When they said…when the fire fighter said I’m going to bring you home.

L: OK, OK. One last question. You’ve been sitting a long time.

Tyquan: When they got all dirty, then their dads and their moms thought they were a different person and they didn’t know who they were.

L: Right! That was so funny, did you laugh?
Tyquan: No.

L: I did. I thought that was funny. If I were the mom and the door opened I would have said, “Oh, no, who is that?”

L: You’re great to tell me all this stuff, children. Thank you, Ms. Terrance for letting me chat with the children. (Ms. Terrance proceeds to talk with the children.)

T: We’re going to have time to play in the classrooms again today.


L: We all know what the story was about today, right?

Carrie: A fire truck.

Claire: Fire men too.

L: Yes, fire fighters. Can women be fire fighters?

Many children: Yes, yes!

L: Who thinks women can be firefighters?

Margaret and Joyce: I do, I do.

L: I’ve seen women firefighters. There’s not very many, so some of the girls in here might want to be a firefighter.

L: OK, now there’s a couple words in there that I didn’t know what they meant. One of the words was rescue. What does rescue mean?

Sally: To save somebody.

L: To save somebody?

Valerie: I forgot.

Eric: Um, um. I don’t know. (Rolls on floor)
Tyquan: It means that you’re rescuing someone that’s in trouble.

L: Rescuing someone in trouble, so we rescue people if they’re in trouble.

Carrie: Uuhh, when it’s…in somebody, when somebody has a fire in their house in their building and the firefighters, the firefighters will come save us.

L: What do you think, Christina?

Christina: They save people.

Adam: I saw a real firefighter.

L: You did see a real firefighter? Was it a man or a woman?

Adam: He was…it was a man. He was washing his fire truck.

L: Yes, we found out that it is important to wash your fire truck, because it gets dirty.

L: Who got dirty in our story yesterday?

Kate: The two kids, and they got fire on them and they got and they got all “mesty” and they were walking home and their mom and their dad said you can’t come inside.

L: Yes, they surprised their mom and dad, knock, knock. Who’s at my door? Their mom and dad didn’t know who they were.

Kathryn: They said, uumm, you can’t come in because you’re too dirty.

L: I was thinking about the story from yesterday and about the dirty fire trucks. OK, OK.

L: One more word from the story, pry. What does pry mean?

Kathryn: Ummm… at some home or on some play date.

L: And pry means that? That was…there was a word in there.

Andrew: I know, it means open something when you want to get out.
L: So pry means open something. If you didn’t know what the word pry meant, what would you do?

Theresa: Ask a friend.

L: Ask a friend. Yes, you can ask a friend. OK, alrighty, thank you. I’ll be talking to you again tomorrow. I’m anxious to see that fire truck tomorrow too, and maybe we’ll see a woman firefighter. What do you think?

Many children: Yea!

L: I don’t know, it would be fun, right?

Martha: We’ll see lots of firefighters.

L: Yes, I think we will.

Eric: They’ll come down the chimney, whee, whee!

L: Down the chimney?

Through the dialogue in these focus group scenarios I showed how the children indicated they would seek the help of another person if they were unfamiliar with a word or didn’t understand the meaning of the story. Some children shared that they would ask a friend, the teacher, or their mom. The children also pointed out that they were pleased when a story was read more than once by either their teacher or a parent. Theresa suggested that multiple readings helped her learn to read, while Brandy protested that this activity helped her know the words. These are both insightful responses by the children, a part of their literacy awareness and growth.

The children’s responses of asking another person for help are also congruent with Vygotskian theory. The "social help of another human being" is (Yarochevsky, 1989, p.129) is one aspect that sets Vygotsky's theory apart from others. A
Vygotskian perspective holds that children within a social situation must be active participants in constructing their own knowledge. Language takes place within this social situation that serves as a key tool for mental development, whether through spoken, signed or gestured language. Language is the primary tool used to "mediate relations between two people" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 20). The children and Ms. Terrance actively used the tool of language to wonder, question, confirm, deny and negotiate on a consistent basis in a social environment to construct their own knowledge and make meaning in any given situation.

In this chapter I analyzed the research data collected that examined how a Master’s level teacher used scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in a Reggio-inspired early childhood classroom. I accomplished this by selecting transcribed vignettes that related to the coded categories and through the research literature associated with reading aloud, scaffolding, mediation, Vygotskian theories, and Reggio Emilia. I reported on the chosen exemplary vignettes in three parts: those socially constructed activities that happened before, during and after the read aloud sessions coordinated by the teacher, Ms. Terrance.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to examine how a Master’s level teacher uses scaffolding and mediation while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom. This case study was conducted in a Reggio-inspired preschool classroom situated in a middle class suburban area of Upstate New York. Eighteen children attended half-day sessions four days per week. One teacher and one teacher assistant worked collaboratively with the children to plan and implement activities in accord with the children’s curiosities and inquisitiveness. The data were collected during a three-
week observation period. After the data collection period, the data were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

The data were initially separated into three groups. These three groups were the events and dialogue that happened before, during and after each of the daily read aloud sessions. Within these categories, the codes of scaffolding and mediation were applied as appropriate. Delineating scaffolding and mediational techniques was a difficult task, as they often overlapped. The scaffolding and mediational strategies were then sub-divided further. Scaffolding techniques were coded as relational, questioning, print and illustration awareness, background and personal experiences, and hands-on experiences. Mediational techniques were coded as curriculum-related, physical and visual cues, questioning, print and illustration awareness and behavioral. Additional codes were added as the data became more familiar with each reading and review. These additional codes were: organizational, clarifying conversations, reviewing, repeating, pausing, negotiating, children writing text, children re-telling stories, and children’s focus groups.

Strengths of the Study

The fact that this research was a qualitative, observational single case study is in itself a strength. This chosen method allowed me to be an observer in a naturalistic setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) in only one preschool classroom, where I could focus on the process of reading aloud and collect volumes of descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). If multiple sites had been selected for the research, Creswell (2007) warns “The study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case” (p. 76).
The structure of a case study allowed me to examine the read aloud practices of one teacher at an in-depth level. The descriptive data of the transcriptions was so extensive; it was at times difficult to choose representative vignettes on which to report. Because case study research was the chosen method it allowed me to “understand [a] complex social phenomena” (Stake, 2000, p. 438), that of reading aloud, and best answer a “how” question (Stake, 2000, p. 438), that is: How does a Master’s level teacher use scaffolding and mediational strategies while reading aloud in an early childhood classroom?

