

**Shared reading interactions:
identifying and developing reading
behaviours between parents and preschool children**

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Vol. I

A thesis submitted to the University of Sheffield for the degree of PhD in
the Department of Education

December 2003

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Peter Hannon for his help and encouragement over the last three years. Thanks also to Caroline Pickstone who helped conduct the assessments in Study 1 and to my mother, Janet Kirkpatrick who carefully coded a proportion of the transcripts in Study 2. I also wish to thank Marcin Szczerbinski for his statistical advice. The contributions of those who read and commented on the draft, Ed and Clare Morgan, are also gratefully acknowledged.

Thanks are also due to those who funded this research; to Fox Hill and Parson Cross Sure Start who provided a grant for books in Study 1 and to the ESRC who provided a two-year research studentship. Finally, thanks to all the families who participated in the research.

Abstract

Research has shown that parent-child shared reading interactions in the preschool period can enhance children's early language and literacy skills, and it is acknowledged that the way parents read with their children is particularly important. This thesis explores the shared reading behaviours of parents and young children in order to identify and develop reading behaviours, especially those that may promote language and literacy skills. Two studies are reported. First, a short, intensive, techniques-based reading intervention programme, called 'dialogic reading' designed to enhance children's language skills was carried out using an experimental design. Programme group parents were shown a number of 'dialogic' techniques to use when reading with their children. Interviews showed that parents were implementing the techniques and that they valued the programme. The early literacy skills of the programme group were significantly enhanced by the intervention although there were no effects on their language skills.

The second study explored in some depth how parents and children read together, and whether behaviours that promoted language and literacy development could be identified. Eight mothers with three-year-old children from varying socio-economic backgrounds were videotaped reading together. Two methods of analysis were employed: a holistic and a more systematic approach. There were substantial differences in the ways mothers and children read, although all mothers used a wide variety of reading behaviours. There was evidence that referring to abstract events and situations, or high-level demand language, promoted language and literacy development. All mothers used some dialogic behaviours, particularly when supporting their children's attempts to read to them. Study 2 also demonstrated that the type of books read affected interactions, with expository books generating the most interaction. Dyads ranked higher on a measure of education and occupation, the educational-occupational ranking (EOR), tended to engage in the highest levels of participation, high-level demand language and the longest episodes. The findings show that the range of shared reading behaviours used by parents is far more extensive than those promoted by dialogic reading; indeed, dialogic reading largely overlooks important behaviours, such as high-level demand language.

Contents

List of Tables	9
List of Figures	12
INTRODUCTION	14
CHAPTER 1: EARLY READING DEVELOPMENT AND SHARED READING INTERACTIONS	17
Introduction	17
The social constructivist perspective of literacy development	17
Outcomes of shared reading interactions	19
Shared reading interactions	25
Factors that can influence shared reading interactions and children’s development	48
Discussion	56
CHAPTER 2: READING INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES	58
Introduction	60
Why intervention?	60
Types of intervention programmes	62
A review of dialogic reading	73

CHAPTER 3: AIM, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY	86
Introduction	86
Study 1: A dialogic reading intervention programme	87
Study 2: An observational study of parent-child reading.....	101
CHAPTER 4: STUDY 1 - A DIALOGIC READING PROGRAMME	115
Introduction	115
The study population.....	115
Programme implementation and processes	122
Evaluation of the programme	126
Discussion	142
Rationale for a further study.....	149
CHAPTER 5: STUDY 2 - INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS	151
Introduction	151
The participants.....	151
Introducing the dyads	153
CHAPTER 6: STUDY 2 - SHARED READING INTERACTIONS: CASE STUDIES OF EACH DYAD	168
Introduction	168

Dyad 1: Catherine and her mother	169
Dyad 2: James and his mother	175
Dyad 3: Sarah and her mother.....	180
Dyad 4: Chloe and her mother	185
Dyad 5: John and his mother	191
Dyad 6: Charlotte and her mother	197
Dyad 7: Sam and his mother	202
Dyad 8: Emma and her mother.....	207
Discussion	214
CHAPTER 7: STUDY 2 - DEVELOPING A CODING SYSTEM.....	221
Introduction	221
The interaction as a whole	222
The mother's role	223
The child's role	231
Advantages and limitations of the coding schemes for mothers and children.....	233
CHAPTER 8: STUDY 2 - SHARED READING INTERACTIONS: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.....	236
Introduction	236

Section 1: Features of shared reading interactions	236
Section 2: Comparison of dyads' reading interactions	244
Section 3: Relationships between features of shared reading interactions	256
Discussion	264
CHAPTER 9: STUDY 2 - EFFECTS OF GENRE, FAMILIARITY AND MOTHER-CHILD ROLES ON SHARED READING INTERACTIONS	269
Introduction	269
Analysis of shared reading interactions	270
Discussion	289
CHAPTER 10: STUDY 2 - RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MOTHERS' EDUCATION, PARENTS' OCCUPATION AND SHARED READING INTERACTIONS.....	292
Introduction	292
Devising the educational-occupational ranking (EOR) scale	293
The interaction as a whole	295
The mother's role	298
The child's role	304
Discussion	310

CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	314
How this research contributes to knowledge regarding parent-child shared reading interactions.....	314
Implications of Study 2 for dialogic reading.....	323
Implications of findings for future research	326
CONCLUSIONS	328
REFERENCES	332
CHILDREN’S BOOK REFERENCES.....	345
APPENDICES.....	332
Appendix 1: Books used in dialogic reading study (Study 1).....	347
Appendix 2: Study 1 – Initial interview.....	348
Appendix 2: Study 1 - Post-programme interview.....	350
Appendix 3: Study 2 – Interview.....	351

List of Tables

Table 1:1 A model of interactive reading.....	33
Table 1:2 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged up to 2:6.....	40
Table 1:3 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 2:6 to 3:6	41
Table 1:4 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 3:6 to 5:0	42
Table 1:5 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 5:0 and above	45
Table 1:6 Longitudinal and ethnographic studies of shared reading interactions.....	46
Table 2:1 Summary of dialogic reading studies.....	77
Table 3:1 Training sessions.....	94
Table 4:1 Selection of families for the study	116
Table 4:2 Numbers of non-participants and reasons for non-participation.....	117
Table 4:3 Frequency of shared reading	118
Table 4:4 Numbers of books owned.....	119
Table 4:5 Pre-programme ages and scores.....	123
Table 4:6 Attendance at training sessions	124
Table 4:7 Post-programme assessment scores	136
Table 4:8 SELDP (books): pre and post-programme scores.....	139
Table 5:1 Mothers' education (highest level).....	151
Table 5:2 Mothers' social class according to occupation.....	152
Table 5:3 Fathers' social class according to occupation	153
Table 6:1 Summary of reading behaviours	217
Table 7:1 Categories of mothers' moves.....	225
Table 7:2 Demand levels of mothers' moves.....	228
Table 8:1 Features of interactions	236
Table 8:2 Mean numbers of moves per book and percentages of moves.....	237
Table 8:3 Means and percentages of mothers' moves	238
Table 8:4 Demand levels of mothers' moves.....	240
Table 8:5 Mothers' use of language and literacy words	241
Table 8:6 Forms of children's moves.....	243
Table 8:7 Children's use of language and literacy words	243
Table 8:8 Durations of shared reading interactions.....	244
Table 8:9 Mean numbers of turns and episodes per book.....	245
Table 8:10 Mean numbers of moves per book and percentages of total moves	246
Table 8:11 Percentages of total mothers' moves.....	248

Table 8:12 Percentages mothers' moves in terms of demand levels.....	249
Table 8:13 Percentages of forms of mothers' moves.....	251
Table 8:14 Percentages of dialogic moves.....	251
Table 8:15 Percentages of forms of move encouraged and discouraged by dialogic reading.....	252
Table 8:16 Mothers' use of language and literacy words.....	252
Table 8:17 Percentages of children's moves.....	253
Table 8:18 Percentages of forms of children's moves.....	254
Table 8:19 Children's use of language and literacy words.....	254
Table 8:20 Children's assessment scores.....	262
Table 9:1 Durations of interactions.....	271
Table 9:2 Features of interactions.....	271
Table 9:3 Mean numbers of moves per book and percentages of total moves.....	272
Table 9:4 Percentages of mothers' moves.....	275
Table 9:5 Percentages of mothers' moves in terms of demand levels.....	277
Table 9:6 Percentages of forms of mothers' moves.....	278
Table 9:7 Mothers' use of language and literacy words.....	280
Table 9:8 Percentages of children's moves.....	281
Table 9:9 Percentages of forms of children's moves.....	282
Table 9:10 Children's use of language and literacy words.....	283
Table 9:11 Features of each type of shared reading interaction.....	286
Table 9:12 Characteristics of mother and child led shared reading interactions.....	287
Table 10:1 Rankings according to mothers' education (highest level).....	293
Table 10:2 Rankings according to mothers' occupation.....	294
Table 10:3 Rankings according to fathers' occupation.....	294
Table 10:4 Dyads' rankings for educational level and occupation according to social class classification.....	295
Table 10:5 Correlations between EOR and features of interactions.....	296
Table 10:6 Correlations between EOR and mothers' and children's moves.....	297
Table 10:7 Correlations between EOR and functions of mothers' moves.....	299
Table 10:8 Correlations between EOR and demand levels of mother's moves.....	301
Table 10:9 Correlations between EOR and forms of mothers' moves.....	303
Table 10:10 Correlations between EOR and mothers' use of language and literacy words.....	304
Table 10:11 Correlations between EOR and functions of children's moves.....	305

Table 10:12 Correlations between EOR and forms of children’s moves.....	305
Table 10:13 Correlations between EOR and children’s use of language and literacy words	307
Table 10:14 Correlations between EOR and children’s assessment scores	308
Table 11:1 Potential effects of mothers’ moves.....	318
Table 11:2 Potential outcomes of children’s moves	319

List of Figures

Figure 1:1 A model of shared reading interactions.....	57
Figure 2:2 A model of shared reading interventions.....	65
Figure 3:1 Page from <i>Fidgety Fish</i> (Galloway, 2001).....	108
Figure 3:2 Page from <i>Farm Animals</i> (Dorling Kindersley, 1999).....	110
Figure 4:1 Distribution of EOWPVT scores.....	134
Figure 4:2 Distribution of 'My Word' scores.....	134
Figure 4:3 Distribution of BPVS scores.....	135
Figure 4:4 Distribution of SELDP (books) scores.....	135
Figure 4:5 Post-programme standardised EOWPVT scores.....	137
Figure 4:6 Post-programme 'My Word' scores.....	137
Figure 4:7 Post-programme BPVS scores.....	138
Figure 4:8 Post-programme SELDP (books) scores.....	138
Figure 4:9 Pre and post-programme SELDP (books) scores.....	140
Figure 5:1 National Statistics socio-economic classification.....	152
Figure 8:1 Categories of mothers' moves.....	239
Figure 8:2 Forms of mothers' moves.....	240
Figure 8:3 Functions of children's moves.....	242
Figure 8:4 Mean numbers of moves per book.....	246
Figure 8:5 Percentages of mothers' moves in terms of demand levels.....	250
Figure 8:6 Percentages of forms of children's moves.....	254
Figure 8:7 Correlation between mothers' high-level demand moves and turns per episode.....	257
Figure 8:8 Correlation between mothers' <i>managing</i> moves and total mothers' moves.....	258
Figure 8:9 Correlation between mothers' high-level demand moves and children's <i>high-level</i> moves.....	260
Figure 8:10 Correlation between mothers' <i>managing</i> moves and children's <i>high-level</i> moves.....	261
Figure 9:1 Mean numbers of moves per book.....	273
Figure 9:2 Percentages of mothers' moves in terms of demand levels.....	277
Figure 10:1 Correlation between EOR and turns per episode.....	296
Figure 10:2 Correlation between EOR and mothers' moves per book.....	297
Figure 10:3 Correlation between EOR and children's moves per book.....	298
Figure 10:4 Correlation between EOR and mothers' <i>managing</i> moves.....	299

Figure 10:5 Correlation between EOR and mothers' <i>expanding</i> moves.....	300
Figure 10:6 Correlation between EOR and mothers' <i>predicting</i> moves.....	301
Figure 10:7 Correlation between EOR and mothers' high-level demand moves.....	302
Figure 10:8 Correlations between EOR and mothers' use of open-ended questions....	303
Figure 10:9 Correlations between EOR and children's responses to mother's questions	306
Figure 10:10 Correlation between EOR and children's use of statements.....	307
Figure 10:11 Correlation between EOR and EOWPVT standardised scores	308
Figure 10:12 Correlation between EOR and BPVS standardised scores	309
Figure 10:13 Correlation between EOR and SELDP (books) scores.....	309

Introduction

This thesis explores shared reading behaviours of parents and preschool children. In this context, ‘shared reading’ refers to parents reading children’s books to young children, usually engaging with them while doing so. ‘Preschool’ refers to children under the age of five, although the children in the studies described in this thesis were in fact much younger (between 2:6 and 3:6). My interest in this area arose from my professional background. As a teacher of four and five-year-olds, I found that children entered school with a vast range of preschool literacy experiences and abilities. My teaching experience suggested that parents acknowledged the importance of sharing books with their children, although many seemed to lack confidence as to *how* to read with their children. There were opportunities to discuss strategies for shared reading at group parents’ meetings and individually. However, I felt that so much more could be done if parents were reached before their children started school. An opportunity to work with parents and preschool children arose when I became a project teacher on an early literacy intervention programme, the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) Project (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001). This intervention project involved working with eight parents and their three-year-old children for around 18 months, and consisted largely of home visiting, providing resources and group workshops.

Two studies are reported in this thesis. The first arose from my desire to share with parents good practice regarding reading with young children. The REAL Project had aimed to enhance parent-child shared reading through facilitation. While parents and children had benefited, a couple of the parents I had worked with had requested more specific techniques-based information on how to read with their children, and I wondered whether offering parents such information would further enhance children’s early language and literacy skills.

My primary interest was in very young children whose language skills were still developing rapidly, since many intervention programmes targeted four-year-olds; far fewer had focused on enhancing the skills of two and three-year-olds. An opportunity to implement an early reading intervention programme (Study 1) was provided by Sure Start, a government initiative with the aim of working with parents and children to *'improve the health and well-being of families and children before and from birth, so children are ready to flourish when they go to school'* (Sure Start, 2003). Sure Start programmes are concentrated in areas where high proportions of children are living in poverty. Some local programmes had already implemented literacy initiatives, such as 'Books for babies' (Wade and Moore, 2000) and 'Storysacks' (Forde and Weinberger, 2001).

The techniques-based reading intervention programme implemented in Study 1 achieved rather limited effects. As a result it was considered necessary to re-evaluate the nature of shared reading interactions and the behaviours that promote language and literacy skills. Study 2 was an observational study of mother-child shared reading. This was of particular interest, since I had informally observed parents and children reading together on the REAL project and noticed that there were substantial differences in the ways dyads read. Behaviours among parents varied from simply reading the text to those that encouraged children to take a much more active role.

Enhancing our understanding of the different ways parents and children read together might provide an insight into which behaviours promote language and literacy development, and how these relate to the behaviours that had been the focus of Study 1.

The thesis begins with a review of the literature in the area. There are two chapters given to this. The first (Chapter 1) focuses on early development of reading and shared reading interactions. The second (Chapter 2) describes early literacy interventions, with particular emphasis on dialogic reading, which was the focus of

Study 1. The research questions and methods for Studies 1 and 2 are provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports and discusses Study 1, a dialogic reading programme. Subsequent chapters relate to Study 2, with the exception of the discussion (Chapter 11), which relates to the findings of both studies. Study 2 is an observational study of mother-child shared reading, and utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods. The participants of Study 2 are introduced in Chapter 5. This chapter reports findings from interview data and includes a description of each dyad's family structure and home literacy practices. In Chapter 6, I have attempted to provide a detailed insight into each dyad's shared reading interactions using qualitative methods. A coding system was devised in order quantitatively to analyse reading behaviours of mothers and children; this is described in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 reports the quantitative findings using the coding system described in the previous chapter. Study 2 also examines the effects of aspects such as genre and socio-economic status (SES) on shared reading behaviours. These are reported in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively. Finally, the findings of the two studies are discussed and their implications for future research are explored. The main findings are summarised in the conclusions section.

Chapter 1: Early reading development and shared reading interactions

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with reviewing the literature regarding young children sharing books with their parents, focusing on preschool children, although a number of relevant studies of slightly older children are also included. Recent research has shown that parental involvement in children's early learning is very important and has an impact upon children's school success (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003).

A social constructivist perspective is used to explain the importance of parent-child shared reading in children's development. The remainder of the chapter focuses on three main issues; firstly the potential outcomes of reading to young children, secondly observational studies of parent-child reading and thirdly factors that can influence shared reading interactions. Finally, a model of shared reading interactions is devised and the need for further research in the area of parent-child shared reading interactions is identified.

The social constructivist perspective of literacy development

The social constructivist perspective provides the context for understanding the importance of sharing books with adults for children's acquisition of knowledge. This theory of development arose from the work of Vygotsky (1934/1987), who emphasised the importance of social practices and cultural environment for children's development. There are three themes underlying Vygotsky's theory; the importance of culture, the central role of language, and the '*zone of proximal development*'. The latter refers to the role of instruction provided by the adult in the child's cognitive development. Pitching the instruction at the appropriate level is of particular importance, that is just

beyond what the child would achieve alone, since *'instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development... leading the child to carry out activities that force him to rise above himself'*.

(Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p. 213)

In the social constructivist (or social practices) perspective on literacy development, the child engages in meaningful literacy activities with adults who are familiar with the cultural practices of the social group. Bruner (1978) also believed that language develops through the process of social interaction. Bruner considered the social environment in which children develop and their interaction with other people. He and his colleagues developed the notion of 'scaffolding'; an adult facilitated process enabling children to carry out tasks that would be beyond their unassisted efforts (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Scaffolding is a kind of support that is adjusted as children develop; it *'is not a permanent fixture but a kind of shifting support that slackens, changes and eventually "self-destructs" as the child learns more and more about how to do the task alone'* (Sulzby and Teale, 1987, p. 70).

In the social constructivist perspective, interaction with more experienced adults is crucial to development, and therefore provides a useful framework within which to consider the contribution of parent-child reading interactions. In this thesis, the term shared reading *interactions* refers to the process of parent-child reading, while the term shared reading *behaviours* refers to the specific acts and utterances of the parent or the child within the interaction. Shared reading interactions do not refer simply to the reading of the text. According to Barton:

'The language associated with story time is not just the text: equally important is the talk around the text, and this is often richer in variety and complexity of linguistic structure than other everyday talk'

(Barton, 1994, p. 145)

Barton highlights the fact that shared reading interactions can provide an optimal context for learning language and literacy skills. Research has shown that mother-child conversation occurs more frequently in shared reading than in other contexts, such as mealtimes, dressing and playing (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; Hoff, 2003).

Outcomes of shared reading interactions

Shared parent-child book reading may have a number of positive effects, although the primary benefit is generally regarded as being the acquisition of language and literacy skills. In the last decade, there have been two major reviews investigating whether the frequency of shared reading interactions benefits children's early attainment in reading. Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) found a wide variability of results in the 31 studies they reviewed, and contended that while there was an association between shared reading interactions and the development of language and literacy skills, this was *'probably not as strong and consistent as is generally supposed'* (Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994, p. 285). However, in their meta-analysis of 34 studies of parent-child shared reading, Bus, van IJzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995) found that frequency of reading was related to outcome measures such as language growth, early reading skills and later reading achievement. These researchers, and others, have argued that shared reading in the preschool is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Bus, van IJzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995; Wells, 1985).

Language development

Associations have been found between language skills such as vocabulary and the frequency of shared reading in the home (Mason, 1992; Payne, Whitehurst and Angell, 1994; Wells, 1985). Elley (1989) found that shared reading constituted a

significant source of vocabulary acquisition for children aged seven and eight, whether or not word meanings were explained. In a study of a younger child, Ninio and Bruner (1978) found that much labelling occurred during shared reading interactions.

During shared reading, children may be exposed to a way of talking about language (metalinguage). Parents may refer to the language of reading (for example, asking '*do you know what that means?*'); this is the metalinguage of literacy (Barton, 1994). Thus, in shared reading, '*the written is embedded in the spoken and grows out of it*' (Barton, 1994, p. 145).

The language skill that has perhaps attracted most attention from researchers in recent years in terms of its importance for literacy development is that of decontextualised language. This refers to language about situations beyond the immediate present, such as explanations, narratives and definitions. Shared reading interactions provide opportunities for utilising decontextualised language, and it has been suggested that acquiring decontextualised language skills may be crucial in learning to read (Beals, DeTemple and Dickinson, 1994; Dickinson and Tabors, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1986; Purcell-Gates and Waterman, 2000; Snow, 1983, 1991; Snow and Tabors, 1993). Others have noted that most classroom tasks depend on decontextualised language, and that children who have had little experience with such language may struggle to do well in their early school days.

Development of early reading skills

Parent-child shared reading interactions are a means by which young children begin forming concepts of books, print and reading (Clay, 1979; Purcell-Gates and Waterman, 2000). They begin to understand that print conveys meaning, books are read from front to back and print is made up of letters, words, punctuation and spaces. Sharing and discussing texts with adults may help children to develop a sense of text

meaningfulness (Holdaway, 1979; Mason, 1992; Sulzby, 1985). Repeated readings of books contribute to children's knowledge about the print itself, since they allow children to concentrate on words and letter-sound patterns while maintaining an understanding of the text meaning (Mason, 1992). Repeated readings allow children to understand '*the essence of storyness*' (Goodman, 1980).

Through being read to, children begin to understand that certain types of wording and intonations are used when reading books. Children may recite key phrases from specific books (Sulzby, 1985; Tannen, 1982). Clay (1979) coined the phrase '*talk like a book*' to describe these attempts to internalise the conventions of book language. Intertextuality describes the references books make to other books. Children may come to understand complex literary features such as intertextuality through shared reading interactions (Meek, 1988). Others have demonstrated that the ability to make connections between texts and personal experience is important for children's literacy learning (Sipe, 2000).

A number of studies have examined children's attempts to read books independently before they have learned to read in the conventional sense (Elster, 1994, 1995; Holdaway, 1979; Schickedanz, 1981; Sulzby, 1985; Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Elster (1995) described how children 'imported' information during emergent readings of books, using information in illustrations and drawing on personal experience and other books. Children's independent readings of such books also related to children's previous experiences during shared reading interactions. Elster contended that such strategies were critical in children's transition from emergent to conventional reading. The studies cited above found that children's readings of the same books over time become progressively more like the actual book being attempted. Holdaway (1979) described how children's pretend reading very quickly became '*picture stimulated, page-matched and story-complete*' (Holdaway, 1979, p. 40). Sulzby (1985) identified a

developmental ordering of children's behaviours, from not forming stories, to forming oral stories, to forming written stories to paying attention to print. This development illustrates that children begin to see themselves as readers long before any formal reading instruction.

Later language and literacy skills

There is an association between families' provision of a literate environment for their children, including shared reading, and children's success at reading (Heath, 1983; Share, Jorm, Maclean and Matthews, 1983). Wells (1985) found that the amount of time that children listened to stories at ages one to three was strongly associated with oral language skills and knowledge of literacy at five. Children in Wells' (1985) study who had been read to did not simply have larger vocabularies; they were better able to narrate and describe events, follow instructions and understand teachers' use of language. Correlations have also been found between preschool knowledge of literacy and reading achievement at age seven (Moon and Wells, 1979; Weinberger, 1996). Weinberger (1996) found that children who were good readers at seven were more likely to have had a favourite book, have been library members and been read to frequently at age three.

Certain language skills that can be enhanced through shared reading are thought to relate to reading comprehension in later years. Indeed, some have argued that highly developed language skills are of greater importance later in the sequence of learning to read, when the child is reading for meaning, rather than early in the sequence, when the child is learning to decode single words (Mason, 1992; Snow, 1991). Dickinson and Tabors (1991) argued that vocabulary and narrative skills were related to later reading comprehension, while Snow (1991) contended that early development of skill with decontextualised language was related to reading comprehension. Shared reading may

foster a way of thinking that enhances reading comprehension (Wells, 1987). Wells' (1987) explanation as to why this might be so relates to the decontextualised nature of written texts; through shared reading, children '*extend the range of their experience far beyond the limits of their immediate surroundings*' (Wells, 1987, p. 152) enabling them to, '*reflect upon their own experience and encourage them to explore, through their imagination, the world created through the language of the text*' (Wells, 1987, p. 158). According to Wells (1987), these experiences are probably among the most important for aiding children's understanding of the dynamics and complexities of language.

Child interest in reading

Children's interest in literacy is associated with emergent literacy skills and later reading attainment (Lomax, 1979; Payne et al., 1994; Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994; Thomas, 1984). There are two broad theoretical perspectives relating to the relationship between shared reading interactions and outcomes for the child. The first suggests that children with high interest and more advanced literacy skills elicit more or better literacy involvement from their parents (Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994). For example, Durkin (1966) found that although precocious readers were read to frequently, shared reading was said to have been prompted by the child's desires rather than by the parents' goals.

In the second perspective, children's interest can be enhanced through shared reading. Shared reading is viewed as a socially created, interactive activity in which children's interest '*is as much a prerequisite as a consequence of book reading*' (Bus, 2000, p. 179).

Holdaway (1979) described how children's motivation is increased through enjoyable shared reading interactions. These children '*gradually develop unshakably*

positive expectations of print, and powerful motives to learn how to interpret it for themselves' (Holdaway, 1979, p. 52).

If children's shared reading experiences are not enjoyable, they are unlikely to develop a love of books. Wells (1985) found that for some parents, reading aloud was an unrewarding and difficult task: *'their rendering is halting and without expression ... not such as to enthral a young listener'* (Wells, 1985, p. 245). In Wells' study, parents who did not enjoy reading to their children generally reported that their children did not like being read to.

Attachment

It is generally considered that shared reading interactions can help to strengthen the emotional bonds between parent and child. However, the limited research into this area has found the nature of the pre-existing parent-child attachment relationship affects family literacy practices, such as the frequency and quality of shared reading interactions (Bus and van IJzendoorn, 1995; Bus, van IJzendoorn and Crnic, 1997). For this reason, these studies are discussed in the later section entitled 'Factors that can influence children's development'.

Summary: Potential outcomes of shared reading interactions

Young children can learn much through shared reading interactions with parents. They become acquainted with books, learn book skills, concepts about print, memorise favourite texts and begin to understand literary features such as intertextuality. Their language skills may be enhanced. The benefits of shared reading in terms of increased child interest and strengthening of emotional bond are more complex, and there is debate as to whether these are prerequisites or consequences of shared reading interactions.

