

STORYTELLING:  
PATHWAY TO LITERACY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between storytelling and literacy acquisition, and its implications for the early elementary classroom. Initially, the history of literacy acquisition in the United States public schools is examined, prefacing a consideration of the two schools of thought about literacy acquisition: reading readiness and emergent literacy. The author then considers the process of oral language development, which it is argued may precede literacy in the learning process. This discussion sets the stage for an investigation into the scholarly literature on the use of storytelling in the classroom. The history of storytelling in U.S. public school education is also considered. Ultimately, the author suggests there is a strong positive correlation between the use of storytelling in the public school classroom and literacy acquisition. However, additional research into this correlation is necessary; storytelling clearly cannot stand on its own as the sole method of encouraging literacy acquisition.

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## DEDICATION OF MERIT

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By this merit may all attain omniscience,  
May it defeat the enemy of wrongdoing,  
Through the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,  
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.  
By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east,  
May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom.  
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled.  
May all beings enjoy profound brilliant glory.

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To my grandmother Jule Reilly, whom I never knew but whose presence has surrounded  
both this project and path

To my grandfather Charles Reilly, an Irishman and a storyteller, for revealing the bluest  
sky I have ever seen

To my sister Dana Hawkins-Berger, for introducing me to a world on the other side of the  
Sound

To a Goddess and best friend, Kristine Ashcraft, for believing in me before I  
knew what to believe in: energy does indeed follow thought

Lastly, to Cinder Ann Reilly my fellow wanderer and companion who left this world so  
that I would have the space to walk this path alone

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What is known as the “loneliness of the journey” is this: that 95% of the discoveries that you make along the way you will never be able to share with anybody else. And the remaining 5% will quite possibly be misunderstood.

--Dr. Reginald A. Ray

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Research

Present concerns around teaching today center on issues of equity, best practice and how to advance the two for children of diverse needs and backgrounds. Literacy is by far one of the most important if not the central concept students need in order to become successful in our society today. As a first year teacher focusing on early childhood (K-2<sup>nd</sup>) education I will be on the forefront of literacy education. Therefore it is critical to explore the means through which students can be imbued with a life-long passion for literacy. Presently the battle lines have been drawn in how best to teach students formal literacy (reading and writing). This paper seeks to examine the “world’s oldest literacy” (Mello 2001) by investigating the role of storytelling and the potential relationship it may have with the acquisition of literacy for all students. How can I as a teacher best provide multiple points of access to literacy so that all students are presented with equitable learning opportunities? The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between storytelling and literacy acquisition, and the implications for a early childhood classroom.

### Relevance/Importance of the Question

Today the debate in literacy is skills versus meaning, or phonics versus whole language approaches. I believe storytelling has the capacity to both creating meaningful authentic experiences and teach skills critical to becoming a successful participating member of society. Delpit (1995) reminded teachers that it is not about one style of

literacy learning being better than another but rather how both progressive and skills-based methods of literacy development need to have a dialogue and that “much can be gained from the interaction” (p. 20). Delpit urged teachers to emphasize “skills within the context of critical and creative thinking” (p. 19). As a first year teacher I need to find the balance between a method that creates meaning while also teaching critical skills my students need to be successful in life. By investigating the relationship between storytelling and literacy acquisition I can explore both the skills and the meaning such a method creates and whether or not the benefits enhance my students’ acquisition of literacy.

#### Rationale

*In every story there exists a dialectic between teller and listener and at some moment the horizons of telling and listening fuse... and as our lived worlds merge, engagement begets reciprocity and participation in the world of the other an evokes from us the call to act. The educator/researcher as storyteller is a metaphor for engagement, a call to action (Polakow, cited in Rosen, 1985, p. 164).*

Storytelling—as the cliché goes—is one of the oldest manners of communication as well as a universal concept with the power to “remember, entertain, teach, inspire, create and know” (Isbell, 1994). According to the seminal study of storytelling by Pellowski (1990) all cultures engage in storytelling as a way of making meaning and passing on traditions. Storytelling in the classroom provides a method that every student can connect to, according to Rosen (1991) who stated, “our memories make storytellers of us all” (p. 53). Traditionally, storytelling has been seen as providing entertainment

value (Zipes 1995) but today a growing body of literature suggests that storytelling might also have education value (Aina 1999; Applebee 1977 & 1998; Barton & Booth 1990; Brand & Donato 2001; Cooper 1993; Cooper & Collins 1992; Collins 1999; Dyson 1989, 1997 & 2003; Dyson & Genishi 1994; Egan 1986 & 1993; Fox 1993; Gallas, 1994 & 2003; Hamilton & Weiss, 1990; Hartse, Woodward & Burke 1984; Heath 1983; Igoa 1995; Isbell 2002; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato 1993; Peck 1989; Malo, 2000; McCabe 1997; McCracken & McCracken 1986; Mello 2001; Morrow 1979; Nelson 1989; Paley 1981 & 1990; Peters 1993; Raines & Isbell 1994; Roe, Alfred & Smith 1998; Rosen 1988; Rubright 1996; Watts 1992; Wells 1986; Zeece 1997; Zipes 1995 & 2004). Despite this, storytelling continues to be sidelined, held in the domain of librarians, school assemblies and special guest speakers (Zipes 2005). What can storytelling as a universal concept offer the formal public school classroom? By identifying whether storytelling can provide students with equitable access to literacy, I hope to be able to articulate the role that storytelling may play in literacy education to parents, fellow teachers, administration and students, as a necessary and important tool in literacy education. In order for storytelling to become prevalent in today's mainstream curriculum and embraced as an effective educational tool, crucial links must be identified connect storytelling to literacy acquisition (Collins 1999).

Peters (1993) asked the question, "where have all the stories gone?" In today's classroom, stories are said to be disappearing and being replaced by worksheets and drills geared towards reading readiness programs. This has occurred despite a growing amount of research from a diversity of disciplines and sources that has found direct connections between stories and oral language as a crucial building block in literacy development

(Teale 1981). Still, the major assumption that reading aloud is beneficial continues to be critiqued as having an inadequate theoretical framework and research base (Elley 1989). Despite this critique there remains a large body of evidence supporting the assumption that reading aloud to students has a positive effect on students' literacy development. One example of this evidence asserted that as students listen to stories they must confront the inconsistencies of what they know and don't know, thus spurring cognitive growth (Peters 1993). This would suggest that listening to stories is not a passive event as has been assumed (Johnson & Adams 1983). It is therefore necessary in the following chapters to delve into this debate and determine what if any effect listening to stories may or may not have on literacy growth. Is it simply passive entertainment or is there a spurring of cognitive growth that stories provide for both the teller and the audience?

The educational community needs to consider the interactive aspects of storytelling. Both Cochran (1985) and Morrow (1988) stated that literacy education in formal schools is constructed through meaning via the interactive process that occurs between student and adult/teacher. Wells (1986) argued that the act of listening to stories provides a direct link to literacy development. Finally, Vygotsky (1978) provided a much-used theoretical framework from which to interpret the interactive process. He believed that literacy as a higher mental function is expanded upon by social interactions that occur between the student and the environment, which consequently leads to internalization of new knowledge. When combined these observations provide a foundation from which to examine the effects of storytelling on literacy acquisition. They bring to light the interactive process that is seen as critical for learning to transpire.

It is necessary then to consider the implications storytelling as pedagogy could have literacy based upon this interactive theoretical perspective.

Stories provide what Bakhtin (1981) called “heteroglossia,” the notion that language is interactive implies that the social aspect of language production is ultimately crucial in forming and transforming meaning. The educational community needs to consider the interactive sociocultural and dynamic process of storytelling and its value to formal school and literacy education.

As less and less time is found to make stories available to the classroom it is critical that the educational community consider what relationship storytelling has to literacy acquisition. Despite efforts to increase literacy, whether through whole language approaches or phonics, students are still being left behind with respect to literacy achievement (Egan 2005). It is imperative for the educational community to explore methods that are equitable and meet students’ diverse needs to insure that all peoples’ children are not left behind. It is then necessary to explore the implications storytelling could have on equity and access to learning.

Current trends in education are presently in favor of results-orientated practices that are easily measured. Schools are strapped for cash, and face further prohibitive measures should a school fall below the desired results. In today’s current political climate, Peters (1993) contends more and more stories have been found disappearing from the classroom in exchange for worksheets and drills. Storytelling may provide an inexpensive and accessible tool that has the potential to provide the means for students to acquire literacy in meaningful ways. Presently the educational community as a tool to engage students’ early literacy skills supports storybooks and story reading. Mello

(2001) stated that storytelling and its educational benefits have still not been fully explored by researchers. As the educational community races to find the newest technology or newest trend backed by scientific research, it may be useful to explore an old art form such as storytelling and the potential it has to reach and engage students of all types.

With regard to professional literature, storytelling is mentioned as an excellent supplemental and informal means to create meaningful literacy development (Peck 1989; Morrow 1979). According to a report by Aiex (1988) “numerous articles and papers entered in the ERIC database between 1985 and 1988 have discussed the benefits of storytelling in developing language abilities, appreciation of literature, critical thinking, and comprehension, and understanding of community and self” (p. 1). In addition, the report differentiates storytelling from story reading, due to the interaction that was found to be immediate, personal, active, and direct. The professional literature also goes on to note the wide ranging impact storytelling has on bridging real and imaginary worlds, reading, writing, listening, literacy development/literacy acquisition, oral language, story elements, structure, and comprehension as well as vocabulary, phonemic awareness, perspective taking, meaning making, establishing climate and social interaction (Aiex 1998; Aina 1999; Collins 1999; Fox 1993; Raines & Isbell 1994; Zeece 1997; Brand & Donato 2001). Scott (as quoted in Aiex 1988, p. 2) succinctly stated from her practical experience as a teacher/storyteller that storytelling produced the following eight results:

- 1) [Storytelling can] introduce children to a range of story experiences; 2) provide young students with models of story patterns, themes, characters, and incidents to help them in their own writing, oral language, and

thinking; 3) nurture and encourage a sense of humor in children; 4) help put children's own words in perspective; 5) increase knowledge and understanding of other places, races, and beliefs; 6) introduce new ideas and be used to question established concepts with out threat to the individual; 6) lead to discussions that are far ranging and often more satisfying than those arising from formal lessons; and 8) serves as the most painless way of teaching children to listen, to concentrate, and to follow the thread and logic of an argument (p. 2).

Professional literature has also supported storytelling as pedagogy. In Paley's (1990) prophetic reflection she provided a glimpse into her teaching career that nurtured student learning through stories, storytelling and dramatic play. Paley's innovation in using stories as a mode of instruction suggests that storytelling may have a place in public early elementary classrooms. Paley's essays and research brought storytelling and its uses in the classroom into a national spotlight but were based in a private University Lab School. Do her assertions and observations cross over from the private classroom to the day-today realities of the public classroom? Paley has created a conversation but more research is necessary to examine storytelling and its practicability in public schools. Is the pedagogy she puts forth applicable in a public classroom setting?

Much of the literature on storytelling supports such a notion in facilitating learning (Barton & Booth 1990; Brand & Donato 2001; Cooper 1993; Cooper & Collins 1992; Isbell 2002; Kies, Rodriguez & Granato 1993; McCracken & McCracken 1986; Roe, Alfred & Smith 1998; Raines & Isbell 1994; Rubright 1996; Whaley 2002; Zipes 1995 & 1994). Although the literature offers theoretical perspectives, literature reviews,

critiques and opinions, the controversy with storytelling is the lack of a research base. Mello (1997 & 2001) and many other researchers of storytelling conduct studies in response to the “paucity of research in this area” (1997 p. 3). Myers (1990) believed the lack of a research base has relegated storytelling to entertainment and frills: “it is generally thought to be merely entertaining, certainly not rigorously pedagogical enough for school time” (p. 824).

For the purposes of this paper, I will examine the relationship storytelling has to literacy acquisition by examining two necessary components for storytelling to be transmitted: oral language and story (Livo & Rietz, 1986). Egan (1993) used an anthropological framework to discuss how preliterate societies used oral language to pass on tradition and make sense of their world. Egan stated that before reading and writing children depended upon spoken word for communication. The argument then is by understanding orality research may then be able to come to a greater understanding of the transition that occurs from orality to literacy. Speaking about the connection between oral language and literacy, he believed that if the purpose of education were simply to install literacy in the mind of a child, there would be no foundation from which to support it. In other words, it would not be connected to anything meaningful.

Indeed Egan (2005) believed that oral language is the necessary first step in acquiring a “literacy tool kit” (p. 77), and is one of the base tools students bring to school already having a grasp of. Oral language, argued Egan, comes to school with base primary tools of story, metaphor, binary opposites, rhyme, rhythm, and pattern, jokes and humor, mental imagery, gossip, play, and a sense of wonderment and mystery. Egan continued to state that these are the tools that are available to students in early elementary



schools and when engaged allow students to begin to use new tools such as reading and writing.

Oral language as a necessary building block to literacy is still heavily contested. Research findings have indicated that beyond phonemic awareness oral language development may not play a central role in literacy acquisition (Bryant et al., 1990; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1979; Mattingly, 1972; Share et al 1984; Tallal, 1988; Vellutino et al., 1996). These studies did not find significant differences in their results when oral language and connections to reading disabilities were compared. Measures included morphological awareness, semantics, and syntax. Despite a number of possible correlations between oral language and literacy that readily emerge there remains a significant lack in the research base supporting the assumption of oral language as a cornerstone of literacy acquisition. Oral language as a cornerstone to literacy marks one controversy revealed by the literature. If oral language is said to be a building block to literacy acquisition, it is important to examine what role it has in such a process. This controversy is examined further in chapter 3.

Story, the next component in the relationship to storytelling, also has a large literature base linking the understanding of story elements and structure to literacy development. Wells' (1986) seminal study discovered links between story, storytelling, narrative discourse and school success. Wells claimed that story and "storying" (p. 194) seeps into all facets of learning. Rosen (cited in Linfors, 1987) considered narrative to be "a fundamental process of the human mind" (p. 357). Hardy (cited in Rosen 1986) proclaimed, "we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative" (p. 168).

Atkinson (1995) referred to stories as blueprints that allow students to make meaning. Stories have been shown to increase multicultural awareness (McCabe, 1997), develop self-identity (Chinen, 1996; Paley, 1990), expand imagination (Rosenblatt, 1976; Gallas, 1994), and morality (Coles, 1989; Zipes, 1997). Stories have been shown to be connected to writing (Calkin, 1986; Graves, 1983; Sulzby, 1985) and to reading (Elley, 1989; Fietelson, Kita & Goldstein, 1986; Teale & Martinez, 1988; Throne, 1988) by providing students with an example in which to model and organize information.

Despite this large body of literature, some scholars (e.g. Elley 1989) claim that empirical connections between story and reading are hard to find, and that theoretical perspectives are missing to provide an adequate assumption that story is beneficial to literacy. Although “acceptable” empirical data may in fact be slim, it remains the only sure critique towards the use of story in the classroom. Peters (1993) revealed that much of the research on story and literacy has been conducted in the home environment and on mainly white middle class students. Much more research needs to be done examining stories affect in the classroom and with diverse students. In chapter 3 I will take a closer look at the research connecting story and literacy.

It is not the aim of this paper to define reading or writing. It is also not the aim of this paper to debate the finer points of what is and what is not literacy acquisition. My beliefs as an emerging teaching professional coincide with constructivist foundations. I believe that learners construct their own knowledge, that learning is dependent on prior knowledge, and takes place through active engagement and social interaction that promotes authentic and meaningful learning. Throughout the course of this paper I adopt an emergent literacy perspective first pioneered by the work of Clay (1966). Clay

observed that children are busy discovering written language before any formal instruction, that reading and writing are interrelated, print awareness begins with oral language and that children's literacy abilities emerge through inner control.

Emergent literacy is messy. It is a dynamic, interconnected, interdependent process in which students facilitate the ability to assimilate, relate to and accommodate symbols, content and meaning in reading, writing, singing, art, listening, speaking and problem solving. Emergent literacy has many definitions, which vary depending on who is defining it. When examining the research in chapter three, I will use the "inside-out theory of learning" (p. 65) offered by Gallas (1994), which includes four approaches to identify what if any evidence of emergent literacy is identifiable with respect to a possible relationship between storytelling and literacy acquisition.