Other strengths of the study include the bounded time-frame (Creswell, 2007) of three weeks spent in the classroom, the collection of vast amounts of data, such as the parent handbook, transcribed audiotapes of the read aloud stories, transcribed interviews with the teacher and focus groups with the children, photographs of the classroom, copies of the schedule of classroom activities, curriculum webs, children’s writings and drawings, and an inordinate amount of field notes collected in an Observational Protocol Journal, which included both descriptive and reflective comments.

The feedback given to me by the participant or member checker, the teacher herself, was also a powerful source of input as she read, verified and clarified the information written in the transcripts. I also did not linger at the research site. Instead, I left the Wicklow Hills Preschool when “exhaustion of resources; saturation of categories; emergence of regularities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 350) of the data had been satisfied. Additionally, I feel that the considerable time spent “describing the context or setting for the case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 93) serves as another strength of
this study. The thick, rich dialogue of the transcriptions and the lengthy description of each area of the early childhood classroom, allowed readers to create a visual picture to feel and experience the actual, authentic happenings and conversations of this classroom.

It may be unprecedented, uncommon, and even counter to case study protocol to name the teacher as a strength of any research, but I would be remiss if I did not do so in this situation. If Ms. Terrance had not delved into the process of co-constructing knowledge before, during and after reading aloud so completely and astutely, I would not have been able to collect the quality of data that I did with regard to scaffolding and mediation. The data would have been grossly different without the gifts and talents Ms. Terrance brought to the research situation. Outlined below are many strengths exhibited by Ms. Terrance, which in turn contributed to the overall strengths of the study.

The teacher in the classroom, Ms. Terrance, read aloud daily to a group of 18 four-year-old children for about 20-25 minutes. Ms. Terrance planned the read aloud sessions deliberately. She did not leave the read aloud session to chance, as is the practice of a number of early childhood teachers, who use reading aloud as a time-filler, a reward (Nielson, 1990) or as a transitional activity (Burton, 1993), instead of incorporating it into their daily lesson plans. Ms. Terrance’s read aloud practices did not. Rather, reading aloud in her classroom was a top priority and was well integrated into the remainder of the daily and weekly activities. In a previous study, Neuman (1999) found that 20% of teachers did not show any evidence of storybook reading in their daily schedules. Similarly, Dickinson and Tabor (2002) found that 25% of the
teachers reported planning read-alouds for more than 15 minutes, whereas, 17% of the teachers planned to read aloud 15 minutes or less per week (p. 16). Again, this did not happen in Ms. Terrance’s classroom, as she planned specifically and intentionally for each read aloud session. The children were well acquainted with the schedule and routine of the classroom and expected the read aloud event to happen accordingly.

Classroom projects often continued for a week or more, allowing the children to delve into the select topics in-depth. Ms. Terrance used “a piece of literature to forward a project and to see where the children’s interests lie” (Interview, October, 2009). She skillfully blended the interests of the children into the curriculum and allowed the children themselves to decide the direction of many of the projects, as she served as a facilitator throughout the whole process. This is consistent with the Reggio-inspired philosophy, and also the emergent curriculum promoted by Jones and Nimmo (1994) where teachers use the emerging and sometimes spontaneous interests of the children to competently plan the curriculum and provide the appropriate support and materials.

Ms. Terrance planned the read aloud sessions when there was plenty of time to not only read the text of the story, but also to dialogue about the picture book. Ms. Terrance believes that the dialogue and conversation surrounding the text is equal to, or greater than the importance of the text itself. She truly believed that meaning emerged from the conversation, and that the meaning did not lie in the printed text itself. This is consistent with research done by Taylor (1995) who insists, "literary meaning does not reside between the covers of a book" (p.158). That is, meaning is not in the text itself. Rather, meaning is made when there is give-and-take, and an on-
going exchange of knowledge (Englert et al., 1994; Hansen, 1998; Taylor, 1995). To illustrate her beliefs, Ms. Terrance artfully engaged the children in socially constructed conversations through open and close-ended questions, comments, probes, reviews, repetitions, clarifications, cues and negotiations. She was a guide or moderator of the conversations, always accepting each child’s comments without evaluation. She did not view her role as the holder and dispenser of all knowledge (Oyler, 1996), but rather saw the children as capable contributing members of the group. She allowed everyone’s voice to be heard and all suggestions to be considered.

Ms. Terrance used a plethora of scaffolding and mediational techniques before, during and after the read aloud sessions. She was extremely adept at incorporating scaffolding techniques of relationship building, open and close-ended probes and questioning, assisting the children in awakening their background knowledge and past experiences as they related to the text and illustrations, and integrated hands-on experiences with all content areas of the curriculum.

She used many verbal mediators. These include: oral speech, words written on a web coordinated simultaneously with the spoken word, classification and sorting words, such as small, medium and large, rhymes and fingerplays, behavioral phrases, such as “If you can hear me, put your finger on your nose,” and consistently repeated a child’s response throughout the conversations to confirm and validate for the other listening children. The visual mediators used by Ms. Terrance include: lists, diagrams, webs, photographs, real objects, maps, graphs, drawings, manipulatives, the children’s own drawings, small replicas of objects, such as people and animals, and blueprints.
Physical mediators were also infused into many activities throughout the day. These include: writing concept webs, word maps, fingerplays involving both oral language and physical movement, and classroom behavioral habits, such as, “Come to the green rug, sit with pretzel legs and get ready to listen to the story.”

These scaffolding and mediational techniques permeated every activity of the classroom and were well integrated with age-appropriate activities. These allowed the children to learn from each other and also learn from other adults.