Shared reading interactions

While shared reading interactions can play an important part in children's early literacy development, not all children who engage in shared reading interactions do well in later literacy instruction (Heath, 1982, 1983; Wells, 1985). It has recently been suggested that the nature of parent-child shared reading interactions may be critical to children's development. Since the mid 1980s there has been a plethora of research in this area. This review focuses on studies of children reading with their parents, those involving reading with teachers or researchers have been omitted. The studies considered to be of most significance have been categorised according to the age of the child participants and are summarised in Tables 1:2 to 1:5 at the end of this section. Table 1:2 summarises studies up to age 2:6, Table 1:3 from age 2:6 to 3:6 and Table 1:4 describes studies from age 3:6 to 5:0. Table 1:5 summarises studies of children aged 5:0 and above. Longitudinal and ethnographic studies, which do not fit neatly into any one of the above categories, are shown in Table 1:6.

Three broad themes emerge from surveying the literature regarding shared reading interactions. These are the nature of shared reading interactions, changes in interactions as children develop and shared reading behaviours beneficial for child development. The research is reviewed under each of these three headings.

The nature of shared reading interactions

Early studies into parent-child reading tended to focus on variations in the frequency of interactions and the implications for children's later language and literacy skills (Share et al., 1984). Investigations into the nature of such interactions did not begin until relatively recently, leading to suggestions that researchers '*have generally paid little attention to defining or describing what constitutes a book reading episode.*

*For whatever reasons, researchers made no concerted effort to specify what was meant by **read to your child**' (Teale, 1984, p. 111).*

In one of the earliest studies of its kind, Ninio and Bruner (1978) [Table 1:2] investigated a mother reading picture books to her young (eight to 18 month old) child with the aim of investigating the precursors of labelling. They found that the mother used three elements in most of her interactions: attentional vocative (attention getting), querying and labelling. Feedback was also often present. Since Ninio and Bruner's study, researchers have extended these elements or offered alternatives in an attempt to describe the function or intention of parent utterances (Bus et al., 1997; Leseman and DeJong, 1998 [Table 1:4]; Neumann, 1996; Panofsky, 1994; Snow and Goldfield, 1982).

DeLoache and DeMendoza (1987) [Table 1:2] used Bruner's (1978) scaffolding model of adult assistance, examining the mother's role as a 'scaffolder' for the child's learning. Consistent with researchers such as Leseman, Kuys, and Triescheijn (1995), they found that mothers tended to control the interactions and took responsibility for determining which features of the book would be talked about. DeLoache and DeMendoza (1987) noted that mothers' questioning was related to their beliefs about children's word knowledge; mothers were more likely to ask the child to label a picture if they thought the child knew the label.

Leseman et al. (1995) [Table 1:3] made some interesting observations regarding the structure of shared reading interactions between mothers and three-year-old children. They noted that 65 per cent of comments were made by mothers and only 35 per cent by the three-year-old children in their sample. In contrast, Phillips and McNaughton (1990) [Table 1:4] found that the initiation of interactions was shared equally between parent and child. The child participated '*as a full conversational partner in setting the topic of exchanges*' (Phillips and McNaughton, 1990, p. 210). In

addition, each turn closely followed and built upon the focus and meaning of previous turns, demonstrating 'semantic contingency' (Cross, 1978). The differences between these two studies may be due to the fact that participants in the Phillips and McNaughton (1990) study were high SES (socio-economic status) families, whereas those in Leseman et al. (1995) varied in SES. In addition, children in Phillips and McNaughton's study were aged three and four years, whereas the oldest children in Leseman and his colleagues' study were aged 3:6.

Leseman et al. (1995) noted that around 21 per cent of the mothers' contribution to the interaction was in the form of a question. Such questions were usually closed questions or instruction/behaviour directives. Heath (1983) found that some parents who read to their young children employed strategies she called 'life-to-text interaction', in which the parents helped children to use their knowledge of the world to understand texts.

Yaden, Smolkin and Conlon (1989) [Table 1:4] analysed three to five-year-old children's spontaneous questions during shared reading and found that most questions were asked about pictures, followed by story meaning, followed by questions about word meaning. Although they did not analyse parents' contributions to the interactions, they concluded that parental style or book type could increase children's interest in a particular area. In contrast, Phillips and McNaughton (1990) found few parent or child comments about illustrations. Most comments during shared reading focused on the meaning of the text, especially the events and goals of the narrative. There were few interactions about concepts of print.

A number of studies have identified different parental reading styles (Haden, Reese and Fivush 1996; Rabidoux and McDonald, 2000; Reese and Cox, 1999). Haden et al. (1996) [Table 1:4] identified three types of reading style; a *describer* style, in which mothers focused on describing and labelling pictures, a *comprehender* style, in

which they focused on story meaning and predicting events, and a *collaborator* style in which mothers tended to confirm their children's contributions. Dickinson and Smith (1994) identified a *performance-oriented* style, in which the story was read uninterrupted and discussion was confined to before and after the story reading. Reese and Cox (1999) found that children of mothers who adopted a performance-oriented style hardly responded verbally, although they did attend for the duration of the interaction. Reese and Cox (1999) also assessed the relative benefits of three styles of adult book reading, a *describer* style, a *comprehender* style and a *performance-oriented* style. They found that children with higher initial vocabulary skills gained most from the performance-oriented style, whereas children with lower initial vocabulary skills gained most from a *describer* style of reading. There was no evidence that the *comprehender* style benefited children's story comprehension.

Rabidoux and McDonald (2000) [Table 1:3] identified four distinctive parental 'interaction roles' in their study of children with language delays: *managers*, *supporters*, *teachers* and *players*. These interaction roles appear to relate to the type of support offered to the child. *Managers* tended to control and direct the interaction in an attempt to keep their children engaged; *supporters* demonstrated a wide range of interaction behaviours while *teachers* asked questions about the text and guided their children to providing correct answers to their questions. In contrast, *players* acted spontaneously and shared the interaction with their children. Rabidoux and MacDonald (2000) also identified three 'communicative styles': *readers* (who often read the whole book with little interaction), *waiters* (who paused after every page or two to talk about features of the book) and *talkers* (who followed their children's lead). These communicative styles differ from 'interaction roles' in that they appear to relate to broader styles of reading. Rabidoux and MacDonald's communicative styles relate to

DeBaryshe's (1995) [Table 1:4] suggestion that reading style ranges from strictly text-focused to highly participatory.

The majority of research has tended to focus on the mother's role, although shared reading is an interactive process. Parent-child influences are reciprocal: children influence the ways that adults behave towards them, and adults influence children's learning experience and opportunities (Lewis and Feinman, 1991). Rabidoux and McDonald (2000) identified four interactive roles for the children they studied: *Proactive, reactive, inactive* and *resistive*. *Proactive* children interacted with mothers as reciprocal partners in the interaction. *Reactive* children generally responded to their mothers but rarely initiated or actively contributed to the interaction. *Inactive* children were often inattentive, demonstrated low rates of participation and rarely initiated utterances. In their sample, Rabidoux and McDonald classed only one child as *resistive*. This child paid only fleeting attention to the parent or the book and actively attempted to escape the interaction.

Sigel (1982) [Table 1:4] explored parent-child reading interactions using a psychological distancing model. This model introduces the concept of distancing strategies, which occur in the context of adult-child interactions. The fundamental feature of the distancing model is that adults' utterances vary in the extent to which they encourage children to separate themselves from the immediate present. The use of the term distancing '*suggests that individuals can project themselves into the past or into the future or can transcend the immediate present*' (Sigel, 1982, p. 50).

According to Sigel (1982) interactions encouraging distancing are critical to the development of representational or abstract thought in the child. Distancing strategies vary in form (telling or asking) and in level of demand (high, medium or low demand). Low-level demand utterances include simple associations, such as demands to label or describe. Medium-level demand utterances are defined as those involving new

information, connected to the personal experience of the dyad. Such information usually requires little demanding mental activity since it is often contextualised and informal. High-level demand utterances are more decontextualised, extending the interaction by involving new plots, links or knowledge. They cannot be made sense of through the contexts of the immediate situation or shared personal experience. High-level distancing is similar to decontextualised language in that it involves non-immediate talk, although decontextualised language is generally considered to refer to extended discourse forms, whereas distancing may involve single utterances. Sigel's distancing model may be useful in helping to conceptualise the utterances parents use when reading with their children. The model contrasts with the perception of adult and child as equal participants, both structuring the interaction. In this model the adult role is that of teacher, although teaching can be very subtle and may not even be deliberate.

A number of other studies have also investigated parent-child reading interactions using Sigel's (1982, 1984) psychological distancing model (Haden et al., 1996; Leseman et al., 1995; Pellegrini, Permuter, Galda and Brody, 1990; Sorsby and Martlew, 1991). Leseman et al. (1995) noted that most mother and child utterances could be classed as low-level demand, consisting of pointing, simple labelling and describing characters and events in illustrations. Relating information in the book to the child's personal experience constituted medium-level demand utterances, similar to Heath's (1983) 'life to text' interactions. Because such utterances are connected to experience and daily life, they are rather contextualised, although they do require some abstraction. In high-level demand utterances, which occur less frequently, the immediate situation, the pictures, book or personal experience do not provide contexts for interpretation. These tend to be decontextualised in that they call for '*considerations of relationships between mental representations of things not present and of possible*

outcomes which may only be reached via a number of cognitive steps' (Sorsby and Martlew, 1991, p. 380).

Not all mothers' speech during shared reading interactions makes up a representational demand; some utterances refer to the immediate situation and serve the role of maintaining the conversation or managing the child's behaviour. These have been called procedural utterances (Leseman et al., 1995) or interactive utterances (Sorsby and Martlew, 1991).

Pellegrini et al. (1990) [Table 1:4] found that mothers tended to adjust their strategies to match their children's competences. For example, mothers used more demanding, less supportive strategies with more able children and less demanding, high support strategies with less competent children. A number of mothers used low-level demand utterances immediately after their children failed to respond to their previously posed high-level demand utterances.

There have been a number of studies of children aged five and above reading with their parents and/or with teachers (Greenhough and Hughes, 1998; Hannon, Jackson and Weinberger, 1986; Tracy 1995). While Hannon et al., (1986) [Table 1:5] found few differences between teachers' and parents' strategies, Greenhough and Hughes (1998) [Table 1:5] found differences between the type of strategies adopted by parents and teachers. Parents were more likely than teachers to help with decoding of text but less likely than teachers to discuss the text with them; an activity they called 'conversing'. They found differences between high conversing and low conversing parents in their views of literacy. High conversing parents had experienced higher levels of formal education and were more likely to regard reading as a valuable and enjoyable activity for its own sake. In contrast, low conversing parents were more likely to see literacy in instrumental terms.

There have been a number of ethnographic and longitudinal studies that have investigated shared reading interactions, often as part of wider studies (Heath, 1983; Minns, 1990; Sulzby and Teale, 1987; Taylor, 1983; Wells, 1987). These studies provide rich descriptions of families using literacy in homes and communities and highlight the socially constructed nature of such activities. They are summarised in Table 1:6.

Parents can help to foster their children's interest in reading by allowing children to select books (Morrow, 1983) although few studies have examined book selection practices among young children and their families. In a study of four and five-year-olds, Robinson, Larsen, Haupt and Mohlman (1997) questioned previous findings that emergent readers did not demonstrate specific book preferences and selection strategies. They found that children's book choices were influenced by genre, familiarity and other book attributes. Children selected familiar books more frequently. Few studies have investigated the criteria parents use when selecting books to read with their children.

Changes in interactions as children develop

As children grow older, they tend to take a more active role in shared reading and adults tend to ask more complex questions (Heath, 1983; Ninio and Bruner, 1978). DeLoache and DeMendoza (1987) noted that the content of interactions varied according to the age of the child, although structural aspects of the interaction remained relatively constant over the age range (from 1:0 to 1:6).

Heath (1983) found that from the age of around three, children in high SES and white, low SES communities were discouraged from interactive participation; adults read the story and children answered questions on cue. In contrast, Sulzby and Teale (1987) found little evidence of the three-year-old children in their study being actively encouraged to wait as an audience. Instead, parents answered children's questions and

responded to their comments as they arose, rather than discouraging interruptions.

Sulzby and Teale did find however, that as children developed, there was less interaction during reading.

Sulzby (1985) suggested there is a change in the behaviour of both parent and child as the child develops; this involves a transition from highly contextualised oral language to decontextualised written language. Young children who experience shared reading interactions develop an understanding of the relationship between oral and written language. Sulzby contended that parents typically read to young children using highly interactive language, and that as children develop, they adopt a 'hybridised' form of language between oral and written codes. This involves interaction and comments plus reading. The last stage occurs when parents read the book and children listen without interruption. Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995) [Table 1:3] proposed a developmental model of shared reading. The model was proposed as a parallel to Sulzby's (1985) scale of independent reading and is illustrated in Table 1:1.

Table 1:1 A model of interactive reading

Sulzby's (1985) scale of independent reading	Bus and van IJzendoorn's (1995) scale of interactive reading
Not forming stories	Commenting on the pictures
Forming oral stories	Extended discussions, primarily about pictures, accompanying the reading
Forming written stories	Some discussion, primarily about the story plot, accompanying the reading
Paying attention to print	Reading the text, focusing the child's attention on the print

Source: Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995, p. 1012)

Like Sulzby (1985), Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995) suggested that readings with inexperienced children tend to be highly interactive, whereas more advanced children mainly sit and listen like an audience. This development reflects children's growing level of book understanding.

The earliest two levels of the model relate to findings of studies of shared reading with very young children (DeLoache and DeMendoza, 1987; Ninio and Bruner, 1978). These two levels could also be said to correspond to the *describer* style identified in Haden et al. (1996). The third level, in which discussion focuses on story plot, corresponds to the *comprehender* style identified above. At the highest level there is very little interaction between members of the dyad; children ‘*mainly sit and listen like an audience*’ (Bus, 2000, p. 1013). This corresponds to a *performance-oriented* style (Dickinson and Smith, 1994). Teale (1984) criticised reading without interruption, contending that interaction is an important part of parent-child shared reading, although he acknowledged that when children reach an age in which they have a high level of understanding it is possible to read long sections before discussing the text. Reporting on earlier work (Anderson, Teale and Estrada, 1980) [Table 1:3], Teale (1984) described a mother reading a book to her two and a half-year-old son from start to finish without pausing for comment or any type of interaction. Only when he interrupted her and initiated dialogue did the pattern change. This highlights the fact that reading at Bus and van IJzendoorn’s (1995) highest level with very little interaction is inappropriate if children are not able to listen and understand.

Panofsky (1994) also found a shift in shared reading behaviours from naming and labelling to making connections to the child’s experience to interpretation and inference. This is similar to the development noted by Goodsitt, Raitan and Perlmutter (1988) [Table 1:4]. However, contrary to other researchers, Panofsky argued that this shift should not be viewed as a stage like model:

‘For one thing, stage models imply “moving beyond” some earlier stage and “not going back”, yet even the oldest children sometimes used functions and strategies that typified the activity of the least experienced children, and even the youngest children were able to participate in the use of all functions to some degree’.

(Panofsky, 1994, p. 233)

Shared reading behaviours beneficial for child development

In addition to examining the nature and development of shared reading interactions, a number of studies have gone on to consider the relationship between reading style or strategies and children's language and literacy development (Haden et al., 1996; Leseman et al., 1995; Leseman and DeJong, 1998; Pellegrini et al., 1990; Reese and Cox, 1999; Wells, 1985).

Describing findings from an earlier study (Snow and Goldfield, 1982) [Table 1:3], Snow (1983) identified three features of shared reading interactions that can contribute to literacy development in young children: *semantic contingency*, *scaffolding* and *accountability procedures*. Semantic contingency in adult speech is considered to be a major facilitator of language acquisition (Cross, 1978) and can also be applied to the literacy domain. It refers to adult utterances which continue topics introduced by the child. These include expansions of child utterances, semantic extensions (which add new information to the topic), questions demanding clarification from the child, and answers to child questions (relating to print, words text and pictures). Semantically non-contingent speech (topics initiated by the adult and attempts by the adult to change topics from those introduced by the child) is negatively correlated with children's gains in language ability (Snow, 1983). Scaffolding facilitates the child's attempts to concentrate on a particular task by for example, reminding the child of the task and guiding the task. Accountability (Dore, 1983) refers to praising and repeating the child's utterances; and more complex features such as refusing to answer children's questions if parents feel children know the answers. Ninio and Bruner (1978) referred to this as '*upping the ante*'. These three characteristics of shared reading interactions can contribute to early literacy skills (Snow, 1983).

Pellegrini et al. (1990) found that low-level demand utterances were negatively related to vocabulary scores, while use of metalinguistic verbs was positively related to

vocabulary scores. Child initiations and references to external stimuli were also effective (Pellegrini, Brody and Sigel, 1985 [Table 1:4]; Pellegrini et al., 1990). Others found that high-level demand questions by mothers often resulted in high-level responses by the child, and that low-level utterances by the mother tended to elicit low-level responses (Leseman et al. 1995; Sorsby and Martlew, 1991). Considering children's responses to the level of mothers' utterances is important because *'the greatest benefit may be gained not by providing children with conversation at the highest level of abstraction but by talking in a way that is tuned to children's capabilities'* (Sorsby and Martlew, 1991, p. 376).

Leseman et al. (1995) contended that shared reading interactions may not be effective unless they contain extended high-level demand interactions (or decontextualised conversations).

It has already been noted that decontextualised language skills are related to literacy (Snow, 1983, 1991; Snow and Tabors, 1993) and that such skills may be developed through shared reading. However, Snow (1991) contended that these language skills do not result from direct contacts with print during book reading, but emerge as a result of a variety of interactive experiences. In contrast, others have argued that direct contacts with print, that is, listening to stories, are beneficial (Purcell-Gates and Waterman, 2000; Wells, 1987). Wells (1987) noted that shared reading interactions in which discussions largely related to the pictures were rather contextualised, and argued instead that listening to stories was far more important. This is because in order to understand stories, children have to concentrate fully on the linguistic message. Through listening to stories children *'discover the symbolic potential of language: its power to create possible or imaginary worlds through words'* (Wells, 1987, p. 156).

Wells' assertion is that listening without interruption is more effective than low-level interaction. Others have also argued that listening without interaction is beneficial for children's development:

'Children who experience years of listening to written stories implicitly learn the linguistic differences between oral discourse and written storybook discourse, particularly the literate vocabulary, complex grammatical constructions and the decontextualised nature of written language'.

(Purcell-Gates and Waterman, 2000, p. 215)

Listening to stories corresponds to the highest level of Bus and van IJzendoorn's (1995) developmental model of interactive reading.

Heath (1983) identified three types of non-immediate comments that may be particularly important for children's later literacy success. These are:

- *What-explanations.* These are basic comprehension questions about events that have already occurred in the text. Such explanations help children to order story sequences or identify main occurrences.
- *Reason-explanations.* These require the child to say why a character performed a certain action or why an event occurred, so helping to make explicit some of the implicit connections in the story. This type of request also helps children to understand cause and effect relationships.
- *Affective commentary.* The child is questioned about why something happened and whether that action was good or bad.

Wells (1985) added *requesting predictions* about story events as being significant for children's literacy knowledge. Wells' *requesting predictions* and Heath's *reason explanations* can be thought of as being the highest level of demand, although *what explanations* and *affective commentary* also involve some level of distancing.

Flood (1977) [Table 1:4] investigated shared reading interactions and children's performance on prereading related tasks. He contended that shared reading interactions required four steps in order to enhance children's prereading skills:

- Preparatory questions need to be asked.
- Parents should involve children in the book reading process; asking questions, relating content to children's experiences.
- Parents need to reinforce children's efforts.
- Parents should ask '*post-evaluative*' questions in order to help children to assess, evaluate and integrate.

Few studies have examined strategies parents use to increase or maintain their children's interest in reading. DeBaryshe (1995) found that child interest in books was strongly correlated with facilitative maternal reading practices. Bus (2000) identified a strategy used by parents to maintain children's interest in shared reading interactions. In repeated readings of the same storybook over time, parents spent a disproportionate amount of time discussing illustrations, which had little to do with the actual story, in response to their children's interest. This characteristic appears to relate to the concept of semantic contingency. The discussion of details and irrelevant story extensions did not decrease with familiarity. As the book became more familiar, children exhibited more control of the discussions. They did not initiate new topics but mostly repeated discussions initiated by parents in previous sessions. There was not an increased amount of stimulating discussion to make books more challenging as reported elsewhere (Dickinson, DeTemple, Hirschler, and Smith, 1992). Leseman et al. (1995) however, contended that following children's initiatives (semantic contingency) was of little importance for preschool aged children, unless these were of high-level demand. It appears they were referring to language and literacy rather than motivational outcomes when they made this assertion.

Summary: Shared reading interaction studies

There have been a number of recent studies into parent-child shared reading. Detailed descriptive studies have attempted to categorise parents' and children's utterances during book reading according to their function, and some have identified reading styles. Studies have noted that parents may adjust their questioning to their children's developmental level. Others have identified changes in parental reading style over time according to the developmental level of the child, with labelling at the lowest level and reading without interruption at the highest level.

A number of researchers have identified behaviours they perceive can enhance children's literacy skills using correlational analysis (Leseman et al., 1995; Wells, 1985) or theoretical interpretation (Heath, 1983). The behaviours identified include asking questions, particularly high-level demand questions, and using decontextualised language. Some have argued that where possible children should be encouraged to use high-level, decontextualised language such as explanations, predictions and inference. Making connections from the text to children's own experience has also been identified as beneficial. It is also important to provide feedback and encouragement. Adjusting strategies according to the developmental level of the child, guiding, prompting and referring to the language of literacy may also be important. Hesitant reading, reading without expression and semantically non-contingent speech may negatively influence children's interest in reading.

Table 1:2 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged up to 2:6

	Ninio and Bruner (1978)	Ninio (1980)	DeLoache and DeMendoza (1987)	*Hoff-Ginsberg (1991)	Bus et al. (1997)
Type of study	Longitudinal case study	Comparative: Low and high SES	Observational	Comparative: SES and communicative settings	Longitudinal study of child and family development
Country	U.K.	Israel	U.S.	U.S.	Netherlands
Sample size	One	40	30 (10 in each age group)	63: 30 low SES & 33 high SES	138
Child ages	0:8 – 1:6 years	1:5 -1:10 years	1:0, 1:3 and 1:6 years	1:6 –2:5 years	1:0, 1:1, 1:6 and 1:8 years
Focus of study	Mother-child dyad High SES	Mother-child dyads Low & high SES	Mother-child dyads High SES	Mother-child dyads Low and high SES	Mother-child and father-child dyads
Type of book	Selected by mother	Three picture books	Alphabet book	Story books and word books provided by researchers	Same book: 'Book of babies' (Foord, 1989)
Recording	Videotape and audiotape	Audiotape and observation	Videotape & audiotape	Videotape and notes	Videotape
Number of sessions	One session every 2-3 weeks	Three books in one session	One session per dyad	Four interactions (1 reading; 1 mealtime; 1 dressing; 1 toy)	One session for mothers; 1 for fathers
Child assessments	None	None	None	MLU and vocabulary	None
Analysis	Coding from transcripts: all verbal and non-verbal communication	Coding from transcripts: 3 interaction styles identified in both groups; 'what' questions, 'where' questions & information giving	Coding for non-verbal & verbal behaviours: Units (utterances), turn taking and episodes	Transcription using SALT	Coding for parent (11 categories) and child (8 categories).
Results	Child mastered reciprocal dialogue rules through book reading, not imitating	Low SES mothers talked less & gave less varied labels & asked more 'where' questions. High SES infants had larger productive vocabulary	For all ages, mother controlled interactions. Maternal orientation to elicit best possible performance from child.	Significant social class differences in mothers' child directed speech.	Child engagement depends on the socio-emotional context of adult support.

Table 1:3 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 2:6 to 3:6

	*Anderson et al. (1980)	Snow and Goldfield (1982)	Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995)	Leseman et al. (1995)	Rabidoux & MacDonald (2000)
Type of study	Naturalistic observation	Longitudinal case study	Comparative: contrasting SES groups	Observational study	Observational
Country	U.S	U.S.	Netherlands	Netherlands	U.S
Sample size	24: Three ethnic groups	One	45	39	20 children with language delays
Child ages	2:6 to 3:6 years	2:5 to 3:4	3 years	3 years. Follow up at 3:6	1:6 to 3:6
Focus of study	Families-focal child Low SES	Mother / father-child Repeated readings of storybook	Mother-child dyads. High and low SES	Mother-child dyads Varied SES	Mother-child dyads Varied
Type of book	Reading materials selected by families	Richard Scarry (1967) 'Storybook dictionary'	Complex narrative 'Dudley and the Strawberry Shake'. Unfamiliar book.	Unfamiliar narrative picture book	1 unfamiliar storybook
Recording	Audio tape & notes	Audiotape	Videotaped in laboratory	Videotape	Videotape
Number of sessions	Varied	13 sessions at regular intervals between age 3 & 4	One reading session per dyad	Two sessions: age 3 and 3:6	One 15-30 minute reading session
Child assessments	None	None	None	Expressive & receptive language	None
Analysis	Transcription from tapes and notes	7 coding categories for child; Item labels, item elaborations, event, event elaborations, motive/cause, evaluation/reaction, relation to the real world	Dyads coded for attachment security. Mothers' utterances coded for irrelevant discussions, relevant discussions, inferences and textual changes.	Coding from transcripts	Coding for behavioural descriptions, interpretations & theoretical hypotheses
Results	Storybook reading was not widespread among families. Parents read to children in different ways.	Child learned through conversations with parents how to talk about the story/pictures	Less secure dyads read less frequently. In frequently reading group there was less communication about the book. In infrequently reading group there were more irrelevant discussions.	Shared reading may only be effective when it results in an extending conversation.	Mothers were classified as Managers, Teachers, Supporters, Players, Readers or Waiters.