Gallas (1994) presented an outline that stands outside the norm of mainstream academia's attempt to quantify and objectify the classroom. Gallas is classroom teacher/ethnographer who uses four approaches to ground her classroom observations with theory. The first approach is that of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963, in Gallas 1994) whose seminal work gave rise to an organic reading method that called upon students' own experiences and stories to assist with their reading and writing. This process valued the students' inner lives, their imagination: "the inner world of the child and to the outer world of the classroom where relationships powerfully influenced learning" (p. 63).

The second approach was presented by Gee (1996, in Gallas 1994) who believed that true literacy begins with the embodiment of the subject. Therefore if one was to be a scientist or a reader, one must walk, talk, eat, live and breathe science or reading, not simply develop a set of skills. Literacy is the process of transferring that identity into

action in the world. In this approach literacy is more than skills but the mastery of a discourse.

The third approach is based on the idea of “body reading” (p. 64) put forth by Grumet (1988, in Gallas 1994). This theory proposed that literacy was a broad cultural performance embedded in the characteristics of each individual’s social, physical, and emotional life. A student’s home and school life reflect the body’s movement from a physical world to a decontextualized world of words, naming identity as critical to learning literacy and as originating organically in the world of the learner. Body reading, suggests that reading does not simply take place in the brain, but includes both mind and body.

The fourth approach is the notion of whole person. Lave and Wenger (1991, in Gallas, 1994) include the teacher in the mind-body world-interconnection frameworks proposed above. They suggest apprenticeship as a model for literacy instruction, complementing the organic, inner-focused approaches previously mentioned. Students become introduced to literacy via real life experiences, with the guidance and expertise of the teacher as mentor.

Weaving together these four approaches Gallas (1994) provided an inside-out framework in which literacy is acquired through the development of identity, the interaction between self and world, imagination, and mentorship. This inside-out approach centers learning on the student, takes into account their place in the world and their stories, and seriously considers the gradual and organic movement/emergent literacy found in literacy acquisition. Gallas’ approach was grounded in years of classroom ethnography and self-reflection, as a teacher-researcher and as a professor. This

approach and framework for emergent literacy reveals the interdependent, messy and dynamic movement that emerges organically from the inner world of a child who attempts to make sense of their surroundings.

This is the framework from which I consider emergent literacy; based in imagination, identity, discourse acquisition/appropriation, whole-body and apprenticeship. An emphasis on imagination inspires literacy, pulling in the inner world of the student and facilitating a process of identification influenced by the individual student's cultural place. Students actively identify and define the meaning of learning activities and how to go about presenting it to the world. Social interaction becomes a place of real experience, a place to test ideas and interpret the world. Whole body implies that a teacher is not simply educating the brain by depositing skills. Instead a teacher observes, examines, and describes the cultural space from which the student interprets the world, where learning lives. Gallas (1994) stated this is a clumsy process outside the fold of mainstream educational thinking, but one which nevertheless creates space to discover the natural expression of the inside-out process of literacy as an integration of mind, body, head, heart and world.

Emergent literacy has, according to Teale and Sulzby (1986), contributed to the altering of the landscape from which the educational community viewed literacy learning. As I have previously stated, I am aligned with and personally believe in this model—a belief fostered during my MIT education and grounded in my own experience working with students—which defined literacy as a process individuals use to make meaning. I have chosen to examine emergent literacy as an avenue to both inform and challenge my belief. I examine the historical roots of emergent literacy further in chapter two.

Emergent literacy is the only lens that addresses meaning, and I believe literacy is fundamentally about making meaning.

With regard to specific observable moments in the classroom, emergent literacy expands beyond the borders of what is considered reading readiness. Teale and Sulzby (1986) explained reading readiness as a position based on the assumption that students need to learn specific skills that once mastered will allow a student to read. First starting with maturation as a guiding force, something a child would have to wait for, a school of thought developed that reading readiness skills could be taught. This ushered in reading readiness workbooks and tests. The history of this school of thought is explained more in chapter two. Specific skills denoting a reading readiness position are evaluated via worksheets and formal tests, which rely on a sequenced mastery of skill sets, such as phonics (sounding out) as a primary strategy to reading, breaking words into smaller parts (decoding), repetition, rime, onset, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and letter recognition. It is also important to note that reading readiness is largely an adult-centered perspective. It was not till the mid-1960's that an alternative perspective emerged to challenge reading readiness as the only major school of thought with regard to literacy acquisition.

Emergent literacy with regard to specific observable moments in the classroom are quite complex, a dynamic and constructed process in which the student gains inner control over language and literacy. Emergent literacy can be assessed in the classroom via six major traits, explained by Brand and Donato (2001) that expand outside the borders of a fixed set of subskills. Emergent literacy acknowledges basic skills but takes into consideration a child centered perspective and expands to include what Gallas (1994)

referred to as an inside-out process to literacy learning focused on the whole student. The six traits are: (1) language development; (2) fluent reading; (3) emotional catharsis; (4) comprehension; (5) self-esteem; and (6) an awareness of story structure. Each of these traits builds a bridge to specific categories that can determine if evidence of an inside-out process literacy acquisition is enhanced through storytelling.

The above section delineates the world of literacy experiences that expand beyond the borders of reading readiness. The world of literacy experiences provides an authentic dance from which areas of literacy knowledge are given meaning. Areas of literacy knowledge, and hence evidence of where emergent literacy is found: letter knowledge, phonological awareness, comprehension of text structures, relationships of print to speech, awareness of print, developmental patterns, purpose and functions of print, conventions of print. Teale and Sulzby (1986) reminded readers that this is not to say that each one is a separate skill that must be taught first, but rather that these skills are interrelated and develop together.

Through the concept of emergent literacy, researchers have expanded the purview of research from reading to literacy, based on theories and findings that reading, writing, and oral language develop concurrently and interrelatedly in literate environments. Despite the solid base of research, means of application, and grounding in theory, Teale and Sulzby (1986) found that emergent literacy continuously faces an uphill challenge in obtaining a foothold in mainstream literacy education. Delpit (1995) illustrated these uphill challenges as a failure to take into consideration the trepidation of minority and poor populations and an either/or approach between emergent and reading readiness literacy learning.

It is the aim of this paper to identify key elements that may provide evidence as to the benefits associated with storytelling and literacy acquisition. To do this I will begin chapter two with a brief history of storytelling in terms of origins, general and contemporary history. I intend to do the same with literacy acquisition; specifically the origins and historical context centered on the theory of reading readiness and emergent literacy as well as the contemporary history. To close chapter two I will look at the state of storytelling and literacy acquisition in public schools today.

Chapter three focuses my examination of literacy acquisition from an emergent literacy perspective grounded in the theory that literacy (reading and writing) begins at birth and is a process which individuals use to make sense of the world. In so doing it is the aim of this section to unearth and identify key patterns and characteristics (imagination, social interaction, identity, phonemic awareness, and comprehension in addition to specific areas of literacy knowledge) connected to the fostering of literacy acquisition in a way that allows students to make meaning. Next I will examine two major components of storytelling, that of oral language and story. First, through examining research with regard to oral language development, I will seek to identify the nature of the relationship oral language has with the previous discussion on literacy acquisition. I will continue the same steps with story. Finally I will close section three by examining research on storytelling and what, if any, relationships exist between it and the previous discussion with oral language and literacy acquisition.

Chapter four will conclude this paper by summarizing key findings and the implications they carry for a kindergarten through second grade classroom. Possible trends will be identified, elements specifically named, and skills recognized that either



support or deny the ability of storytelling on literacy acquisition. It is the hypothesis of this paper that storytelling indeed supports literacy acquisition and therefore provides a powerful tool in which to allow all peoples' students into the literacy club. This may sound easy, even as though I have made up my mind, but as Mello (2001) stated: "questions about the impact of storytelling in classrooms remain virtually unanswered" (p. 4).

#### Definition of Terms

Storytelling: an art form by which a storyteller transmits both mental and emotional images to an audience using spoken word, gestures, sign language, and matches the needs of both environment and audience. It reflects all cultures and literature and is used for "educational, recreational, historic, folkloric, entertainment and therapeutic purposes" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p.6).

Literacy Acquisition: I use Gee's (1991) definition: "a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error without a formal process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that the acquirers know that they need to acquire something in order to function and they in fact want to so function" (p. 5). Literacy acquisition is therefore a natural process in which an individual has an intrinsic desire to learn to read.

Literacy Learning: I use Gee's (1991) definition: "a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching, though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher. This teaching involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves

attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta knowledge about the matter” (p. 5).

Story: a shape or pattern that information can be arranged in for the retelling of events in a multitude of ways.

Storying: Information transformed into story, the action of telling a story (Livo & Rietz, 1986).

Emergent Literacy: The forward process(es) of becoming literate. This is done through active engagement with the world around them starting at birth. The term also implies that reading and writing develop and are dependent on each other.

### Limitations

The purpose of this paper will seek to specifically examine oral language and story to decipher if a relationship between storytelling and literacy acquisition can be advocated and implemented in a kindergarten classroom. This paper—as previously stated—will be limited to an emergent literacy perspective. Storytelling in a review of the literature has also been found to have many other important functions in the classroom, not only in introducing students to multiculturalism but also in how specific stories and methods of stories are advantaged over others; and in regard to gender, specifically who tells the story and from what perspective. Both of these issues are critical to teaching all peoples children, as evidenced by Wellesley College Center for Research on Women who claim that “until matters of gender are considered seriously, neither girls nor boys will receive an education that is both excellent and equitable” (cited in Mello, 2001, p. 548).

Issues of multiculturalism, race, socioeconomic status, equity and gender will not be singled out or addressed specifically. All these issues are critical to teaching all peoples children and to the advancement of literacy learning. Although these issues will arise throughout the research and may present trends relevant to potential implications in the classroom or identified for future research, the intention is not to sideline these issues, but rather to narrow the focus exclusively on exactly what relationships storytelling as a method has to literacy acquisition. Therefore the aim is to identify what elements, characteristics, and capacities foster literacy can be acquired in meaningful ways via storytelling. Only by identifying specific skills can storytelling as a method be possible.

This paper will also not address the specifics (technical aspects) of reading and writing. For a thorough discussion on the mechanics of writing see Graves (1983) and for reading see Smith (1988).

## CHAPTER 2: (HIS)TORICAL BACKGROUND

*Oral stories and storytellings are intimations of something very old thing that has its roots in the origins of language and human culture. In the act of storying, we are all one community (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 24)*

The purpose of this chapter is to provide historical significance surrounding the focus of this paper. I will begin by offering a brief general overview as to the origin of storytelling, its general history, and current role in relation to public schools in the United States. This will assist with understanding the historical context from which my question arises. Next I will provide a brief history of literacy acquisition beginning with the creation of the public school system in the United States, and outlining the two major schools of thought that form the contemporary debate as to how best to approach literacy acquisition. By understanding where both storytelling and literacy acquisition has come from the aim is to find the context from which the current debate and thus the relationship that literacy acquisition and storytelling may or may not have.

### Origins of Storytelling

There is no origin of storytelling—at least in the sense of actual empirical proof. Sometime between 2000 B.C.E. and 1300 B.C.E. storytelling is often cited (Livo & Rietz, 1986; Myers, 1990; Pellowski, 1977; Livo & Rietz, 1986) as having emerged from Egyptian times. The conversation between the Pharaoh Cheops and his sons (Pellowski, 1977). Pellowski quoted the story that was written down on Papyrus and later translated: “Know ye a man who can tell me of the deeds of magicians? Then the royal son Khafra stood forth and said, “I will tell thy Majesty a tale of the days of thy forefather Nebka” (p.

4). Pellowski from this point moves slowly through time where she highlighted Sanskrit scripture that spoke of storytelling (500 B.C.E.); which illustrated the Tripitaka scriptures of Buddhism as having used storytelling to transfer knowledge and wisdom.

Pellowski (1977) provided evidence of storytelling's use in many cultures, from the Greeks, Romans, German, Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, Slavic, Parthian, Incan, African, Arabic, Indian, Persian, Native American, Mayan, to Europe and beyond. The assumption being that storytelling is a concept that is Universal. According to Pellowski, there are seven prominent theories towards an origin of storytelling based on research conducted across the disciplines including anthropologists, archeologists, folklorists, philologists, semioticians, linguistics and the discipline of literature. They are as follows:

- 1) That it grew out of playful, self-entertainment needs of humans;
- 2) That it satisfied the need to explain the surrounding physical world;
- 3) That it came about because of an intrinsic religious need in humans to honor or propitiate the supernatural force(s) believed to be present in the world;
- 4) That it evolved from the human need to communicate experience to other humans;
- 5) That it fulfilled an aesthetic need for beauty, regularity, and form through expressive language and music and body movement;
- 6) That it stemmed from the desire to record the actions or qualities of one's ancestors or leaders, in the hope that this would give them a kind of immortality; and
- 7) That it encoded and preserved the norms of social interaction that a given society lived by (p. 10-11).

Pellowski traces the movement of storytelling with the spread of Buddhism under Asoka, spreading rapidly into China, East Asia, Persia, North Africa, Spain and into Europe. In terms of a reverse flow or the notion of storytelling from Europe influencing Asia, the issue is still widely debated.

In this brief summary of the origins of storytelling, it is easy to delineate that storytelling may indeed be the oldest form of communication. Certainly it crosses cultures and time, providing evidence of storytelling as a universal concept. There is also evidence that indicated trends in theoretical origins. First is storytelling as communication whether for entertainment, religious reasons, or transmission of culture. Second is storytelling acted as way to make sense of the world whether supernatural forces or the surround physical world.

### General History of Storytelling

In a brief general history, it is important to note that Pellowski (1977) noted that Islamic, Judaic, and Christian traditions—traditions passed down through oral tradition—objected to storytelling as soon the ability to put stories into text. The religious traditions found storytelling to be dangerous due to the interpretations or versions that were created from the orally communicated interpretations providing a direct threat to the power these institutions held over sometimes-illiterate populations. On the contrary, Hindu and Buddhist leaders encouraged stories and saw spoken word superior for transmitting knowledge and wisdom. Here we see the interpretative power of storytelling as well as the context of controversy those interpretations could provide.

The history of storytelling also reveals the use of it to educate children. Pellowski (1977) found evidence from the times of the Greeks, and the storytelling of the Brothers Grimm to the libraries and classrooms and festivals of present time. Storytelling was also pointed out as a means of socialization for students. With the spread of the U.S. public school system, storytelling found its way into an established program at most libraries by 1927. Storytelling began in the United States institutionally around 1899.

Stories first entered public school through the advocacy of kindergarten teachers. Initially storytelling had the enthusiastic support of Froebel, Montessori, Dewey, and Herbart. Pellowski (1977) discovered that in the educational community educators themselves were found to be the farthest removed from the practice of storytelling. One reason cited was that storytelling never became a part of teacher training. One of the first books in the U.S. to connect storytelling to education was written by Alder titled the *Moral Instruction of Children* in which the author expounds mainly on his personal beliefs as to the importance of storytelling for children. Storytelling from the onset of public education in the U.S. was never able to do what libraries could: to establish both on a policy level and philosophically, a scheduled and structured story hour. Storytelling never became part of public school policy or philosophy. In 1927 there were storytelling programs in 79% of public libraries. The Depression changed that. With a lack of money for public endeavors such as formal schooling and public library staff, story time along with the economy began to shrink. Storytelling never recovered. Pellowski found that “from 1930 to 1940, there are fewer articles on the subject in professional journals than for any other decade between 1900 and the present” (p. 101).

Storytelling never recovered as radio, movies, television, and picture books and other forms of entertainment started to make inroads in society. Storytelling, a Universal concept found prevalent throughout the world as, at the very least, a form of communication has historical roots in the transmission of culture and traditions, experience, religion, education, socialization and the need to make sense of the world. Storytelling entered the U.S. institutionally around turn of the twentieth century. Finding popularity as a method for exposing children to literacy (namely reading) it spread throughout the public library system becoming a part of the daily schedule, and only at the behest of kindergarten teachers in New York did it find a foothold in U.S. public education until it declined during the Depression era for more mandated and skills orientated education determined to equip workers with the skills necessary to turn the economy around. Storytelling never recovered, a trend still apparent today, as storytelling continues to exist on the periphery of public school education. Although storytelling had a small moment in the educational spotlight with respect to story hour, it rarely moved beyond the borders of kindergarten.