The scaffolding techniques within the ZPD enabled the novice to perform at a higher level. With scaffolding the task itself is not changed, but what the learner initially does is made easier with assistance. Gradually the level of assistance decreases as the learner takes more responsibility for performance of the task. (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 42)

This was surely evident when the children memorized and re-told the story of The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969). As each child told and retold the story, with or without assistance from the CD, and as some children watched others re-tell the story, each re-telling became richer and more complete. Ms. Terrance realized the importance of having the children memorize lines of a story as a critical step for emerging readers. Therefore, she planned for and dedicated sufficient time for this age-appropriate literacy skill to develop.

The time spent in Ms. Terrance’s classroom revealed how much the adults and children thrived on dialogic conversations. Meaningful conversations occurred from the time the children entered the room with their parents at the start of the afternoon, and continued for the remainder of the two-and-a-half hour session. Socially
constructed conversations happened not only before, during and after the read aloud sessions, but also during block building, dress-up play, writing, drawing, music, snack time, and during creative arts projects. This classroom could be considered not only a print-rich environment, but also, most especially, a conversation-rich environment. A print-rich environment is very obvious when one walks into the room. The walls are covered with text appearing in poems, stories, songs, children’s dictation, experience charts, labels, functional information and directions. The shelves are filled with hundreds of books spread out around the room, various sizes of paper, envelopes, stamps, pencils, crayons, markers, paint, magazines and newspapers. All of these essential materials appeared in Ms. Terrance’s classroom. However, the quality of the conversations made this environment remarkable.

A conversation-rich environment is much less obvious. One has to linger and listen, as was done in this observational case study with Ms. Terrance. Ms. Terrance exuded a love of literature by the way she personally interacted with the text that then infected the children’s attitudes and feelings toward reading and literature. If teachers and parents instill in children the desire and love of reading, the first hurdle to becoming a competent reader is often overcome (Burton, 1993; Clark, 1984; Snow & Ninio, 1986). Becoming a literate person is also a source of power for children as they soon realize that being literate can open many doors for them (Burton, 1993).

Ms. Terrance actively involved the children as equal partners in reading the stories by encouraging their participation in related movements and sound effects. The children’s talk and dialogue was legitimized as they freely conversed with both peers and other adults. Children were never silenced in this classroom. Ms. Terrance
valued community building and joint problem-solving as was evident when one child noticed the missing steering wheel on the farm tractor. Minutes later several children joined together to rectify the situation.

Limitations of the Study

This case study had several limitations, as it is merely “a slice if life” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 377). It was limited by the fact that it took place in only one preschool classroom, for a short three-week duration. An extended period of time for observation and data collection would have provided more information. Ms. Terrance was hand-selected to be the subject of this research because she was a Master’s level teacher who skillfully used scaffolding and mediational strategies before, during and after reading aloud. She sought out and highly valued the contributions of the children during dialogic exchanges as part of her established practice. The children in the study were not selected by any criteria, but were those children randomly registered in Ms. Terrance’s afternoon class. The children also were not placed into ability groups, but rather, the whole class participated in read aloud sessions. Therefore, as expected, the children were at various developmental levels in all areas and brought miscellaneous skills to the setting. Another configuration of registered children might have exhibited different abilities in literacy and language development, and thus, their ability to sustain a dialogic interchange before, during and after reading aloud might have been analyzed differently. Conducting this study in multiple classrooms or sites, with multiple teachers, would also alter the evidence collected and lead to a different analysis.
In the Literature Review, the controversy of reading aloud in small or large group settings was addressed, and creates another limitation of the study. During the three-week observation period for this study, a small group read aloud session only occurred twice. Both times the small group of four or five children convened on the green circle rug with the assistant for only a short time left in the scheduled day.

Presently, there is no agreement as to whether reading aloud in small or large groups is the better choice to promote socially constructed dialogue. Both of these configurations have benefits and drawbacks. Jalongo (2004) suggests that the size of the read-aloud group for an early childhood classroom should only be twice the age of the children involved. If this guideline were applied to Ms. Terrance’s classroom, the size of the preferred read-aloud group would have been eight children. This did not occur on a day-to-day basis. Ms. Terrance regularly read to a group of 17-18 children. Mandel Morrow (1990) believes small group read-alouds extend, repeat and elaborate on what other children say during the session. The children in a small group read aloud are more prone to use words, phrases and nonverbal gestures that their peers more readily understand (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978). Hansen (1998) and Mandel Morrow (1990) also agree that small group read-alouds offer children a more supportive environment for risk-taking. The children may feel more comfortable in a small group and, therefore, take a risk to articulate their feelings, discuss a related problem, or exchange views on a similar experience.

However, several educators feel differently about the size of the read aloud group. Cohen (1968) and Feitelson et al. (1986) found that whole group story reading showed an increase in children's comprehension, decoding ability and vocabulary
development. In their study, reading aloud to whole groups of young children proved to be a very viable and valuable practice. Critical skills needed for literacy development showed improvement despite the size of the group. Hansen (1998), however, questions how many times each child could effectively contribute to the socially constructed dialogue if the reading took place in a large group setting with 17-18 children. It is clear from the contributions of these educators that a controversy remains, as was discussed in the Literature Review. Since small group read aloud sessions only happened twice in the three-week observation period, a valid analysis could not be delineated for this study.

However, Ms. Terrance conscientiously chose quality read aloud stories that captured the children’s interests and intrigue, stories that contained clear and meaningful illustrations, and stories that lent themselves to the hands-on long-range projects that are firmly ingrained and indicative of the characteristics of a Reggio-inspired classroom. If Ms. Terrance had chosen other read aloud stories, or those of a lesser literary quality, again the data collected and analyzed would be different in nature.

Another limitation of this observational single case study is its determinate generalizability. However, I chose to do a case study precisely because I wanted “to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 1998, p. 208). Two definitions are offered to define the term, generalizability: “A study that [sets] forth findings that are expected to be true in samples of persons and situations beyond those studied” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 71) and a study that examines “whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the
specific research subjects and the setting involved” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 32).