Table 1:4 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 3:6 to 5:0

	Flood (1977)	*Sigel (1982)	Pellegrini et al. (1985)	Goodsitt et al. (1988)
Type of study	Observational / correlational	Observational	Comparative: communicatively handicapped and non communicatively handicapped	Observational
Country	U.S.	U.S.	U.S	U.S.
Sample size	36	120 families	120: 60 communicatively handicapped (CH) & 60 non CH	48
Child ages	3:6 – 4:6	4 years	3:6 – 5:8 years	2:0, 3:6 and 5:0
Focus of study	Three SES groups Four ethnic groups	Parents and children, high and low SES; two contexts - paper folding and book reading	Parent-child dyads Varied SES	Mother-child dyads SES not reported
Type of book	One narrative book	One narrative book	One book read by mother, a different book read by father	Familiar and unfamiliar
Recording	Audiotaped home reading	Videotape through one way mirror	Videotape	Videotape and observation
Number of sessions	One	One book reading for each dyad	One session mother-child one session father-child	One session per dyad
Child assessments	Pre-reading tasks: letter recognition, word recognition, vocabulary.	Seven tasks to assess child's representational abilities and problem solving competence.	IQ assessment	None
Analysis	Coding for number of words. Parent: Warm up questions, factual & interpretive questions, post-evaluative questions, correction, elaboration of answers. Child: questions answered and asked, relates to own experience	Five aspects of parental behaviours coded: teaching demands, verbal emotional support, non-verbal parental support, form of utterance, cohesion of interaction.	Coding according to levels of cognitive demand (high, medium and low) & directiveness	Coding. 5 categories: Labelling, story content, general world knowledge, specific child experiences, other.
Results	Shared reading is a cyclic entity. Four steps for effective results: ask warm up questions, ask questions, reinforce child's attempts, ask post evaluative questions	Distancing strategies serve a significant function of children's problem-solving competence. Frequency of distancing strategies is influenced by ecological and personal-social variables.	Parents more directive & less demanding with younger CH children than with older non CH children. Different reading styles predicted children's IQ.	Formal reading increased with age and book familiarity, labelling decreased with age and familiarity.

Table 1:4 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 3:6 to 5:0 (continued)

	Yaden et al. (1989)	Pellegrini et al. (1990)	Phillips and McNaughton (1990)	*Sorsby and Martlew (1991)
Type of study	Longitudinal case study	Observational	Observational	Observational comparative
Country of study	U.S.	U.S	New Zealand	U.K.
Sample size	9	13	10	24
Age of children	3 to 5 years	4:4 years	3 and 4 years	3:7 to 4:6
Focus of study	Parent-child High SES	Mother-child dyads Low SES	Parent-child High SES	Mother-child High SES Two contexts: play-doh and book reading
Type of book	Reading materials selected by children	Narrative & expository genre Traditional storybook Comics/adverts in book form	Nine unfamiliar storybooks	Two narrative books
Recording	Audiotape	Videotape	Audiotape	Videotape
Number of sessions	Two times per week for 1 or 2 years	Nine reading sessions recorded	Three controlled readings for each book	One reading
Child assessments	None	PPVT	None	None
Analysis	Coding of transcripts. 5 categories: questions about graphic form, word meanings, story text, pictures & book conventions	Coding utterances into high, medium or low demand	Coding of transcripts according to parents' & children's utterances	Mother coding: 4 levels of representational demand (Sigel, 1982); interactive utterances and function of utterance. Child coding for responses to mother: fully adequate, partially adequate, inadequate
Results	Children asked most questions about pictures. Book sharing may affect comprehension more than print awareness	Low SES black mothers use strategies similar to high SES mothers. Genre affected strategies.	Parents initially focused on making meaning of story clear but later readings fostered anticipation & prediction	Mothers' conversation at a higher level of abstraction for book reading. Child responses to high-level requests were superior for reading.

Table 1:4 Studies of children aged 3:6 to 5:0 (continued)

	*Beals and DeTemple (1992)	DeBaryshe (1995)	Haden et al. (1996)	Leseman and DeJong (1998)
Type of study	Observational comparative (mealtime conversation and shared reading interactions)	Observational	Longitudinal study	Comparative longitudinal study
Country	U.S.	U.S	U.S.	Netherlands
Sample size	84	60	24	89
Child ages	3 and 4 years	Mean age 3:11 years	3:4 & 4:10 years [same sample]	4 years. Follow up at 5 & 6 years
Focus of study	Mother-child dyads Low SES (Head Start families)	Mother-child dyads Low SES dyads	Mother-child dyads High SES	Families Varied SES. 3 ethnic groups
Type of book	Narrative: Carle 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' plus one other families' own selection	Not reported	Familiar & unfamiliar	One unfamiliar narrative picture book
Recording	Audiotaped home reading	Audiotaped home reading	Audiotape	Videotape & observation
Number of sessions	Two sessions; the first at age 3 the second at age 4.	One reading session per dyad	Two total: first at 3:4, second at 4:10	Three sessions (first at 4, second at 5 & third at 6)
Child assessments	End of Kindergarten year: Standardised tests of linguistic and cognitive skills. Independent language tasks.	PPVT; EOWPVT; ITPA-VE	At 5:10: PPVT, concepts of print, decoding, story production, comprehension & retelling	Receptive vocabulary at 4 & 7. Literacy achievement at age 7
Analysis	Coding for immediate and non-immediate talk, relative involvement of child.	Coding for type of question, feedback, conversation	Coding for mothers: confirmations, high, medium and low level distancing strategies	Coding. Seven categories: procedural utterances, labelling, repeating & completing, explaining, evaluating, extending.
Results	A combination of home social & economic measures, family conversational measures and child language measures are best predictors of children's scores.	Direct effect of maternal beliefs on quality of interaction & child interest	Three maternal groups found: describers, comprehenders & collaborators.	Home literacy is multifaceted.

Table 1:5 Studies of shared reading interactions with children aged 5:0 and above

	Hannon et al (1986)	Tracey (1995)	Greenhough and Hughes (1998)
Type of study	Comparative: parents and teachers	Comparative: At-risk readers and accelerated readers	Comparative: parents & teachers
Country of study	U.K	U.S.	U.K
Sample size	52	Not reported	32
Age of children	5 – 7 years	Mostly 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd grade, some older	5:2 – 7:4
Focus of study	Parent-child, teacher-child Low SES	Child-parent Low SES and Middle SES	Parent-child & teacher-child Varied SES
Type of book	Age/ability appropriate school reading book	Grade level reading material and instructional level material	Mostly narrative
Recording	Audiotape	Videotape	Videotape
Number of sessions	1 session per family	At least 2	1 parent-child, 1 teacher-child
Child assessments	None	None	None
Analysis	Coding from transcripts. 21 categories identified; strategies identified from moves	Transcription from tapes	Coding for intervention behaviours: management, decoding, evaluation, conversing, intimacy
Results	Parents focused more on responding to miscues & hesitations than teachers	Mothers of accelerated readers used more questions and comments than mothers of at-risk children.	High conversing parents read for enjoyment; low conversing parents viewed reading in instrumental terms

Table 1:6 Longitudinal and ethnographic studies of shared reading interactions

	*Heath (1983)	*Taylor (1983)	*Sulzby and Teale (1987)	*Wells (1987)	*Minns (1990)
Type of study	Ethnographic study: 3 contrasting communities/SES	Ethnographic case study	Longitudinal naturalistic study	Longitudinal study.	Case study
Country	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.K.	U.K.
Sample size	Between 30 and 150 in each community. Usually around 40.	Six families	Eight families	32 children	Five
Age of children	Birth to school age	2 – 7 years	1:9 to 4:6	1:3 to 3:6 years	4 years
Focus of study	Families: One high SES and two low SES communities (one black, one white)	Families in which preschool child was successfully learning literacy. High SES	Parent-child 4 low SES 4 high SES	Families Range of SES	Parent-child & teacher-child Varied SES; three ethnic groups
Type of book	Reading materials selected by families	Reading materials selected by families	Selected by families	Families' own	Selected by families
Recording	Observation initially; audiotape later in study	Audiotape and observation	Audiotape – some videotape	Audiotape and observations	Audiotape
Number of sessions	Varied	Varied	Varied (families made their own recordings when reading occurred)	Ten observations for each child	At least one
Child assessments	No	No	No	At 3:3, 5:0 and 7:0 years	No
Analysis	Transcription from tapes & notes.	Transcription from tapes & notes	Transcriptions	Transcription & coding.	Transcriptions
Results	The 3 communities differed in language & literacy use. White low SES focused on picture labelling; black low SES focused on oral language	Families read for enjoyment rather than to teach children. Parents provided strong models of literacy and valued education	Shared reading: Is integral part of family life Is a socially constructed activity Becomes internalised with repeated readings Changes over time Varies in language and social interaction	Listening to stories read from books was significantly associated with 'Knowledge of literacy' age 5 & Reading Comprehension aged 7.	Schools must recognise the importance of children's early literacy experiences at home. All children experienced literacy at home but to different extents.

Key to Tables:

- * Shared reading observations took place in these studies as part of a wider study
- PPVT Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn and Dunn, 1981)
- EOWPVT Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (Gardner, 1981)
- ITPA-VE Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities – Verbal expression (Kirk et al., 1968)
- SALT Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts

Factors that can influence shared reading interactions and children's development

Recent research has shown that the degree and type of parental involvement in children's early learning is strongly affected by socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as factors such as levels of maternal education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). More specifically, a number of studies (Snow and Goldfield, 1982; Teale, 1984) contend that the varying nature of shared reading interactions is also due to factors including the personalities and socio-cultural backgrounds of the participants. Other factors that may affect how books are read include the type of text and the number of times a book has been read. These factors are now discussed.

Socio-economic, cultural and educational factors

It is widely reported that children from low SES communities are at greater risk of poorer school achievement than children from less deprived backgrounds, and their less extensive knowledge of literacy is evident by the time they start school (Dickinson and Snow, 1987; Heath, 1983; McCormick and Mason, 1986; Morrow, 1983; Wells, 1987). Studies have attempted to identify the types of parent-child interactions that may account for these differences and many have described the literacy interactions that do occur in low-income homes (Heath, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1984). A number of studies have documented differences in book ownership and frequency of shared reading between low versus high SES families (Heath, 1983; McCormick and Mason, 1986; Ninio, 1980; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1987). In McCormick and Mason's (1986) study, 47 per cent of their sample of low SES families reported no alphabet books in the home, in contrast with only three per cent of middle class families. Children from lower socio-economic groups may also underachieve at school

because of cultural differences, or a mismatch between home and school in definitions of literacy and teaching styles (Heath, 1983).

SES differences are also reported in the speech mothers address to their children (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; [Table 1:2]). High SES mothers have been shown to produce more speech per unit of time interacting than low SES mothers (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1994; Hoff, 2003). High SES mothers also sustain conversation longer, thereby increasing the amount of speech children are exposed to (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1994; Hoff, 2003).

Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) maintained that factors such as SES and children's attitudes to reading had larger effects on reading attainment than parents reading to children. In their meta-analysis however, Bus et al. (1995) found that the effectiveness of parents reading to their children did not vary according to SES.

Heath's classic ethnographic study (1983) of language use and communication in three contrasting communities identified very different cultures of literacy. The high SES parents frequently read to their children; indeed books and book related activities pervaded the lives of the pre-schoolers. In the white low SES community, cloth books, alphabet and number books, nursery rhyme books, bible stories and 'real life' books were common. These children were read to, taught alphabet letters, words and labelling, but there was little generalisation to other contexts. The black low SES community had an oral language tradition; there were no reading materials especially for children, and adults did not sit and read to children.

A number of studies have found that low SES parents want to help their children and think that their role is important but some feel they do not know how best to help (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Toomey and Sloane, 1994; Weinberger, 1996). Purcell-Gates (1996) found that some low SES parents gave little literacy support to their children in the preschool period, but began giving help once children had started school.

The nature of shared reading interactions may also vary between socio-economic groups. Ninio (1980) [Table 1:2] found that low SES mothers asked fewer *what* questions (requiring an oral response) and more *where* questions (usually requiring the child to point). Higher SES children had a larger productive vocabulary and low SES children had a larger imitative vocabulary. The rate of development was slower in the low SES group. Overall, mothers from low social class groups engaged in fewer teaching behaviours during shared reading than mothers from high social class groups.

Heath (1983) found that children in the high SES community learned to answer decontextualised knowledge questions and became co-operative partners with parents in negotiating meaning from books. In the white low SES community children were read to, and shared reading focused on labelling pictures in books, letters of the alphabet, numbers and simplified retellings. The white low SES parents did not relate book content to children's own experiences. Heath also noted that many of the low SES parents did not tend to adjust their language to their child's level of understanding and did not appear to view their children as appropriate conversational partners (Heath, 1982). The differences between the white and black low SES communities were substantial. Heath (1982) speculated that reading practices among the three different communities in her study were at least partly responsible for children's later literacy success or failure. For example, children in the high SES community usually did well at school, while those from the white low SES community often achieved for a few years until they were expected to think more creatively and conceptually, when they began to fail. Children from the black low SES community found it difficult to adjust to school learning and frequently did not meet with school success.

High SES mothers generally use more teaching type strategies, such as using metalinguistic verbs, encouraging children to relate book events to the real world and strategies to maximize children's participation than low SES mothers (Heath, 1983;

McCormick and Mason, 1986; Ninio, 1980; Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Leseman et al. (1995) found that infrequently occurring high-level demand conversations were highly correlated with socio-economic background and parents' educational level. Contrary to these findings however, Pellegrini et al. (1990) concluded that black, low SES mothers used strategies similar to those employed by high SES mothers. For example, there was evidence that they adjusted their questioning to match their children's competences.

Socio-economic status tends to be determined using indices such as parental income, occupation and education. There has been some debate regarding which aspects of SES most strongly relate to later academic achievement. Parental education has emerged as one of the most important factors in shaping the home literacy environments of young children (Hart and Risley, 1995; Snow, 1993). In a study of six to eleven-year-olds, Mercy and Steelman (1982) found mothers' education to be the best predictor of attainment. In his meta-analysis, White (1982) found that SES accounted for about five per cent of the variance in academic achievement. Among the traditional measures of SES, family income accounted for the greatest amount of variance, but SES measures that combined two or more indicators accounted for more variance than single indicators.

Parental values and attitudes

SES may be viewed as a somewhat crude indicator of children who may be at risk of school failure later. There is great variation in literacy practices of families both within, as well as between socio-economic groups (Anderson et al., 1980; Hewison and Tizard, 1980; Weinberger, 1996). Home environmental differences may therefore be more important than socio-economic status in accounting for variation in children's literacy development. For example, parental attitudes towards literacy, frequency of oral reading, parental aspirations for the child, the number of books owned and library

membership, predict levels of language and literacy skills above and beyond socio-economic status (Raz and Bryant, 1990; Share et al., 1984; Tizard et al., 1988; White, 1982). The findings of a recent longitudinal study (EPPE; Taggart, Edwards, Sammons, Elliot and Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) showed that children's intellectual and social development were enhanced in homes where parents actively engaged in activities, and that although parents' socio-economic status and education level had an impact, the quality of the home learning environment was more important.

Others have shown that the values and attitudes held by parents regarding literacy have a lasting effect on a child's attitude to learning to read (DeBaryshe, 1995; Baker, Scher and Mackler, 1997). Many low SES parents place a high value on literacy and also believe that reading is important for school success. In a powerful study of low SES families sometimes living in extreme poverty, Taylor and Dorsey Gaines (1988) followed families whose young children were successfully learning to read. The parents all had aspirations for their children's future success in school. We may conclude therefore that *'it may be how parents rear their children and not the parents' occupation, income or education that really makes the difference'* (White, 1982, p. 471).

Bus (2000) noted that parents were more likely to respond to their child's interest in books if they themselves had a positive attitude towards literacy. This resulted in mutually enjoyable book-reading interactions. Studies of early readers have found that the majority of their parents were avid readers (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966). Baker et al. (1997) found that parents who viewed reading as a source of entertainment tended to have children with a more positive view of literacy than parents who emphasised the skills aspect of learning to read.

McDonald and Pien (1982) suggested that mothers differ in the communicative goals they have when talking to their children. The differences may range from a

primary concern for directing children's behaviour to a primary concern with eliciting conversation from their children. This continuum could be applied to shared reading interactions.

Attachment

Bus (2000) investigated shared reading among dyads differing in the emotional bond between parents and children. Attachment theory assumes that children's expectations and responses are influenced by their past experiences of their interactions with their parents. Parents also differ in the extent to which they are able to support their child in interactions and parents' abilities are rooted in their own attachment history (Bus and van IJzendoorn, 1995; Bus et al., 1997 [Table 1:2]). Bus (2001) noted that the frequency and quality of shared reading interactions related strongly to the history of experiences children shared with their parents. Children with positive shared reading experiences were keen to read more frequently than those with negative experiences. Bus contended that *'the development of literacy is a profoundly social process, embedded in the parent-child emotional relationship'* (Bus, 2001, p. 51). The emotional relationship can encourage or inhibit shared reading interactions. Each shared reading interaction *'is a reflection of the participants' unique interpersonal style, history of storybook readings and socio-cultural norms'* (Bus, 2001, p. 51).

Book familiarity and genre

A number of studies have investigated the similarities and differences in shared reading interactions around familiar and unfamiliar books (Beals and DeTemple, 1992; Goodsitt et al., 1988; Haden et al., 1996; Martinez and Roser, 1985; Sulzby and Teale, 1987; Yaden et al., 1989). Yaden et al. (1989) found that in initial readings of a book, most children's questions related to the illustrations. With re-readings however,

questions about the meaning of words and the story itself began to emerge. This shows an increased depth of processing (Martinez and Roser, 1985). Mothers' demands for children's participation may be increased with familiar books (Phillips and McNaughton, 1990). Related to this, repeated re-readings of the same book may facilitate children's participation in interactions (Goodsitt et al., 1988; Haden et al., 1996; Martinez and Roser, 1985). Young children may begin to chime in with the parents' reading as books become familiar (Sulzby, 1985; Yaden, 1988; Yaden et al., 1989). In familiar picture books, parents may attempt to foster anticipation and prediction. Overall, there may be more decontextualised talk with familiar books (Beals and DeTemple, 1992; [Table 1:4]).

Haden et al. (1996) found that half the mothers in their study adjusted their reading style according to the familiarity of the book being read. They also suggested that children's comments during reading of familiar books may predict later print and story skills.

A small number of research studies have investigated the effects of genre on shared reading interactions and have shown that children participate more around expository texts than narrative texts (Heath, 1983; Pellegrini et al., 1990; Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Pellegrini et al. (1990) found that mothers used more high demand utterances in expository texts than in narrative texts.

Sulzby and Teale (1987) found that the pattern identified by Ninio and Bruner (1978) (that is attentional vocative, query, labelling and feedback) only occurred in readings of label books, ABC books and counting books, not in narrative or expository books. It appears that the text affects not only the content of the activity but also the nature of the parent-child interaction.

A number of studies have examined children's attempts to read familiar books before they can read in the conventional sense (Holdaway, 1979; Sulzby, 1985; Sulzby

and Teale, 1987). While Sulzby and Teale (1987) examined the role of parents in supporting children's attempts to read independently, this aspect of shared reading interactions has not been fully explored. The research conducted by Sulzby and Teale (1987) was a case study involving one parent-child dyad. The researchers argued that parents could be '*sensitive scaffolders*' and '*good negotiators*' of Vygotsky's (1934/1987) zone of proximal development while supporting their children's attempts at independent reading. There have been limited investigations into mothers' support for children in other contexts, such as retellings of stories (Reese, Haden and Fivush, 1993; McCabe and Peterson, 1991; Peterson and McCabe, 1996) and 'movie' stories (Clark-Stewart and Beck, 1999). The parents' role in supporting young children's attempts to read independently has been largely overlooked.

Summary: Factors that can influence shared reading interactions

There are differences in the home literacy experiences of children from different cultures and socio-economic groups. However, there are wide variations in experiences within these groups; many children from low SES backgrounds do achieve at school. Parents' values and attitudes regarding education, the importance of literacy and their role in their children's development are more important than SES and cultural factors.

While few studies have investigated book selection practices of parents and children, many have examined the differences in shared reading interactions between familiar and unfamiliar books. In familiar books children may participate more and may chime in as the parent reads. They may begin to ask more complex questions relating to story meaning. Parents make more complex demands, asking questions encouraging children to make predictions and making connections to children's own experience. There may be more decontextualised conversations around familiar books. There has been little research into the effects of genre on shared reading interactions,

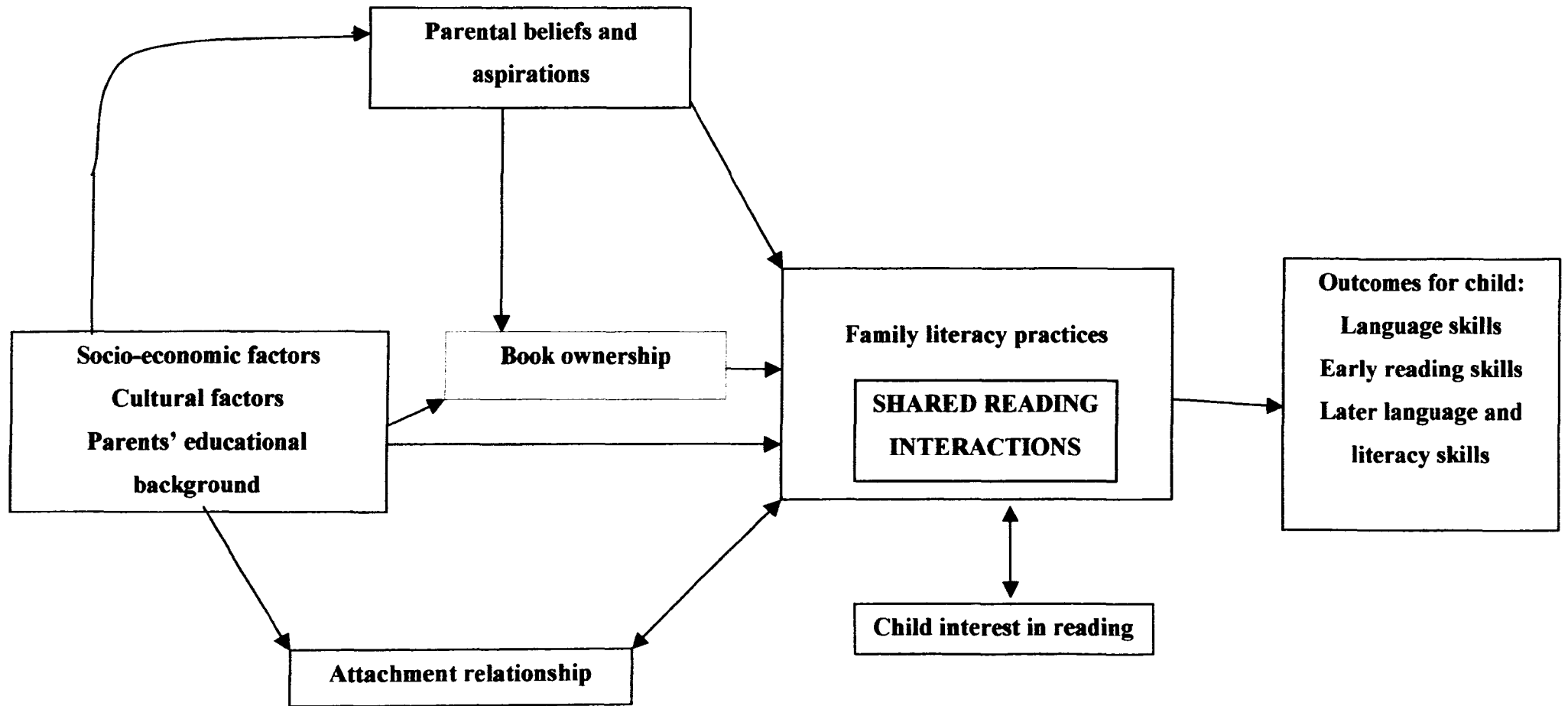
although it appears that expository texts may encourage more participation from both parents and children and increase parents' use of high-level demand strategies.

Discussion

This chapter has discussed what is already known about shared reading interactions. Firstly, some potential outcomes of shared reading interactions were described. This was followed by an examination of studies concerned with the nature of shared reading interactions, and finally factors that can influence shared reading interactions were identified. It was possible to devise a model to describe shared reading interactions based on these three areas (see Figure 1:1). The model is based on the social constructivist perspective of literacy development. It illustrates how factors such as parental education, socio-economic and cultural features may influence parental beliefs about literacy and attachment between parent and child (attachment is shown with a two-way arrow to illustrate that it may also be affected by family literacy practices). These may affect family literacy practices; the literacy opportunities, recognition, interaction and models provided by parents (The ORIM Framework, Hannon, 1995).

Shared reading interactions are located within family literacy practices because they are just one of many literacy practices the family may engage in. Others include environmental print and writing, although discussion of these areas is beyond the scope of this thesis. The final part of the model illustrates potential outcomes of shared reading interactions for the child; these include language skills, early reading skills, later language and literacy skills and child interest. Like attachment, child interest in reading is shown with a two-way arrow, indicating that it influences and is influenced by shared reading interactions.

Figure 1:1 A model of shared reading interactions



The research reviewed in this chapter highlights a number of areas for further investigation. There has been very little research into book selection strategies adopted by parents and children. While there have been several studies into children's independent reading of favourite books, very little is known about parents' support for their children's attempts to read independently, and whether the strategies they use are similar to those employed when the parent reads to the child.

Sigel's distancing model provides a useful framework for describing parent-child shared reading interactions and there is scope for further research in this area. Further investigation into factors that can affect shared reading interactions, particularly genre and SES is merited. A number of studies have compared shared reading interactions in families from contrasting SES communities. Most reported large differences in the reading behaviours of low and high SES families, although there has been some disagreement as to the extent of these differences. While a number of researchers have identified parental reading behaviours that may promote children's language and literacy skills, there have been some conflicting findings.

The literature reviewed also highlights epistemological differences between studies. A number of ethnographic studies have provided rich descriptions and interpretations of shared reading interactions as a whole. In contrast, most observational studies have based their findings on the minutiae of interactions, categorising each utterance according to its intention. In order to gain a full insight into shared reading interactions, a combination of these two forms of analysis is required.

This review has discussed the nature of shared reading interactions; their benefits and some of the factors that can influence them. Because the early literacy experiences of children from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds vary greatly, intervention programmes have been devised to attempt to enhance these

experiences for children considered to be at risk for later language and literacy difficulties. The next chapter is concerned with such programmes.

Chapter 2: Reading intervention programmes

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the importance of parent-child shared reading and its potential impact on young children's language and literacy development. This chapter is concerned with reading intervention programmes which aim to increase the frequency or enhance the quality of shared reading interactions between parents and children. It is interesting to note that there are far fewer studies of literacy-related interventions than those investigating naturally occurring home literacy. This observation was made by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), who also noted that while the quality of studies into naturally occurring family interaction practices was generally very high, the quality of intervention studies they reviewed tended to be much poorer.

The chapter begins with an overview of some reasons as to why intervention programmes might be utilised. This is followed by a description of different types of programmes. These will be discussed under three headings; opportunities-based, facilitation-based and techniques-based programmes. A large section is given to a specific, techniques-based programme called dialogic reading, since this type of programme was considered, on account of promising reports of its effectiveness, to be worth further investigation in this doctoral research. Dialogic reading is critically discussed in the final section.

Why intervention?