Contemporary History of Storytelling. Pellowski (1977) claimed that one reason storytelling in present times has not found refuge in the public school classroom was storytelling as pedagogy was the antithesis of storytelling. Pellowski pointed out that pedagogy entailed “explanation, interpretation, rationalization, and justification” and therefore caused a “subtle change in the storyteller/audience relationship” (p. 5) to occur. Pellowski believed that the informal storytelling of librarians provided a space where students were not explicitly asked to learn was the success of library storytelling sessions



and the failure of storytelling to find a home in the public school classroom. The result was the outsourcing of storytelling to specialists and artists who would be invited to the school as part of a special program. Presently most of the schools that have aligned themselves with storytelling are found to be in the private domain. Zipes (2004) went as far as to state that storytelling in public schools is done simply on the principle of entertainment and separate from the curriculum. In fact Zipes found that storytelling is rarely found in teacher-education programs, experiencing a slight renaissance in the 70's and then a sharp decline, the handful that have survived are only available in graduate programs. Thus storytelling for teachers, despite renewed interest, lacked the training and connection to curriculum, even the imagination to bring storytelling into the mainstream public school, let alone having any educational capacity.

Pellowski (1977) found pedagogy and storytelling as non-compatible and was found to be a major reason storytelling has yet to secure a place in public education. Zipes (2004) countered that claim. He acknowledged that genuine storytelling pedagogy, as exemplified by Paley (1990), has the power to bring about critical literacy, critical awareness, and critical pedagogy. The historical debate continues right up to today. Storytelling in a U.S. institutional setting remained the focus of a kindergarten curriculum until the depression when education demanded less entertainment and more skills. As storytelling shrank from the classroom and teacher trainings, storytelling and its direct effects on literacy acquisition was only just beginning to be explored. Is, as Pellowski found, storytelling non-compatible with pedagogy or does storytelling have an academic significance, a relationship to literacy? Both provide valid points, meanwhile storytelling pedagogy remains outside peering inside the window of public school classrooms.

Origins of Literacy Acquisition. With regard to the origins of literacy acquisition I will begin with the onset of public education in the United States. In the beginning, according to Teale and Sulzby (1986) students in early elementary classrooms were neglected with respect to literacy due to the belief in the lack of maturity. There was a complete lack of data with regard to pre-first grade instruction into reading and writing. In 1898, Iredell, according to Teale and Sulzby, was the first to mention a parallel between young children's oral language development and literacy development with respect to the importance of literacy learning. This could very well be the origin of emergent literacy. In the 1920's reading readiness began to root in early childhood education as a "period of preparation" (p. ix) reading readiness has shifted over the years, according to Teale and Sulzby, reading readiness has moved from beliefs in maturation, neural ripening to a product of experience.

Contemporary History of Literacy Acquisition. For the purposes of contemporary history I will present the frameworks provided by Teale and Sulzby (1986) for reading readiness and Goodman (1986) for emergent literacy.

The "Reading Readiness" school of thought continued its dominance in public school classrooms. Often today referred to as phonics, reading readiness is presently endorsed and official policy of the federal government and mandated by a high percentage of schools as the official curriculum. According to Teale and Sulzby (1986) this form of boxed curriculum cost districts tens of thousands of dollar. Reading readiness has been shown to increase results, but one major point of contention is that

students do not make the meaning necessary to sustain enthusiasm and interest in literacy. Rather students learn parts disconnected from the whole.

Reading Readiness Framework:

1) Instruction in reading can only begin efficiently when children have mastered a set of basic skills prerequisite to reading. The most important skills predict subsequent achievement most strongly; 2) The area of instructional concern is reading. It is implied that composing and other aspects of writing (except for letter formation—or handwriting) should be delayed until children learn to read; 3) Sequenced mastery of skills forms the basis of reading as a subject to be taught; instruction focuses almost exclusively on the formal aspects of reading and generally ignores the functional uses of reading; 4) What went on before formal instruction is irrelevant, so long as sufficient teaching and practice presented in a logical sequence are provided when instruction begins; and 5) Children all pass through a scope and sequence of readiness and reading skills, and their progress up this hierarchy should be carefully monitored by periodic testing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. xiii).

The roots of emergent literacy, according to Teale and Sulzby, came about due to emerging trends in early childhood education, which mounted the first challenge to the reading readiness philosophy. Clay (1966) was the first to use the term of emergent literacy. This was based in her research with regard to language acquisition. The term was based on her observations of independent reading behaviors employed by the student herself.

Emergent Literacy Roots:

- 1) Development of print awareness in situational contexts; 2) Development of print awareness in connected discourse; 3) Development of the functions and forms of writing; 4) The use of oral language to talk about written language; and 5) Metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language (Goodman, 1986. p. 7-12).

One set of roots is based on subskills and the mastery of such skills before any real writing or reading may begin. The other sees reading and writing as developmental, from which the student engages the literate world around her, gains inner control, and literacy emerges. Currently, reading readiness has dominated the current policy debate, and thus has found a home in public school classrooms. Is it possible in a reading readiness curriculum to apply storytelling as an alternative to literacy acquisition?

### Summary

Reading and writing since their invention have consistently been privileged over the more traditional aural form of communication since the onset of the printing press. Nevertheless storytelling has been found as a manner in which most cultures have communicated and passed on information. With the onset of public education and the institutionalization of storytelling, storytelling became the domain of librarians and was thus traditionally situated within a story hour. Seen as having more of an entertainment than education value and combined with fears that students were not getting the skills

needed to compete for jobs, storytelling never found a foothold outside of the kindergarten classroom.

Literacy acquisition traditionally has been seen as a series of skills taught to a student to prepare them for the ability to read and write. Reading readiness assumes that students must be taught each subskill in order to be able to read and write. Emergent literacy assumes that the student is already learning to read and write on a developmental basis. Reading readiness as the dominant philosophy found in public school classrooms has largely overshadowed emergent literacy.

It becomes clear that for storytelling to have any implications for an early elementary school classroom, it must be determined, what, if any, skills storytelling contributes to literacy acquisition. Only by clearly articulating what relationship storytelling has to literacy acquisition can a case be made. Can storytelling and pedagogy work together or is storytelling a time for the imagination to take root and learning to be sidelined? As Pellowski (1977) has shown, storytelling crosses over cultural lines and may indeed have the potential to inform the oral language development of students, something Teale and Sulzby (1986) found to be a precursor to literacy. It is important then to examine how storytelling may act as way for all students to have access to learning.

## CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature will first look at research conducted on literacy acquisition from an emergent literacy perspective. This will form the foundation to building a relationship to storytelling. Next I will split storytelling into two components. First I will review research of oral language development and its relation to the literacy acquisition. Second I will review the role story may or may not have with regard to literacy acquisition. Finally I will look at storytelling research to determine if any viable relationships to literacy acquisition can be discerned.

### Literacy Acquisition

*It is a way of being in the world: learning to walk, talk, write, think, and perhaps dream like a historian, writer, a mathematician, an artist, or a scientist. The more ways of being we acquire, the more discourses we master, the more easily we move through different strata of society and the world (Gallas, 1994, p. 23).*

In the following studies, the notion of literacy acquisition is examined from the perspective of emergent literacy. What allows for students to acquire literacy? The studies review the role of imagination, social interaction, and teacher perception as a possible foundation for how literacy is acquired from inside an early elementary school classroom. With imagination as a centerpiece, the social context and interaction of students creates a space for students to acquire literacy. This space though is subject to the teachers' assumptions and beliefs with regard to how literacy is best acquired.

As was previously described emergent literacy is messy. Emergent literacy means different things to different people and will organically manifest based upon the diversity of lived-experiences shared by students of a particular class. Gallas (1994) in providing an inside-out process to literacy, provides the framework from which I will examine literacy from. These five aspects are imagination, identity, authoring, whole-body and apprenticeship, all of which I connect to the six traits identified earlier by Brand and Donato (2001): (1) language development; (2) fluent reading; (3) emotional catharsis; (4) comprehension; (5) self-esteem; and (6) an awareness of story structure. Underlying the five aspects inherent to an inside out process towards literacy acquisition are letter knowledge, phonological awareness, comprehension of text structures, relationships of print to speech, awareness of print, developmental patterns, purpose and functions of print, conventions of print. Again this is not a linear conception, where one thing leads to the next, but rather a dynamic process that the student moves through on the journey towards becoming literate.

Gallas (2001) stated that imagination had a role in literacy acquisition. The author's study claimed that identity, discourse appropriation, and authoring are all foundations to literacy acquisition. In deciphering what literacy acquisition is, and therefore its relationship to storytelling, this study inquires into the realm of imagination and its overall affect on the process. The study implies that identity, discourse acquisition and authoring are not necessarily circular but dynamic and therefore literacy acquisition occurs first through identity, then discourse appropriation and then through authoring through interdependent unfolding of a system of action. The imaginative work of children intersected via "listening to a story with engagement; using the language,

point of view, and tools of specific disciplines; creating oral texts with an audience; and participating in a literate community that creates its own signs and texts” (p. 488).

This study was conducted using ethnographic means including audiotapes of classroom interactions, field notes, interviews, and both structured and unstructured events inside the classroom from 1995 to 1999. Participants in the study come from two different schools, one urban and diverse on the east coast, and the other a small rural charter school with a homogenous Caucasian population. Data collection from this study occurred through participant observation.

The strength of the methods was evident by the role of teacher as researcher. This may entail the possibilities of bias on the part of the teacher, but also allows closeness to students otherwise not attained by an outsider. Another strength in the study is the duration and diversity of students and locations. Data for this study was obtained throughout a four year study and locations representing contrasting spaces, both economically and ethnically, with one being a larger diverse population, and the second being a smaller homogenously rural charter school. Confounding this study is also the aspect of teacher as researcher. The teacher in this case was able to reconstruct the classroom in a manner that was suitable for the investigation of her question. This would have a greater impact on the results of the findings should this study be replicated in a strictly regimented classroom.

This study revealed that imagination is a key component in literacy acquisition as it helped to drive identity, discourse appropriation, and authoring. Gallas (2001) created spaces for the imagination to flourish and become expanded upon. These areas where imagination and literacy intersect were found in engaged story listening, the creation of



oral texts, participation with an audience, participation in a literate community, using the language, and utilizing the tools of specific disciplines. All three of the processes, identity, discourse appropriation, and authoring, support the notion that literacy acquisition is an “action-embedded activity” (Gallas, p. 487) that starts with student action and navigates a multifaceted social arrangement. For one to acquire information that information must be transmitted via social interaction. This study grounded literacy acquisition in imagination the fuel for social interaction in the classroom. This study implied the social nature in which literacy thrives.

In establishing the social nature of how literacy is acquired Rowe (1989) investigated the role that social interaction has upon literacy learning. Through ethnographic study and participant observation the author collected data aimed specifically at a writing center table inside a preschool setting in an effort to see exactly how social interaction played a role in the acquisition of literacy. Via the interaction of conversation and the two opposite outcomes they produce –shared meaning construction and the staging of challenges—children were found to “generate, test, and refine this knowledge through conversation, observation of demonstration, and experimentation in their own text” (p. 345). Through this conversation, observation, and experimentation students entered into literacy events, or points in which students intersected with print, in a fashion that could be negotiated and potentially acquired.

The study was conducted over an eight-month period that involved four distinct phases in which data was collected through participant observation, field notes, audiotape, photography, videotape, theoretical notes, student artifacts, and informal teacher interviews. The four phases consisted of (1) field entry, (2) identifying patterns

and developing hypotheses, (3) theoretical sampling, and (4) field exit. The greatest strength of this study was the microsociolinguistic analysis of videotape, audiotape and student artifacts. Triangulation was used in this study by the researcher both through informal interviews and interpretations of teachers, and by an outside participant. Samples of six transcripts were coded by the researcher and outside participant resulting in a .92 interrater agreement where differences were centered on suggestive statements.

Although no specific income bracket is mentioned, the 21 students in this preschool were the children of university professors and staff. Neither was there a mention of the ethnic make up of the students. The setting itself was chosen because of the preschool staff's dedication to literacy by way of a whole language philosophy. The students would self-select activities at two different parts of the day, choosing how, when and why they participated. Students in the study were between the ages of three and four, as opposed to the five through eight-year-old range found in traditional early elementary public school settings. Public school settings in today's climate where self-selected literacy choices are more an exception than the rule would seem to severely affect the replication of this study. Finally, the study by default was limited to only public remarks so as to not record that which is hidden from the observer, something Dyson (1993) referred to as the hidden work of children.

Throughout the study, students were found to shift cognitive positions from using literacy as a means of communication to reflecting about it in order to reconstruct a hypothesis with regard to community interpretation. These observations were made via the writing center where students' talk was measured during print-related activities that included letters written home, notes to classmates, sign-up sheets, writing stories for their

newspaper and reading stories to friends and/or teachers. The transcripts of their conversations were recorded as well as any artifacts created by the students. Researchers, to detect patterns in students' messages, sought to decode how talk fused these messages with meaning.

This study clearly supported the idea that literacy acquisition is a social event via three claims supported by patterns of evidence: (1) conversation provided a medium between students, teachers, and peers that formed the foundation for the processes, content and overall purpose of literacy, (2) the social interaction of conversation was what produced challenges to student's current interpretations and written text. Because their writing was intended to communicate, new perspectives, thoughts and ideas, students were led to reevaluate and construct original hypotheses, and (3) the participation in presenter/audience scenarios which required students to shift from constructing to reflecting upon their writing and means of communication both during the presentation and later when a student returned to the writing center table. Although this study does not specifically address an early elementary public classroom, it provides specific instances of evidence as to the value of student self selected choice in literacy events that allowed for the informal conversation, observation and experimentation of students to harness tools of literacy in an authentic and interactive manner.

Furthering the notion of literacy events as a social process, Poveda (2003) conducted a study that investigated the processes at work in the literature socialization of a kindergarten classroom from a folkloric perspective. The study indeed found the socialization process of literacy can occur through the promotion of decontextualized language and thought but also too must be socially constructed by the participants in

order for the literacy event to occur. The key claim and relevancy of this study was its focus on the beliefs and perceptions of the teacher and its effects on literacy events and the acquisition of discourse. This study viewed socially organized activities as “deeply embedded in the culturally patterned beliefs, behaviors, and expectations that adults and children display during the event” (p. 235). Thus the teacher is seen as a transmitter of knowledge that the students then acquire.

Poveda (2003) used several methods for data collection in which he was a participant observer of three reoccurring literacy events throughout the school day and over the course of one academic year. These events included the introduction, the story reading/telling and the picture showing and discussion of stories. Poveda collected data from read-aloud events via video and audiotaping, which was then transcribed and analyzed as the specific focus of the study while student and teacher interviews were collected as well. The study included 18 students (10 boys and eight girls) who represented a poor working class community in Madrid, Spain. The students were made up of African immigrants, Gypsy-Spanish and non Gypsy-Spanish students. The teacher was an experienced member of the specific school and district for a number of years.

The findings in this study indicated the significant extent to which a teacher’s beliefs and reasons (reading readiness or emergent literacy) for teaching literacy affected students’ overall acquisition. The fact that the teacher used story time to explicitly connect a number of skills (story structure/discourse, vocabulary, etc) and consequently create an experiential atmosphere surrounded in “imagination, patterning, (and) enchantment” (Poveda, p. 242) reflected her personal perceptions and philosophy with regard to literacy. This research supports the continuing theme that imagination, social

context and interaction serve as the necessary ingredients for literacy acquisition. The key point being that of the teacher --the participant involved with mixing the ingredients— had a direct influence on how literacy events become acquired.