This completed case study conducted at Wicklow Hills Preschool has limited
generalizability due to the fact that the program espoused the Reggio Emilia
approach. Given similar characteristics where two professionals, such as Ms.Terrance
and Ms. Seneca, who are steeped with knowledge of Reggio, and who have
established an environment where extensive dialogue is primary, and who have
established a community of learners where the children help guide the activities and
implement long-range projects centered around their own interests, then similar
results could be found. Presently, there are few of these sites in New York State,
although Reggio-inspired schools are increasing in numbers around the country. If a
similar preschool, with similarly trained teachers, who share the Reggio-inspired
philosophy, can be located, then similar results could be obtained. However, if this
environment cannot be replicated in other situations, or if the findings cannot be
found true in other situations, then the generalizability of this study is indeed
restricted.

Firestone (as cited in Merriam, 1998) does, however, offer an alternate
viewpoint by suggesting the term “reader or user generalizability” and states:

Reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study’s
findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations. Called
case-to-case transfer, it is the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study
that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply? (p. 211)

The last limitation of the study I will discuss concerns the transcriptions. When
transcribing the audiotapes of the teacher and children’s conversations I had planned to
use a modified version of a two-column format suggested by Ochs (1979, p. 59). When planning my study I originally chose this format and adapted it so the transcriptions, which are the “researcher’s data” (Ochs, 1979, p. 45), as efficiently as possible would indicate the overlapping conversations so often present when young children communicate. However, when I started transcribing the audiotapes using the two columns, reading the conversational exchanges became a struggle and confusing for the reader. The physical eye-sweep movement required to move back and forth from column to column created a disjointedness and interrupted the flow of the dialogue. Therefore, I wrote the transcriptions in the traditional top-to-bottom, left-to-right progression to facilitate reading the text. I will use two of Ochs’ (1979) symbols for verbal transcriptions, and one non-verbal transcription code from Bloom (1974). The list of these symbols appears in Appendix F.

However, given these limitations, the study does provide us insights into what a conscientious teacher can accomplish when choosing high quality literature, who skillfully uses scaffolding and mediational strategies and who deliberately plans the before, during and after read aloud projects that are meaningful, hands-on, and intrinsically related to the curriculum. Therefore, the study provides us insights into the ways in which reading aloud can contribute to student learning as we examine classrooms similarly structured with excellent teachers to see the degree to which they accomplish similar results.

**Connections with Prior Research**

The observational case study completed in Ms. Terrance’s preschool classroom has many connections to past research. These links assist in adding to, and
moving forward, the body of knowledge about early literacy, specifically with regard to dialogic reading aloud, scaffolding and mediation, and the Reggio-Emilia approach.

First, a study completed by Hansen (1998) in a kindergarten classroom with five-year-olds was consistent with this study done with four-year-old preschool children at Wicklow Hills. In both instances, the children were able to "hold their theory of the world up to their personal interpretations of story" (p.126). In Hansen’s (1998) study, this comment was made in reference to the children listening to the story *Strega Nona* (1975). However, this same statement could also be applied to the books read aloud in Ms. Terrance’s room. In each and every case, the children and teacher participated collaboratively in give-and-take dialogue to learn from each other. They questioned, confirmed, denied, extended, agreed, disagreed and wondered. Hansen (1998) reports: “knowledge was gained through talk about the story, personal experiences were connected to the story, and risk-taking was eased as the children felt the support of the group in learning more about the world” (p. 127).

In Ms. Terrance’s room similar observations were made. For example, knowledge was gained when the children learned about the Caldecott medal when reading *A Tree is Nice* (1956), when they compared various habitats when reading *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* (1981), and when they learned the process of metamorphosis when reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969). Children connected their personal experiences to the story when reading *Building a House* (1981) and *The Fire Engine Book* (1989). One young girl shared that a moving van had come to her grandparent’s house to transport their belongings to a new home,
similar to the scenario after the completion of the new house in the story. When talking about fires, fire prevention, fire safety, and the anticipated visit from the firefighters, one girl shared with her classmates that a fire truck had indeed come to her house and transported her to the hospital. A boy shared that on his way to school, he and his Dad had driven past the neighborhood fire station and saw the firefighters washing the fire engines.

During the children’s focus groups I conducted, all the children seemed to be at ease, as everyone was eager to share their thoughts and ideas and build upon each other’s comments. All the children joyfully took a risk to contribute to the conversation, with a relatively unknown person in their classroom, to tell me what the story was about, what words they didn’t understand, and to again relate their own personal experiences. They were so eager to share that after about ten minutes, I felt the need to curtail the focus group conversations to allow the remainder of each afternoon’s activities to proceed.

This study in Ms. Terrance’s room also connects to a previous research study completed by Englert (1994) and her colleagues. In this study they compared the effects of two different interventions while reading aloud. They found that the intervention that included dialogue, social interactions and scaffolding (POSSE—Predict, Organize, Search, Summarize, Evaluate) created the greatest gains as opposed to the intervention (K-W-L—What We Know, What We Want to Know, What We Learned) that did not include the socially constructed dialogue. While the case study conducted in Ms. Terrance’s classroom was not a comparative one, the children together with Ms. Terrance used a modified version of the POSSE approach.
POSSE is a “comprehensive procedure that was designed to support dialogic interactions among teachers and students” (Englert et al., 1994). POSSE builds upon three assumptions: knowledge is a social and cultural construction (Bruffee, 1986); higher mental functions have their origins in social and dialogic interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991); and higher mental functions develop as adults provide guidance and support in children’s zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Similar to one component of Englert’s et al. (1994) comparative study, the children together with Ms. Terrance constructed knowledge within both a social and cultural context. The social and cultural context was the cohort of the preschool children functioning together in the literate community of the classroom along with the teacher and assistant, as they jointly and actively constructed and negotiated meaning. The use of higher mental functions was apparent when Ms. Terrance asked the children to think of the letters contained in each of their names, so they could dismiss from group time in an orderly fashion to commence with their project work. Ms. Terrance provided both guidance and support to two children within their own individual ZPDs when she ascertained whether these two children with special language learning challenges, could identify two parts of a plant shown in the book. She used the visual scaffold of the actual illustration, pointed to the pictures in question and asked each child the identity of the leaf and the vine when reading the story, *Pumpkins* (2006).