Differences in the home literacy practices and shared reading behaviours of families from differing socio-economic groups have been of concern to researchers for many years, because young children from low socio-economic backgrounds are at much greater risk of later literacy difficulties. As described in Chapter 1, the reasons are

complex, and may include factors such as cultural and educational differences; leading to differences in the ways families interact. While families from different cultures and educational backgrounds may engage in literacy activities and value school achievement, the practices themselves may differ in ways which can have major implications for their children's later school achievement (Heath, 1983).

We have seen in Chapter 1 that some parents may not know how best to help their children (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Toomey and Sloane, 1994; Weinberger, 1996). Hannon and James (1990) conducted a study comparing teacher and parent perspectives on early literacy development. They found that parents took an active role in their children's literacy development, but that there was a lack of communication from school to parents. Three quarters of parents were uncertain about the way they helped their children, but only one had asked the teacher. Parents would have welcomed advice but believed that teachers were unwilling to involve them in their children's literacy development. A recent study found that the most effective preschool settings, in terms of intellectual gains for children, were those that encouraged high levels of parental involvement (EPPE; Taggart et al., 2003).

There have been a number of surveys of home literacy, and particularly reading practices, which reported encouraging findings in terms of the proportion of families that regularly engage in literacy practices. For example, Davie, Hutt, Vincent and Mason (1984) studied 165 children aged three and four years and found that 94 per cent of them looked at books for around 20 minutes per day, often with an adult. Similar results were reported much more recently. A survey by Powergen revealed that 90 per cent of parents read their children a bedtime story (Nursery World; 2002, 1st August). In contrast, others have reported a decline in reading practices in many homes in recent years. For example, The Guardian newspaper (Carvel; 2000, 2nd December) reported a decline in bedtime story reading. Eighty-four families with young children were

surveyed about their home reading practices. Although 93 per cent of parents could remember being read to at least twice a week as children, only 40 per cent did the same for their children, while only 16 per cent read to their children every night. These findings are consistent with the wider concern that there has been a decline in young children's oral and listening skills over the last five years (National Literacy Trust, 2001). A survey of head teachers found concern that parents were unaware of the importance of talking and listening to their children.

Types of intervention programmes

Early programmes attempting to improve reading skills in young children tended to focus on intervention after children started school such as the Haringey Project (Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1982). More recently the importance of reaching families before children start school has been realised, since early literacy development has been shown to be important for later achievement (Wells, 1985; Tizard et al., 1988; Weinberger, 1996). It has been argued by some that waiting until children start school means opportunities are missed for enhancing literacy skills at the time when the foundations of literacy learning are laid (Hannon, 1996). While some relevant early reading programmes targeting school-aged children are included in this review, the main focus is on intervention studies aiming to enhance children's learning before they start school.

Recently, programmes have acknowledged the importance of involving parents more fully in their young children's literacy learning, since parents can make powerful contributions to children's early literacy achievements. In the U.S., Bronfenbrenner (1974) reviewed a number of intervention programmes. He found that programmes involving children in school, with no parental involvement, resulted in IQ gains in the first year after the programmes, although the gains diminished relatively soon

afterwards and could not be enhanced by continuing the intervention. In contrast, programmes that also included parents produced gains that could be further improved by continuing intervention programmes. Bronfenbrenner's findings confirm the view that *'you must reach the parent to serve the child'* (Darling and Paull, 1994, p. 279). Parents and other family members have a significant role to play in children's early literacy development and in fostering an enjoyment of learning. Because of the importance of the parents' role, the studies reviewed in this chapter are those which involve parents in their children's literacy learning. Those not involving parents have been omitted.

The term 'family literacy' has been used to describe some intervention programmes, although the term does not have a clear definition (Morrow, 1995). The Kenan Model (National Center for Family Literacy, 1989) advocates that family literacy programmes should have four components; parent literacy education, early childhood education, support groups for parents and opportunities for parents and children together (PACT) time. Given that the focus of this thesis is shared reading interactions, there is a bias towards reading focused interventions, although some described here include other areas of literacy as well. In addition, this review places considerable emphasis on the effectiveness of programmes; this is important as there is increasing demand for evidence-based practice.

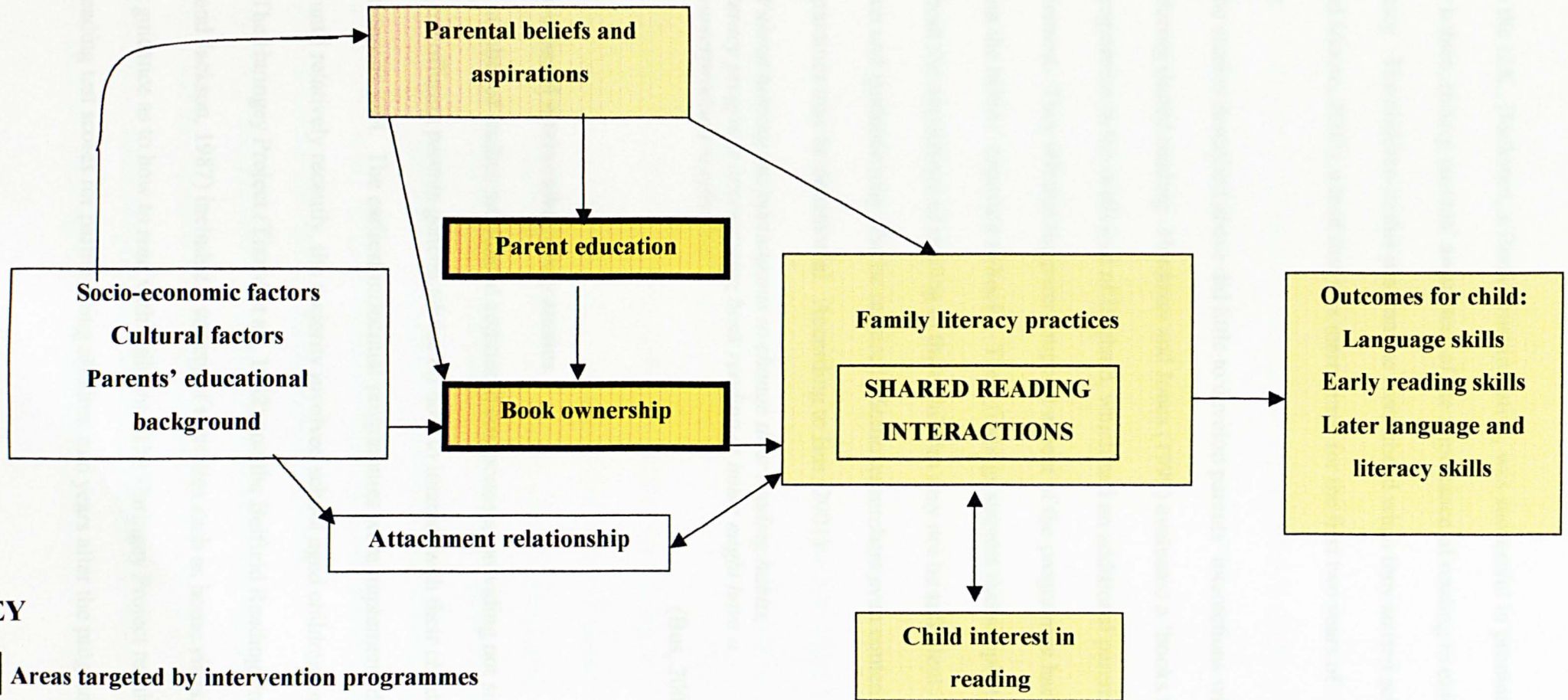
The model of shared reading interaction devised in Chapter 1, Figure 1:1, has been adapted for use in the context of reading intervention programmes. Figure 2:1 shows aspects of shared reading that researchers have attempted to influence through intervention. For example, early intervention studies increased families' **book ownership** by providing children's books, and therefore aimed to increase *opportunities* for engaging in literacy practices, in particular shared reading interactions. More recently programmes have focused on **parent education**, informing parents about the

importance of engaging in **shared reading interactions** with their children, providing information and guidance. In doing so, the aim is to influence **parental beliefs** about literacy and **aspirations** for their children's achievement. These programmes are viewed as *facilitative*; all provided children's books as well. Other parent education programmes have been more *techniques*-oriented, and some have shown that parents can be successfully taught to use certain reading behaviours. These too can be thought of as **parent education** programmes. All interventions ultimately aimed to positively influence the **outcomes of shared reading for children**, while one described below, specifically aimed to increase **children's interest in shared reading**. The three types of intervention identified here are discussed below.

Opportunities-based intervention programmes

This section describes programmes which aimed to improve children's opportunities for book reading. They were resources based, that is they provided parents with books with the hope that this would increase the frequency of book reading. In one of the most widely cited such studies, families had 'little books' posted to them several months before children started kindergarten (McCormick and Mason, 1986). In spite of there being very little parent-teacher contact, there was some impact on literacy attainment at the end of the kindergarten year. Similarly, the Pittsburgh Beginning with books Project provided packs of books, again without parent-teacher interaction, but on a very large scale involving thousands of children (Locke, 1988; Segel and Friedberg, 1991). Very young children were targeted.

Figure 2:1 A model of shared reading interventions



In the U.K., Bookstart, a Book Trust initiative, was successful in promoting books for babies, raising parents' awareness of the importance of reading to children from infancy. The children in this programme were ahead when they started school (Wade and Moore, 2000), a lead that was maintained for the first two years of schooling.

The studies described above did little to develop parents' interactions with their children during shared reading. Hardman and Jones (1999) evaluated a 'books for babies' programme in the north east of England, which had an additional parental support element. They felt that the parent support aspect of the programme had more impact than the babies' exposure to books. Their findings suggest that simply to inform parents about the importance of reading to their children may not be sufficient; information and guidance may also be required. Some researchers even contend that such programmes may be detrimental. According to Bus (2001):

'Without helping the participants to change their reading habits, literacy programs encouraging book reading at home might have a counterproductive effect'

(Bus, 2001, p. 51)

Facilitation-based intervention programmes

A number of studies introduced additional components, providing not simply resources but offering parents general advice on how to interact with their children around literacy as well. The earliest influential programmes were implemented in the U.K. and until relatively recently, the majority involved school aged children and their parents. The Haringey Project (Tizard et al., 1982) and the Belfield Reading Project (Hannon and Jackson, 1987) included a variety of activities such as home visits, book loans and guidance as to how to read with children. The Haringey Project resulted in gains in reading test scores for participating children two years after the programme

began.

Around the same time, Swinson (1985) targeted parents of three and four-year-old children, encouraging them to read to their children from books which they were able to borrow from a school. Two initial meetings were held for parents to discuss reading with children and talk about 'good practice'. The programme ran for a year, in which time daily home reading increased from around 15 per cent to almost 100 per cent, and there were gains for children in expressive vocabulary and verbal comprehension. In a follow up study after school entry, researchers found gains on word matching and letter identification compared to children in a control group.

The Calderdale Preschool Parent Book Project (Griffiths and Edmonds, 1986) was devised to encourage parents of nursery children to borrow books from project schools over an eight-month period. There was some teacher involvement in the form of meetings to discuss 'good practice'. Parents and teachers viewed the project positively and take-up was high. After the programme, there were found to be gains for children in measures of literacy development.

In 1993 and 1994 the Basic Skills Agency set up four family literacy programmes in deprived areas in the U.K. The programmes ran for 12 weeks with both parents and children being tested on reading and writing skills at the beginning and end of courses. Results showed that the programmes had been highly effective in enhancing parents' literacy skills, their ability to help their children and children's language and literacy skills (Brooks et al., 1996). In addition, a follow up study (Brooks et al., 1997) revealed that both parents and children had maintained these gains.

In the U.S., Neumann (1996) implemented a 12 week programme for low income parents and their four-year-old children, designed to provide access to books and opportunities for shared reading interactions. Book reading sessions were held in Head Start Centers and group discussions were held before each book reading session.

These were designed to help parents discuss events in books and to relate events to children's own experiences. A number of shared reading interactions in the book reading sessions were tape recorded and coded to analyse the patterns of interactions. The analysis revealed that parents increased their use of discussion over the duration of the programme. Children's vocabulary and print concept scores increased significantly when compared with their performance before the intervention.

Another programme which attempted to increase the amount of discussion during reading interactions between parents and school children (aged five to seven years) was described by Greenhough and Hughes (1999). This exploratory study was designed to assess the effectiveness of different methods for encouraging 'conversing'. The researchers worked in four different schools, adopting a different method in each. The methods included 1) a workshop to discuss the importance of conversing and provide examples, 2) a home-school diary in which aspects of conversing could be recorded, 3) a workshop plus home-school diary 4) a 'visitors comment book' accompanying each book sent home. Unlike Neumann (1996), the researchers found that none of the interventions were particularly successful. Greenhough and Hughes (1999) concluded that the amount of conversing dyads engage in is related to other factors, such as educational levels and attitudes towards literacy. There are a number of possible reasons for the conflicting findings of Neumann (1996) and Greenhough and Hughes (1999). Firstly, the children in Neumann's study were much younger. Secondly, Neumann's study involved parents and children reading together *immediately after* the group discussions in which strategies for enhancing interactive talk were discussed. In Greenhough and Hughes' study, only two conditions involved workshops in which strategies for encouraging conversing were discussed, and these may have occurred some time before parents tried out the strategies, as parents were free to make tape recordings of their interactions at times which suited them.

Longer-term initiatives, such as the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) Project (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001) have been implemented in the U.K. In this project, ten teachers worked with 80 families with three-year-old children for a period of 12 to 18 months. The programme involved monthly home visits, in which teachers worked with parents and children, provision of literacy resources, particularly books, centre-based workshops, special events and postal communication. Results showed that the programme group was significantly ahead of the control group on an early literacy assessment (SELDP; Nutbrown, 1997) and a letter recognition test at the end of the programme (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001).

The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) was set up in 1995 to work with parents to support learning at home (Roberts, 2001). The project was offered to all families within a defined geographical area and parents were offered weekly meetings, home visits and resources. Results for this programme too, have been positive, with significant gains reported in three-year-old children's verbal comprehension, vocabulary, concepts about print, phonological awareness and writing (PEEP Conference Report, 2001).

Facilitation-based intervention programmes have also been implemented in the U.S. (for example Handel, 1992) and elsewhere. In Australia, Toomey and Sloane (1994) devised a programme in which preschools sent books home and supported parents in reading with their children, mainly through meetings in school. They reported gains in children's emergent literacy skills and print knowledge.

Far fewer programmes have aimed to teach parents explicit techniques for reading with their children. The next section describes some of these.

Techniques-based intervention programmes

Some of the earliest techniques-based family literacy programmes were again introduced to benefit school-aged children. For example, the Paired Reading technique, used with struggling readers, offered parents a limited range of strategies for reading with their children. The technique was devised by Morgan (1976) and modified by Topping and Lindsay (1992), and involves the parent and child sitting side-by-side reading along together. The child signals to the parent and then takes over the reading until a mistake is made. At this point, the parent joins in, and the two continue reading together again. The technique has been shown to be effective in raising reading attainment, with gains enduring at follow up (Brooks, Flanagan, Henkhuzens and Hutchison 1998).

In the U.S. some attempts have been made to influence parent-child reading interactions in much younger children. Edwards (1989) ran a small-scale qualitative programme to help parents interact with their children during book reading. Edwards (1989) described and developed successful interactive reading behaviours of five low SES black mothers. The five mothers were videotaped reading with their children once a month for a period of nine months. The videotape was then replayed so that mother and researcher could analyse the reading behaviour. New interactions were suggested including:

- Using strategies to maintain the child's attention
- Responding to the child's comments
- Relating the text to life experiences and life to text experiences
- Answering children's questions and relating text to children's own personal experiences
- Initiating discussion, recounting parts of the story, sharing personal reactions and encouraging children to respond similarly

Some mothers made more progress than others, although it was felt that none of the mothers' potential was fully realised due to the brevity of the study. This study did not measure children's language and literacy skills, as it was the mothers who were the subjects of the study.

Twenty-eight parent-child dyads participated in a four-week home based book reading intervention programme devised by Justice and Ezell (2000). Parents were taught book-reading strategies, and individual parent-training sessions with children were also provided. Participating mothers significantly increased their use of comments and questions about print while children in the study significantly increased their ability to understand concepts of print.

Another study used a techniques-based programme to attempt to increase child interest in shared reading (Ortiz, Stowe and Arnold, 2001). This study provided parents with five principles thought to be important to fostering child interest in reading. These included following the child's lead, getting the child actively involved, making reading fun, using positive feedback and selecting books that were of interest to the child. Information was also given about what to do if a child was not interested in a reading session. The researchers evaluated the programme using parent report, reading logs and direct observations. They concluded that the intervention had helped to increase child interest after one week, although after four weeks the effects were somewhat diminished.

DeBaryshe (1992) aimed to show that improving the *quality* of parent-child shared reading interactions was preferable to increasing the *frequency* of such interactions using an experimental method. She compared two experimental conditions plus a no-treatment control group. In one of the experimental groups, parents received two training sessions that emphasised asking challenging questions, reading less from text and providing feedback to children's comments. Parents were asked to use the

techniques while reading daily to their children at home for a seven-week period. Parents in the second experimental group were encouraged to read to their children daily, but did not receive any special training in book reading techniques. The control group received no parent involvement at all. Analyses of home tape-recorded reading sessions showed that parents in the first experimental group were using the techniques. Their children's verbal participation during the intervention period was greater than that of the children in the group for which only the frequency of reading was emphasised. However, no significant differences among the three groups for descriptive language, receptive or expressive vocabulary were found.

There are a number of possible reasons as to why this study did not achieve significant results. Because participation was voluntary, those who participated in the programme tended to be families who regularly engaged in shared reading interactions. DeBaryshe also felt that parents' use of the techniques 'peaked' during the middle of the programme and then tapered off although she did not collect data on this (personal communication, 17th October, 2001). Scarborough and Dobrich (1994), suggested another reason for null effects of this kind, arguing that most intervention studies whose aim is to improve the quality of parent-child interactions probably influence the frequency of interactions as well. In the DeBaryshe study, because these two conditions (frequency and quality) were contrasted, neither was found to be effective.

The DeBaryshe (1992) study described here utilised many of the techniques devised for a programme called Dialogic Reading. The programme is described in some detail below because it was of potential interest to the study about to be undertaken.

A review of dialogic reading

Whitehurst and colleagues (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst, 1992; Whitehurst, Arnold et al., 1994) devised an intervention programme involving ‘*a package of stimulation*’ (Whitehurst et al., 1988) to investigate the relationship between shared reading and children’s language development. One set of techniques was devised for two and three-year-old children, and an extended set of techniques were devised for four and five-year-olds. The dialogic reading programme aimed to teach parents to use three general principles when reading with their children:

- *Evocative techniques.* These are questions that encourage the child to take a more active role; for example ‘what’ questions rather than ‘where’ or ‘yes/no’ questions. Such techniques have been found to be effective when sharing books with children (for example, Hargrave and Senechal, 2000; Pellegrini et al., 1990; Wells, 1985).
- *Feedback.* This should be informative and where possible should incorporate expansions of the child’s response. It should also include corrective modelling. A number of studies have linked this type of feedback to an increase in children’s spontaneous utterances and imitations (for example, Scherer and Olswan, 1984).
- *Progressive change.* This refers to the mothers’ ability to tailor questions to the child’s developing abilities. For example, a child should be able to label objects before being asked to refer to its attributes (Moerk, 1985). This technique is based on Vygotsky’s (1934/1987) theory of the zone of proximal development; that the adult can help the child to achieve just a little more than they ordinarily would through questioning and encouragement. This is described in more detail in Chapter 1.

Dialogic reading, therefore, was devised using a combination of techniques taken from existing studies and theories. According to Arnold and Whitehurst:

'Dialogic reading is based on the premise that language development may be accelerated if the boundaries of the proximal zone are pushed further than they might be spontaneously'.

(Arnold and Whitehurst, 1994, p. 105)

The aim of dialogic reading was to stimulate children's vocabulary skills and descriptive language abilities; typically the assessments used have been the Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT; Gardner, 1981) which measures expressive vocabulary, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT; Dunn and Dunn, 1981) which measures receptive vocabulary, and the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities – Verbal Expression (ITPA –VE; Kirk, McCarthy and Kirk, 1968) which measures verbal fluency in describing common objects. In addition, mean length of utterance (MLU) has been calculated in a number of studies, and a test that drew on novel vocabulary from books used in the intervention was also devised.

As parents become more involved in the dialogic reading technique, they gradually allow the child to become the storyteller, taking an active role. Parents become active listeners, prompting, expanding and rewarding the child's efforts. They are taught seven points at the beginning of the first programme:

- Ask *what* questions
- Follow the child's answers with questions
- Repeat what the child says
- Help the child as needed
- Praise and encourage
- Follow the child's interest
- Have fun!

Two to three weeks later, after the first part of the programme, parents are taught to:

- Ask open-ended questions
- Expand what the child says
- Have fun!

Dialogic reading studies

Dialogic reading techniques have been taught to parents, teachers and students in a number of studies, and results have been impressive. The design and results of some of the earlier studies are summarised in Table 2:1.

In the first study (Whitehurst et al., 1988), high SES parents were trained because it was argued that such parents were easier to involve in intervention studies. Parents in both the control and experimental groups tape-recorded reading times with their children before the programme and there was found to be no difference in the frequency of reading between the two groups. After the programme, children in the intervention produced significant increases in MLU and on three standardised tests of children's language skills: EOWPVT, ITPA-VE and PPVT. This study showed that language development in high and middle SES children could be enhanced significantly with a very short (four week) intervention.

Two-year-old children of low-income parents were the subjects of the next study (Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst, 1992). The children attended a day care centre in Mexico and their linguistic ability was very poor. The children in the intervention received a ten-minute dialogic reading session each weekday for six weeks, while the control group received ten minutes one-to-one adult attention on non-book related activities. At the end of the programme, children in the intervention group produced significantly more, longer and more complex utterances than the control group.

Children in the intervention used more diverse language and were more likely to provide answers, initiate and continue conversations.

A video training presentation of dialogic reading was developed following these two initial studies. It was used with middle to upper SES parents and children and found to be very successful; Arnold et al. (1994) found greater gains in two-year-olds' receptive and expressive vocabulary when their parents were taught by videotape than when they were trained using the original direct training methods. It seems that the advantage of the videotapes was that they modelled parent-child reading interactions, rather than using role-play, as in the direct training techniques.

In the next study (Whitehurst, Arnold et al., 1994), parents and day-care teachers of children averaging three and a half years were trained in the techniques. Children from low SES backgrounds were assigned to one of three groups; a school only group, who were read to using dialogic reading by their teachers, a combined school and home group who were read to by teachers and parents and a control group. Parents in the 'home and school' group received books to read to their children at home. Training of all adults was based on the instructional video developed in the previous study. The two programme groups were significantly ahead of the control group on the EOWPVT and PPVT at the end of the programme, although the two programme groups did not differ significantly from each other.

Table 2:1 Summary of dialogic reading studies

	Study 1: Whitehurst et al. (1988)	Study 2: Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst (1992)	Study 3: Whitehurst, Arnold et al. (1994)	Study 4: Arnold et al. (1994)	Study 5: Whitehurst, Epstein et al. (1994)	Study 7: Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998)
Sample size	30 children	20 children	73 children	64	164	114
SES	High SES	Low SES	Low SES	Mid-high SES	Low SES	Low SES
Age of children	1:9 – 2:11	2:3 – 2:11	3 years	2:0 – 2: 10	4 years	2:9 – 5:0
Programme duration	4 weeks	6 – 7 weeks	6 weeks	5 weeks	1 school year	6 weeks
Assessment setting	University	Public day care	Day care	University	Head start centre	Day care
Assessment duration	Not reported	Not reported	1 session; 25 minutes	Not reported	Not reported	1 session; 25 minutes
Other measures	Pre-programme questionnaire	Pre-programme Questionnaire	Family Reading Survey	Pre-programme questionnaire	Family Reading Survey Quick test (IQ measure) Sound foundations	Not reported
Training	Direct training 2 half hour sessions	Not reported	Video training: 2 sessions	2 sessions: video or direct training	Video training: 2 sessions	Video training: 2 sessions
Who was trained?	Parents	Graduate students	Parents and teachers	Parents	Teachers & parents	Parents and teachers
Pre-test assessments	Not reported	EOWPVT, PPVT, DDST	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE	Reynell, PPVT	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE, DSC
Post-test assessments	MLU, EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE, Our Word	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE ITPA-GC	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE, writing & print concepts	EOWPVT, PPVT, ITPA-VE, MLU
Conditions	Programme / control	Programme / control	School / school and home / control	Video training group / direct training group / control	Programme / control	School / home / school and home / control
Dropout	1	Not reported	2	Not reported	40	23
Frequency of reading	4 times a week	Thirty 10-12 minute individual sessions	Daily	4 times a week	Group & home reading 4/5 times per week.	Daily
Results	ITPA-VE $t(27)=3.941$, $p=0.005$ EOWPVT $t(27)=2.513$, $p=0.009$ PPVT not significant	EOWPVT $t(18) = 3.06$, $p=0.007$ PPVT $t(18) = 2.57$, $p=0.019$ ITPA-VE $t(18)=3.38$, $p=0.003$	ANCOVA: EOWPVT & Our Word significant for centre and condition. PPVT significant for interaction of centre and condition. ITPA not significant	ANCOVA: Video training had most significant impact on EOWPVT, ITPA-VE, ITPA-GC and PPVT.	MANCOVA: No effect on language skills overall. Significant effects on writing & print concepts	ANCOVA: Significant effects for all 3 conditions versus control.
Effect size	Mean effect size: 0.99 EOWPVT $d= 1.1$ PPVT $d=0.69$ ITPA-VE $d=1.2$	Mean effect size: 1.56 EOWPVT $d=1.29$ PPVT $d=1.3$ ITPA-VE $d=2.08$	Not reported	Not reported	Writing $d=0.516$ Print concepts $d=0.624$	Overall EOWPVT $d=0.41$ (0.30 school group 0.74 school and home) Overall ITPA $d=0.44$

Key for Table 2:1:

EOWPVT = Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test

PPVT = Peabody Picture Vocabulary test

Reynell = Reynell Developmental Language scales (Reynell, 1985)

DSC = Developing Skills Checklist (CTB,1990)

ITPA-VE = Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic abilities – verbal expression (ITPA; Kirk et al., 1968)

ITPA-GC = Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic abilities – grammatical closure (ITPA; Kirk et al., 1968)

DDST = Denver Developmental Screening test (Frankenburg et al., 1993)

MLU = Mean Length of Utterance

Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) conducted a further study contrasting the effects of

- a no treatment control group
- a school-only reading condition
- a home-only reading condition
- a school plus home reading condition

The children in this study were three and four-year-olds and most were African-American. The main purpose was to compare the impact of the school only dialogic reading with the home only dialogic reading. Results showed a significant increase in children's expressive language abilities. The intervention groups scored significantly higher on the EOWPVT than the control. The two school groups resulted in the largest gains in expressive vocabulary, leading the authors to suggest that teachers may focus on teaching specific age-appropriate vocabulary. Children in the three intervention conditions scored significantly higher on the ITPA-VE than children in the control condition at post-test. Children in the home only condition scored significantly higher on the ITPA-VE than children in each of the other three conditions. As the ITPA-VE measures descriptive language, Lonigan and Whitehurst surmised that parent-child dialogic reading impacted on children's use of descriptive language. The results showed that low SES parent led dialogic reading could have a positive effect on young children's language skills. Initial fears that low SES parents may have difficulty using dialogic reading techniques were not realised. Parents were able to use the technique as effectively as teachers.