The previous study due to its ethnographic lens, looked specifically at how one teacher's perceptions and beliefs on literacy affected the socialization process of her students in literacy events. Thus the study revealed how within the system of interaction taking place the teachers assumptions play a titanic role in how, what, when and why literacy is acquired. McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) served to expand this idea. They investigated the relationship between teacher perceptions of and students involvement in literacy events between teachers of 2 distinctly different philosophies: reading readiness, and emergent literacy.

One aspect this study examined specifically was the differences that exist in student's involvement in literacy events based upon the teacher's alignment with either a reading readiness model of instruction or that of emergent literacy. In other words, does an emergent literacy based classroom and teacher encourage students to participate in more literacy events? Literacy events in this study were defined in nine areas located throughout a classroom where a student could intersect with literacy learning. The nine areas included: (1) a library center; (2) listening center; (3) books and other reading materials; (4) a writing center; (5) a classroom with signs, labels, and directions; (6) materials for recording language; (7) written information about the current day; (8) student work displays; and (9) center area integration.

This study compared two separate approaches to literacy learning to decipher if one or the other helped to facilitate literacy acquisition. The study indicated that students

in emergent literacy classrooms participated in a significantly higher number of literacy events (McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis, p. 177). 65% of children in emergent literacy classrooms participated in observed literacy events compared to 45% of children in reading readiness classrooms that participated in observed literacy events.

The strength of this study is found in the multiple fashions in which data was collected and also the setting in which it took place. Two instruments were used, The Inventory of Literacy Indicators (ILI) and The Literacy Acquisition Perception Profile (LAPP). Both instruments were subject to scrutiny from both experts in the field of early childhood education and reading instruction, professors, graduate students with experience teaching, undergraduates and currently employed teachers. A panel of university experts found that any rating less than 80% was to be revised or eliminated from the study all together, which confirmed content validity. The tests were checked for reliability through a sample of 35 pre-service teachers. Both the emergent literacy and reading readiness test retest reliability scores were significant ( $p < .001$ ). Throughout the duration of the study, a specialist in the area of early childhood education accompanied the researcher to form independent observations to either invalidate or validate the investigators observations. The interrater agreement was established at 92%.

The setting also played a significant role in this study. Participants in this study were 12 female kindergarten teachers from six different public school districts in southern Mississippi. As opposed to the above ethnographic studies, this one compared multiple teachers in multiple school districts, which provided a wider camera lens. This allowed for the results to be generalized to a larger population

No middle ground was sought in this study. That is to say that teachers selected for the study represented both philosophical extremes. Excluded from the study were teachers who were found to use both reading readiness and emergent literacy as a means of increasing participation in literacy events. Another important critique is that observation took place at a specific time instead of monitoring throughout the entire school day and those observations and the philosophical viewpoints of the observers could have a subjective impact on the study. Would an observer with an either a grounded theoretical base in reading readiness or emergent literacy affect the lens in which they observe the classroom? How would the beliefs of an emergent literacy researcher affect their observations in a reading readiness classroom? It is also significant to note that all six teachers grouped in support of emergent literacy held advanced degrees from the same university, which could lead to a greater reliability of the methods used should all teachers adopt the same basic philosophy as prescribed by the university. (McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis, p. 180).

In summary, emergent literacy classrooms produced a significantly higher amount of engaged literacy activities than that of reading readiness classrooms. The findings of this study found that the emergent literacy teachers were found to have three core principles: (1) One is that students learn through the construction and active engagement of learning, (2) that language is learned through practice, and (3) that the teachers were more aware of the interconnectedness with the four modes of language: writing, reading, speaking and listening (McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis, p. 178). This study indicated that a teacher's perceptions and belief systems about literacy (reading readiness vs. emergent literacy) effect the amount of opportunities students had to engage in

meaningful literacy events. Therefore the teacher is positioned to have monumental affect on a student's acquisition of literacy.

Does this mean that an emergent literacy program significantly allows for greater gains in students' literacy acquisition? Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) examined one emergent literacy approach, the Language Experience Approach (LEA: see chapter one's description of the Language Experience Approach as described in emergent literacy) expanded to include reading readiness skills. Findings from this study determined that when LEA was expanded to include reading sub skills (e.g. systematic instruction in: letter names, auditory and visual discrimination, phonics, vocabulary, etc) "kindergarteners benefited by participating in literacy activities that were derived from the content of their language experience stories and which were designed to emphasize specific sub skills" (p. 71).

Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) observed 44 kindergartners, 22 in a control group and 22 in a control group. Students were randomly chosen within sex and race dimensions establishing a control group of 13 boys and nine girls, and an experimental group of 12 boys and 10 girls with a mean age of 5.0. The treatment period was conducted over a six-month period. Students were administered the California Achievement Test (CAT) at the beginning and near the end of school.

The control group was administered six sequential steps found to be in traditional LEA classrooms. The teacher would introduce a stimulus object, experience, or pictures for the students to create a story using the students' discussion and ideas centered on the stimulus. After the story was composed the teacher read the story allowed after which the teacher asked students to engage in an activity directly relating to the story such as



drawing a picture. The story and student artifacts were then displayed on a wall in the classroom.

The experimental group followed the first five steps of the control group where only the sixth step was changed. Instead of allowing for student-centered follow-up activities, students instead were provided with activities designed to provide interaction with the story's print emphasizing subskills. The specific nature of what subskills depended on the teacher's assessment of students' needs. Teachers from both groups both held a Master's degree and had two years of kindergarten teaching experience.

CAT was used to measure listening for information, letter sounds, visual discrimination, sound matching, total visual-auditory skills, letterforms and letter names. The validity of CAT was established during the development of the test and was found to provide a test-retest reliability of .91. In addition to CAT, students also took an oral cloze test which strives to gauge students attempts at anticipating meaning from context and to correctly provided a word deleted from text. Oral cloze tests measure reading comprehension and language processing. Both the oral cloze test and the CAT test were used before and after the treatment period.

Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were found with the experimental group on with regard to the CAT test. The oral cloze test indicated significant differences in beginning, middle and total scores in favor of the experimental group in each category except the final score. The greatest gain on both tests was the advance made by the experimental group in the subtest on listening comprehension skills. The study complemented other studies (see the following in Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr 1989; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Atkin, Bray, Davison, Herzberger, Humphreys, & Selzer, 1977;

Bagford, 1968; Beller, 1973; Humphreys & Davey, 1983; Lohnes & Gray, 1972) indicated that listening to stories provides a strong and valuable link to success in reading. The experimental group was found to outscore the control group in most areas including both meaning and subskills.

The study was exploratory in nature. In order to strengthen the study, a third group should have been added, which would have added a reading readiness program into the mix. This would provide even further evidence of the researchers hypothesis of an expanded LEA and its positive effect of literacy acquisition. There is no mention of the students' socio-economic class or pre-exposure to literacy prior to enrollment of kindergarten. Did students in one group have more literacy exposure than another? The random nature in which students were assigned into groups strengthens the study, but to provide stronger findings, students prior exposure should be included in future research. The study is also lacking in how the tests were conducted. Did the teacher, researcher, stranger conduct the test? Was it the same person every time? Both of these questions need to be answered in order for the study to stand strong. Scores could be corrupted if the tests themselves are subject to interpretation and/or the test giver is an outsider with whom the student could be potentially uncomfortable with ultimately effecting a student's performance on the test.

Specifically, this study provided one example of what happened when both an emergent literacy methodology, such as LEA, and reading readiness subskills are combined to assist in students' literacy acquisition. Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) presented evidence that emergent literacy and reading readiness philosophies, when used in tandem, produce greater opportunities for students to facilitate interaction with print,

specifically in such areas as listening comprehension. This suggests that one philosophy is not better than another but rather when combined produces authentic, meaningful opportunities for students to acquire the skills that are deemed fundamental for literacy.

In this section on literacy acquisition, the research here has presented the processes involved as depending on a specific teacher's methodology. Because this paper is limited to an emergent literacy perspective, the research has indicated that imagination, identity, discourse acquisition/appropriation (social interaction), and a teacher's beliefs (apprenticeship) play a part in how literacy is acquired. Literacy acquisition fails to be nice and neat and is instead complex system of on going processes.

As the last study indicated the true potential of emergent literacy may only blossom with the added support of subskill instruction. Gallas (2001) indicated that imagination might provide the fuel that creates social interaction (Rowe, 1989) and thus literacy acquisition to evolve. Socialization (Proveda, 2003) would then take place between teacher/student and student/student that creates opportunities for literacy events to occur. This idea supports the relationship of teacher/student in the context of apprenticeship. In classrooms, the teacher typically controls interactions, and is ultimately responsible for how literacy events are constructed (McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). From within an emergent literacy classroom, teacher perceptions and beliefs, what Gallas (1994) would call apprenticeship, imagination, the social context, and student's active engagement/interaction become the foundation for literacy acquisition to occur. Furthermore, Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) provided evidence that positively connected emergent literacy practices in line with Gallas (2001)

with the explicit teaching of reading readiness subskills as advantageous for literacy acquisition to occur.

### Oral Language Development

*Speech itself exists in a space between children's present time, emotions and images—their meanings—and the words others have given them, their linguistic reality, as it were. This in between space can be a place in which willful, contemporary children can infuse new possibilities into old words and worlds*

*(Dyson 2003, p. 16)*

Oral language is a component of storytelling and is therefore necessary to examine what role if any, oral language has in literacy acquisition. This section, again from an emergent literacy perspective, looks at both qualitative and quantitative data to decipher by what specific means oral language contributes to literacy acquisition. First I look at teacher perception of talk and how that affects students' use of it in the classroom. Next literacy acquisition is viewed through two studies, one specifically focused on reading, the other writing, and how talk assists the transition into literacy. The next part will look at how students use talk in the classroom, with respect to peer interactions and perspective taking. Following that section will be research, which challenges the general assumption that oral language is a foundation of literacy. In relation to that I look at two studies examining the interrelationships of talk in conjunction with writing and reading with respect to the previous challenge. Findings from the studies presented in this discussion indicate that indeed oral language is a capacity that all students have, and

although it may not be uniformly associated with literacy, it provides a necessary bridge from which students create meaning while attempting to ascertain a new medium.

Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler (1992) reported findings from the first two years of a three-year study that followed students from pre-kindergarten to 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The study used Halliday's (1975) seven functions of oral language in addition to the developmental theories of Vygotsky (1986) in order to examine how instruction effects student's use of Halliday's (1975) seven functions of oral language, how oral language was used to facilitate literacy, and how student understanding of literacy changed over the course of the three years. For the purpose of this paper and to continue with the previous section I will focus on the first and second investigation. Important to my review of the literature is the desire to uncover what about oral language and students use of it allows literacy learning to take place.

In the previous section, I reviewed how teachers' beliefs about literacy directly affected the degree to which students acquired literacy skills such as reading and writing. This study looked through the lens of oral language to decipher how teacher instruction affected the use of oral language. Halliday (1975) identified seven functions of oral language: "1) instrumental, to have needs met; 2) regulatory, to regulate behavior; 3) interactional, to establish a me-and-you relationship; 4) personal, to assert one's self in opinion and feelings; 5) heuristic, to ask questions fostering learning; 6) imaginative, to play; and 7) informational, to pass on information" (Thomas, Rinehart, Wampler 1992, p. 149).

The study used ethnographic means to study the four students of varying levels and found that students who had the most developed sense of all seven of the functions, held a better understanding of reading and writing. As oral language proficiency declined so did the students understanding of reading and writing. Students with low oral language proficiency were found to be in classrooms that only allowed for instrumental and regulatory uses of oral language. These were also classrooms that subscribed to formal reading readiness instructional methods. All three teachers in public school kindergartens were also found to use just two functions of oral language development themselves: instrumental and regulatory, such as “I want, do this, do exactly as I say” (p. 159). In fact the students did do exactly as they were told, and hence learned only two of the seven characteristics of oral language that then correlated with the students reading and writing skills and perceptions.

This study was reporting out on its first two years of results. In these first two years four students were selected to examine throughout the three-year study, each with varying differences in ability. The study used ethnographic data collection with observation and transcription of student talk using both audio and videotaping. 36 hours of data was collected and scored with regard to tally marks, which specified the specific type of language used according to Halliday’s (1975) categories. Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler (1992) also used two additional measurements. One of two assessments measured print awareness and the other measured students print concepts. Print awareness was measured by asking students to decipher if print printed on an index card could or could not be read. The same exercise was repeated with logos such as McDonald’s. Both of these instances provided students with print both decontextualized

and contextualized. Print concepts were measured using Concepts About Print, which measure 19 different concepts about print.

In order for this study to be stronger, more students need to be included and specific assessments used for a before and after purpose to better mark the students individual progress. In two of the classrooms observed no writing center existed and was set up by the researchers to collect student artifacts and keep observational tallies. Confounding the study could be insertion of a foreign object into the two classrooms. This 'new' writing center could have adversely affected the students' ability if the writing center was not an original part of the classroom. In one instance a student moved from a classroom that had a writing center in his pre-kindergarten, to a kindergarten that did not. If the teacher did not encourage the center the students may not of favored it. Only students with prior experience as to the uses of a writing center table would have benefited. The study also only reported out the instances surrounding the writing center, failing to report or observe other areas where students had the opportunity to expand upon their use of oral language.

Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler's (1992) study revealed that as oral language functions are varied and used, students understanding of reading and writing increased, and that students who actively engaged with peers and/or adults/teachers had a "heightened sense of language development"(p. 150). With the promotion of oral language the study also revealed that students showed a greater interest in the act of writing. This study also noted the difference between classrooms that subscribed to reading readiness and emergent literacy as having a substantial impact on how oral language is used, and thus affecting students' understanding of reading and writing. A

major difference was how talk and play were utilized. This study supported the notion that talk and play supported the seven functions of oral language development and thus supported a greater understanding of reading and writing.

Lartz and Nelson (1988) examined one student's transformation from oral language to written language. Their study indicated that by retelling a story, "she [the student] recognized the key ideas of the story with an opening and a closing, problem and resolution. She linked story events with explanations and prepositional structures. All of these moves—verb tense, pronoun use, dialogue, complex syntactical structure, and depiction of key ideas—brought her remarkably close to the actual text"(p. 205). This proximity to the text was implicated through listening to stories and repeated retellings the student had with adults and peers, thus revealing how talk fostered emergent literacy skills.

The time of the study is short, only covering nine weeks with one student. The story was read once and for the following eight weeks the student was asked to retell the story once a week. After the retelling was told the student and researcher would wander off to an activity of the student's choosing. The child was deemed story-literate nonreader before the study in that she was unable to read decontextualized text. No assessment of the student's literacy ability was conducted. Such an assessment would fortify the findings of the study with respect to the apparent transformation from oral to written language. The student was also from a middle-class family, had high exposure to books, and was supported by parents who proclaimed a commitment to literacy.

Would the findings indicated here be replicable with a student who lacked a home literacy environment and/or who was unfamiliar with basic story form? The study aimed



at discovering how a student moves from oral language to reading, via story-readings. Data from the observation later shifted to a focus on the student's oral retelling of the story. The persistent retelling of the same story over and over for eight weeks could have allowed her greater familiarity with the text of that one story. The study's strength could have been increased if the researchers attempted to transfer the student's newly acquired knowledge to another unfamiliar story/text. Little information is provided with respect to how the researcher affected the student in terms of questioning or presence in the classroom. Despite the portrait of just one student over a nine-week period Lartz and Nelson (1988) reveal a rather close and intimate view of one student's use of oral language and how this corresponded to this particular student's use of printed text.

Through retelling and talking about the story the student moved from disconnected fragments to sounding and acting like a reader by making successful attempts at decoding through initial letter sound relationships. The student was found to use her familiarity with story (and subsequent memory of stories) as a tool for acquiring the use of printed text. Using Halliday's (1975) seven uses of oral language, as in the previous study, the student was free to engage in any type of talk she wanted. Lartz and Nelson (1988) concluded that hearing, talking about, and retelling stories served to foster this student's understanding of printed text as she began to take on many of the behaviors found in early readers. This small-scale study served to intimately indicate that as a student negotiates more control over oral language, the student begins to actively engage in behaviors found in early readers. Can the same relationship be said with regard to oral language and writing?