The students in Englert's et al. (1994) POSSE study learned and used strategies that included frequent turn-taking, overlapping talk, self-nomination
(volunteering information) and co-narration of the read-aloud story. These, too, were evident in the Wicklow Hills preschool classroom and create another link between this study and past studies. Children took turns contributing to the dialogue, even though at times, Ms.Terrance reminded them that she couldn’t hear everyone at once; there was an abundance of overlapping talk due to the children’s excitement and authentic interest in the stories; children volunteered information at phenomenal rates as is evident in the selected vignettes, and the children re-told the story of The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) both in groups, taking turns with the dialogue of the text, and individually, either with or without the scaffold of the CD.

Another study that has connections to the study done at Wicklow Hills Preschool is one by Dickinson and Keebler (1989). In this study, one of the teachers was labeled as giving a performance-type reading of the story as she modulated her voice to dramatize the actions of the characters. She required silence from the children, proper posture, and never asked any questions. She had complete control over the reading and was definitely in charge. Therefore, employing this style of reading aloud she did not create any socially constructed meaning-making during the story, nor did she use any scaffolding or mediation. This style is different than the style of reading aloud preferred by Ms. Terrance where she became the "human being" in the phrase "the social help of another human being" (Yarochevsky, 1989, p. 129) to scaffold the meaning making. In one of our interviews, Ms. Terrance stated in her own words a statement similar to Oyler’s (1996). By listening to the children and their comments and questions, the teacher "gains insight into the connections students are making between the text and their lives, between the text and their current
schema, and between the text and other texts” (p. 150). The actions and practices of Ms. Terrance disconfirm the findings regarding this one teacher mentioned in Dickinson and Keebler’s (1989) study.

Ms. Terrance was extremely conscientious in incorporating many concepts of print and book awareness concepts while planning activities before, during and after the read aloud sessions. She pointed out the conventions of print advanced by Clay’s (1991) research, directionality (Jalongo, 2004), that books have authors, illustrators and publishers (Snow & Goldfield, 1983; Moss, 1996; Taylor, 1995), that print is stable (Conlon, 1992), and that it remains the same throughout repeated readings (Schickedanz, 1986; Snow & Ninio, 1986).

While reading aloud to children Ms. Terrance always created a quality experience, which Meyer et al. (1994) contend is a critical piece in literacy development. However, the research of Hoffman et al. (1993) question the quality of the actual reading of the text itself in many classrooms. They argue that the quality of reading is often very poor in most early childhood classrooms. If this is true, reading aloud may not contribute to a student’s socially constructed meaning making and literacy growth. The caution created by Hoffman et al. (1993) study, however, was not confirmed in the preschool class at Wicklow Hills. Instead, an environment that was contrary to their warnings was firmly in place, as was shown through the rich, high caliber, first-rate, dialogues presented in the selected vignettes.

The selected vignettes also show an abundance of interruptions happening during the read aloud sessions. However, reading the story through without interruptions is supported by the research of Neuman (1999) who feels this procedure
enables children to “hear the language and rhythm of the text” (p. 295) and to savor the aesthetic qualities of good literature (Barrantine, 1996; Neuman, 1999). Additionally, Mandel Morrow’s (1990) research concluded that when children interrupt, precious learning time is lost in redirection, and that often the children’s comments are off topic. Conversely, Ms. Terrance welcomed these interruptions and during one of the interviews quipped that she couldn’t imagine reading a story completely through without any interruptions. If a child’s comment seemed irrelevant in Ms. Terrance’s classroom, she directly asked the child if the comment was connected to the story. If the comment was truly extraneous, Ms. Terrance either asked the child to hold the question until later, or figured out collaboratively with the child how the idea in the story reminded him of something from his own life experiences. An example of this happened when Ms. Terrance was reading *A Tree is Nice* (1956). One young boy started talking about saying prayers. At first glance, prayers and the Caldecott medal shared nothing in common. When Ms. Terrance questioned him further, the young boy said he received a medal when he went to church and said his prayers. In the child’s mind there was indeed a connection. The medal on the front of the award-winning book, connected with the child’s prior experiences of earning his own medal. The child’s background knowledge had been awakened and the teacher helped the youngster to make meaning and links between both these events. The child was not silenced.

Ms. Terrance, however, abided by the research of Oyler (1996), Dyson (1987) and Nikola-Lisa (1992) who support interruptions. These researchers suggest that what some teachers see as "digressions" (p. 150), when a child interrupts a story with
a question or comment, could actually be seen as an active attempt at meaning-making. The practices employed during reading aloud by Ms. Terrance exhibited her complete agreement with these past research studies as evident in the vignettes that included multiple and continuous interruptions. Ms. Terrance did not view these as negative interruptions, but rather, the place where all meaning-making originated. She viewed interruptions as essential elements of the reading aloud process. In addition to positively viewed interruptions, Ms. Terrance also used the scaffolding technique of re-reading a story to aid in clarification, knowledge building and vocabulary development. Ms. Terrance re-read the story *The Fire Engine Book* (1989). During the second reading, the children and the teacher discussed in more depth, new vocabulary words, such as: gas mask, extinguisher, crowbar, life net and search light, which proved consistent with Oyler’s (1996), Dyson’s (1987) and Nikola-Lisa’s (1992) prior studies.

The last link with previous research studies that I will discuss was done by Burton (1993). In this study, teachers received in-service training about mediational strategies to use before, during and after the read aloud sessions. After completion of the workshops, the teachers in Burton’s (1993) study remained reluctant to use these new strategies. Instead, they reverted back to strategies they were comfortable with; those that were posed by the basal readers, those that used close-ended questions, and ones that did not address children’s in-depth thinking skills. The findings in Burton’s (1993) study are not consistent with the findings in this recently completed study in Ms. Terrance’s preschool classroom, where the conversations were inundated with scaffolding and mediational strategies. The dialogue in the Wicklow Hills Preschool
was rich and in-depth, addressed meaning-making, was socially and collaboratively constructed, addressed each child’s ZPD as needed, was inclusive, appreciated, and valued. At no time was any child silenced, but rather, all children were allowed and encouraged to participate, engage, and become contributing members of this Reggio-inspired preschool learning community.