Other studies of dialogic reading have been of longer duration and have included additional elements. Whitehurst, Epstein, et al. (1994) investigated the effects of dialogic reading with older children, aged four, enrolled in Head Start. Classrooms of four-year-olds were randomly assigned to a dialogic reading programme (conducted

both at home and at school) for 30 weeks, or a control group. The school dialogic reading involved small group, rather than individual interactions. The children in the intervention also experienced a school based sound and letter awareness programme called Sound Foundations (Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley, 1992) for 16 weeks. For the home condition, parents were trained in dialogic reading techniques and were asked to read dialogically with their children at least three times per week. Hints for 'wh' prompts were added to each page of books used in the programme, and hints for recall questions were added to the inside back covers. Teacher and parent book guides for each book providing hints on how to read specific books with children were also developed. Children were tested on language, writing, linguistic awareness and print concepts. The intervention programme had a significant effect on writing and print concepts. The effects on writing were likely to have been a result of the 'Sound Foundations' part of the intervention. There was no significant effect on language skills overall. However, the extent to which parents participated in the reading programme at home was strongly related to children's scores on the language factor of the assessment. The researchers concluded that while there were problems with small group dialogic reading by teachers, *parent-child* dialogic reading was related to children's language development in the preschool period.

Dialogic reading has been used successfully with children with learning difficulties (Crain-Thoreson and Dale, 1999; Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson and Cole, 1996), limited vocabularies (Hargrave and Senechal, 2000) and mild language delays (McNeill and Fowler, 1999). Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) added to the dialogic reading techniques an instruction to parents to pause after asking questions of their child. It seems likely that all children, not just those with learning difficulties, can benefit from adults pausing after asking questions, giving the child time to respond.

Discussion of dialogic reading

The research suggests that dialogic reading may be more beneficial for younger children. Although the programme techniques were extended to include four and five-year-olds, the effects were not as great as in some of the earlier studies. One possible reason is that some of the theory behind dialogic reading is based on research of very young children; for example, the 'feedback' principle was based on a study of two-year-old boys (Scherer and Olswan, 1984). Although the programme involving the older four and five-year-old children included additional techniques, the theory and fundamental techniques were ultimately the same.

While the early dialogic studies reported language gains for programme children, these were not consistent. For example, in some cases expressive vocabulary and descriptive skills were most affected (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst, 1992), in another study there were no significant gains for descriptive language (Whitehurst, Arnold et al., 1994). In a later study there were no significant gains at all for programme children's language skills (Whitehurst, Epstein et al., 1994). These factors led DeBaryshe, who was involved in the first dialogic reading study (Whitehurst et al., 1988), to comment that Whitehurst '*does not always get clean results*' (personal communication, 17th October, 2001).

Another possible reason for such variation in results was posited by Dale et al. (1996) who contended that types of responses to dialogic reading interventions were related to skills children already had. Children with more advanced language skills responded to dialogic reading with improvements in their grammatical competence, whereas those with less advanced language skills experienced a growth in their expressive vocabulary. Reese and Cox (1999) also concluded that the skills children brought to intervention programmes were important.

The DeBaryshe study reported above (DeBaryshe, 1992) utilised a number of dialogic type techniques and achieved no significant effects. This study was not published, but was obtained through ERIC document reproduction service. DeBaryshe conducted another dialogic reading study around the same time, involving a school only reading condition, a home only reading condition and a control group. The study achieved null effects and the results were never published. DeBaryshe explained that it is *'hard to find an editor who will accept null results'* and conceded that *'this publication bias does, of course, leave an overly optimistic impression about the true strengths of such interventions'* (personal communication, 17th October, 2001).

Another criticism that may be levelled at the Whitehurst studies is that the earliest study adopted one-tailed hypotheses (Whitehurst et al., 1988). This may be acceptable, given that it was an intervention study in which the direction of the difference was clearly stated, that is, the programme children alone were expected to make gains. However, using one-tailed hypotheses is discouraged, since this is considered to be too lenient a criterion. Subsequent studies utilised two-tailed hypotheses.

Unlike the family literacy studies reported earlier (Brooks et al., 1997) the effects of dialogic reading may not be maintained. Although the gains made in emergent literacy from the Whitehurst, Epstein et al. (1994) study were maintained throughout kindergarten, there were no significant differences in reading scores for the same children at the end of first and second grade. Whitehurst and his colleagues proposed that while the impact of dialogic reading may be seen immediately in some areas, such as vocabulary and descriptive language, the impact on other areas of literacy may not be evident until later on, when children begin to read for meaning (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1999).

Although dialogic reading incorporates a number of techniques, it is primarily a low-level demand programme (Reese and Cox, 1999) and is similar to the *describer* style of reading identified by Haden et al. (1996), discussed in the previous chapter. Haden et al. (1996) found that children of mothers using a *describer* style had lower language and story comprehension skills than mothers using a *comprehender* style. In contrast, Reese and Cox (1999) found that a *describer* style of reading resulted in greater benefits for children's vocabulary than *performance-oriented* or *comprehender* styles. Reese and Cox's (1999) findings suggest that dialogic reading may be beneficial for enhancing vocabulary, while interventions focusing on encouraging discussion and explanation (for example, Neumann, 1996; Greenhough and Hughes, 1999) may affect other skills, such as decontextualised language.

One of the difficulties found in many of the studies reported above concerned parents' rates of participation in home dialogic reading interventions. Payne et al. (1994) and Whitehurst, Arnold et al. (1994) found that there was substantial variability in home literacy behaviours. It is likely that factors including daily stress, major life stresses, low social support and family size may contribute to parents' lack of involvement in such programmes. Many parents recognise that reading with their child is important, but some are too overwhelmed with stress and daily tasks to find time for it. A study by McNeill and Fowler (1999) found that some mothers needed many weeks to implement the dialogic reading techniques effectively. This implies that some adults may need more extensive training in order to acquire and sustain their use of the techniques.

Another criticism of dialogic reading is the very short duration of the early programmes, from between four and six weeks. This could also be viewed as a strength of the programme; to produce significant gains on standardised tests after such a short intervention is quite an achievement.

One dialogic reading study had assessed older children's emergent literacy skills (Whitehurst, Epstein et al., 1994), although the reported gains were likely to have been at least partly due to the Sound Foundations element of the programme. None of the earlier studies investigated whether dialogic reading impacted on two and three-year-old children's emergent literacy skills. This was an area considered worthy of investigation. In addition, although studies investigated families' socio-economic status and home literacy practices, none had sought parents' views of dialogic reading. These would provide insights into parents' perceptions of the programme, their programme practices and whether or not they were likely to continue to use the techniques. Just as important, they may also yield reports of outcomes for children. For example, it is possible that dialogic reading may enhance child interest, since the study reported earlier (Ortiz, Stowe and Arnold, 2001) utilised a number of dialogic type techniques, such as following the child's lead, getting the child actively involved and using positive feedback. Given that the Ortiz and colleagues achieved their aim of raising child interest, it is likely that dialogic reading may have a similar outcome. It was not possible for Whitehurst and his colleagues to determine whether this was the case however, because none of the studies interviewed parents immediately after programmes. If dialogic reading programmes are to be more widely implemented, parents' views of the techniques are surely crucial.

Summary

Dialogic reading has produced encouraging, if somewhat inconsistent, results. However, on balance the programme is of interest, particularly because a number of the studies have achieved positive results after very short interventions. There is scope for additional elements to be included, such as assessment of early literacy skills and seeking parents' views of the programme. No studies of this kind have been conducted

in the U.K. While positive results have largely been obtained from facilitation-based intervention programmes (such as REAL and PEEP), little has been done to determine whether improved results could be achieved with a more direct, instructional approach, aiming to improve the *quality* of parent-child reading interactions. The next chapter provides a rationale for the implementation of a dialogic reading study as part of this thesis, drawing on the gaps in previously implemented programmes and identifying how the current study would address these gaps. The methodologies for this and the subsequent study are described.

Chapter 3: Aim, research questions and methodology

Introduction

In this chapter the rationale and methods used in the research are explained. Chapter 1 examined some of the literature into parent-child reading, while Chapter 2 provided a review of early literacy intervention studies. There are issues arising from both areas of literature. For example, there is still some debate as to which behaviours are most beneficial for enhancing language and literacy development. A number of the intervention studies discussed in Chapter 2 based their programmes upon what researchers perceived were reading behaviours that promoted language and literacy development, and a number achieved promising results. However, there is scope for further investigation. With this in mind, a broad research aim was identified,

- To identify and develop shared reading behaviours that promote children's language and literacy skills.

A small number of intervention studies have attempted to enhance children's language and literacy skills by developing parental reading behaviours, in particular dialogic reading. We have seen in Chapter 2 that the effectiveness of dialogic reading was measured only in terms of language outcomes for participating children. As an initial study I intended to implement and evaluate a dialogic reading programme, measuring outcomes in terms of language and literacy skills, as well as less tangible aspects of literacy development, such as enjoyment, motivation, confidence and self-esteem. After completion of the programme there would be two possible research routes. Firstly, if the intervention significantly enhanced children's language and literacy skills and increased dyads' enjoyment of reading, some of the techniques appropriate for reading with young children would be applied to other areas of literacy, in particular writing and phonological awareness. It was hoped that an original set of

techniques for parents could be devised that would increase children's enjoyment of literacy activities and enhance their emergent literacy skills. If the dialogic reading programme did not increase enjoyment and significantly enhance children's language and literacy skills, parent-child shared reading would be revisited, with particular focus on behaviours that may help to promote language and literacy development.

The next section describes in more detail how the decision to conduct the initial intervention study was taken, the detailed research questions for the study and the methods used. This is followed by the research questions and a description of the methods used in Study 2.

Study 1: A dialogic reading intervention programme

Very few U.K. literacy interventions have adopted direct, instructional methods to enhance the quality of parents' literacy interactions with children, preferring instead to utilise more facilitative approaches (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001; Roberts, 2001). This is likely to be largely due to the belief that such explicit teaching is considered inappropriate within a developmental model of literacy development.

Although dialogic reading is not an instructional programme for children, parents are taught very specific techniques which they then use, some might argue in contrived 'teaching' type reading situations, with their children.

The instructional dialogic reading programme also appeared to reinforce the 'professionals know better than parents' approach on how to educate children. I was concerned that it was an example of an instructional, school type programme in which the purpose of reading together was to read dialogically. Reading for enjoyment did not appear to be a major aim. Clearly there was a conflict between my experience of parents' desire for tangible strategies for developing language and literacy and my own reservations about the ethics and cultural appropriateness of such a programme.

My decision to conduct a dialogic reading programme was ultimately influenced by a number of factors. The first was my own experiences of parents' interest in gaining knowledge of such techniques. I have already explained my concerns regarding parents' lack of confidence as to how to interact with their children around books in the Introduction. This is summed up by the contention that:

'We must go beyond telling lower SES parents to help their children with reading. We must show them how to participate in parent-child book reading and support their attempts to do so'.

(Edwards, 1989, p. 248)

Secondly, I was influenced by the notion that '*instruction and facilitation may not be irreconcilable types of teaching*' (Hannon, 2000, p. 63); that it may be possible to utilise both. Hannon suggests the idea of a '*teaching spectrum*' with instruction at one end and facilitation at the other (Hannon, 2000). Instead of viewing instruction and facilitation as different concepts, they can be viewed as different instances of the same concept.

The dialogic reading techniques can be viewed as emphasising the instructional end of the teaching spectrum, while parents' original reading styles may (or may not) tend towards the facilitation end of the spectrum. I argue that informing parents about dialogic reading strategies provides them with new techniques for reading with their children, which they may opt to use or not. They may choose to utilise dialogic techniques at times while continuing to use their naturally occurring reading approaches on other occasions.

Dialogic reading studies to date have tended to concentrate on children's language development, largely disregarding the attitudes and literacy behaviours of families before and after programmes. Such information is necessary if programmes are to be fully evaluated. Programmes have tended to focus on children's language skills, while early literacy skills have largely been ignored. Although book skills are not

directly targeted by the intervention, it is likely that such skills may be affected. Dyads' enjoyment of reading, confidence and motivation for reading were not assessed in any of the studies to date. There was clearly scope for implementing a dialogic reading programme that addressed the points highlighted above. In addition, there had been no dialogic reading studies carried out in the U.K.

Methodology for Study 1

Designing the programme

The research questions for this study were,

1. What is the nature of families' home literacy practices before the intervention?
2. Can parents be taught to use dialogic reading techniques?
3. What is the value of a dialogic reading programme?

The first research question was included for a number of reasons; in particular because it was considered desirable to determine the extent to which families used 'dialogic' type techniques before training. Information about families' pre-intervention home literacy practices could also help in judging the amount of support parents were likely to need when implementing the techniques.

It would be more difficult to evaluate the second research question, since the most rigorous way of determining the extent to which parents were using the techniques would involve observations of parents and children reading together. A less precise, but still valid method would be through interview and informal discussion. After careful consideration it was decided not to observe dialogic interactions, partly because this would be very time consuming. The primary reason however, was that I did not want parents to feel they were being judged. It was anticipated that recruiting participants to the study would be difficult enough without the added pressure of observations.

Instead, the extent to which parents adopted the techniques would be gauged on informal weekly visits to each family, monitoring of reading diaries and interviews.

The third research question involved the evaluation of the programme. The programme would need to measure children's language and early literacy skills, and any enhancement of these skills would need to be shown to be a direct result of the dialogic reading programme, that is, the programme would need to establish causality. A number of researchers argue that the experimental approach is the only method that directly concerns itself with causality (Smith, 1991). Although some (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) contest this claim, the experiment was selected as a method in this study because it was judged to provide a degree of rigour desirable for this type of research. A pre-test-post-test control group design was chosen in order to maximise internal validity and the probability of detecting real effects of the programme.

In experimental research researchers '*deliberately control and manipulate the conditions which determine the events in which they are interested*' (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 211). In this study, the controlled condition would be the intervention programme; the only discernible difference between the control and programme groups after the study would be that the programme group had received the intervention training and resources. The events of interest would be the outcomes of the programme; children's language and literacy skills as well as enjoyment and motivation. Children's language skills would be measured using specific language and literacy assessments both before and after the intervention, and analysed using quantitative methods. The pre-test-post-test control group design would enable two types of analysis. In the first 'between subjects' analysis, the programme and control groups would be compared on all assessments before and after the programme. In the second 'within subjects' analysis, the programme group's performance on one of the post tests would be compared with its pre-test performance.

Enjoyment, motivation and confidence are more difficult to measure using quantitative methods. It was therefore considered that additional evaluation could take a qualitative form. Since research methods are a way of experiencing the world, and are never neutral, reliance on one method may bias the researcher's view of the phenomenon being investigated. Utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods enables the researcher to '*explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint*' (Cohen and Manion, 1985, p. 254). I intended to ask parents whether and how they thought they and their children had benefited from the programme, and to ascertain their views of the programme itself. None of the dialogic reading studies carried out to date had done this, which seemed a somewhat missed opportunity. I was very interested to find out parents' views about the prescriptive nature of the programme and whether they felt they had benefited from the programme in any way. The programme design, methods and rationale are now described in more detail.

Duration of the programme

Dialogic reading had achieved positive results in terms of significant vocabulary gains for programme children after just a four week intervention (Whitehurst et al., 1988), although most programmes were around five to seven weeks or longer. After some deliberation, it was decided to make the programme reported here six weeks in length. This was judged to be long enough to allow for measurable gains in children's vocabulary, yet short enough to maintain families' active participation. It was therefore a short but intensive programme.

Sampling

The next dilemma concerned sample size. The sample had to be large enough to

enable statistically valid comparisons between groups, yet small enough for a single researcher to manage (in terms of carrying out assessments and directing the programme). Statistical power is the probability of getting a statistically significant result given that there is a real effect in the population being studied. In order to detect a medium difference between two sample means ($d=.50$) at $p<.05$, Cohen (1992) suggests that a sample size of 64 is required in each group. This number would have been unmanageable for a single researcher. However, some of the earlier dialogic reading studies used small samples of 20 (10 in each group) and 30 (15 in each group), and achieved large effect sizes (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst, 1992). Miles (2001) suggests that it is legitimate to utilise effect sizes of other research studies in the area of investigation as a basis for estimating sample size.

A sample size of 40 was eventually decided upon for this present study, with 20 being allocated to the programme and 20 to the control group. The programme would utilise a 'matched cases' design, in which children would be matched in pairs in terms of their scores on the initial language and literacy assessments. Children would then be randomly allocated to programme or control groups, so that the means and variances of the two groups assessment scores were as nearly equal as possible.

The age-range of children in the earlier dialogic reading studies tended to be relatively large, sometimes a year or more (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Arnold et al., 1994). Although no difficulties were reported in terms of children being at different stages of development and therefore differing techniques being required, it was decided to use a narrower age range in this study (age 2:6 to 3:00 at the beginning of the programme).

Gaining access to a target population

The target population was families with young children in a deprived urban area in the north of Sheffield that had recently been designated a 'Trailblazer' Sure Start

area. I approached the Sure Start Research and Advisory Committee with a research proposal and they approved the study. Names of families with children in the target age range (2:06 to 3:00) were provided. In addition, health visitors based at the five main surgeries in the area were approached by Sure Start workers and agreed to meet with me to discuss the suitability of families for the study. The smaller surgeries and those out of the area were omitted for ease of management, and these children were excluded from the study. At the meetings, families identified by health visitors as living in difficult circumstances and children identified as having behavioural or learning difficulties were excluded from the study.

Recruitment of families

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to the 40 families randomly selected from the list. The 40 were then followed up with a call to the house, at which the programme was explained in more detail and if parents agreed to participate, a convenient date was made for another visit to carry out the initial interview and child assessments. When parents declined to take part or could not be contacted, a replacement was randomly chosen from the list.

Training parents in dialogic reading techniques

Programme parents were invited to attend two training sessions, three weeks apart in which they were trained in the techniques.

At the initial meeting, the importance of daily reading was emphasised and the dialogic techniques were introduced using a videotape training method (Huebner, 2001). The videotape contained two sessions, described in Table 3:1. The procedures for the adult in Table 3:1 were presented and were followed by taped extracts of adult-child book reading that exemplified those rules. The techniques were demonstrated using a

child's picture book. Parents were then given a children's book and asked to generate appropriate questions in pairs.

Table 3:1 Training sessions

	Goals for the child	Procedures for adult
Session 1: Tips to build vocabulary	Noun labels Attribute and function labels Turn taking	Ask 'what' questions Follow answers by the child with questions Repeat what the child says Help the child with answers when needed Praise and encourage Follow the child's interest Have fun
Session 2: Tips to build sentence skills	Multiword expression Story and picture structure	Ask open-ended questions Ask follow up questions Expand what the child says Have fun

Source: Whitehurst, Arnold et al. (1994, p. 683)

At this training session, parents were given a folder containing:

- three children's books;
- a handout summarising the seven steps listed in Table 3:1;
- a reading diary, which they were asked to complete every time they read dialogically with their child;
- a handout of 'ideas for questions' for one of the three books they had been given.

Parents were asked to read dialogically every day for between five and ten minutes and to make a note each time they read in the reading diary. At the end of the session I arranged a time to visit each family at home the following week to change the books and to find out how they were finding using the techniques.

At the second session, parents were shown the procedures in Table 3:1, Session 2. These procedures are:

- ask open-ended questions

- ask follow up questions
- repeat what the child says and add a little more

The parents were trained using part 2 of the videotape used in the first session and were given a handout listing the tips from part 2.

Children's books and book exchange

The books used in this study were generously provided by a grant from NCH/Sure Start (see Appendix 1 for a list of titles). Eighteen different titles were used; this meant that each family could borrow three different books a week for the six week duration of the programme. Four sets of each title were required, totalling 72 books. I visited each family at home in order to exchange their books, look at their reading diary, and to talk about any concerns or queries they had.

The 'hints for questions' included for one of the three books in the set tended to be extension type questions rather than the simpler 'what' questions. At the end of the study, at the request of the Sure Start programme co-ordinator, the children in both the control and experimental groups were given one of the books as a gift.

Families were visited at home on a weekly basis for the purpose of exchanging books. This also provided an opportunity to discuss any difficulties, to gauge levels of participation and the extent to which dyads were utilising the dialogic techniques.

Evaluation of the programme

Interviews

Interviewing was selected as one of the research methods because it is a very flexible technique and its purposes are varied. In this study it was to be used to gather data on home literacy practices before the programme and also to sample participants' opinions of the programme after intervention. The interview schedule was devised with

a combination of fixed-alternative responses and open-ended items (Kerlinger, 1970). Patton (1990) contends that the sequence and framing of interview questions must be considered, so that easier and less threatening questions are addressed earlier in the interview in order to put respondents at their ease. Thus, *what* questions precede the more searching and difficult *how* and *why* questions.

Parents were interviewed about their home literacy practices and attitudes to literacy before the intervention. The researcher has to be adept at 'active listening' when interviewing (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 279). Interestingly, 'active listening' is also a term used in dialogic reading to describe the parent's role when reading with the child. This implies that the researcher's role in interview is similar to that of the parent in dialogic reading. As part of this 'active listening' role, the interviewer is responsible for accounting for the dynamics of the situation such as how to keep the conversation going, motivate participants to discuss their thoughts and deal with potential problems of an imbalance of power in the interview (Kvale, 1996).

The initial interviews took place on the same visit as the pre-programme assessments of children's language. Interviewing parents before assessing children's language and literacy skills gave the children an opportunity to become accustomed to my presence.

At the end of the programme, parents from the programme group were interviewed about their experiences of the programme using mainly an open-ended format. All interviews took place in homes. Where parents agreed, the interviews were tape-recorded. Although it was considered that tape-recording might constrain parents somewhat, this approach was selected because it enables all responses to be captured fully. The interview schedules can be viewed in Appendix 2.

Measurement of children's language and literacy skills

The assessment of young children is a controversial topic. Young children are easily distracted, particularly in long, unengaging abstract activities, and instructions can be easily misunderstood (Bredekamp, 1986). Hence many literacy researchers support the necessity of 'informal' assessment, while few support 'formal' measures of early literacy (Clay, 1993; Stallman and Pearson, 1991; Teale, 1991). However, in the current study formal assessments were required in order to maximise validity, in particular, the generalisability and replicability of the study. The assessment outcomes were to be utilised solely in the research study, and outcomes were of interest not for individual children but for each group (that is, the control group and the programme group).

The main concern was for children during the actual administration of assessments, in terms of pressure they might feel. In addition it was important to select the most appropriate tests. Nutbrown (1997) emphasised the importance of the assessment and assessor in early literacy measurement:

'The integrity of the assessment instrument will depend upon ways in which the instrument reflects what is known about how young children learn and what literacy they meaningfully engage in, and whether the instrument, its administration and outcomes are matters which retain respect for the children who are being assessed'.

(Nutbrown, 1997, p. 78)

Pre-programme assessments

The primary purpose of the pre-programme assessments was to match children as far as possible on language skills before randomly allocating them to either programme or control groups. In order to determine language ability, an assessment that evaluated a broad range of language skills was required. The 'Preschool Language Scale-3' (Psychological Corporation Ltd. 1997) was chosen because it measures both

expressive and receptive language. Children's knowledge of language content (semantics) is assessed by tasks that focus on both vocabulary and concepts. Knowledge of language form (structure) is evaluated by tasks which focus on morphology and syntax.

A measurement of early literacy was also required. There are few adequate measures of early reading development available, with the exception of the Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (SELDP, Nutbrown, 1997). The SELDP assesses children's knowledge of three strands of literacy; environmental print, books and writing. The books strand of the profile assesses knowledge about the features of books, asking them to identify the front of the book, pages, pictures and words. It also asks children to recount the main events in the story after looking at the pictures. This test was designed for use with children age three to five, and some of the children in this study were three or four months short of their third birthdays when the pre-programme tests were administered. However, a decision was made to use the books strand of the profile to evaluate children's book awareness in spite of this shortcoming. The PLS-3 was administered first, followed by the SELDP (books).

Post-programme assessments

Expressive and receptive vocabularies were the skills explicitly targeted by the first training session. 'Multiword expression' and 'story and picture structure' were targeted by the second session (see Table 3:1). In previous dialogic reading studies, multiword expression was usually measured with the ITPA-VE. Alternatively, dialogic reading studies calculated mean length of utterance (MLU) as a measure of children's expressive language. Although this is a useful tool it was considered too time consuming and intrusive for this research study. Its use would involve making audio-tapes of parent-child reading, transcribing all tapes then counting all morphemes in each

child utterance.

The number of assessments had to be limited, since children tend to tire if sessions are too long. For practical purposes, the assessments had to be carried out in one session, which should be no longer than around forty-five minutes. The books strand of the SELDP would again be used to measure book knowledge; this would also measure story and picture structure, targeted by the second session. Multiword expression would not be assessed.

The assessments used were:

- The EOWPVT (Gardner, 2000) which measures expressive vocabulary. Standardised in the US for use with children age 2:00 upwards, this assessment contains colour photographs which children must name.
- ‘My Word’, which is a non-standardised vocabulary assessment of my own devising. It consists of black and white photographs from the books used in this study that were judged to call for novel vocabulary.
- The BPVS (Dunn, Dunn, Whetton and Burley, 1997), which measures receptive vocabulary. This is a U.K. assessment which has been standardised from age 3.
- The books strand of the SELDP (Nutbrown, 1997).

The assessments were conducted in the order presented above, with the two expressive tests being administered first, followed by the measure of receptive language and book knowledge.

Children’s performance on the SELDP (books) after the programme could be compared with performance before the programme (within subjects design). None of the other assessments would be used in this way, since the primary analysis involved the ‘true’ experimental design; the pre-test post-test control group design, which utilised a between subjects analysis.

A limitation of the study was that, due to lack of funding, I had to be involved in

the assessment process, thus risking bias in the results. However, an independent researcher, who was blind to families' group assignment, volunteered to assist and was able to conduct eight of the assessments (four programme and four control group children). It was intended that parents' views of the programme and its outcomes could be analysed in relation to children's assessment scores.