Dyson (1983) investigated such a relationship, specifically writing processes and the role of oral language. Dyson stated: “A young child laboriously prints her sister’s name and then, with ease talks about that sister. A competent user of oral language, she is beginning to control a new symbolic medium—written language” (p. 1). Dyson investigated the role of oral language development in order to better understand how and why children use talk in the writing process. Dyson discovered that students used talk as both a way to make meaning and a manner in which to systematically get meaning onto paper. In finding the writing center as a central location of both oral and graphic activity, specifically Dyson stated: “I suggest that writing develops from a form of drawing (a graphic representation) to a form of language (specifically, an orthographic representation).

Dyson’s (1983) study did not set out to prove a theory but rather to develop a hypothesis that arose from the data. Dyson attempted to pursue a phenomenological perspective in an attempt to remove herself from the perspective of how adults feel writing should be learned but rather to learn how children themselves structure their own learning. As with all participant observation, the research could have impacted the students’ structure and means of production.

The study took place in an ethnically diverse public school kindergarten with five students who represented a range of developmental abilities with regard to writing. The main strength of this study is that the kindergarteners themselves were allowed to use the writing center anyway they chose. In other words, how they themselves defined “writing”. Dyson noted that this was done in order to both sustain interest and as a means of preventing her own inaccurate judgment of students’ writing abilities. This was

Dyson's attempt at a phenomenological perspective. The study's collected data presents strong evidence as to the analysis, with over 500 written artifacts and 112 observations of case study students.

Findings from Dyson's (1983) study indicated that all the case study children used one if not all of what were called writing event components:

“1) Message Formulation: devising the message(s) to be conveyed in print; 2) Message Encoding: using strategies to convert formulated message(s) into print; 3) Mechanical Formation: physically placing letters or letter like forms on paper (i.e., handwriting); and, if Message Formulation and Encoding were not present; 4) Message Decoding: using strategies for translating an unknown message which had already been written.”

In each instance, talk plays an important part in students' ability to formulate a message, both the physical aspect as well as the mental capacity. Dyson concluded that talk gave text meaning. By focusing on spontaneous talk centered on a writing center table, allowing students to interpret the act of writing, this study's strength was found in the attempt to observe the process of writing from the student's point of view. This study supports the idea that talk invests students' graphic representation with meaning.

The previous two studies provide, from an emergent literacy perspective, that oral language provides necessary tools to make meaning out of reading and writing. In the next two studies Pellegrini et al, (1994 & 1998) attempts to reveal the importance of social relationships and context that come embedded in oral language and literacy learning. In the previous section on literacy acquisition, social interaction was shown to

be a cornerstone for emergent literacy and again is revisited here with respect to oral language. The studies took place in both public school kindergartens and first grade classrooms, with a collective time frame of three years, peering into the relationship of oral language, literacy and social context.

The first study, Pellegrini et al (1994) revealed that oral language, perspective taking and literacy were interrelated and revealed strong correlations. Nine separate tests dealing with reading and writing were conducted taking into account perspective taking, oral language and literacy, which resulted in positive correlations from .36 to .63 with a significance between  $p < .05$  and  $p < .01$ . Researchers found this correlation to be directly related to the type of social interactions and experiences the students had. Findings from the correlation “suggest that the ability to decenter and mentally represent other people, other mental states, and past events are important dimensions of literacy” (p. 21).

Students were audio taped once a month with tests conducted three times throughout the year. Audiotapes were coded based on verb tense, third person pronouns, and cognitive and linguistic terms. The study consisted of 35 students (19 boys and 16 girls) made up mainly of Caucasian and African-American descent. The teachers each had Master’s degrees and five years of teaching experience.

Nine tests were conducted on two classes of first-grade students for one academic school year. Tests consisted of psychometric assessments including a Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, a perspective taking task, as well as receptive vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonological isolation and deletion test in addition to Clay’s (1985) Concepts About Print to assess reading and writing specifically. Both the number and type of tests

in addition to significance levels and the large sample size, gives this study reliability and generalizability pertaining to the aspect of perspective taking.

This study demonstrated that cognitive decentering has a relationship to early literacy as demonstrated through the use of oral language. Pellegrini et al (1994) claimed, "Literacy seems to involve using oral language terms indicative of social-cognitive decentering" (p. 14). Measures of oral language and perspective taking correlated significantly and positively with literacy tests. This ability was able to flourish when students had the ability to interact with others in multiple activities. Pellegrini purported that "By interacting in more diverse contexts, children view more models of literate behavior and also encounter discrepant information to which they must accommodate" (p. 2). A hypothesis succinctly supported by the data.

Pellegrini et al (1998) conducted another study that reviewed the role of social relationships with regard to oral language and literacy learning. Findings indicated that literate language served as an indication of school-based literacy (reading and writing) both proximally (reading  $.16 p < .05$ ; writing  $.07$ ) and distally ( $.17 p < .05$ ). Findings also supported the hypothesis that students engage in more types of literate language when grouped with friends. When friends and non-friends were compared, friends produced more conflict/resolutions, emotional terms and literate language than non-friend dyads. Relevant to this paper is the notion that oral language, namely phonemic awareness, acts as a predictor of a student's capacity to acquire literacy.

These findings were in congruence with the hypothesis and also were carried out over a two-year period with different cohorts of kindergarteners. Kindergarteners were tested both before and after the study, as well as audio taped and observed by researchers.

Being that the population was at an early elementary age, in an ethnically diverse setting in a public school, taking place over a two-year period, in conjunction with several means of data collection and assessment, the findings are generalizable and supported by the overall purpose of the study.

This study supports the idea that oral language in early elementary serves as an indicator of early literacy skills. Thus far, oral language has been shown to have a relationship with school-based literacy when students are given the time and appropriate modeling with which to use oral language. Pellegrini et al (1994 & 1998) has provided evidence to further substantiate the claim that oral language serves as a pretext to emerging literacy skills such as perspective taking, and concepts about print. The more varied and meaningful experiences a student has with language the greater capacity a student has to manipulate letters and words into meaning. In the previous study Pellegrini et al (1998) claimed that it was students' metalinguistic use of language that correlated with phonemic awareness, something that has been shown to be an energetic indicator of early literacy. In addition students were found to engage in more literate language with friends versus non-friends in using emotional and conflict/resolution language. Despite continuing claims of the relationship between oral language and literacy, some research has challenged this general assumption.

Speece et al (1999) conducted such a study. The aim was to discover the relevancy oral language had to early literacy. The analysis consisted of multiple variables. Overall an impressive number of tests were conducted and compared and analyzed in a variety of manners. Findings relevant to this paper found that oral language skills have a positive relationship to phonemic awareness but greatly differentiates based

upon developmental level and skills, when compared to other attributes of literacy acquisition. No uniform patterns, outside phonemic and print awareness were found with regard to oral language and the acquisition of literacy skills.

The study took place in a metropolitan public school that received Title one funds over the course of two-years with a total of 88 kindergarteners in five kindergarten classrooms. Speece et al (1999) conducted tests on intelligence, semantics, syntax, metalinguistics, narrative discourse, print awareness, invented spelling, and comprehension. The tests included “both norm-referenced and experimental tasks known to be reliable and valid” (p. 172). The research determined the validity of the tests through various measures which measured the same skill such as print awareness, in conjunction with teacher judgments and a third step in validation which consisted of a reduced number of tests that were conducted in first grade. Unlike the previous studies (e.g. Pelligrini, 1994 & 1998, Dyson 1983, Lartz and Nelson, 1985 and Thomas, Rinehart & Wampler, 1992) and Speece et al (1999) focused largely on empirical data obtained from tests. These tests were conducted throughout a four-month period of time in kindergarten and then in individual one hour sessions conducted in the first grade. Data was collected for student’s narrative ability in telling the researcher their favorite story.

The previous studies mentioned above were based largely on observation, which provided a more contextualized (in-the-classroom) understanding as to the role of oral language and literacy acquisition. Despite this, the sheer volume of tests conducted, the demographics involved, and the duration of the study itself, Speece provided strong research that disputes the “commonly held assumption” (p. 187) that oral language does not have uniform affect of literacy acquisition.

A critical finding Speece et al (1999) provided was to suggest that oral language fails to have a uniform affect of the acquisition of literacy. With regard to the volume of tests conducted, only nine of the 27 comparisons were significant, with six of those nine being from the high achievement cluster. This finding indicated that students with highly developed oral language skills did indeed have greater success with literacy. Based upon the comparisons that failed to be significant, students with average oral language skills displayed no significant gains over low oral language skilled students. Therefore the study suggested that the relationship between oral language development and literacy acquisition might not be uniform.

These findings from Speece's et al (1999) provide valuable insight into a general assumption about oral language. Speece challenged that oral language development, outside phonemic awareness, might not be a centerpiece of literacy acquisition but failed to then define or suggest in lieu of her study, what literacy acquisition is, should oral language not be a central component of the equation. Dyson (1986) and Dickinson and Snow (1987) both acknowledged that literacy acquisition does not develop in a uniform manner, but that indeed oral language provides a transitional framework from which to move into literacy.

Dyson (1986) qualitatively examined 18 kindergarteners in a diverse urban magnet school. The students were Anglo, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Portuguese and mixed ethnicity. The purpose of the study was to discover the interrelationships between the talking, dictating, and drawing of young children. The study revealed what Speece et al (1999) demonstrated with regard to the non-uniformity of literacy acquisition. Dyson (1986) found that oral language skills, when observed in writing events, were dependent



upon a student's intentions, interests, and styles, consequently suggesting a potential reason for the non-uniformity of literacy acquisition. Speece's et al (1999) study provided a large volume of empirical data void of context, while Dyson's (1986) observations provided observational data as to why no uniformity exists.

Dyson (1986) conducted the study in an urban magnet school. The study gathered 36 hours of observational data, with 30 hours of spontaneous talk, 189 artifacts from four students chosen to represent a wide range of ability, and over 300 pages of observational notes and transcribed notes. Dyson stated: "The aim of this process was not the exact measurement and coding of variables to be statistically related; the aim was to develop categories of behaviors that would allow the comprehensive description and interpretation of observed behaviors" (p. 385). Dyson found students used five types of language when dictating their story or when involved in open center time. The language types were directive, representational language, heuristic, personal and interactional. The language types emerged from observation and were thus used to code and analyze student interactions during center time. Assessments were also used to determine how students were associating written text with spoken word.

Dyson demonstrated in this study, how students differentiate talk and writing in order to convey meaning. Based on students' imagined worlds, interests, styles and intentions, students' development varied "i-identifiable ways for different children" (p. 407). This suggests that how a student goes about applying oral language to literacy activities varies depending on a wide variety of reasons. Therefore literacy cannot be reduced to text, instead as Dyson stated, "we have to look for its beginnings in all the kinds of making that children do" (p. 407). Dyson revealed that talk is related to the

early making of literacy, albeit for different rhymes and reason dependent on each student. Whereas Dyson sought to understand how children use oral language to acquire the ability to write, Speece et al (1999) sought answers to questions in isolated units. Despite the difference in access points, both studies targeted different tactics and arrived at similar conclusions despite being two different perspectives: oral language development as a whole, does not uniformly contribute to literacy acquisition but rather each student brings a unique set of experiences to the table. Dyson also concludes by noting that students cannot be assessed simply on the text alone, but that their whole imagined world must be considered as well.

Dyson (1986) looked specifically at the interrelationships of talk and writing, Dickinson and Snow (1987) looked specifically at relationships between oral language and pre-reading skills from two different kindergartens based on socio-economic status (SES). Their data suggested that the ability to reflect on language at both a phonemic and discourse level provide transition into early literacy. 33 (16 girls and 17 boys) students were from two distinct social classes were tested.

Environmental print, vocabulary, print concepts, sound isolation, spelling, decoding, alphabet knowledge, letter writing, and rhyming were all tested over several months in three or four 15 to 20 minute sessions. Tests were also conducted during the middle of the school year. It is important to not that these tests were mainly conducted at a daycare. No information was made available as to who conducted the tests. Was it the same person or someone different each time? What time of the day were the tests conducted? After the end of a long day students may not be interested in engaging tests which could alter the results. Students were tested with numerous tests isolated in a

separate room. The number of tests provides a paradox to the testing in that students were subjected to a battery of tests, while at the same time potentially being too much and potentially at the end of a school day. There is also no information as to the accuracy of the tests or how specifically the test was handed out.

Despite middle class students showing significantly higher scores on a vast range of tests, only two oral language variables revealed significant social class differences. To refer back to Speece et al (1999) oral language may not uniformly lead to literacy acquisition as indicated by tests performed by Dickinson and Snow (1987). In their study, the data indicated that children from both social classes did indeed have “roughly equivalent oral language abilities” when it came to environmental print (p. 16). This was not the case with regards to literacy, print decoding, and print production measures, where class-related differences did appear. Despite oral language skills not uniformly leading to literacy acquisition, there is evidence supporting the notion that all students regardless of intention, interest, style, or SES, have the same oral language abilities. Students will indeed have different strengths and weaknesses but still have the same potential, an important point with regard to literacy acquisition and oral language.

Oral language, as the above studies have shown, in conjunction with a well-established body of literature that supports the “assumption” that oral language provides a foundation of literacy acquisition as a continuum between contextualized and decontextualized ability (Bruner, 1975; Calfee & Sutter, 1982; Cummins, 1979; Donaldson, 1978; Fowler, 1981; Goodman, 1982; Nickerson, 1981; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1979; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Snow, 1983; Tannen, 1982). As Speece (1999) demonstrated, it is not enough to simply state it, but it is important to examine the

specific ways in which oral language and literacy form a relationship. This relationship is dependent upon several items. As Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler (1992) concluded, a teacher's apprenticeship and beliefs with respect to the role of oral language and literacy directly affects the type of language used in the classroom. In addition they concluded that the types of interaction prevalent in play and/or "center" learning, led students to naturally utilize Halliday's (1975) seven uses of oral language. Lartz and Nelson (1988) and Dyson (1983) fortified this understanding by viewing students in their natural surroundings, engrossed in play and interpretation, subsequently allowing students to engage in the seven uses of oral language. Talk, in both studies, provided the means for students to enter the world of literacy. Pellegrini (1994 & 1998) found that when students talked they naturally engaged in literacy talk, and cognitive decentering (perspective taking) both of which were shown to display a significant and positive correlation to literacy learning through elaborated language use and phonemic awareness.

Speece (1999) provided findings that challenge the general assumption that oral language is a cornerstone of literacy by suggesting that oral language was found consistently to only support phonemic awareness. Findings suggested that oral language did not uniformly lead to literacy acquisition. The findings do not impede the emergent literacy perspective, but rather support what Dyson (1986) and Dickinson and Snow (1987) suggested. Both literacy acquisition and oral language is not uniform. This appears to support the earlier section on literacy acquisition.

The previous section on literacy acquisition revealed literacy acquisition to depend on many more aspects than the ability to decipher or decode text. Social interaction (Dyson 1986; Pellegrini 1994; Proveda 2003 & Rowe 1989) was shown to be

a clear component in a student's literacy acquisition. Gallas (2004) indicated that an inside-out process of literacy is not linear but a dynamic process in which each student experiences differently.

Evidence provided in this section on oral language revealed that when students have the opportunity to talk, to engage in authentic experiences centered on discourse and dialogue students begin a transition to literacy. Talk is infused with meaning, and it provides a means for students to enter the literate world. Talk then supports the notion of discourse, identity, and authoring Gallas (1994) identified as important aspects found within an inside-out approach to literacy acquisition. The more opportunity students have to engage in conversation, the more students expand their identity, and discourse.

Prevalent in these studies and more specifically in Dickinson and Snow (1987) is the role of story in literacy acquisition. Their study found that a significant correlation ( $p < .002$ ) existed between story comprehension and literacy tests conducted. Lartz and Nelson (1988) witnessed one girl's journey into reading via story retelling, and Dyson (1983) recorded the narratives and stories students included in their attempts at writing.