**Implications of the Research**

During the time I spent conducting case study research at the Wicklow Hills Preschool and the time spent writing and analyzing the data, I had time to reflect upon the information gleaned from the research relating to reading aloud in Chapter Two and the data collected at the research site. I offer the following suggestions for early childhood teachers. First, and foremost, schedule a time for reading aloud on a daily basis if this has not been a prior practice. Be intentional about setting aside some time, then try to assure that enough time has been allocated to engage in dialogue between the reading adult and the children. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) remind early childhood educators of the importance of extended dialogue by stating, “read[ing] to them in small groups and talk[ing] with them about the stories. Especially rich in linguistic payoff is extended discourse; that is, conversation between child and adult on a given topic sustained over many exchanges” (p. 7). Sufficient time set aside specifically allows for this extended discourse.

In Ms. Terrance’s classroom most of the reading aloud took place in large groups. However, in an ideal classroom with no time constraints or other outside influences, reading in small groups would be optimal. Children in small groups extend, repeat and elaborate on what other children say (Mandel Morrow, 1990).
These children are more prone to use words, phrases and nonverbal gestures that their peers more readily understand (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978). The small group setting also offers children a more supportive environment for risk-taking (Hanson, 1998; Mandel Morrow, 1990). The actual ideas brought forth can be challenged or attacked, rather than the child who articulates the ideas (Hansen, 1998; Wells, 1986).

Early childhood professionals also need to be intentional with their teaching. This includes reading aloud. The intentional teacher,

Acts purposefully, with a goal in mind and a plan for accomplishing it.

Intentional acts originate from careful thought and are accompanied by consideration of their potential effects. Thus, an intentional teacher aims at clearly defined learning objectives for children, employs instructional strategies likely to help children achieve objectives, and continually assesses progress and adjusts the strategies based on that assessment. The teacher who can explain just why she is doing what she is doing is acting intentionally—whether she is using a strategy tentatively for the first time or automatically from long practice, as part of an elaborate set up or spontaneously in a teachable moment. (Epstein, 2007, p. 4)

Teachers need to carefully plan for and integrate the read aloud story with the whole curriculum. Jalongo (2004) suggests that books be connected to the curriculum, lend themselves to storytelling and dramatization and have the appropriate amount of new vocabulary words. Young children “enjoy learning new words” (p. 56) and also “delight in learning new words and putting together known words to form a new meaning or to play on the words” (Nekovei & Ermis, 2006, p.
Jalongo (2004) continues when she reminds early childhood educators regarding the importance of including picture books as an integral part of their curriculum. She states,

A common teacher misconception is that sharing picture books is a separate activity to be reserved for a storytime of a few minutes a day. Actually, teachers who are successful in promoting literacy infuse picture books into their entire program, by making their classrooms and centers places where books are shared, recommended, connected with all curricular areas, and supportive of the goals of diversity. (p. 136)

Early childhood teachers who support developmentally and age-appropriate practices incorporate and integrate as many content area subjects as possible throughout the day. These include: language and literacy, science and nature, social studies, math, health, safety and social skills.

The last implication and recommendation I set forth is to suggest that early childhood teachers let go of the need to be in charge of the classroom, and especially the conversation during a read aloud session. Given the opportunity young children will show how capable they really are and how knowledgable they have become in just a few short years of life. Many times the child is the expert from whom adults and other children alike can learn about a new topic or develop a new skill. Teachers need to sit back, listen and observe more often than is presently the case. By practicing these less obtrusive skills, ideas, concepts, and interests emerge from the children. The children’s ideas can then be the basis for future activities and curricular-related themes. As practitioners in Reggio-inspired classrooms confirm, “The
curriculum is not child centered or teacher directed. The curriculum is child originated and teacher framed” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 240). Teachers need to blend the interests of the children into the curriculum and allow the children themselves to decide the direction of many of the projects. Early childhood teachers need to adopt the role of facilitator rather than that of a director.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Several suggestions for future research studies emerge as this case study draws to a close. These possible studies enable us to look further at teaching practices and students’ learning.

First, more studies need to be done with Master’s level teachers who are identified as such. Longevity and experience in an early childhood classroom brings a special kind of knowledge and skill set that cannot be replicated by less experienced professionals. Spending quality time and taking part in quality dialogic experiences with young children are crucial characteristics in constructing environments where meaning making is socially and collaboratively constructed and where all facets of the curriculum are integrated through the classroom literacy practices. This expert type of pedagogical practice does not develop overnight, but rather needs time and experience to evolve. A multisite or multi-classroom comparative study could be designed to observe the practices of first or second year early childhood educators in contrast to more veteran educators with 15 or 20 years’ experience. It is possible, however, that present college level course work that integrates recent research on literary learning with exemplary student teaching experiences could prepare less experienced professionals with the skill sets needed to create such conversation-rich
and curriculum-integrated environments. A comparison study of this type could add critical information to the literature.

A second suggestion for future research would be organized around one or more early childhood teacher’s reflections about dialogic interactions and the social construction of knowledge. More educational institutions need to encourage teachers to reflect on their own practices, as often the execution of the lesson is primary and the practice of reflection or deliberate contemplation takes a secondary position.

A third topic for future research would be an expanded study of student focus groups after a read aloud session. Much information was gleaned from these discussions as the children shared their thoughts, ideas, insights, and confusions. Due to time limitations, and the fact that these young children had already been sitting for 20-25 minutes to listen to the story read aloud, and were becoming quite restless, only about ten minutes per day was devoted to this aspect in Ms. Terrance’s room. Conducting these focus groups at alternate times during the day might have been a reasonable compromise. However, after the group meeting for the read aloud story, the children dispersed to participate in other projects and activities.

A fourth idea for future research is a longitudinal one. A one year study would allow us to follow the children over an extended period of time to learn whether and how reading aloud assisted in students’ language learning. Does it affect some children more than others? Does it make a difference in terms of where they are in their language learning?

Further, a two or three-year study would ascertain how children, who experienced a preschool program where knowledge was collaboratively and socially
constructed, functioned and used these skills in a kindergarten and first grade classroom. Were the children able to carry-over these skills and use them effectively? What happens to the skills acquired in preschool when a child is placed in an environment where these skills are squelched in deference to covering the curriculum and preparing the children for future tests?