Ethical issues

There are particular ethical issues involved in working with very young children. It was not considered appropriate to seek the informed consent of the children because of their age, although the children were given some explanation about the programme, as recommended by researchers such as Fine and Sandstrom (1988).

The dialogic reading programme itself however, was directed at parents. There were only two occasions in which I was involved with the children themselves for research purposes, that is, in the assessment process. However, I often chatted with the children on the weekly home visits. While involved in the assessment process, I was mindful of the comments of Cohen et al. (2000) who state that '*should a child show signs of discomfort or stress, the research should be terminated immediately*' (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 53).

Participating families all gave their informed consent. The procedures and their purposes were fully explained to parents and potential pressures of the study were also explained (these were the expectation that parents read with their child every day and possibly the slight stress of assessments for the children). The potential benefits of the programme were also explained. Parents were told they were free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time. They were also assured anonymity.

One of the main ethical concerns of the programme was that the families in the

control group would not benefit from the programme, even though they had volunteered to participate. This had been an issue on the REAL Project; a number of control group parents expressed disappointment that they had not been included in a programme. While it would not have been possible to run the REAL Project a second time because of its long duration, the current six week dialogic reading study was offered to families in the control group at a later time.

Study 2: An observational study of parent-child reading

It will be seen later when the findings from Study 1 are reported that the intervention programme had rather limited effects. The findings prompted a re-examination of those reading behaviours thought to promote children's language and literacy development. A detailed investigation of parents and children reading together could reveal the complexities of shared reading interactions, the strategies parents use to encourage child interest, the variation between dyads' reading styles and the identification of reading behaviours thought to promote language and literacy skills. The extent to which parents used dialogic reading behaviours and effects of SES and book type could also be explored.

There were a number of methodological considerations. With the exception of the ethnographic and longitudinal studies, most studies of reading interactions to date have involved observation and analysis of just one or two reading sessions. However, research has shown that repeated observations result in fewer changes of behaviour as participants become used to the intrusion of being observed (Tizard and Hughes, 1984). Only through repeated observations therefore, can reliable assessments be made. Future research studies need to address this issue by conducting repeated observations of parent-child shared reading interactions. Extant research studies tend to focus on either holistic, interpretive analysis or statistical analysis involving numbers of utterances

coded according to their function. A combination of methods would provide more complete and reliable results.

Methodology for Study 2

Designing the study

In order to investigate the complexities of parent-child shared reading and its impact on children's literacy development, more searching, critical research was required. Family circumstances and parental beliefs about literacy would also be considered. Repeated recordings of families engaged in reading would be required to ensure that the behaviour being observed was as natural as possible. The behaviour used by parents and children when interacting around different types of book was also of interest.

The aim was to develop a critical appreciation of shared reading through a detailed investigation of parent-child reading interactions within today's context of literacy. I identified the following research questions which would be addressed in relation to the families studied:

1. How do parents and children read together?
2. What factors influence parent-child reading interactions?
3. Which behaviours promote language and literacy development?

In order to address these research questions, it would be necessary to study a small number of families over a number of months using a broad set of methods. A number of parent-child shared reading interactions would need to be observed in order to gain as undistorted a view as possible of the way in which parents and children interact. Parents' use of dialogic and other types of behaviours would be investigated using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In addressing research question 2,

factors that influenced reading interactions, the effects of genre, book familiarity and the roles of parents and children during the interaction (that is, whether the reading is led by the parent or the child) could be studied. It would also be interesting to study the reading behaviours of families from socio-economically contrasting groups.

Research question 3 would be difficult to address. Some researchers have made claims about behaviours which reportedly promote language and literacy development using correlational analysis; examining the relationships between children's assessment scores and parents' reading behaviours (DeBaryshe, 1995; Leseman et al., 1995; Pellegrini et al., 1990; Wells, 1987). Others have proposed what they perceived to be effective strategies using interpretive methods (Heath, 1983; Wells, 1987). Very few have used experimental designs (Reese and Cox, 1999). In the current study, correlational and interpretative methods would be used. Behaviours identified as promoting language and literacy skills may, or may not relate to those identified in the literature. In addition, the effectiveness of dialogic techniques would be considered.

The method in Study 2 would be collective case study research (Stake, 1994). This involves a number of cases with similar or dissimilar characteristics, chosen so that theories can be generated about a larger collection of cases. The epistemological stance of most case study researchers tends to be interpretive. The methods used in this study therefore would be descriptive; I would set out to describe and interpret *what is* (Best, 1970). This is in contrast to some of the more objective, positivist methods used in the previous study. This collective case study research involved a number of methods which I will now describe in more detail.

Sampling

A sample of eight mother-child dyads took part in the study. While it would have been interesting to study both mothers and fathers reading with their children, this

was not considered practical, since most fathers had employment outside the home and the fieldwork for the study was conducted at times suitable for participants. In every case, this was the daytime. In addition, potential participants were approached personally through nurseries, and in the majority of cases it was mothers who were involved in taking children to and collecting them from nursery. In one or two cases, fathers did not read with their children on a regular basis. Up to this point, I have referred to parent-child reading. From now I will use the term mother-child reading when referring to the interactions in this study.

The participants included four dyads from a lower SES area and four from a higher SES area. This sample was considered small enough to make detailed observations of individual families, yet large enough to reach insights beyond the nature of the families themselves.

Studies of parent-child reading have focused on children from birth to around age seven. In this study, children who were aged 3:0 to 3:4 at the beginning of the study took part. The intention was to investigate children's responses to mothers' questions, their unprompted questions about pictures, story text and print conventions when engaged in shared book reading. Focusing on children aged just over three was considered an optimum age for such an investigation, as children's language becomes increasingly sophisticated.

Gaining access to nurseries and potential participants

I made contact with a community teacher at a nursery in a deprived area who compiled a list of mothers whom she thought might be willing to take part. This teacher approached mothers as they collected their children from nursery and I explained the study to them. Mothers were given a letter explaining the study and were asked to respond within a few days as to whether or not they were willing to participate. Four

out of six parents approached agreed to take part. This was regarded as a relatively high take-up rate considering the nature of the study, and is likely to be a result of the excellent rapport between the school (and particularly the community teacher) and its parents.

Recruiting participants from more affluent areas proved more difficult. I wrote to the head of a playgroup in an affluent area of the city, who agreed to circulate letters to parents, requesting that they contact me if they were willing to take part in the study. Although thirteen letters were sent to parents with children in the target age range, only one parent agreed to take part in the study. As the personal approach had worked in recruiting dyads from the more deprived area, I decided to adopt this approach in recruitment of the three remaining dyads. The head of a second playgroup was contacted and agreed for me to approach parents as they collected their children. This approach however, did not yield any participants. The three remaining participants therefore, were recruited through my own professional contacts and personal friends.

Books: genre, familiarity and mother-child roles

With the exception of ethnographic studies (Heath, 1983; Minns, 1990; Taylor, 1983) researchers have tended to select books for families to read. While it may be easier to analyse tapes in which the same book has been read, particularly when the sample is large, such selection practices only contribute to the contrived situation. In this study, dyads selected their own reading material in the first shared reading interaction. Few studies have examined the effects of genre on parent-child book reading interactions (Neumann, 1996; Pellegrini et al., 1990) although several have explored differences between readings of familiar and unfamiliar books (Goodsitt et al., 1988; Pellegrini et al., 1990). Only one has investigated interactions when the focus is child led, that is, when the mother supports the child while reading a familiar book

(Sulzby and Teale, 1987). The books selected for this study are described in a later section.

Interviews

Interviews have already been discussed as a method in Study 1. Mothers were interviewed about shared reading practices and also their attitudes and beliefs about literacy at the beginning of the study. It was intended that mothers describe perceived aspects of their shared reading in some detail in interview. These descriptions could then be compared with observations made of shared reading interactions. The interview schedule can be viewed in Appendix 3.

Observations of mother-child reading interactions

Three methods were considered for use in observing shared reading interactions. Use of fieldnotes was quickly dismissed as unsatisfactory. Since the study involved analysis of discourse, a complete and exact record of the interactions was required. Audio-recordings were considered; a tape-recorder would be relatively unobtrusive and would provide a complete record of verbal interactions. However, all non-verbal communication and many of the contexts for discussion would also be missed if this method were adopted. This left audio-visual recording, which would provide a complete record of the interaction, but is not without disadvantages. The most notable perhaps is that it is without doubt the most obtrusive method of observation. There was a danger that the presence of the video camera (and researcher) would affect the interactions. An observer effect is, to some degree, to be expected, but would dyads' behaviour be altered to such an extent as to invalidate the results? It was judged likely that there would be a habituation effect (Tizard and Hughes, 1984) in which the observer effect decreases over time. The habituation technique involves conducting

observations at the beginning of the study that are not included in the analysis (Tizard and Hughes, 1984, p. 30). In the current study, a video-recorded observation was made of dyads reading a book before mothers were interviewed. All eight dyads read the same book, *Once upon a time* (Prater, 1993). This initial observation was not included in the analysis. Observations were always followed by an informal discussion about the interactions, in particular whether mothers felt interactions were typical or not.

The video-recorded interactions were transcribed. Transcriptions included all verbal utterances and non-verbal communication that were deemed essential for understanding the context of the interactions, for example, pointing, page turning, nodding, head shaking.

The videotapes were digitised and stored on the hard drive of a computer. This enabled use of the software VideoLab (Coleman, 2001) which allows positions within the video to be marked, saved and used to access specific points in the video from the text transcripts.

The shared reading interactions

The dyads were video-recorded on four occasions; these are hereafter referred to as 'sessions'. Each session had a different focus and dyads read differing numbers of books. The content of the sessions were as follows:

- Session 1: *Once Upon a Time* (Prater, 1993) not included in the analysis. Books chosen by the dyad from their own selection. No direction was given as to the number of books dyads should read, they were simply asked to read as they normally would.
- Session 2: Unfamiliar narrative (*Fidgety Fish*, Galloway, 2001) and an unfamiliar narrative selected by the dyad from a selection of books.
- Session 3: Familiar narrative (the same book selected in the previous session and

kept by dyads) and *Farm Animals* (Dorling Kindersley, 1999) an unfamiliar expository book.

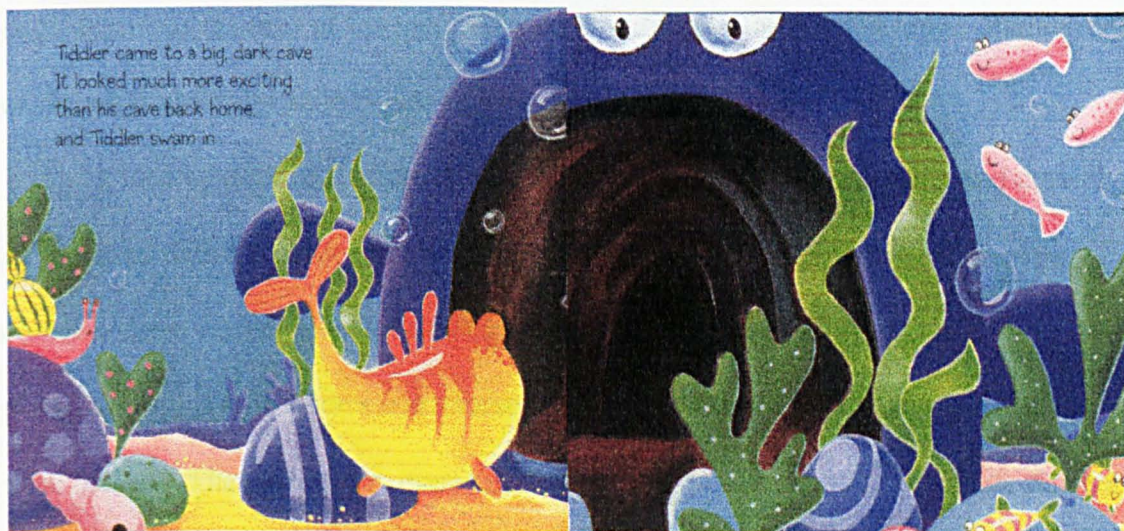
- Session 4: Child reading of familiar book to mother. This book was selected from the children's own books.

Overview of books

Two books selected for this study were read by all dyads. These are now described in order to provide some context. For the unfamiliar narrative book, a recently published book was selected to ensure unfamiliarity for all participants.

Fidgety Fish (Galloway, 2001) begins under the water and shows a mother fish telling her lively offspring, Tiddler to go and swim outside until he is tired. She warns him to watch out for the Big Fish. Tiddler encounters a number of characters on his outing, including limpets, jellyfish, a starfish and a crab, none of whom will play with him. Eventually, Tiddler comes to a cave which he thinks looks exciting. The illustration shows a huge dark mouth, taking up most of the page, with eyes at the top. To the adult reader it is clear that this is in fact the Big Fish, posing as a cave, as shown in Figure 3:1.

Figure 3:1 Page from *Fidgety Fish* (Galloway, 2001)



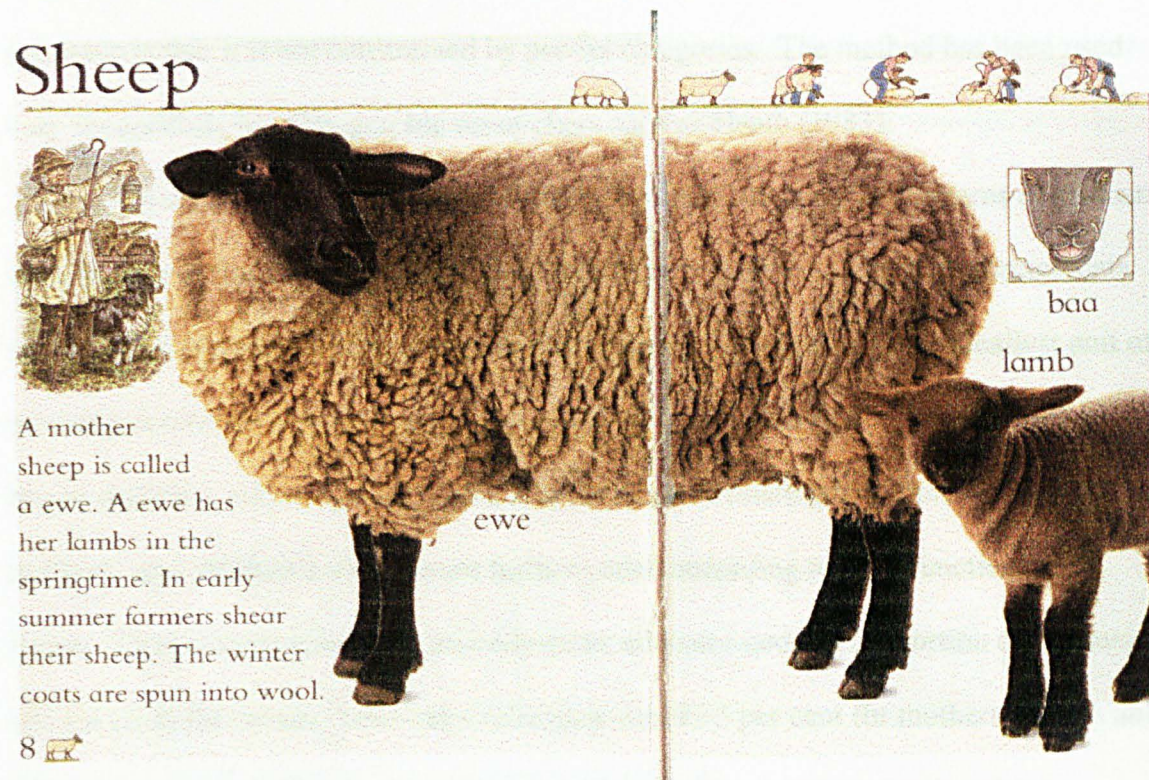
Tiddler swims into the 'cave' and the next page shows him on a double page surrounded by darkness, with the word 'SNAP!' written in huge white letters. The next double page depicts Tiddler inside the Big Fish's tummy, and the accompanying text finally acknowledges that '*Tiddler was trapped inside the Big Fish*'. However, the Big Fish begins to feel strange, and the last sentence on this page reads '*Suddenly the Big Fish did an enormous...*' The following page shows only the word 'BURP!' and shows Tiddler being projected from the fish's mouth. The final two pages show him being propelled all the way back through his front door to bed.

Fidgety Fish has a number of characteristics typical of narratives, such as an orientation, a complication, a crisis and a resolution. The text is written in past tense and contains some literary language including rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, similes and direct speech. The book was also selected because it was anticipated that additional explanation would be required in order for a young child to understand this story fully. There were good opportunities for prediction. In addition, it was considered that there were opportunities for literacy references; the words 'SNAP!' and 'BURP' are shown in outsize print, taking up a whole page each.

Farm Animals (Dorling Kindersley, 1999) has many characteristics typical of expository texts. Figure 3:2 shows a typical page from this book. The text on each page describes features of the pictured animal written in the present tense. Photographs of the adult and baby animals are accompanied by labels.

Close-up drawings of the animals' mouths are provided as inserts and drawings are labelled with the associated noises made by the animals. The top of the page contains more drawings of farming techniques such as shearing sheep, milking cows or ploughing fields with horses and another detailed drawing shows farming techniques from history. There are many opportunities for interaction; like *Fidgety Fish*, this book was selected partly for its opportunities for literacy references.

Figure 3:2 Page from Farm Animals (Dorling Kindersley, 1999)



Measurement of children's language and literacy skills

Children were assessed on two measures of language (EOWPVT and BPVS) and a measure of literacy (the books strand of the SELDP) at the end of the study. Because the two vocabulary assessments have been standardised for children over the age of three, surveying these scores would enable judgements to be made regarding children's performance in relation to other children of the same age. In addition, it was anticipated that relationships between the three assessment scores and certain reading behaviours could be explored.

Analysing the observational data

Two methods of analysis were adopted for this part of the study. Firstly, the data were transcribed. Then an interpretive analysis was utilised, which involved making holistic judgements about the nature of the interactions, thereby overlaying a

'structure of meaning on the data' (Gall et al., 1996). One of the benefits of such an approach is that it is not constrained by pre-set categories. The method has been used very successfully by ethnographic researchers such as Heath (1983).

The second method of analysis involved coding the language patterns of mothers and children according to their perceived intention or function. The transcription data were broken into *moves*, *turns* and *episodes*. A *move* was classed as the smallest unit of meaning, a *turn* was one or more moves made by one person before the other person began speaking, and an *episode* was a number of turns relating to a topic. Both mothers' and children's *moves* were further coded according to their functions and forms. To maximise reliability, an early-years educator coded a proportion of the data (10 per cent) for moves. Inter-rater reliability was 92.5 per cent for mothers' moves and 95.5 per cent for children's moves. Chapter 7 provides a more comprehensive discussion of the coding system.

These two levels of analysis were adopted for all video data collected. The methods of analysis for the different areas of the study are described below.

Rationale for data analysis regarding the sample as a whole

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse the data for the sample as a whole. The qualitative methods involved case study research and utilised the shared reading videos and transcriptions of the data (Chapter 6). For each dyad, extracts of interactions are provided and discussed. In some cases, these represent typical interactions, in other cases the intention is to highlight infrequent but salient behaviours through the transcription extracts. In each case, an indication as to the frequency such behaviours were seen is given. This method is similar to that used by ethnographic researchers such as Minns (1990) and Taylor (1983), and also by Holdaway (1979) in his study of children's 're-enactments' or retellings, of stories.

In Chapter 8, frequencies and proportions of behaviours are given for the sample as a whole and for individual dyads. Correlational analysis is also used in this chapter to explore relationships between behaviours. The findings from this research must be interpreted with caution however, because the sample is very small. It is also important to recognise that correlational relationships cannot be regarded as implying causation. Sometimes, significant results represent the influence of a third variable and sometimes relationships revealed may be spurious.

Rationale for data analysis regarding genre, familiarity and focus

This analysis involved exploring differences in shared reading behaviours for all eight dyads for different types of book reading. Four different types of book reading were involved:

- Familiar narrative books (between 2 and 6 books per dyad)
- Unfamiliar narrative books (2 books per dyad)
- Unfamiliar expository book (1 book per dyad)
- Child reading of familiar book (1 book per dyad)

Designs in which all participants take part in a variety of conditions are known as within subjects designs. The results were analysed using the Friedman test, which is a non-parametric test, using ranks of scores rather than actual scores. It is the equivalent of the Wilcoxon test when applied to more than two groups. Ordinarily the alpha level (p) is set at .05, which means that no more than one in 20 statistical tests will show a result when none exists (type I error). However, this analysis involved multiple comparisons, and increasing the number of tests on a data set increases the likelihood of getting a significant effect by chance alone. In the Bonferroni method, the alpha level of each individual test is adjusted downwards to ensure that the overall risk for a number of tests remains .05. This avoids spurious positives. Calculating the Bonferroni

adjusted alpha level involves multiplying the customary alpha level (.05) by the number of tests conducted. There is a serious drawback in using the Bonferroni method, however. By reducing the chance of type I errors, the chance of type II errors is increased, that is not recognising effects when they actually do exist. The Bonferroni correction is recognised as a very conservative measure.

Rationale for data analysis regarding relationships between SES and shared reading interactions

Two methods for exploring shared reading interactions and SES were considered. These were comparing the two groups of dyads (higher SES and lower SES) using non-parametric analysis such as the Mann Whitney test, and using correlational analysis to investigate the relationships between shared reading behaviours and indicators of SES.

Because of the small sample in this study, that is four dyads in each group, it was not considered appropriate to use statistical tests such as Mann Whitney. In addition this analysis, like the previous one, involved multiple comparisons, and as a result a Bonferroni correction would need to be applied. Using a Bonferroni correction in this case would have rendered any effect virtually undetectable with such a small sample. This would have meant that there would be a substantial risk of type II errors. Such statistical tests were therefore ruled out.

The richness of the data enabled a more rigorous method for investigating the differences between SES and shared reading interactions. Rather than viewing the dyads as two dichotomous groups (higher SES and lower SES), the dyads were ranked according to mothers' education and parents' occupation. This ranking scale is described in detail in Chapter 10. Correlational analysis was then carried out for the ranking scale and shared reading behaviours.

Ethical issues

The study procedures and their purposes were explained to parents. Potential participants were given time to consider their response. The intention to use video-recordings of dyads reading was stated in the initial letter given to mothers while considering whether or not to participate. Mothers participating in the study gave their informed consent and were told they were free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time, although none did so. The ethical considerations discussed in Study 1 regarding assessing young children were applied in this study.

Mothers in particular experienced a degree of nervousness while being observed. In an attempt to counteract this, I always tried to make them feel at ease, chatting informally before the observations. I also informally discussed the interactions after each session, making general and positive comments about the child's responses during reading. I hoped that this feedback would put mothers at their ease.

While children were aware of the video camera at the beginning of the study and during the first few minutes of each session, most seemed to forget about its presence quite quickly. Most mothers reported that children looked forward to my visits. Although I had only limited interactions with them, it seemed my visits were accompanied by the total attention of their mothers and additional attention from the video camera and myself. My visits were also a time for the children to choose two books to keep.

All individuals remained anonymous; names have been changed in this report. In return for participating in the study, dyads were given around ten children's books and a videotape of their reading sessions as gifts at the end of the study. The findings of the study were also shared with participants.

Chapter 4: Study 1 - A dialogic reading programme

Introduction

This chapter describes and evaluates a dialogic reading programme. First the study population is described; this relates to recruitment of participants, sampling, non-participation, and includes the home literacy practices of participants. Secondly, the programme implementation and processes are explained. While the design of the programme was described in the previous chapter, this section focuses on the challenges of carrying out such a programme in practice, and in particular, rates of participation. The evaluation of the programme is covered in the third section. To reiterate, the research questions for this programme, identified in Chapter 3, were as follows:

1. What is the nature of families' home literacy practices before the intervention?
2. Can parents be taught to use dialogic reading techniques?
3. What is the value of a dialogic reading programme?

Research question 1 is investigated in the initial section describing the study population, question 2 in the sections dealing with programme implementation and processes and the evaluation of the programme. Research question 3 is addressed in the evaluation section. The findings and limitations of the study are discussed at the end of the chapter, and a section explaining the rationale for the subsequent study follows this.

The study population

Recruiting participants

A list of names of children eligible to take part in the study was obtained from a Sure Start area in Sheffield, as described in Chapter 3. The original list contained 141

names, (see Table 4:1), although thirteen of these had recently moved out of area. Meetings were then arranged with health visitors based at the five main general practitioners' surgeries in the area. The smaller surgeries and those out of the area were omitted for ease of management and these children were excluded from the study (27). The 40 children in the sample would therefore be selected from a total population of 101. At meetings with health visitors, children in the population and their families were briefly discussed. Families in difficult situations and children identified as having behavioural or learning difficulties were excluded from the study. The number of families to be omitted as a result of these criteria was 23, and included six who had recently moved out of the area. The sample was selected at random from the 78 remaining families, by selecting every second name on the list.

Table 4:1 Selection of families for the study

	Number of families in total population	Moved out of area	Not registered with one of 5 main surgeries	Excluded families
Number of families	141	13	27	23
Families remaining		128	101	78

Source: Study data

Invitations to participate in the study were sent to the 40 families randomly selected from the list. The 40 were then followed up with a call to the house, at which the programme was explained in more detail, and if parents agreed to participate a convenient date was made for another visit to carry out the initial interview and child assessments. When parents declined or could not be contacted, a replacement was randomly chosen from the list. With a take-up rate of just over 50 per cent, the recruitment of participants for the study was a lengthy, time-consuming and at times demoralising process. Table 4:2 shows that by the time 40 families had agreed to participate in the study, a total of 72 families (out of the population of 78) had been approached.

Characteristics of non-participants

Ten out of 32 non-participants had moved away and could not be contacted. They had been sent, but had not received the letter of invitation to participate in the programme. In one respect, therefore, they were not 'non-participants' in the true sense of the word, as they knew nothing about the programme. Sometimes the houses were boarded up, the block of flats was about to be demolished or the new occupants did not have a forwarding address. This high number is a reflection of the deprived nature of the area; tenants tend to move house frequently.

Table 4:2 Numbers of non-participants and reasons for non-participation

Families approached	Declined	Accepted then avoided	Could not be contacted – moved away	Could not be contacted – still living at the address	Accepted
72	10	2	10	10	40

Source: Study data

Ten out of 32 declined to take part. Two were heavily pregnant and gave this as a reason for not wanting to participate. Two said they were not interested because they read with their child anyway and others said they did not have time. Two of those contacted agreed to take part initially. A convenient date for a visit was arranged, but when I returned, the family was not at home. It was not possible to contact either family after that.