## STORY

*Constructing stories in the mind—or storying, as it has been called—is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning, as such it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning. When storying becomes overt and is given expression in words, the resulting stories are one of the most effective ways of making one’s own interpretation of events and ideas available to others. Through the exchange of stories, therefore, teachers and students can share their understanding of a topic and bring their mental modes of the world into closer alignment. In this sense stories and storying are relevant in all areas of the curriculum” (Wells 1986, p. 194).*

What is the relationship of story to literacy acquisition? As a major component of storytelling (the ability to understand story structure), story would be positioned to become a major player in the relationship between storytelling and literacy acquisition. Dyson (1987, 1988) found that as students interact, through dialogue and collaboration, children’s understanding of story grows. Interaction, dialogue and collaboration all take place through communication. In the previous section I looked at oral language and its relationship to literacy acquisition. In this section the role of story is examined.

Brown and Briggs (1991) designed a study to indicate kindergarteners’ literacy development by use of six specific story elements through the examination of the children’s original stories. Findings revealed that dictated stories produced more story elements (61%) than oral (50%) or written stories (45%). Dictated and oral stories did not differ significantly from each other. The study found that “age, prior knowledge, level of social interaction, and environmental experiences influence the content and organization of the children’s stories” (p. 149).

Students involved in the study were not selected at random, but rather had to be able to tell and write a story. The focus of the study determined that the ability to both tell and write a story was a necessary component for the research question due to the

broad analysis of the stories students would be producing. 16 students were studied altogether, although this number was skewed towards boys (12) with only four girls participating results in a negative affect on generalizability. The study indicated that students were a part of a university lab school with assorted socio-economic and educational settings. No mention is made as to whether the school was public or private. Students were first audio taped as they performed oral stories and then after a bit of time were asked to dictate a story. The researchers with respect to why or what each approach was measuring established no differentiation between the two. Dictation received high results, but was heavily biased due to the teacher's favoritism and belief in story dictation.

The stories produced by students were analyzed with respect to six story elements identified by the researchers: 1) Connected events; 2) Classic story version; 3) Fantasy; 4) Goal directed; 5) Personal experiences; and 6) Social interactions. Another weak element as to this study's findings was the lack of explanation for the use of these six elements. Stripped down, this study primarily provides the perspective of how mostly boys constructed stories.

Brown and Briggs (1991) claimed that students' level of awareness was high with regard to the six story elements analyzed due to the students' "many opportunities to participate in functional literacy events" (p. 149). The study presents a viable case, but the claims and congruence of the study appear to be misdirected. Implications provided are often unsubstantiated or off-topic from the study's focus.

Brown and Briggs (1991) reported one finding as such: "From their encounters with stories, children naturally acquire a rhythm for language patterns" (p. 151).

Although this is an attractive finding, confounding factors prevent it from being expanded upon a general population. One substantiated finding indicated that giving students the opportunity to dictate and/or talk about stories provides students with the opportunity to acquire knowledge about story. Another useful aspect of this study was the ability of five and six year-olds to provide all six-story elements.

Geist and Aldridge (2002) provide a more focused study of students' developmental levels with regard to oral story inventions. The study found that story structure was learned through interaction with words and text and not through direct instruction. That is to say that the data suggested that story structure cannot be trained. All students in the study received direct instruction on story structure, yet there was evidence of a developmental progression between the age group.

Students in kindergarten were found to tell stories of fantasy formulated from previously heard material. While in first grade students began to differentiate between fantasy and reality but still relied upon the familiar. Second graders relied not on outside forces such as family or mass media but instead told stories born of their imagination. Surprisingly, Geist and Aldridge found that third graders lost this sense of imagination prevalent in the second grade and instead focused on personal narrative and moved from parents to friends as the primary force of their stories. Regardless of age students still had the ability to tell stories, albeit at different cognitive levels. Important to this paper is how telling stories provides a means for development from kindergarten to second grade.

The students were all African American and from low socio-economic families, representing a kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms at a public elementary school in the Southeastern United States. Each classroom represented



approximately 15 students. Each classroom was given a 45-minute lesson on fairytales and story structure, after which the students were then individually asked to make up their own tale orally. A model for the categorizing of student information emerged from the data. An independent educational professional with reportedly extensive knowledge of fairytales categorized the data that was used to construct a model for genre, content, and organization in order to establish inter-rater reliability.

One confounding aspect of the study presented by Geist and Aldridge (2002) is the underlying assumption provided by the researchers as to developmental levels. No specifics are mentioned which allows for the possibility that each identical lesson provided for each grade level could have been geared to developmental level. That is to say, kindergarteners could have been talked down to or encouraged to produce more fantasy-driven stories based upon the instructor's assumptions with regard to a specific grade level's capabilities. Classifications found that second graders used the most imagination in terms of their stories, yet kindergarteners told stories of "talking umbrellas, flying to Mars, magic and evil witches that turned children into food" (p. 36) that were found not to be imaginative but fantastical. To strengthen the study direct instruction would need to be compared to other forms of instruction such as modeling. The study supported the hypothesis that stories told by children did follow a developmental level.

Geist and Aldridge (2002) found that oral storytelling and story structure are part logicomathematical knowledge. From this, Geist and Aldridge acknowledged invented stories could promote cognitive development. "Each time children tell a story, they must attempt to order it mentally. This mental activity promotes the construction of

knowledge” (p. 38). Story then supports movement through developmental stages, as Geist and Aldridge infer that students should be given the opportunity to tell stories. Despite developmental level, students will invent stories by telling or writing them, from which the interpretations of the audience and listening to others stories presents authentic moments of disequilibrium. Disequilibrium leads to development. The previous study indicated that students in kindergarten were able to orally communicate 6 elements of story structure. Geist and Aldridge claimed that students understanding of story is concretely developmental. Does developmental level play a role in story structure and students’ capacity to invent stories?

Hough, Nurss and Wood (1987) conducted a study on elaborated language in an integrated urban school from kindergarten to third grade. Their study indicated that when students told an original story, the stories were long and involved. Hough, Nurss, and Wood noted that some stories lacked a clear plot and other features, but the characteristics of stories from kindergarten through third grade were found to have “a conventional beginning, the marking of time and location, one or more characters, a sequence of events and a conventional ending” (p. 11). Researchers recorded no instances of developmental differences but instead showed differences as students moved from single pictures, to wordless books to original story. Students without the guidance of a picture were told to tell a story and were found to use more elements of story structure. The use of elaborated language and consequently the strengthening of oral language skills was enabled through use of original story.

Three tasks used by Hough, Nurss and Wood (1987) with 48 students (25 girls, 23 boys, 30 black and 18 white children) to encourage story talk. Students were chosen

randomly from groups who were labeled average by their teachers. A strength of the study was the use of common everyday events typically used in classroom environments. To illustrate findings in a direct and simplistic manner, one student's three stories were used to identify and illustrate an example of the language production that was produced.

Picture books were found to support vocabulary development through descriptive language, while with wordless books found students reading the pictures for clues as if to answer the right question. Original story produced a mean of 21.25 with respect to story conventions in comparison to single picture (14.58) and wordless book (19.42) activities. This study provides additional evidence that the telling of original stories produced more language that contained story conventions. Evidence supported the notion that original stories without the use of props allowed for more use of elaborated language. It is important to next consider the aspect of story and story structure in conjunction with literacy.

Feitelson, Goldstein, and Kita's (1986) compared two groups; one read to for the last 20 minutes each school day, and the other continuing with usual learning activities over a six-month duration. Students who were read to where found to score higher on tests measuring for decoding ability, reading comprehension, and the active use of language. Despite the findings of Hough, Nurss and Wood (1987) with respect to picture storytelling tasks compared to original story, Feitelson, Goldstein, and Kita (1986) discovered that the use of the picture storytelling task indicated that the first graders developed appropriate story schema. "The schema was carried over from hearing stories read to performing a partly visual task, namely, interpreting a picture story" (p. 354).

Feitelson, Goldstein, and Kita's (1986) study included 139 students from one elementary school in Haifa, Israel. The school was situated in a disadvantaged suburb where many families were part of a social welfare program. Three of the five classrooms were randomly selected for the inclusion of story time (experimental) and two continued their normal routine (control). Nine characteristics were measured with regard to vocabulary, technical reading skills, comprehension, causality, story structure, accuracy, and sentence length. Tests were administered before and after the study period of six months. Students were randomly tested, and testers had no prior knowledge as to what group the child was assigned. Findings were further corroborated via a diary kept by the school counselor, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers and students in the experimental groups.

Story structure was measured through a picture-story-telling task. Findings found that students in the experimental group produced gains significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than those of the control group when gains between pre and post tests were examined. Students in the experimental group also were found to have significant gains on all of the various tests, including technical reading and writing tasks. Feitelson, Goldstein, and Kita (1986) provide evidence supported by the data that illustrates the role of oral language, story and literacy acquisition. Students in the experimental group outperformed the control group in every area. Important to this study is how story structure was derived from reading stories in a first grade classroom. Specifically students were able to infer causal relationships from picture clues, the ability to retell the plot of the picture story and produced accurate contents of the story to researchers.

Morrow (1988) provided yet another comparison of story reading techniques. Morrow utilized one-to-one story readings in day care centers where the maximum income of each family was \$10,000 a year. Complete data was collected on 79 students 40% of whom were categorized as so-called minorities and 23% had been referred to the day-care center due to abuse and/or neglect. Group one was read a different story, group two the same story, and group three was given traditional reading readiness activities throughout the 10-week treatment period. Findings indicated that the one-to-one story reading group asked more questions and provided more comments than group three.

This finding was made despite the day care centers' policy of no interruptions during story time. Group one asked more questions, group two with repeated readings of the same story developed questions earlier than the other groups and provided significantly more responses and comments that lead to both detailed and descriptive elements of the story. Not only did repeated readings prompt more elaborate language use, but it also prompted more responses from low ability students, who, based on a parent survey, were read to once a month or less. Exposure to story appeared to affect students' oral language ability and understanding of story structure, two valuable elements as to the development of literacy (Sulzby, 1985; Teale, 1984; and Yaden, 1985).

Morrow's (1988) study diverged from the bulk of most research on one-to-one story reading, and story reading in general, where the primary focus was on middle class families. The study's methods were congruent with the research questions. Training was given to researchers as to soliciting information from students, in which they practiced and tape-recorded in order to best monitor correct procedures. The control group was instructed in the use of a commercial reading readiness program in which no storybooks

were used. Pre— and post—assessments was conducted in the second and tenth weeks. An assessment by a researcher blind to the condition of the experimental group helped to foster greater reliability for the transcribed audiotapes of each story session. The initial coding system was pre-assessed and reassessed before a final draft was created. Despite training, researchers who read one-to-one stories directions, prompts, and/or questions were found to change with respect to the ability level and duration of the experiment. This would seem to have an overall affect on the results. Following the same guide sheets, the same behaviors, and procedures, the researchers own questions were sculpted in direct relation to student responses.

Morrow (1988) in addition to Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986), demonstrated the universal power of stories in getting students to use elaborated language. Both studies were represented by low SES, and represented two different geographical locations and languages, yet stories still provided a means for students to interact with text. Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein's (1986) study found students not read to, to be outperformed by those who were. Morrow (1988) provided similar findings in which one-to-one story reading out-performed those in a commercial reading readiness program. Both studies support the finding that when students are given the opportunity and ability to interact with text, students are capable of interpretative responses, specifically association, prediction, and elaboration, skills that provide for both literacy and oral language skills.

Retelling stories is one strategy that has emerged that utilizes oral language capacity with story structure. Retelling strategies have also been found to add to literacy

development, comprehension, story structure, and language capacity (Hennings, 2000). The next two studies provide evidence of such a claim.

To further the case of stories as a tool for literacy growth, Morrow (1985, 1986) examined retelling stories as a specific strategy to increase students' comprehension, story structure and oral language capacities. Morrow (1986) investigated whether story retelling could improve upon story structure and increase oral language skills. Findings supported the study's aim, and found story retelling improved story dictation and oral language complexity. Through the process of retelling, students were found to internalize and increase awareness of story elements (theme, resolution, sequence, etc) that were then transferred to original stories. Retelling was also found to provide opportunity for the use and modeling of oral language directly from children's literature. Story therefore provided the opportunity for students to interact with text. After a story the experimental group was asked to retell the story compared to the control group who was asked to draw a picture. Comparisons found that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group with setting and plot episode ( $p < .02$ ). Results also indicated that the experimental group made positive gains when pre— and post-test results were compared.

Morrow (1986) provided a large sample size of 82 students from 17 kindergarten classrooms, all located in different public schools. Three girls and three boys were randomly selected and assigned to either the experimental or control group. Gender was split down the middle with the control group having 22 boys, and 22 girls, and the experimental group having 21 girls and 17 boys. SES was lower middle to upper middle class, and standardized test scores indicated students' ability levels to revolve around below average to above average. The demographics of the study provide strong

generalizable traits due to the diversity of schools and even representation of gender. The same stories were used in all classrooms. Finds are further supported by the use of pre- and post-test measures that analyzed original stories dictated by the students of both groups, for story structure and oral language complexity. Further reliability was provided as researchers blind to the treatment procedures evaluated the stories for both story structure and oral language skills. The mean correlation for evaluators was .93 for story structure and oral language and found to be a reliable measure for the study of oral language. Confounding factors of school differences, teacher perspectives, exposure to stories all inevitably could of played a role with treatment conditions despite efforts on the part of researchers to uniformly apply treatment.

Morrow (1986) provided several factors that contributed to the results. Specifically, retelling allowed for active involvement, interaction and guided practice/performance of emerging skills. Story structure and oral language complexity increased regardless of students' ability level. Teachers interviewed after the study found students engaged in storytelling with greater frequency and confidence. They also initiated more literacy activities, reported on students involved with the experimental groups. Morrow provided empirical data that supported the method of retelling as having education value.

Morrow (1985) offered further support for retelling stories as a means for acquiring literacy in two studies that sought to determine if retelling enhanced story structure, and the ability to construct literal, inferential and critical questions about a story. In the first study the experimental group was asked to retell as story, and the control group was asked to draw a picture in reference to the story just presented, similar



to the previous study. Results found that students in the experimental group improved more than the control group but only significantly with respect to comprehension. The control group improved 12.4% while the experimental group increased 16.4%, thereby informing the result that story retelling contributes to comprehension.

The second study was conducted with the same form and treatment as the previous study. Based on the first study results, Morrow (1985) investigated the gains in comprehension further by investigating the hypothesis that frequent retelling would have a continued positive impact on comprehension. The experimental group improved over the control group with respect to story retelling with theme, resolution, sequencing and total story recall. Morrow indicated similar findings to Geist and Aldridge (2002) that students at the kindergarten level had developmental difficulties in sequencing stories in the correct order, although Morrow (1985) did find that students improved their scores due to the treatment provided. Oral language was found to improve as well, supporting previous studies that agree stories provide conceptual framework for improving student language.

Both studies provide large and diverse samples from public school kindergartens. Evaluators were all blind as to what group a student was a part of throughout the course of assessment and student teachers were all given training with respect to implementing the treatment. Reported findings were statistically significant and the methods for determining the findings were congruent with the original aim of the studies.

Students who were found to improve with retelling also were found to improve in literacy acquisition. Both studies (Morrow 1985, 1986) provide empirical data that support retelling improves story structure and comprehension. Oral language complexity

within the experimental group improved over the control group in syntactic complexity. Retelling provided a clear interactive engagement of the part of the student with stories, as opposed to passive listening. Instead when scaffolded by adults students increased in an awesome amount of skills suggesting that storytelling cannot be viewed as a simple gimmick but as a powerful tool for increasing student performance with respect to oral language and story structure, to necessary components of literacy acquisition.

Established thus far is the notion that story and story structure act as a powerful concept from which students can develop understanding of literacy through story elements, comprehension and oral language. Some of the previous studies indicated developmental differences that emerged from studies that indicated that students of a particular age had more trouble with certain tasks than others specifically with regard to sequencing a story. Findings also indicated that all students, regardless of geography or socioeconomics, had the capacity identify story elements and utilize oral language. Empirical evidence suggested that retelling stories served as a catalyst for literacy acquisition.