Reggio-inspired classrooms and schools are few in number in many areas of the country. Consequently, a large body of research does not exist. Many studies have been done in the actual Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, but studies done on how this philosophy is implemented in the United States are just beginning to take place. As the Reggio-inspired philosophy makes greater in-roads in this country more data will be needed. No other studies could be found that examined how the Vygotskian constructs of scaffolding and mediation were implemented in Reggio-inspired classrooms. This case study could also be replicated.

The last suggestion for future research is a study that would examine separately three aspects that Ms. Terrance so adeptly orchestrated in this case study. How is knowledge constructed with young children when a story is read aloud as a “stand-alone experience”, and one that does not include any dialogue, scaffolding and mediational strategies? How does this change if dialogue, scaffolding and mediation are added? How does the picture change again if hands-on-experiences or extensions of the literature are then added to the experience?

In conclusion, the children in Ms. Terrance’s preschool classroom were empowered by the practices employed in that environment. The teacher and assistant both embraced and exhibited positive attitudes towards books, literacy and learning in
They collaboratively established a dialogic and supportive environment where the children emulated and embraced these practices and attitudes as well. In this Reggio-inspired classroom the children’s authentic voices were heard, celebrated and allowed to shine brightly for all to hear.
References


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Appendix A

Parent/Guardian General Consent Form

Study Title: How is Meaning Made While Reading Aloud to Young Children?

Principal Investigator: Jeanne Loysen and David Hursh

Introduction: This form describes a research study that I am asking your children to participate in. I am studying how children make sense of a story that is read.
aloud to them by their teacher and how they interact with the teacher and each other while listening to the story.

This study is being conducted by Jeanne Loysen of the University of Rochester’s Warner School of Education and Human Development.

Your child has been asked to participate in this study because he/she is a student in the afternoon 4-day per week session at Wicklow Hills Preschool.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the process of how four-year-old children make sense of a story that is read aloud to them by their teacher.

**Description of Study Procedures:**

If you agree to allow your child to participate, I will observe large group, read-aloud sessions between the teacher and your children will be audio-taped, as well as any books read aloud to individual or small groups of children throughout the afternoon session for 12 days. After the stories are read aloud, the children as a whole group will be asked to respond orally to questions related to the stories.

**Number of Subjects:** I anticipate to enroll 19 subjects including the classroom teacher.

**Risks of Participation:** There will be minimal risk associated with this study. The children will be observed during their regular half-day sessions with their teacher.

**Benefits to Participation:** Your child may improve their communication skills within a group. In addition, the teacher may be able to use the information gleaned from this study to improve and adjust her literacy instruction.

**Confidentiality of Records:** All audiotapes, daily reflections, transcript logs, field notes, daily schedule and interviews will be kept in a locked home office and on a password protected home computer to protect the identity of the subjects involved.

**Contact Persons:** For more information about this research study, please contact Jeanne Loysen 585-288-1276.

If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the Human Subject Protection Specialist at the University of Rochester Research Subjects Review Board, Box 315, 601 Elmwood Avenue, Rochester, NY 14642-8315, Telephone (585) 276-0005. For long-distance you may call toll-free (877) 449-4441.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child is free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. In the event that you do
Withdraw your child from this study, I will keep the information collected confidential.

Signature/Dates:
Subject Permission
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my permission to allow my child to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.

Study Subject: ___________________________Print Name

Study subject: ___________________________Signature

_______________ Date

Person Obtaining Consent
I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form for their child. I will provide the subject’s parents with a copy of this form. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subjects were solicited and answered to the parent’s satisfaction. In my judgment, the parent has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

____________________________________ Print Name and Title

____________________________________ Signature

_______________ Date

Appendix B

Wicklow Hills Preschool Consent

Date:  October, 2009

Study title:  Reading Aloud to Young Children

Principal Investigator:  Jeanne Loysen
Jeanne Loysen, the Principal Investigator from the University of Rochester is conducting a study to examine the process of reading aloud in a preschool classroom.

The study involves collecting data through observation, audiorecording, photography, child-produced work, transcriptions, daily reflective notes, descriptive field notes and interviews with the teacher, and through focus groups with the children. The data collected will be used to determine how the teacher and children collaboratively make sense of the text while reading aloud. Participation in the study will be kept confidential. Only the Principal Investigator and classroom teacher will have access to the data collected.

I hereby give my permission for Jeanne Loysen to utilize data from Ms. Terrance’s classroom regarding the process of reading aloud.

Signature ________________________________

Print Name ________________________________

Title ________________________________

Date ________________________________

Appendix C

Warner School Consent

Date: October, 2009

To: Ms. Terrance

I have been an early childhood educator for over three decades and I am completing my Doctoral Degree at the University of Rochester. As an early
childhood educator, I am interested in how teachers of young children use the process of reading aloud in their classrooms.

As part of my dissertation I will spend three weeks in your classroom to observe how you and your students interact and make meaning while reading aloud a story in your classroom. I will observe in your pre-kindergarten classroom from 12:15 until 2:45pm.

Please note that your participation in my study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

This study is completely confidential. Neither you nor your school will be identified by name. Your participation is greatly appreciated, as it is essential to the completion of this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: The Human Subjects Protection Specialist at the University of Rochester Subjects Review Board, 585-276-0005, for long distance you may call toll-free, 877-449-4441.

Thank you for your time and support.

Best regards,

Jeanne Loysen

Appendix D

Participant/Member Checker Letter of Consent
Warner School Letter Head

October, 2009

I have agreed to serve as a Critical Friend in Jeanne Loysen’s research for her Dissertation study at the University of Rochester. I understand that our conversations will be audiotaped and transcribed and that portions of those conversations may appear in her Dissertation. I will have the opportunity to read and review the transcripts and the way in which these are used in the Dissertation.
Appendix E

Bibliography of Children’s Books

Pre-Day 1  Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain (1981) by Verna Aardema
           Illustrated by Beatriz Vidal

Pre-Day 2  Rumble in the Jungle (2001) by Giles Andreae
           Illustrated by David Wojtowycz

Pre-Day 3  Rumble in the Jungle (2001) by Giles Andreae
           Illustrated by David Wojtowycz

Day 1     The Fire Station (1983) by Robert Munsch
           Illustrated by Michael Martchenko