Ten of those who were invited to participate could not be contacted, although they were still living at the address. After the initial letter of invitation had been sent, I called round to the house. If no one was at home, a note was left saying that I would call back the following day, giving an approximate time and a telephone number. I called at each house on three separate occasions and at different times of the day, from morning to early evening. On the third visit a final note was left, asking the family to contact me if they would like to take part.

Characteristics of participating families

Forty families eventually agreed to take part. However, the fact that take-up was only just over 50 per cent means that the sample was not truly representative of the Sure Start population. These families had agreed to participate in a reading intervention programme and all were interested in their children's learning.

Parents were interviewed about their family characteristics and literacy practices. All families had English as their first language, and the majority lived in public housing. Only three were single parent families; all others had two parents living at home. Thirteen children were only children, 15 had one sibling. Twelve families had three or more children.

Literacy practices of families before the intervention

The pre-programme interviews revealed that literacy events, notably reading, were taking place on a regular basis in many homes. Most parents talked about reading with their children, a few mentioned drawing or writing. Parents in all but one of the homes visited said that they sometimes read to their children. Table 4:3 shows the responses in more detail.

Table 4:3 Frequency of shared reading

	Number	Percent
Rarely	4	10
Weekly	3	7.5
Several times a week	20	50
Daily	9	22.5
More than once a day	4	10
Total	40	100

Half of the parents said that they read with their children several times each week. Four parents said that someone in the house read rarely with their children. In one case this was because the child had no interest in books, although the family was

trying to do activities with him every day since the speech therapist had emphasised the importance of this. In another case, the family rarely read books, although father and son did look at football magazines together. One of the parents who read only rarely with their child also said that there were no books in the house for her, although she was now beginning to bring books home from nursery.

Only two parents said their children had no interest in books at all, and only one said their child did not own any books. The majority of parents said that children owned between 20 and 49 books and virtually all kept the books in an accessible place. Three parents said they kept *some* books out of reach for ‘best’ for reading together.

Table 4:4 Numbers of books owned

	Number	Percent
None	1	2.5
1-2	1	2.5
3-9	6	15
10-19	4	10
20-49	19	47.5
50-99	7	17.5
100+	2	5
Total	40	100

Just over half of parents said that their children had had a favourite book, although the majority said that this changed on a fairly regular basis. Some said that their children’s favourites were anything about a specific character or television show, such as *Thomas the Tank Engine* or *Bob the Builder*, rather than a specific book.

Parents who said that they read with their children were asked to describe what happened when they shared a book together. Seven said they read the book while children listened, although four of these parents felt that children became bored after a few pages had been read, and the sessions were usually abandoned, saying for example, ‘*he tries to turn the pages before I’ve finished reading*’. Four parents felt that the reason for their children’s lack of interest in reading together was a short attention span.

Five parents made comments such as '*I don't think we do anything consciously*', implying perhaps that they read the whole book from beginning to end. Another mentioned reading lift the flap books with her child, and described the shared reading interactions as the mother reading the text while the child lifted the flaps and turned the pages.

Twenty-seven parents described dialogic type features in their shared reading sessions. Twenty of these said that they asked the child questions, or that the child asked them questions. For example:

'We don't read the whole book from beginning to end. We talk about the pictures and she'll pick out things in the pictures. I answer her questions'.

Others said children pointed out features of the pictures or repeated what they had said. Five described how their children read books to their parents after reading together. Five parents mentioned strategies for maintaining children's interest when reading, with one saying that she did '*silly actions*' and another making up voices for different characters. Three said that they made up stories from the pictures, particularly if they were reading a long book. This again appeared to be a strategy for maintaining children's interest.

Two parents mentioned skills teaching, emphasising that they discussed colours, numbers and counting in shared reading interactions.

Parents' views of literacy and expectations for the child

Parents' own experiences

Parents were asked about their own experiences of learning to read. The majority had positive experiences and made comments such as:

'I remember my dad reading bedtime stories to me and my sister'.

'I used to like reading and we used to go to the library once a fortnight. I still like information books, on DIY and dogs'.

'We always had books when we were little. My mum used to read to us every night'.

Some parents said they could not remember learning to read at all. A few had negative experiences and made the following comments:

'I had difficulty with reading. I was dyslexic and wasn't diagnosed until the last year of junior school. I had panic attacks when I was asked to read aloud in front of the class'.

'My memories of learning to read aren't good ones. I still can't read very well now'.

'I couldn't read very well. I think I'm dyslexic. I'm going to have a test to find out whether I'm dyslexic or not. Then I'm going to do a course to learn to read in September'.

'I hate reading. I think it's down to the way I was taught to read, by flashcards. I'm still not a good reader. I mean, I'll read magazines but I never read books'.

Parents' aspirations for their children

The parents all had aspirations for their children's later reading and writing attainment. Most felt that their children would do well and gave a variety of reasons for this, for example, because they had a good memory, were 'bright', or were interested in books now. They made comments such as:

'I think she'll be brilliant! She's old for her age. When it's just me and her, we have great conversations together. She's very forward'.

'I think she'll do quite well because she's been read to and she likes books'.

A small number seemed less sure, particularly those who had older siblings who had not done as well as expected:

'I don't know how he'll do because his sister isn't very good at reading. I did more with her before she started school than I have done with John, because I didn't have him then'.

All parents felt that they had a part to play in their children's reading development. Most said they helped their children by reading with them. A small number felt that they would adopt a supportive role when their children started at school; implying they did not feel they had a part to play in helping the children at present.

Sometimes parents' reasons for participating in the programme related to their concerns about their own negative experiences of learning to read or to the fact that older siblings had experienced difficulties, for example:

'The reason I wanted to do this programme was that you don't know whether you're doing the right things. His sisters struggle with reading so I thought I could find out more about what to do'.

Summary of pre-intervention family literacy practices

Clearly literacy practices, in particular interactions around books, were occurring in the majority of families. However, in common with the findings of other researchers (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Teale, 1984), it seemed that home literacy experiences varied between homes. Most parents felt that their children were interested in books, and virtually all parents sometimes read with their children. The parents all had aspirations for their children's later reading and writing attainment.

The majority of parents had described certain dialogic aspects of their reading interactions with their children. Would such families benefit from a dialogic reading programme if they were using the techniques anyway?

Programme implementation and processes

This section provides details of the programme implementation. Firstly, allocation of families to programme or control groups is explained. This is followed by

a section describing attendance at training sessions, the home visits and reading diaries.

Rates of participation and drop out from the programme are also discussed.

Allocation of families to control and experimental groups

To ensure that the control and programme groups were as similar as possible, each child was paired with another child within the group according to age, sex and pre-test scores as far as possible. Each pair was then split, with one being randomly allocated to the control and one to the programme group.

There were no significant differences between the two groups pre-intervention on the PLS-3 or the SELDP (books). The control group were slightly ahead on means for both assessments (see Table 4:5) while the median measure for the programme group was slightly higher than that of the control group. For the SELDP (books), both mean and median were higher for the control group. The children's PLS-3 scores were used as the primary measure for pairing children.

Table 4:5 shows the children's pre-intervention assessment scores. The mean standardised score for the PLS-3 is 200, however for the children in this sample, the mean is considerably lower.

Table 4:5 Pre-programme ages and scores

	Age in months	PLS – 3 Standardised Scores	SELDP (books)
Programme group			
Mean	33.25	185.95	2.74
Median	33.00	187.00	2.00
Standard Deviation	2.31	25.29	2.21
Number	20	19	19
Control group			
Mean	34.2	187.95	3.53
Median	35.00	180.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	2.26	29.54	3.03
Number	20	19	19

Attendance at Training Sessions

Training session 1

The 20 parents in the programme group were invited to a meeting held locally in a Sure Start Family Centre. The meeting was held twice and a creche was available while the meeting took place. Nineteen out of the 20 parents arranged to attend one of the meetings. One parent was unable to attend because of work commitments, and I agreed to train her at home. A further five parents did not attend either meeting, and I also trained these parents in the techniques at home, on an individual basis.

Table 4:6 Attendance at training sessions

	Arranged to attend	Arranged to attend – then cancelled	Arranged to attend but did not	Attended	Trained at home	Not trained: dropped out
Training session 1	19	0	6	13	7	0
Training session 2	13	4	3	6	12	2

Source: Study data

Training session 2

Fewer parents attended the second meeting (see Table 4:6). Parents could choose to attend a training session on one of two dates, and a creche was available at one of the sessions. Parents who did not attend were trained at home.

Home visits / Book exchanges

Books were exchanged at weekly home visits. These visits also provided an opportunity to offer support and discuss any concerns or difficulties parents were experiencing. I enquired about how families were finding using the techniques and whether they had enjoyed the books. Parents would ask questions about the techniques, speak honestly about how much reading they had done that week, and say which books

they had particularly liked. Sometimes parents would demonstrate their use of the techniques while reading with their children.

Reading diaries

Parents were asked to record each shared reading session in a reading diary. The reading diaries were intended to gauge rates of participation. However, only ten of the diaries were returned at the end of the programme. Others had been mislaid. Of the ten, two had entries for each day or every other day, the rest were more sporadic. One was returned without a single entry. Even parents who had literacy difficulties themselves had made some entries. Sometimes, parents simply entered the date and the name of the book, but often they made a comment too. Sometimes the comments referred to the book (whether the child liked it or not) but more often they referred to the child's response to the dialogic reading techniques. Some examples of typical entries were:

'Beth enjoyed this book and answered my questions about the pictures'.

'I asked Todd the questions that were provided with the book and he seemed to know a lot of the answers. I liked this book as it was very detailed and I could ask loads of questions'.

Rates of participation in the intervention

Rates of participation in the programme were gauged through discussions with parents each week when books were changed. In addition, parents were asked about their participation directly in the post-programme interview. Families differed in the extent to which they participated in the programme. Some read dialogically most days, others less frequently.

Many of the parents said they read most days for several weeks, then had a week or so where they read very little. They nearly always gave reasons as to why they had not read. The reasons they gave ranged from everyday situations, such as a disruption

to the family's routine through the husband being off work, sunny weather, decorating the kitchen or forgetting; to major, life changing stresses and strains, such as death of a close relative, partner leaving home or moving house.

Drop out

Two families dropped out of the programme. The first mother gave no indication that she intended to do so; she received the initial training session at home and was given the first set of books. I arranged a convenient time to call the following week to change the books, but when I called back, was told by another adult that the mother was not at home, and I should call back another time. A different date was arranged, but when I called back, there was no answer at the house. Phone calls were also made, but there was never an answer.

The other family stayed on the programme for four weeks before leaving. The child's mother had said at the outset that her son was not really interested in books, and her reason for leaving was that the books lent to them as part of the programme were 'too old' for her son. He was one of only two children out of 40 who would not work with me on the pre-programme language assessments. His mother had tried but could not persuade him to read the books with her. She felt that the types of book he was interested in were simple board books. When she dropped out of the programme, the mother said *'I feel like I'm pushing him, and I'll turn him off books for good if I'm not careful'*.

Evaluation of the programme

The programme was evaluated using data from two different methods; the child assessments and home visits and parent interviews. The parents' responses to the programme are reported first.

Parents' experiences of the programme

The 18 parents who completed the programme were interviewed about their views of dialogic reading at the end of the programme. Parents' views and experiences were also sought more informally on a weekly basis during book exchanges. In this section, parents' views about implementing the techniques, the programme itself, the benefits of the programme and the programme books are reported.

Implementing the techniques and views of the programme

The majority of parents made positive comments about the programme. The only slightly negative comments related to the fact that the techniques were not greatly different to methods parents used prior to starting the programme. Four parents made this type of comment.

Nine parents said that they found the techniques quite difficult to use initially. For these parents it seemed, dialogic reading was very different to the shared reading methods they had used previously. The techniques required practice, for example:

'It takes a bit of practice! Before, we'd just read the story but we're actually looking at the pictures now. She has more fun doing that than me just reading the book'.

These parents felt that the techniques were quite different to how they had read previously, for example:

'Before I'd just sit and read. I'd ask questions, but only one. Now I follow it on and she's got better; she talks more'.

'It's different to how I used to read; I wasn't going into the questions side of it. I'd ask him a question, and once he'd answered it, that'd be it. But now I just keep asking, asking, asking!'

Seven parents felt that the techniques were not difficult to implement, suggesting that the methods 'came naturally'. Two parents initially felt that they might find the

techniques difficult to implement, although when they began to read with their children, found that this was not the case, for example,

'At the training session, I felt like, "How am I going to take it all in?" It was like being back at school! But when I got home and started doing it, I realised, I do some of it anyway. I'm just more aware of what I'm doing now'.

These parents felt that the methods were similar to how they read anyway, although five of these felt that the training sessions had helped to reinforce and make them more aware of 'good practice':

'It's not a lot different to what I did anyway, but it's more in depth; asking more questions'.

Fourteen parents described using specific aspects of the programme, suggesting that they had understood and were utilising the techniques. These fourteen all mentioned that they had increased their use of questioning. Six of these also mentioned an increase in discussions, implying that shared reading sessions had become more interactive, with the roles of both members of the dyad being of equal importance, for example:

'Rather than just reading the book to her, I let her get more involved by stopping me and saying "Look mummy, look what he's doing" whereas before I'd have just said "Quiet, let me read the book". Now she stops me and we talk about it more'.

This quotation suggests that this parent had indeed become an 'active listener'.

Only one parent mentioned techniques introduced in the second training session, which focused on developing children's language through encouraging the child to say a little more, that is, multiword expression:

'I'm more aware about asking questions now, and about taking him that "little bit further" part of it'.

No parents mentioned increasing their use of praise and repeating the child's correct response, and only one described how she asked her son to repeat her extended response, although this was to illustrate her son's lack of co-operation:

'Sometimes he doesn't repeat you when you ask him to'.

Parents were asked how frequently they had read with their child over the duration of the programme as a whole. Ten had answered 'on average, several times a week'; five had read 'most days'. Only three said they had managed to read dialogically every day. Fourteen felt that being in the programme had increased the frequency of their shared reading sessions. This was often because reading together had become more enjoyable with the dialogic reading techniques.

Parents were then asked whether they had found participating in the project a pressure. The overwhelming response was no. One parent replied:

'Well it was kind of a chosen pressure; I know that I should be reading more with Beth, so it helped focus me as well'.

Parents were asked what were the best and worst things about the programme. Their perceptions as to the 'best things' about the programme varied; some expressed their views about perceived benefits for the child, for example:

'The best thing was knowing the difference it's made in the short time that we've been reading this way. She picks up an awful lot more information now when we look at a book, because I think we're more focused about what we should be looking for'.

For others the best feature was the dialogic reading approach itself, for example: *'The best thing was learning a new way of reading'.* One parent felt that a more functional aspect of the programme was its best feature:

'The best thing was the sheets you gave me with the questions on. Instead of having to think up my own questions, you were giving me ideas as well.'

Only seven parents could identify a negative feature of the programme. In every case, this related to finding time to read, or feeling guilty about not reading, for example:

'The worst thing was sometimes thinking 'Oh no! I've not read today!''

'The worst thing was trying to find time every day to do it!'

Most felt that the programme was an appropriate length. Some thought it should be longer; none said it was too long.

The benefits of the programme

Parents were asked whether they thought their children had been affected at all by the programme. Sixteen believed that their children had benefited in some way. All sixteen mentioned the enjoyment aspect of reading together dialogically, for example:

'Seeing that she has enjoyed it so much makes it better for me as a parent'.

'He prefers the new way of looking at books'.

'She's always been interested in books, but I think her interest is greater now. It's more at the forefront of her mind. If we're sat down in the sitting room, it's like she thinks 'books!', rather than just watching TV'.

Most also mentioned general benefits, for example: *'I think it's fetched her on really well'*. Eight specifically mentioned an improvement in concentration, particularly in the length of shared reading sessions, for example:

'He sits and looks at books better than he did before'.

'It's made reading together a lot easier and it made him concentrate for longer'.

Two mentioned an increase in confidence, for example:

'It's improved her speech and her confidence as well. She seems to know more words, and if she hears a word now and she doesn't know what it means, she'll ask me what it means'.

Eleven parents said that the techniques had helped to develop their children's language. They made comments such as:

'Sharon is doing much more talking now. She anticipates my questions saying, "Shall I tell you what it is, mummy?"'

'Emily anticipates that I'm going to ask her more questions, so she's started saying more about the pictures without being asked. She's definitely saying a lot more now, and we seem to spend a lot longer looking at books now; before she used to get bored quickly'.

Difference to parents

When asked whether the programme had made any difference to them, most parents responded in terms of the effect that it had on their reading methods. One mother said that it had brought her and her child closer together. Only one specifically described the impact the programme had had on her. This parent, who had found learning to read difficult herself, commented:

'I've enjoyed reading whereas before I hated the thought of books'.

All parents said that they would continue reading using the dialogic reading methods. All were in favour of the programme being offered to other families.

The overwhelming response to the programme was positive. Most parents expressed gratitude that they had been selected for the programme.

Programme books

The majority (18 out of 19) of the families enjoyed the programme books and a number of parents asked where they could purchase them. Most of the children had a

favourite out of the eighteen books lent to them and this varied from child to child. One child's favourite book was another child's least favourite. Typical comments included:

'You're the 'book lady'. It doesn't matter what we're doing; we could be in the middle of our tea; we have to read all three books as soon as you've gone'.

One parent felt that the books were not appropriate for her child. She felt that the programme books were more suitable for older children. Her son was not interested in the books and they dropped out of the programme after four weeks.

Most parents felt that the 'three books a week' system was appropriate. One said that the books were changed too frequently. She felt her son was just becoming familiar with the books when they were exchanged:

'You upset him every time you took the books away. He'd look at the new ones, then ask where the old ones were'.

Post-programme assessment analysis

Between subjects analysis

The primary analysis in a true experiment involves comparing the programme group with the control group after intervention. In such between subjects analysis, statistical and practical (effect size) differences can be calculated.

In the current study, not all children completed all post-programme assessments, usually due to lack of co-operation or tiring. If this was the case, that child and their associated partner from the other group were excluded from the analysis for that particular test. This was felt to be the most rigorous method of analysis. Thus, there are different numbers of children in the analysis for different tests. The numbers for each test are: EOWPVT – 17 pairs; 'My Word' – 16 pairs; BPVS – 14 pairs; SELDP (books) post-programme – 14 pairs.

Although the EOWPVT and BPVS have been standardised, the BPVS standardisation begins at age three, above the age of many of the children in the study. For this reason, raw scores are used for this test. The assessment data were examined for the purposes of selecting an appropriate statistical test. The t-test was the preferred test of significance since it is the most powerful of the comparative tests. This test depends on three assumptions;

- Data should be of interval type
- Data should be normally distributed
- Variances of both samples should be similar; the variance of one should be no more than three times larger than the variance of the other (the assumption of homogeneity of variances)

The distribution for EOWPVT was slightly negatively skewed (see Figure 4:1), while the 'My Word' test (Figure 4:2) had a slightly positively skewed distribution. BPVS (Figure 4:3) had a somewhat flat distribution. The distribution for SELDP (books) was normal (see Figure 4:4). Overall, however, the distributions were considered appropriate for the use of the t-test, that is, they were not skewed sufficiently to warrant the use of a different test.

Figure 4:1 Distribution of EOWPVT scores

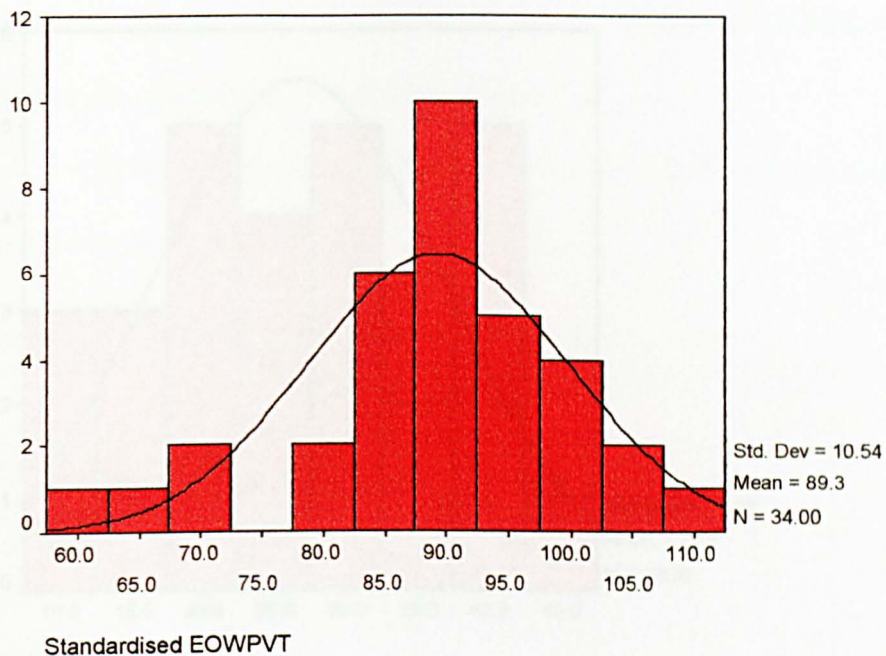


Figure 4:2 Distribution of 'My Word' scores

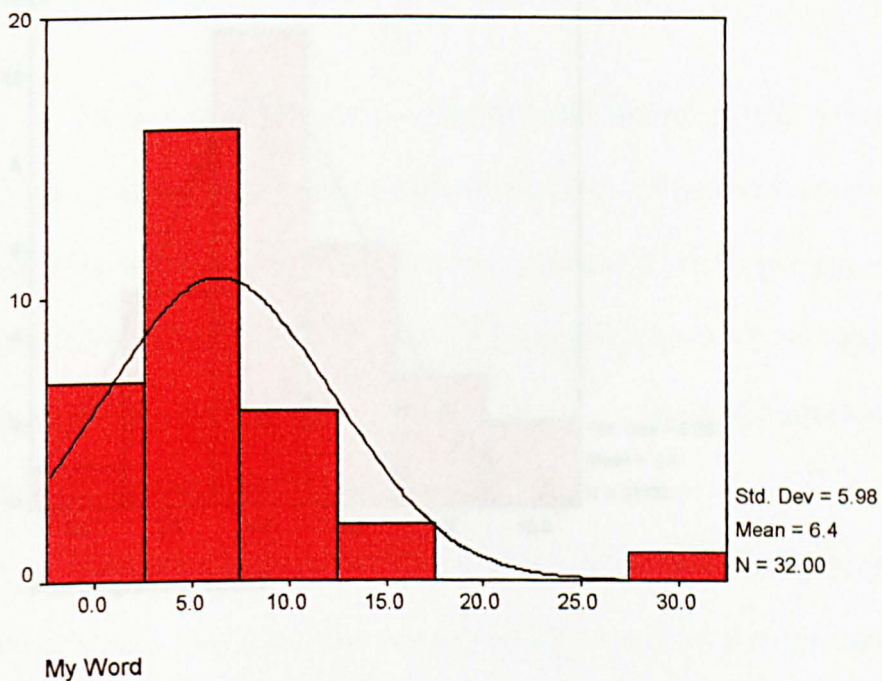


Figure 4:3 Distribution of BPVS scores

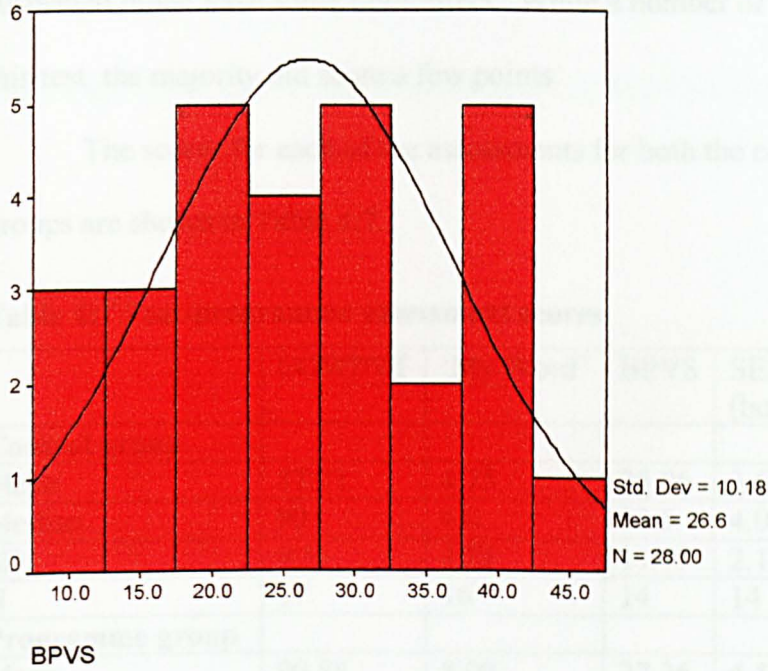
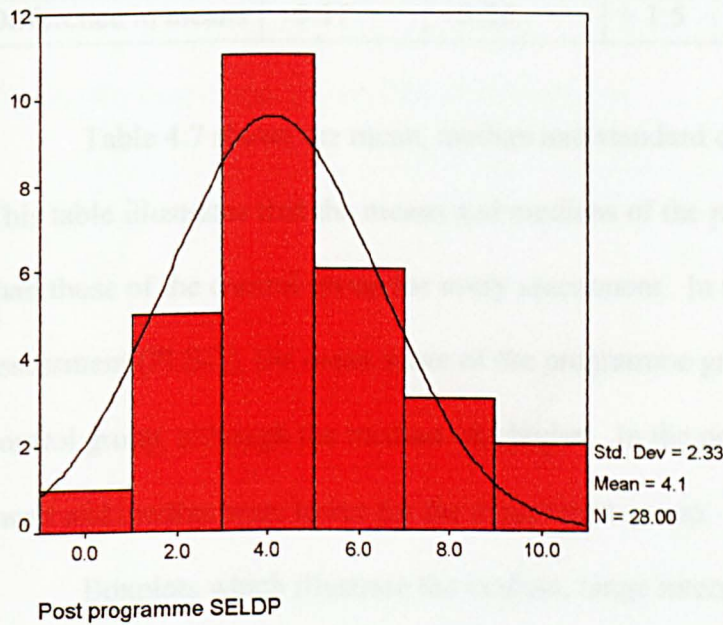


Figure 4:4 Distribution of SELDP (books) scores



There had been some concern that there may be a ‘floor effect’ on the SELDP (books), since it was designed for use with three to five-year-olds and some of the children in the study were just approaching three. However, this was not the case; the SELDP (books) scores were in fact the most normal of all the distributions. Similarly,

the ‘My Word’ assessment was designed to measure novel vocabulary and hence was suspected might have some floor effect. While a number of children scored poorly on this test, the majority did score a few points.

The scores for each of the assessments for both the control and programme groups are shown in Table 4:7.