One ritual present in many early childhood classrooms is that of story time. Cochran-Smith (1985) investigated the story time of one preschool and found it full of literature activities where students “learned how to relate and interpret oral and written language, and how to express personal needs within confines of the rules of language use” (p. 25). Cochran-Smith (1985) found that interactive story reading as compared to passive story reading, combine features of oral language and decontextualized reading that result in students’ literacy development.

The study took place over an entire school year where an ethnographic perspective was undertaken to better understand the patterns that emerge from story time functions. Data collection included audio recording of story time, informal and formal interviews with parents and teachers and longitudinal observations of a broad range of activities. Data mainly emerged from annotated transcripts of story readings. Affecting the generalizability of the study is the environment of the school. The school did not believe in teaching children specifically how to read as many of the parents were against reading readiness programs that are commonly found in public schools. Students also came from homes deemed very literate.

Cochran-Smith's (1985) findings suggested that the pattern of story time produced patterns that supported students' understanding and capacity to interpret and use oral and written language that when networked forms a relationship that affects students' literacy development. From questions asked and scaffolding provided by teachers, students learned how to talk about and interpret and concentrate on decontextualized text. This then provides a necessary foundation to literacy found prevalent in oral language and exposure to the pattern of stories.

In continuing the examination of story time in preschool settings, Roser and Martinez (1985) found as a result of two hundred story-time transcripts seven types of story talk produced by four and five year-olds. The seven types were narration, interpretive, evaluative, associative, predictive, informative and elaborative. The focus of these seven types of story talk were title, setting, character, detail, event, story language and the entire story. Reading readiness program curriculums examined by Roser and Martinez suggested explicitly teaching students to infer, predict and interpret, something

that contrasted the data they apprehended. Roser and Martinez showed story time to be an authentic meaningful way in which students naturally acquire story talk all of which were directed at story elements.

Roser and Martinez's (1985) conducted a study in both a preschool and in home environment. Audio taping in both settings was performed and transcribed for a period of 10 months; with student responses categorized each week. Specifically, the study considered their comments, questions, interpretations and answers with respect to the texts presented. Findings of the seven types of story talk were found to exist in both the home and school environment. One confounding factor was that students studied at home were allowed to use books that were apart of their home collection. This would appear to have an affect with regard to familiarity and bias the findings reported from the home environment. There was no information provided as to the child's exposure to books read from the home environment.

Roser and Martinez (1985) were astonished with respect to the wealth and diversity of preschool children's responses to literature. Adults were found to model the means of which a student could model inferences, while adult questions were also used as a strategy to gauge comprehension. From this interaction adults modeled the construction of meaning. Despite developmental concerns, preschoolers in this study have indicated that their use of story talk acts as an active tool from which they seek out modeling providing the assistance in order for the student to make meaning occur. Roser and Martinez's study would imply the relevance of teacher talk in the classroom.

Hansen (2004) investigated just such a question through the examination of classroom discourse centered on story. Hansen found that story talk or discussions that

take place after a story address four of the five characteristics of the National Reading Panel Report (2000); phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Emerging from the data, four categories pertaining to questions were created: 1) comprehension, 2) reflection, 3) transaction, and 4) literary response. Hansen found that teacher directed questions diminished as students began to hold their own conversations with literary language. The movement of questions moved from establishing the environment, challenging students methods and the pressing of student thinking. Hansen stated: “Talk about story became a way the children in this classroom came to learn more about their world and the world of story” (p. 127).

Hansen (2004) studied a school in a suburb of a large city in the southwest, composed mainly of white middle-class families. Participants were kindergarteners, 22 in all with eight girls and 14 boys. The study was conducted over a five-month period. Data analysis was transcribed from both video and audiotape, after which systematic review, coding, constructing categories, and interpretive analysis were implemented. From the study there is no evidence of independent review or triangulation or audit of the data.

Hansen (2004) demonstrated that teachers play a pivotal role in inviting students into literacy events and story language. Gradual release proved an effective strategy for the teacher as students obtained more and more from the modeling the teacher provided. By valuing student responses and pressing her students to make connections or back up claims, students engaged in genuine conversation. Hansen found that teacher talk was instrumental in establishing the classroom climate towards the promotion of literacy. By engaging and modeling strategies for students to utilize literate thinking, the teacher

became an apprentice that allowed students to imagine and acquire the discourse (interaction between text and person) used to construct such thinking. Therefore a teacher may not just read a story and call it literacy learning, but instead must systematically use talk as a means to actively engage students to interact and transact with the text. Hansen believed that students came to kindergarten using talk to understand their world, and therefore talk is perfectly positioned for students to begin to understand story, and consequently, literacy.

The previous studies have indicated that story can be used as either an organizational tool (Hansen 2004) or as an opportunity for the use of elaborated language (Morrow 1988; Feitelson, Kita & Goldstein 1986). The previous research shows evidence that story and story structure when applied aurally can develop an understanding of literacy. Geist and Aldridge (2002) observed that each time students told or retold a story they had to work to organize it mentally. This organizing provided opportunities to put literacy skills to work. Developmental levels were also shown to be a factor with plot, but not with sequence, use of characters, and setting between students from kindergarten to third grade (Hough, Nurss and Wood 1987). The concept of story has been shown to have a positive impact with regard to comprehension, sequence, and elaborated language. All of which lead to greater imagination, patterning, and enchantment through the apprenticeship of a teacher.

## Storytelling

*Storytelling awakens us to that which is real. Honest. It is the most pure form of communication because it transcends the individual. The Kalahari Bushmen have said, "A story is like the wind. It comes from a far-off place, and we feel it." Those things that are the most personal are most general, and are, in turn, most trusted. Stories bind. They are connective tissues. They are basic to who we are (Williams, 1984, p. 134-5).*

In the previous sections the role of oral language, and story have been discussed in relation to literacy acquisition. As has been shown previously, oral language is one of many routes that can lead to greater literacy acquisition. Furthering this, the concept of story and story structure also serve as a tool for expanding language use and developing story schema and comprehension. Story plus talk equals storytelling. Much literature has surfaced recently in using this form of communication as a means to increase literacy development. By providing an interactive format with which to interact with story, text and audience, storytelling may indeed provide an old yet new way to foster authentic, meaningful literacy moments.

Because literacy acquisition has shown some characteristics in step with an inside-out process through which imagination, identity, discourse, active engagement, and teacher beliefs (apprenticeship) inform the construction of literacy events, the following studies will inquire into the role of storytelling as enhancing perspective

taking, meaning making, language use, social context, imagination, teacher interaction and a comparison of story reading and storytelling. Thus the importance of reviewing studies which examine the actual act of storytelling, complete with oral language use, and story structure when used towards the enhancement of literacy events. Storytelling as a potential to providing such characteristics and connections to literacy acquisition will be investigated.

Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) conducted a study into storytelling and its affects on cross-cultural education, which provided the ability of students to make meaningful connections to literature, reformulate story structure and extend their knowledge of story schema. Findings indicated that students each created their own unique interpretation creating a dialogic narrative that was found to promote children's understanding and approval of other cultures. The study found that students were able to make personal connections with "some of the underlining values, images, and stories" (p. 42) of other cultures. This can be linked to Pellegrini's et al (1994) concept of decentering discussed in a previous section. Students experienced diverse contexts and had to make the necessary accommodations of discrepant information by mentally representing another culture. Therefore students in Al-Jafar and Buzzelli's (2004) study fused personal connections, imagination, and the accommodation of new information to mentally represent another culture through interacting with a different but familiar theme. Students were not found simply repeating the story but instead creating and authoring their own versions thereby creating a new story. Students enlarge the story and visualize their own interpretation, cognitively decentering and spurring imaginative development, both of which are critical factors in literacy acquisition.



The study took place in a rural setting in the Midwest of the United States. Participants in the study were students belonging to classrooms in the first and second grade. The researcher was a visitor to the school and subsequently performed the activities with students. Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) presented two versions of the same folktale to first and second graders in a rural elementary school. Participant observation, interviewing and document collection were used in data collection. No information was provided to how many visits, leaving a reviewer of this study to speculate that the visit to the school conducted only once. No information was provided as the demographics of the classroom, no mention of whether the school was private or public, essentially meaning that the study appeared to be a snapshot of the classroom. Although this is not bad in and of itself, the lack of data, and the unknown categorization and collection of data prevent this study from being expanded upon.

Students were introduced to 10 pictures of Cinderella. The pictures were used to explain the different versions of the story that had emerged through time. The researcher then narrated a Kuwaiti version of Cinderella due to its familiarity with students in the United States. Students were asked to compare and contrast the two versions of the story to ensure students' understanding of the basic theme. Students were then split into three groups, one of mixed gender and two others composed of only boys and only girls to share their interpretations. Duration of the study is unspecified and some conclusions reached by the author go unsubstantiated. Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) provided a snapshot into what storytelling has the capacity to accomplish when multiple versions of a single story are explored in the first and second grade.

Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) provided evidence that students use personal connections and new information in a dialectic relationship to form a recreate a new story. “Just as myths and fairytales embody the deep ways that cultures are expressed, the tales written by the children expressed the meanings they created in their study of the fairytales (p. 42). As the students created new versions of the same story they made the story personally meaningful to their lives.

Geist (2003) studied African-American kindergarteners from low socio-economic status to third grade and examined their orally invented fairytales in order to understand the cognitive aspects of storytelling. Results suggested that children’s stories are created with a wide range of experiences, including “fears, concerns and anxiety of everyday life” (p. 40). The everyday lived experiences of students were expressed through stories. This finding supports the notion that storytelling provides a venue for students to at the very least attempt to make meaning from events in their life. This study illustrates the importance of students having authentic connections to real life experiences in addition to a safe place from which to express themselves. Storytelling by providing such a space to allow students to make sense and meaning of events in their life also contributes to literacy learning by providing an avenue to make meaning.

Data for the study was collected from informal interviews and then analyzed using a content analysis method. One student representative of each classroom (kindergarten through third grade) was independently interviewed and asked to make up a fairytale. Stories were then analyzed for “reflection of trauma, or story and plot lines that dealt with death, grief, rescue, or other traumatic experiences for children.” No system or reason or method for selecting one student for each classroom was mentioned. Neither

were any of the representative students assessed prior to or after the storytelling session. No information was presented as to the ability level of the student selected. There was also no mention of gender. Reliability was established from the content analysis method.

Geist (2003) provided research on students invented fairytales and discovered that students imbued their stories with everyday life experiences. The study suggested that this was done in order to make sense of events in one's life. Geist found stories to provide a safe place for students to express themselves and to make meaning of events. Meaning making is critical to literacy acquisition. Both in Al-Jafar and Buzzelli's (2004) study and with Geist (2003) students combined messages encased in stories told from within the context of their lived experiences.

Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch (2001) conducted a study that investigated storytelling from a constructivist point of view. The focus was to examine what tenets of constructivism storytelling provided. Storytelling was found to support all four tenets of constructivism. Findings indicated that students gained understanding of story concepts, active involvement, vocabulary knowledge and the ability to learn socially. Findings also suggested that the use of the Storytime Exchange model produced authentic and meaningful literacy experiences for students. The Storytime Exchange model began with children telling stories, then children writing and reading their own stories, and finally the teacher or student tells the story while the group listens.

Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch (2001) conducted their study at a summer program with two different age groups ranging from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. The study was conducted in two locations. The first location was a free program and the second location required a fee. The free program had fewer counselors with no

counselors in training or program leaders when compared to the program that had a fee. Participation in the event was scattered due to students' summer vacation plans. Findings reported out in the study reflect the younger four to seven year-old bracket. Participant observation was used, but no mention is made to how artifacts were analyzed with the exception of notes and transcriptions being taken by observers. Consensus was reportedly easily reached with no explanation to the system that was used when evaluating the information.

The four major tenets of constructivism examined included: 1) Learners construct their own understanding; 2) New learning depends on prior knowledge; 3) Learning is enhanced by social interaction; and 4) Authentic learning tasks promote meaningful learning. Observation by researchers found that storytelling provided all four learning tenets as described by the researchers. Storytelling found students (four to seven years old) actively constructing knowledge, sequencing stories, using prior knowledge, taking risks, experimenting and interacting throughout the Storytime Exchange model. Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch (2001) claimed that if learning must be created by the individual and not transmitted through text or a teacher, storytelling provides such a bridge for authentic and meaningful learning to begin. Researchers insisted that they had observed the "imaginative function of storytelling" (p. 209).

Social context and interaction is also considered necessary component of literacy acquisition. Mello (2001) conducted a study of a fourth-grade classroom to explore the effect of storytelling on how students process self-concept and social experiences inside the classroom. Storytelling was found to have affected students' interpersonal relationships, interest and empathy. Students engaged their imaginations and interacted

with text, influencing their discourse and reflection capacities. Storytelling seemed to increase transactional experiences between students that then increased their active construction of knowledge on a variety of themes through oral language, and story structure.

Mello's (2001) study was conducted over an entire school year in a small mill town made up of working class, poor-working class, and "welfare-poor parents" (p. 5). Unlike retellings (examples presented in the previous section on story) this study sought the perspective of stories originating from purely an oral form. Although the age group was fourth grade and hence outside the age scope of my paper, it still provides one of the rare glimpses into specifically the oral aspect of storytelling. Validity was established with authentic relativism, something Mello described as being dependent "on the research design, employed disciplines and procedures, fostered the research relationship as part of its methodology, and reflected participants' viewpoints in order to create an authentic account that is grounded in the reality of the event" (p. 5). One specific example of validity was the collection of multiple data from a variety of sources as a way of crosschecking researcher biases and assumptions. Small group interviews, group discussions, and stories were all taped and transcribed. No outside independent audit was conducted, something that could have provided further strength to the research.

Mello (2001) discovered that students found storytelling "created relationships between students and the story, between the story and life experiences and between the teller and the listener" (p. 8). Previous studies have shown that when students tell stories they reorder the story and often include personal experiences that merge to create a newly constructed story. By creating a relationship between student, story and life experiences,

storytelling provided meaningful interaction with story structure through the oral language medium. This social interaction fosters a relationship with literature/stories. Mello also reported an increase in student interest in stories. In order to promote students participation in literacy events, students must be interested and find meanings relevant to their lives and experiences.

Mello (2001) found that students were found to take on other perspectives, use their personal experiences to make meaning, become personally interested, and to create relationships through social interaction, all qualities important to emergent literacy acquisition. One specific example of storytelling and literacy acquisition was Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch's (2001) use of the Storytime Exchange model that used storytelling as a vehicle to move students through telling, writing, reading, and listening to stories.

Mello (1997) addressed another issue with her storytelling that is key to literacy acquisition: imagination. Mello again focused on student responses to storytelling in the school environment to discover students' own thoughts about storytelling. Findings indicated that storytelling "created pictures in my mind" (p. 5) as one student reported. Students observed that they had to use their imagination with regard to how they interpreted the information. Mello found that listening to the story was not simply an auditory event but a participatory event where students interacted with the teller and subsequently the text, controlled the story with pictures in their mind, and gave the listener the opportunity to act, control and create the story. Listening was found by students to be hard work, because you have to use your mind.

The aim of the study focused on how children experience listening to stories. Informants to Mello's (1997) research were eight fourth and fifth grade students in an economically depressed small town. Students at the school came from a variety of social classes from poor working class to middle class. All students in the study were white, and attended a special needs class in reading. Strength of this study was the findings were directly connected to students' transcribed comments during storytelling sessions and discussions. Transcriptions were not edited but are presented in their original form. The study is small and only representative of white fourth grade students but still provides an authentic description of students' own thinking with regard to storytelling. The study would need to be expanded in order to increase validity.

Mello (1997) found that listening to a teller tell a story was much more than an auditory event requiring passive listening. Instead students found hard work with having to use their minds to create pictures. From the perspective of students, listening to stories being told provided an interactive experience causing students to make meaning through the use of imagination. Storytelling has been shown to provide opportunities for students to shift perspectives, make meaning, socially interact with classmates and teachers, provide authentic means for students to increase understanding and comprehension of story structure, and provide opportunities for literacy events to take place.