Day 2     The Fire Engine Book (1989) by Jesse Younger
           Illustrated by Aurelius Battaglia
Day 3  The Fire Engine Book (1989) by Jesse Younger
       Illustrated by Aurelius Battaglia

Day 4  The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969) by Eric Carle
       Illustrated by Eric Carle

Day 5  Fall Changes (2001) by Ellen Senisi
       Photography by Ellen Senisi

Day 6  A Tree is Nice (1956) by Janice May Udry
       Illustrated by Marc Simont

Day 7  It's Pumpkin Time (1999) by Zoe Hall
       Illustrated by Shari Halpern

Day 8  Pumpkins (2006) by Ken Robbins
       Photography by Ken Robbins

Day 9  Pumpkins (2006) by Ken Robbins
       Photography by Ken Robbins

Day 10 Runaway Pumpkins (2004) by Diane Ochiltree
       Illustrated by Anne-Sophie Lanquetin

Day 11 Building a House (1981) by Byron Burton
       Illustrations by Byron Burton

Day 12 “The Pumpkin Song” by Mary Ann Hall (1980), adapted by Bev Bos, Michael Leeman and Tom Hunter
       Song and story re-enacted by children using felt board
Appendix F

Verbal Transcription Codes

1. Intonation, prosodic quality
   ! marks exclamatory utterance
   place , ? . ! at end of utterance

2. Metatranscription ( ) unclear reading
   marks

   (Ochs, 1979)

Non-verbal Transcription Code

1. Change in gross motor activity
   Use simple present tense to describe action (Bloom, 1974)
Appendix G

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Reading Aloud

Materials: This protocol
Pen, paper
Tape recorder

Thank you for your willingness to be a part of my research project at the University of Rochester and the time you’re taking today to talk with me about your classroom, specifically reading aloud. All the information you share with me today will be held in confidence. Do you have any questions before we get started? Do you have any objections to having this interview audiotaped to allow me to gain as much information as possible? If at any time you want me to stop recording, please let me know. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can ask me to stop at any time.

I’ll start my asking you a few questions about yourself.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   Probes:
   a. How long have you been teaching preschool?
   b. How long have you been teaching at this school?
   c. Did you ever teach any other level?

2. Tell me about your educational background.
   Probes:
1. Where did you attend college, what degrees did you earn, what major did you pursue?
2. Did your professors ever talk about reading aloud?
3. Did you take any courses specifically about reading aloud at the undergraduate, graduate level?
4. Did you ever get to practice reading aloud while student teaching? If you did, tell me about it.
5. How did your Cooperating teacher address reading aloud during your student teaching experience?

3. Tell me your thoughts about reading aloud.
   Probes:
   a. How often do you read aloud to your students now?
   b. What do you see as any benefits and/or drawbacks of reading aloud?
   c. Has your viewpoint of reading aloud changed over time? If so, how has it changed?

4. Tell me how you conduct a read aloud session in your classroom. Can you describe what it looks like when you read aloud in your classroom?
   Probes:
   a. What methods or strategies do you use to assist the children in meaning making while reading aloud?
   b. How do you check for children’s knowledge while reading aloud?
   c. Do you reflect upon any conversations you have with the children about reading aloud? If so, how and when do you do this reflection—journaling, talking with colleague?
   d. Do you converse and interact with the children about stories after reading aloud, next day, next week? If so, how do you do this?
   e. Tell me how you adapt your reading aloud sessions to children’s individual needs.
   f. Tell me how you select books and prepare for a reading aloud session in your classroom.

5. Tell me about your involvement in Reggio Emilia.
   Probes:
   a. Tell me about any changes that have happened since your school adopted the Reggio Emilia approach.
   b. How does your classroom and preschool as a whole differ now since using Reggio Emilia (environment, materials, activities, parent involvement etc.)?
   c. Do you conduct your reading aloud sessions any differently? If so, how do they differ since using Reggio Emilia (new strategies, different child involvement)?

6. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me today?
Thank you again for the time you spent talking with me today and sharing your thoughts and perspectives.

Appendix H

Time Line for the Research Study

PRE-DAY ONE: Get acquainted with teacher, children and other staff. Talk with parents about the study and pass out Consent Forms. Meet again with teacher, Director of Early Childhood Programs and Principal. Begin Reflective Journal and unofficial videotaping.


DAY ONE: Begin official audio-recording, transcribing, writing descriptive field notes. Begin collecting other data and artifacts.

DAY TWO: On-going as in Day One. Interview teacher daily through informal chats.

DAY THREE: Begin taking photos of classroom. Have the classroom teacher read transcriptions after sessions 3, 6, 9 and 12. Conduct formal interviews with teacher
after sessions 3, 6, 9 and 12.

DAY FOUR thru EIGHT: Continue on-going activities, such as data collection, audio-recording, transcription of field notes.

DAY NINE: On-going activities as in Day One and Two and third formal interview with teacher.

DAY TEN and ELEVEN: On-going activities as in day One and Two.

DAY TWELVE: On-going activities and conduct the fourth and final interview with teacher.

RETURN VISITS: Clarify, confirm, disconfirm any information.

Appendix I

Observational Protocol Journal Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LENGTH OF ACTIVITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTIVE NOTES</td>
<td>REFLECTIVE NOTES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Environment/materials

Teacher
Appendix J

Focus Group Questions

What was today’s story about?

What do you do if you don’t understand what is happening in the story, or if you don’t understand a word?

Were there any words in today’s story that you didn’t understand?
Appendix K

Photographs of Classroom

Photo 1: Shelves with blocks, glass stones and manipulatives
Photo 2: Shelf with photo of Peruvian woman, baskets and small animals

Photo 3: Unit blocks, trucks, tree logs, animals and globe
Photo 4: Hollow blocks, baskets with tools, puppets and musical instruments

Photo 5: Colored vases, dried gourd, shadow box with glass, postcard
Photo 6: Silk flower arrangement, wicker baskets with writing supplies

Photo 7: Farm wagon made from shoe box and wooden disks
Photo 8: Slide at farm market made from cardboard tubes
Photo 9: Cut tree branch in center of room with bee hive, pine cones, large log, magnifying glasses and seashells