Table 4:7 Post-programme assessment scores

	EOWPVT	‘My Word’	BPVS	SELDP (books)
Control group				
Mean	87.71	4.75	25.86	3.64
Median	90	4.0	25.5	4.0
SD	9.51	3.73	11.79	2.17
N	17	16	14	14
Programme group				
Mean	90.88	8.00	27.36	4.57
Median	91.0	5.5	26.5	4.5
SD	11.54	7.38	8.66	2.47
N	17	16	14	14
Difference in means	+3.17	+3.25	+ 1.5	+ 0.93

Table 4:7 shows the mean, median and standard deviations for the two groups. This table illustrates that the means and medians of the programme group were higher than those of the control group for every assessment. In the pre-programme language assessment (PLS-3), the mean score of the programme group was lower than that of the control group, although the median was higher. In the pre-programme SELDP, both mean and median were lower for the programme group.

Boxplots which illustrate the median, range interquartile range of scores, are shown for the programme and control groups on each of the four assessments (Figures 4:5 to 4:9). We have already seen in Table 4:7 that medians for the programme group were higher for every test, but the boxplots illustrate this graphically. Very low or high scoring ‘outliers’ are shown on the boxplots, but are not included in the distributions. The range of scores for the EOWPVT and ‘My Word’ were larger for the programme

group but smaller for the SELDP (books) and BPVS. The 'My Word' boxplot illustrates one extremely high performer scoring 30.

Figure 4:5 Post-programme standardised EOWPVT scores

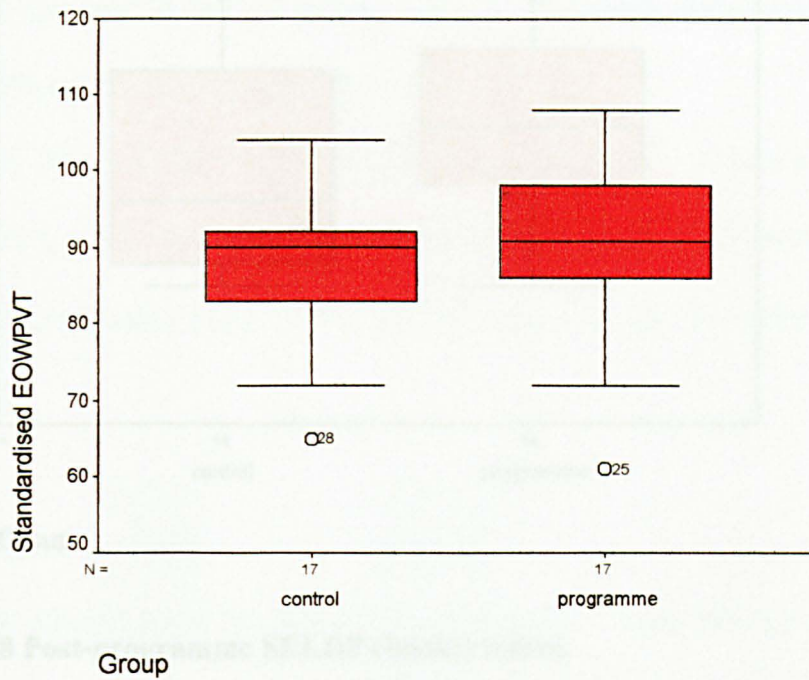


Figure 4:6 Post-programme 'My Word' scores

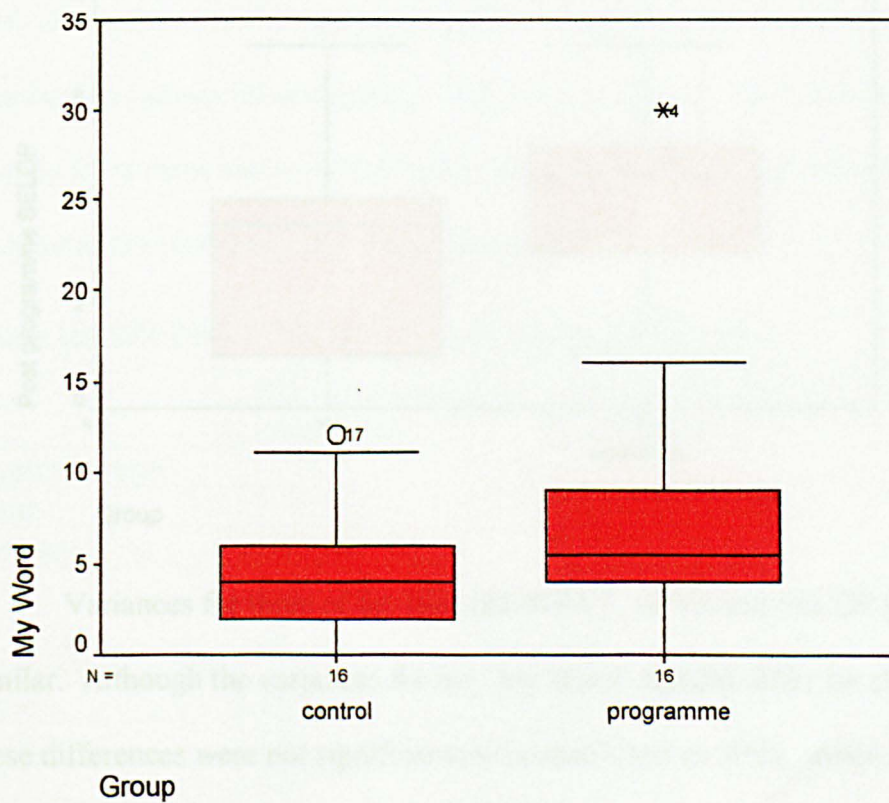


Figure 4:7 Post-programme BPVS scores

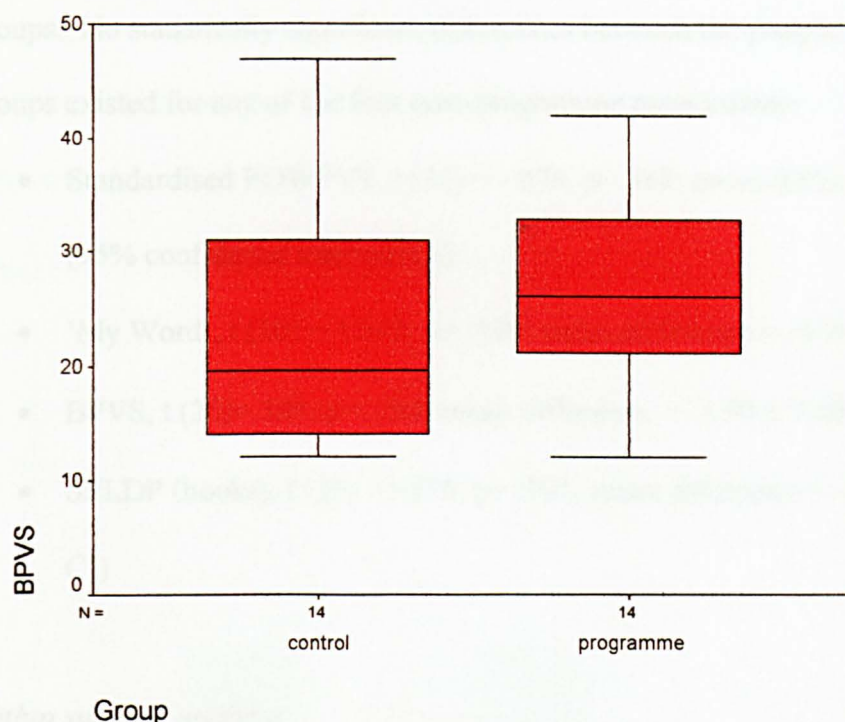
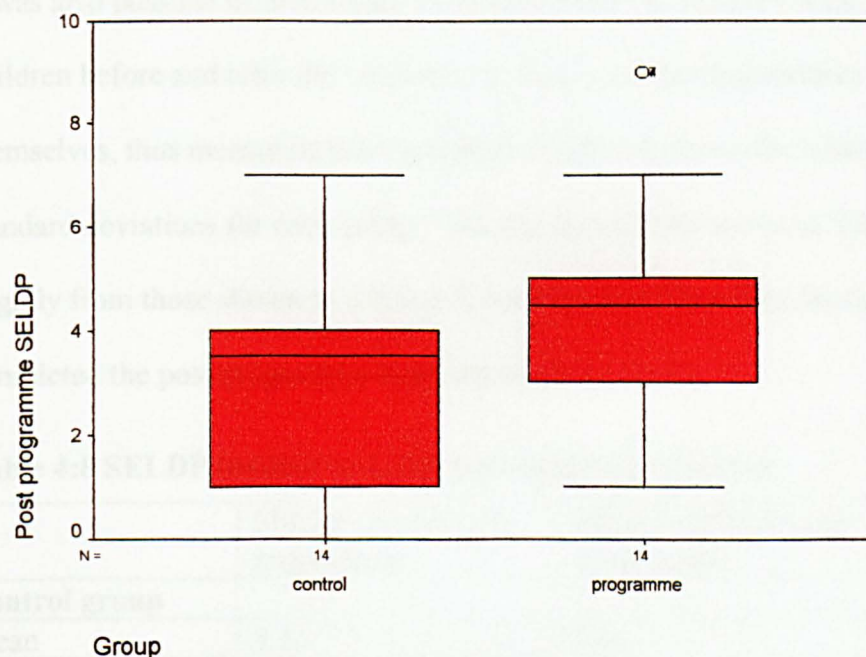


Figure 4:8 Post-programme SELDP (books) scores



Variances for three of the tests (EOWPVT, BPVS and SELDP [books]) were similar. Although the variances for the 'My Word' test did differ for the two groups, these differences were not significant on Levene's test in SPSS, which formally checks the assumption of the homogeneity of variances.

Thus the t-test was used to check for statistical differences in means for the two groups. No statistically significant differences between the programme and control groups existed for any of the four post-programme assessments;

- Standardised EOWPVT, $t(32) = -.876$, $p = .388$; mean difference = -3.18 ± 7.11 (95% confidence interval, CI)
- 'My Word', $t(30) = 1.572$, $p = .126$; mean difference = -3.25 ± 4.05 (95% CI)
- BPVS, $t(26) = .384$, $p = .704$; mean difference = -1.50 ± 7.66 (95% CI)
- SELDP (books), $t(26) = 1.056$, $p = .301$; mean difference = -0.93 ± 1.72 (95% CI)

Within subjects analysis

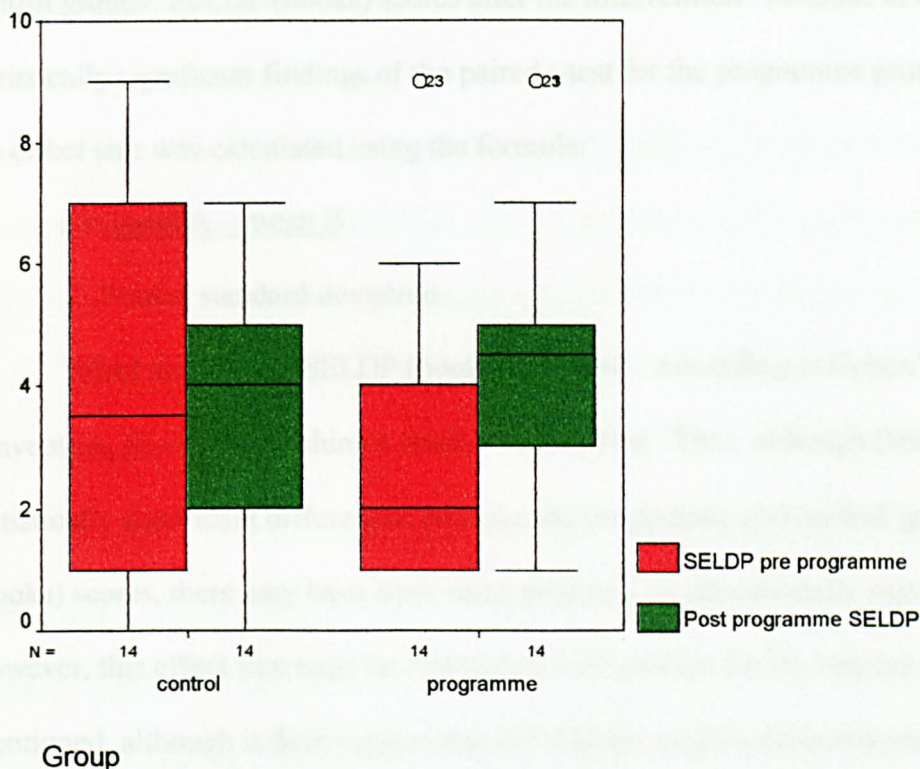
The analysis so far has focused on differences in scores between the two groups. It was also possible to investigate mean differences in SELDP (books) scores for children before and after the intervention, that is, comparing children against themselves, thus measuring their progress. Table 4:8 shows the means, medians and standard deviations for each group. The pre-programme scores in Table 4:8 differ slightly from those shown in Table 4.5, because only the scores for the 14 children who completed the post-programme assessment are included.

Table 4:8 SELDP (books): pre and post-programme scores

	SELDP (books) pre-programme	SELDP (books) post-programme
Control group		
Mean	3.50	3.64
Median	3.0	4.0
SD	3.03	2.17
N	14	14
Programme group		
Mean	2.93	4.57
Median	2.0	4.5
SD	2.37	2.47
N	14	14

The control group performed slightly better at post-test, whereas the mean for the programme group increased markedly, from 2.93 before the intervention to 4.57 at post-test. Figure 4:9 shows boxplots for the two groups before and after the intervention.

Figure 4:9 Pre and post-programme SELDP (books) scores



A paired samples t-test was carried out for each group on the pre and post-programme SELDP (books). This was significant for the programme group, $t(13) = -3.453, p = .004$; mean difference -0.96 ± 1.95 (95% CI), and not significant for the control group, $t(13) = .747, p = .468$; mean difference -0.279 ± 0.64 (95% CI). These results suggest that the programme group's early book knowledge increased as a direct result of the dialogic reading intervention programme. It is worth noting that the programme group's result could not have arisen from regression to the mean. Regression to the mean is a statistical phenomenon in which groups can be expected to score closer to the mean on a retest than they did on the original test; that is, the sample's mean appears to regress toward the mean of the population from pre-test to post-test.

Effect sizes are normally given when statistically significant differences between two groups are apparent. It is difficult to know whether the effect size should be calculated in this case, as there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the programme group at pre-test and post-test. However, we have already seen that there were no statistically significant differences between the programme and control groups' SELDP (books) scores after the intervention. Because of the statistically significant findings of the paired t-test for the programme group's scores, the effect size was calculated using the formula:

$$d = \frac{\text{mean A} - \text{mean B}}{\text{Pooled standard deviation}}$$

Pooled standard deviation

Effect size for the SELDP (books) was 0.40. According to Cohen's (1977) convention, this is approaching a medium effect size. Thus, although there were no statistically significant differences between the programme and control groups' SELDP (books) scores, there may have been some practical, or educationally significant effect. However, this effect size must be interpreted with caution for the reasons already mentioned, although it does suggest that the dialogic reading intervention programme had an effect upon the literacy (SELDP) scores of the children who took part.

Summary of findings

The data suggest that most parents were implementing the dialogic reading techniques at least to some degree. While most reported an increased use of simple questioning, few reported using open-ended questions or expanding children's responses.

The majority of parents valued the programme and felt it had helped their children in a variety of ways. Some thought their children had benefited in terms of vocabulary acquisition, others mentioned enhanced concentration, confidence or

enjoyment of books. Some said the programme had increased their own awareness of what to look for when reading with their children. All eighteen interviewed at the end of the programme said they felt the programme was worthwhile and should be offered to other families.

No statistically significant differences were reported for the programme group over the control group for vocabulary or early book skills. However, statistical tests showed that the programme group's early book skills were significantly enhanced by the intervention. It is possible that other language skills not tested for (such as descriptive language and/or MLU) may have been affected, since many parents reported an increase in interaction between parent and child after the programme.

Discussion

The analysis shows that gains in children's book knowledge can be achieved with a relatively short intervention. These gains were achieved even though the children themselves were not the focus of the intervention; it was the parents who received the training. The children's gains in knowledge of books over the duration of the programme may be due to the fact that the frequency and/or quality of shared book reading increased while parents participated in the programme.

A small number of children in the control group performed slightly worse in the post-programme SELDP (books) than they had six to eight weeks earlier. This may be due to the fact that:

'development does not always take place in a neat and upward rising line – all real development includes peaks and plateaus, and slow as well as rapid progress..... there is sometimes apparent regression'.

(Nutbrown and Hannon, 1997, p. 6)

The post-programme assessments took slightly longer to administer than the pre-programme tests, and children were often tiring towards the end of the assessment

sessions. However this does not explain why the programme children, as a group, performed much better on the post-programme assessment.

In spite of the gains in scores for the programme group, children generally scored poorly on the SELDP (books). This may have been because the test was designed for use with children aged three to five and some children were not three at the time of post-testing. It was felt that the SELDP (books) did not acknowledge the full extent of such young children's book knowledge; for example, no marks could be given for holding the book, orientating the book correctly, turning pages, looking at pictures and being interested in the book, even though these are clearly important very early book skills. Perhaps a more qualitative measure of book knowledge and interaction around books could be used in future studies involving such young children. Another possible reason for the poor scores achieved on the SELDP (books) was that it was always administered last, by which time many children were lacking concentration. Many failures on questions were due to refusals, rather than an incorrect response or an inability to answer.

Positively influencing children's early book skills was just one objective of this programme; the main aim of previous dialogic studies had been to enhance receptive and expressive language. Some parents in this study felt their children had made gains in vocabulary, although this was not reflected in any of the post-programme vocabulary assessments. It is necessary to explore some possible reasons as to why this may have been the case.

There are problems involved in the testing of very young children; most significantly, it is only possible to assess their *performance* on a particular day, not their actual *competences*. Many children in this study did not appear to achieve their potential. Typically, children would concentrate for the first few minutes, then, as time went on, their attention wandered. In many cases, parents commented that their child

was capable of responding correctly more often than they actually did. In several cases, children who had scored well on the first test (the EOWPVT) then went on to score poorly on the remaining tests, because they had tired so much. This is a problem for any researcher working with such young children. In particular, the performance of children at the younger end of the age range appeared to be more variable than that of slightly older children.

In previous dialogic reading studies, assessments were carried out in university and nursery settings, usually being conducted in one session lasting around 25 minutes. In the present study, both pre and post-programme assessments were conducted in the child's home in one session, usually lasting between 35 and 45 minutes. It was felt that conducting the testing in homes was not an ideal situation. There is some evidence that children tend to perform better in a clinical environment. There were many distractions in homes; for example, often the television was left on while the testing was carried out, and sometimes siblings or dogs were present and caused some distraction. The problem of inconsistency in children's performance is exacerbated by the small sample. By the end of the programme, 18 families remained. Some of the children declined to perform all assessments, and some did not appear to achieve their potential.

The parents in this study were trained using a videotape training method. Because the videotape used in the original dialogic reading studies was no longer in production, Whitehurst recommended the Huebner (2001) videotape instead (personal communication, 21st February, 2001) although it was of shorter duration (12 minutes for the first training session and 5 minutes for the second). There were some differences in the content of the two videotapes, the most notable of which was that Huebner (2001) did not include a section showing inappropriate adult-child book reading. In previous dialogic reading studies, parents were asked to criticise the adults in terms of the rules of dialogic reading and to say what the adult reader should have done differently in

response to the child. In the present study, I demonstrated the dialogic reading techniques. Ideally, adult-child role-play would have been demonstrated at the session, although this was not possible because of limited resources to fund a second trainer.

While previous dialogic intervention studies reportedly experienced few problems altering the reading behaviour of parents in the intervention, others have noted significant difficulties. Greenhough and Hughes (1999) were largely unsuccessful in increasing the amount of 'conversing' between parents and children when reading together. They contended that altering parents' behaviour was very difficult because the amount of conversing parents engage in is related to other aspects of their lives, such as levels of education and their wider views about the role and value of literacy. It is possible that in spite of training, parents' behaviour in the present study was not significantly altered, although this theory contradicts the interview findings somewhat, which suggest that nearly all had implemented at least some of the dialogic reading techniques to a greater or lesser extent. While the more complex aspects of the programme, such as extensions of children's responses, were hardly mentioned, virtually all parents seemed to have increased their use of questions to encourage labelling.

Varying rates of participation may have been a contributory factor in the modest effects of this study. More than half the parents had at least a week in which they read very little or not at all. All were very honest about this, admitting to it when I called round to change the books, apologising and giving reasons. In such a short, intensive programme, weeks of low or non-participation must have affected the overall result. Rates of participation were also gauged by examining the reading diaries that were returned at the end of the programme, although only ten diaries were returned at the end of the programme. Of these, only two had entries for every day or every other day. Most began with an entry for each day, but then dwindled to around one a week. It is

difficult to say whether these entries were a true reflection of the actual number of adult-child reading sessions that took place or not. In the final interview, only three parents said they had read dialogically every day of the programme's duration. Some had read '*most days*'. The majority said they had only managed '*on average, several times a week*'. This variation in rates of participation could very possibly have been a contributory factor in this study's mixed findings.

It is necessary to consider the wider context of this study, which took place in May 2001. The previous dialogic reading studies were carried out in the late 1980s and early/mid 1990s. There has been a great deal of publicity around the importance of reading to young children recently and a plethora of literacy initiatives over the last decade or so. In the U.K. interventions include the Bookstart project in Birmingham (Wade and Moore, 2000) and the REAL Project in Sheffield (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001). In September 1998, Sainsbury's supermarket announced it was giving away one million books to babies in the U.K. as part of a £6 million project with the charity, Book Trust. Sainsbury's *Bookstart* initiative was part of a national programme to encourage literacy by giving children's books and information on reading to parents attending their babies' nine-month health checks. The majority of parents on the dialogic reading project had benefited from this initiative. Recently publicity regarding literacy has even included television advertisements to 'help your child with reading' and soap operas which have adopted storylines with literacy themes. In the run up to the 1997 election the Labour Party made education, and in particular literacy, one of its top priorities. The National Literacy Strategy was introduced, with its highly structured daily 'literacy hour' for children in all primary schools.

As a result of these initiatives, parents may have been more aware of the importance of their role in their children's literacy development than they were previously, regardless of SES. This suggestion would appear to be backed up by the

U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (Nord et al., 1999) which used data from the 1993 and 1999 National Household Education Surveys. They found an increase in the frequency of shared reading between the 1993 and 1999 surveys. They concluded that '*families have gotten the message about the importance of reading to their young children*' (p. 2) and that '*in general, children in 1999 are more likely than those in 1993 to engage in literacy activities with family members*' (Nord et al., 1999, p. 5).

While this is an American survey, the U.K. may have experienced similar increases in home literacy practices. Such an influence could have affected the results of this study, in that both control and programme groups may have been more aware of the benefits of reading to their children than they were several years ago. Indeed, an important finding of this study was that most families described using certain aspects of the dialogic reading approach as part of their usual reading routines before the intervention.

A positive finding of the study was that families valued the programme and did not appear in any way to feel patronised by its instructional methods.

Limitations and practical issues

One of the main limitations of the study was the fact that I was involved in the assessment process, particularly in administration of the post-programme assessments. Another limitation, touched on in the discussion, was that determining the extent to which parents utilised the dialogic techniques was difficult without making observations of parents and children reading together.

A third limitation was the small sample size, and related to this the possibility of type II error. Type II errors occur when statements are rejected when they are in fact true: in this case a type II error would have occurred if the experiment showed no significant gains in vocabulary, whereas in reality there were gains. The fact that a

number of parents reported benefits in terms of language developments suggests that this might be the case. Cohen et al. (2000) suggest reducing the level of significance to $p < .20$ or $p < .30$ as a way of addressing the possibility of type II errors. In the current study, this would have resulted in significant gains for the programme group over the control group for 'My Word' ($p = .126$) and SELDP (books) ($p = .301$). However, reducing the level of significance increases the likelihood of committing a type I error (accepting statements when they are false).

There are a number of practical issues that need consideration for future research. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that the study was 'community based'. Many hours each week were spent visiting families at home in order to change books. While this was a valuable experience, and provided an opportunity to discuss issues with families in their own home, it was extremely time consuming. Sometimes, families were not at home when I called, and another appointment had to be made later. This became quite a problem when trying to visit nineteen families each week over two days. If the study had been based in a nursery, parents could have brought the books there on a given day when they took their child into the nursery. This would have been far less time consuming. A nursery-based programme would also mean that children could be assessed within the nursery environment, rather than at home.

It is also possible that parents are more likely to agree to participate in a nursery-based programme, viewing it as being associated with school, and therefore worthwhile. A number of studies (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001; Tizard and Hughes, 1984) which approached parents through nurseries and schools reported a 100 per cent take-up rate. The study reported here achieved a relatively low take-up rate of 56 per cent, probably because it involved 'cold calling'.

Rationale for a further study

The dialogic reading programme raises a number of interesting questions. I would like to examine these in relation to my original research aim, which was,

- To identify and develop shared reading behaviours that promote children's language and literacy skills.

The dialogic reading programme had succeeded in enhancing children's reported enjoyment, confidence and/or concentration around books and also to some extent, their early book skills. No previous dialogic reading studies had investigated this. However, unlike the dialogic reading studies to date, significant gains in children's vocabulary were not achieved. The effects of the dialogic reading programme were therefore perceived to have been rather limited.

It was not feasible to continue the research route, which involved devising further interventions based on the dialogic reading techniques for other areas of literacy, since there were questions about the effectiveness of the intervention. Dialogic reading is essentially an intervention which extends parents' use of low-level distancing strategies (Reese and Cox, 1999), by encouraging children to label and describe. Would a programme that encouraged parents' use of medium and high-level distancing strategies have been more effective? Few studies have investigated parents' use of distancing strategies among three-year-old children, with most examining distancing behaviour in relation to four to seven-year-olds (Pellegrini et al., 1990; Sigel, 1984).

At this time therefore, the alternative research route appeared far more interesting and challenging. Clearly, many parents who took part had already developed strategies for reading with their children before the programme. Some parents said they simply read the text; others said they adopted a more interactive approach. It was assumed that parents were not already using dialogic techniques when the study was implemented, although in this study some parents felt the methods were

similar to those they originally used. It would be interesting to compare dialogic reading techniques with other methods parents use. A detailed descriptive, observation study was needed with a different set of participants in order to determine how parents read with their children. If we could understand how parents and children read together, we could perhaps begin to identify behaviours which foster early reading and language skills.

The following six chapters (Chapter 5 to Chapter 10) relate to Study 2. Chapter 5 begins by introducing the participating dyads, providing portraits of each.