Storytelling has been shown to provide many benefits directly related to literacy acquisition, but thus far has remained sidelined by story reading. Story reading is widely regarded as the appropriate manner in which to engage pre-literate interest and comprehension of literacy skills and remains the most popular used (Mello, 1997; Trostle & Hicks 1998; Glazer, 1991). In the next set of studies storytelling is compared to story

reading to discover what, if any, differences exist between the two. Story reading has a profound body of literature supporting its use in early childhood classrooms, and therefore is important to compare story reading with storytelling to see if storytelling offers implications for a kindergarten through second grade classroom.

Myers (1990) conducted a study that looked at student/adult reactions and interactions with regard to storytelling and story reading. Findings found that students collaborated more with the storyteller than with the reader. Students significantly laughed more, asked more questions, initiated more responses, and asked more questions with storytelling as compared to reading. Findings also indicated that students nonverbally participated more with the telling of stories and taking on a more passive participation with when stories were read. Despite these findings students expressed more of a desire for teachers to read stories rather than to tell them.

Myers (1990) studied students that were part of an after school program. Student ages ranged from seven to eleven years old from middle to upper-middle class families. Students were divided into two groups based on age and told 2 stories and read 2 stories over a 4-week period in which students were video taped for both verbal and nonverbal interactions to be analyzed into data and categorized based on an adaptation of Degh's (1969, quoted in Myer 1990) study of Hungarian storytelling. The study was conducted over a short period of time with a small group of participants. The study would need to be expanded in order to generalize the findings to a larger population. Also the three of the participants were related to the researcher: the storyteller, and two sons, participants in two different groups. This could have affected results and interpretations of the data during the analysis process as both storyteller and researcher reviewed the tapes. The



storyteller was also more openly biased about his preference for storytelling, which was also revealed in the analysis based upon his interaction and enthusiasm. In order for the results to be strengthened, both treatment groups should be read to with equal enthusiasm or by a separate teller and reader.

Myers (1990) concluded that while students engaged in active participation with storytelling, markedly more so than with story reading, students still preferred teachers to read rather than tell stories. Myers claimed that teachers don't often tell stories where students do not typically find personal elements such that storytelling may provide. Students claimed that the classrooms were associated with and organized more for print than storytelling. Myers focused on the effects of storytelling and story reading on student/teller interaction both nonverbal and verbal. Although participation and imagination were identified by students as important to literacy acquisition, there remains a need to uncover exactly what storytelling can do with regard to skills deemed necessary for the development of literacy.

Trostle and Hicks (1998) investigated such a question. Their study compared storytelling and story reading and the effects each had on vocabulary and reading comprehension. Trostle and Hicks revealed that students who were exposed to storytelling outperformed those exposed to story reading in both vocabulary and comprehension. Further tests revealed no significant differences between students' ability level and gender. The storytelling group significantly outperformed the story reading group on comprehension ( $p < .02$ ), and on vocabulary ( $p < .01$ ). The results suggest that storytelling indeed increases students' capacity for specific skills related to literacy acquisition.

Trostle and Hicks (1998) researched over a six-week period of time with 32 British primary students between the ages of seven and 11 years old. Participants were divided according to gender with 16 girls and 16 boys. Students were rated through a reading survey filled out by each student's teacher. Results indicated that the participants reflected an entire range of abilities, from low to high on a variety of subjects. From the 32 students, eight groups were formed, with each group having, one high and low ability student and two average students. The two control groups were given story readings performed by a researcher or student teacher and the two experimental groups were given storytelling sessions by a separate researcher/storyteller. The six-week time frame limits the study's findings and needed to be expanded to strengthen results. Students were tested after a 10-minute break with no discussion following each event. Students were then tested individually on vocabulary definitions and then on comprehension.

Assessments included asking the students to define a word pronounced by the researcher. The response was then awarded points dependent on the answer. In order to check for comprehension, 12 questions were utilized. Each story used questions at varying levels including, literal, interpretive, analytic, critical and creative. Answers were categorized based on whether the answer produced was a two-part, one-part, or non-answer and were scored appropriately. Scores showed significant differences between groups with regard to vocabulary and story comprehension in favor of the storytelling group.

The strength of the study is the overall design and careful placement of ability. Also the storyteller and the story reader are not the same person preventing the favoring of one method over the other. Findings were found to be statistically significant and in

congruence with the original aim of the study. Throughout the testing phase there appeared to be independent checking of results. One researcher per four students interpreted student answers and scored appropriately. This allows great leeway in interpretation of student answers. Assessments would have strengthened the findings if one researcher conducted the tests or assessments were videotaped and then transcribed and independently verified. It is important to note that students were asked specific questions as to comprehension and not asked to retell the story.

Trostle and Hicks (1998) found that storytelling significantly increased vocabulary and comprehension with all students regardless of age, ability or gender. “Students involved with the story tell condition understood the stories better and gained more understanding of the vocabulary used in the story, regardless of their initial reading and vocabulary ability or their gender” (p. 134). Thus not only was storytelling successful with helping students acquire literacy skills, storytelling was successful in helping students acquire literacy skills across a wide variety of learners. This is increasingly important as teachers work to teach all peoples’ children.

Isbell et al (2004) conducted a similar study to the one above. In fact both their respective titles are nearly identical and differ only slightly. Isbell examined again the effects of storytelling and story reading on comprehension and oral language complexity as opposed to vocabulary. Findings indicated that storytelling improved comprehension while story reading was found to improve oral language capacity. Findings suggest that story reading and storytelling offer two valuable aspects of literacy learning.

Isbell et al’s (2004) investigation conducted over a 15-week period with 38 participants at a university lab preschool. Students were three and four years in age.

Data harvested was descriptive language transcripts based on responses by students in addition to story retelling. Data also included before and after assessments of both oral language complexity and story comprehension. Unlike Trostle and Hicks' (1998), Isbell et al (2004) used specific story conventions (beginnings, endings, time and place, resolution, narrative, characters and sequence) that were analyzed, transcribed and categorized by both the perpetrator of the test and a research assistant providing credibility to the study's analysis process. Stories used and a committee on early childhood education to increase validity of the study approved methods applied.

This study contrasts with Trostle and Hicks (1998) who found that storytelling increased vocabulary and reading comprehension. Isbell's et al (2004) findings did agree with reading comprehension but disagreed with regard to oral language complexity. One major difference in the studies was both the age groups tested and the degree to which oral language was tested. Trostle and Hicks (1998) asked students aged seven to 11 for definitions of single words that were pronounced by a researcher where as Isbell et al (2004) measured students aged three and four on a variety of variables such as fluency and word diversity. While Trostle and Hicks (1998) asked students direct comprehension questions and scored results accordingly based upon a point system, Isbell et al (2004) conducted retellings that checked for beginnings, endings, theme, setting, moral, and narrative, which were subsequently found to have increased significantly over the story reading group, agreeing with Trostle and Hicks (1998) own findings.

With respect to storytelling versus story reading, comprehension was found to increase. Isbell et al (2004) provided more thorough evidence to that fact, which is supplemented by Trostle and Hicks (1998). Storytelling was found to be engaging while

story reading was found to be more of a passive experience. In all three cases students participated with storytelling more and interacted with the text more than in story reading situations. Isbell et al (2004) provided evidence that storytelling and story reading used together provides “powerful literature experiences” (p. 162). When combined storytelling and story reading have the potential to provide meaningful authentic experiences — comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, story structure/elements — as previous studies have noted, which form to create critical foundations necessary for the acquisition of literacy. One important factor not covered thus far is teacher beliefs with regard to storytelling.

This section has shown storytelling to provide the means to cognitively decenter and take alternative perspectives (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli 2004), which causes discrepant information to be accommodated. Also, storytelling has been shown to fuse both story and personal narrative from real life experiences and social contexts and create a safe place for expression. Through the use of the Story Exchange model, storytelling was identified as a vehicle that enabled writing, reading, telling and listening, which served to provide literacy experiences. In addition storytelling was found to foster and expand imagination. Storytelling was also revealed to not simply be an auditory event, demonstrating that storytelling required cognitive skills, imagination, and mind mapping. Storytelling was also shown to support major constructivist tenets, which allowed students to socially interact, build on prior knowledge and actively engage and create new knowledge. Finally, storytelling and story reading were compared in terms of their effects on student interaction, vocabulary, oral language complexity, story and comprehension (story elements and structure). Storytelling, by requiring both a sense of

story and the use of oral language skills, formed a direct and natural connection to skills and functions that support emerging literacy acquisition.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

*In the telling and performing of stories, all ideas must be heard, considered, compared, interpreted, and acted upon. The bridges built in play are lengthened, their partially exposed signposts organized and labeled in ways that commit the storyteller to travel in particular directions. The subject encompasses all of language and thought: It is the academic inheritor of the creative wisdom of play (Paley, p. 35, 1990).*

Delpit (1995) stated the need for teachers to emphasize aspects of both reading readiness and emergent literacy. Skills in addition to creative and critical thinking need to be combined in literacy learning. Rumi (trans. by Barks 1995) wrote about a field that lay out beyond the dual ideas of right and wrong. McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis' (1998) study served to illustrate the point made by both Rumi (1995) and Delpit (1995): that an expanded LEA provided students with authentic opportunities to make meaning while simultaneously learning skills important to ascertaining both the creative and critical aspects of literacy needed to make meaning. Does storytelling provide access to creative and critical aspects of literacy, that space between reading readiness and emergent literacy where the two meet in such a field?

As Mello (2001) stated in chapter 1 of this paper: "Questions about the impact of storytelling in classrooms remain virtually unanswered (p. 4). Through the course of this research I have discovered more questions than I had when I began. New insights and evidence seem only press thinking further. Nevertheless there are still trends, elements and skills that have emerged from the research surveyed in chapter three, which support the contention that storytelling provides a viable bridge to literacy acquisition. My belief

in storytelling as a medium, which creates meaningful authentic experience and teaches skills critical to successful literacy has been strengthened.

Studies in chapter three found that storytelling was immediate, personal, active, and direct, and did indeed have a wide-ranging impact on real and imaginary worlds (Gallas 2004; Proveda 2003; Dyson 1986; Hansen 2004; Al-Jafar and Buzzelli 2004), reading (Reeves-Kazelskis and Barr 1998; Thomas, Rhinehart, and Wampler 1992; Lartz and Nelson 1988; Dickinson and Snow 1987; Hough, Nurss, and Wood 1987; Feitelson, Goldstein, and Kita 1986; Morrow 1988 and 1986; Roser and Martinez 1985; Hansen 2004; Trostle and Hicks 1998; Izbell et al. 2004), writing (Gallas 2004; Rowe 1989; McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis 1998; Thomas, Rhinehart, and Wampler 1992; Dyson 1985 and 1986; Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch 2001), listening (Lartz and Nelson 1988; Dyson 1985; Pellegrini et al. 1994 and 1998; Morrow 1986; Roser and Martinez 1985; Mello 1987; Myers 1990; Trostle and Hicks 1998; Izbell et al. 2004), literacy development/acquisition (Gallas 2004; Proveda 2003; Pellegrini et al. 1994; Morrow 1988; Cocher and Smith 1985; Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch 2001; Trostle and Hicks 1998), oral language (Dyson 1985 and 1986; Thomas, Rhinehart, and Wampler 1992; Lartz and Nelson 1988; Pellegrini et al. 1994, 1998; Brown and Briggs 1991; Cocher and Smith 1985; Roser and Martinez 1985; Hansen 2004), story elements (Reeves, Kazelskis, and Barr, 1989; Brown and Briggs 1991; Feitelson, Goldstein and Kita 1986; Morrow 1985, 1986, and 1988; Cocher and Smith 1985; Palmer, Harshbarger and Koch 2001), comprehension (Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr, 1989; Feitelson, Goldstein and Kita, 1986; Morrow 1986 and 1988; Hansen 2004; Mello 2001; Trostle and Hicks 1988; Izbell et al. 2004), vocabulary (Reeves, Kazelskis, and Barr 1989; Dickinson and



Snow 1987; Feitelson, Goldstein and Kita 1986; Hansen 2004; Trostle and Hiocks 1988), phonemic awareness (Pellegrini et al. 1994; Speece et al. 1989; Dickinson and Snow 1987; Hansen 2004), perspective taking (Gallas 2004; Rowe 1989; Pellegrini et al. 1994 and 1998; Al-Jafar and Buzzelli 2004), meaning making (Gallas 2004; Thomas, Rhinehart and Wampler 1992; Lartz and Nelson 1988; Dyson 1995 and 1986; Hough, Nurss, and Wood 1987; Al-Jafar and Buzelli 2004, Geist 2003; Mello 1997 and 2001; Palmer, Harshbarger and Koch 2001), and social interaction (Gallas 2004; Rowe 1989; Proveda 2003; Thomas, Rhinehart, and Wampler 1992; Dyson 1985 and 1986; Lartz and Nelson 1988; Pellegrini et al. 1994 and 1998; Hansen 2004; Mello 1997 and 2001; Myers 1990).

The main conclusion of this paper is that storytelling bears a significant relationship to literacy acquisition. The research does indicate that storytelling cannot stand alone as an effective way for literacy to be acquired (Reeves, Kazelskis & Barr 1989). This does not mean teachers should neglect storytelling, relegate it to librarian-teachers or special guests, or use it in a supplemental fashion in relationship to entertainment (e.g. instead of a movie). Storytelling should be used in conjunction with other methods and teaching models of education (Reeves, Kazelskis & Barr 1989; Palmer, Harshbarger & Koch 2001).

## Summary of Findings

In summarizing the findings of the research reviewed in Chapter 3, it is important to recall earlier controversies uncovered in discussions of Rationale (Chapter 1) and historical background (Chapter 2). As indicated in chapter two, storytelling never completely became a part of the classroom. Due to both the Depression Era, and the onslaught of technological advances, the use of storytelling declined (Pellowski 1977) relegated to libraries and special events such as assemblies (Zipes 2004). Pellowoski (1977) pointed out that storytelling, as pedagogy required the breaking apart of storytelling into small pieces, destroying the integrity of storytelling as entertainment. Teachers were also found to not have the skills to do the act of storytelling for students, since, as Zipes (2004) pointed out, storytelling is no longer a significant component of teacher education. Storytellers in the studies reviewed in chapter three were all experienced. This may be one reason storytelling has not become a mainstream literacy practice: teachers do not see themselves as storytellers.

It is also crucial in the summary of findings to consider not only storytelling pedagogy, but also whether or not storytelling can find a home in a mainstream public classroom. Many of the studies found here occurred in preschool, day-care or private school setting. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, Paley (1990) presented a powerful model for storytelling in the classroom, but the classroom existed in a private university lab setting. Paley was free from standards, assessments, tests, and scripted and pressurized curriculum. In other words her classroom was free from the ongoing philosophical and policy debate that consumes public school classrooms, districts and school boards. Questions of the ineffectiveness of storytelling as pedagogy (Pellowski

1977) and the difficult reality of introducing storytelling into the standards based curriculum and political climate of modern public schools are important factors to take into consideration while reviewing literacy acquisition, oral language development, story, and storytelling.

Literacy acquisition was found to be equally dependent on the student and the teacher's philosophy and beliefs regarding how students learn to read and write (McMahon, Richmond and Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). The research reviewed was limited to an emergent literacy perspective and was confined to some of the major assumptions of that school of thought. Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) made an important observation. Their study found that when emergent literacy is combined with the direct instruction of specific reading skills and subskills, greater opportunities for literacy were more likely to occur. For storytelling to form a clear relationship to literacy, storytelling would need to address not only the imagination, social interaction, comprehension, story structure, etc, but also skills associated with reading and writing; e.g. systematic instruction in: letter names, auditory and visual discrimination, phonics, and vocabulary.

Oral language development was found to be a precursor to literacy. Dyson (1983) and Latz and Nelson (1988) found that through play students interpreted their environments. This allowed students to engage in Halliday's (1975) seven uses of oral language. Pellegrini (1994 & 1998) found that oral language was the vehicle that allowed students to enter onto the road of literacy. Speece (1999) argued that data obtained from testing students did not lead to a uniform acquisition of literacy. Oral language was found to support phonemic awareness, an integral part of learning to read and write with both emergent literacy and reading readiness. Literacy is by no means

uniform and neither is student development with regard to reading and writing. Oral language development and its connection to phonemic awareness then highlights one relationship storytelling may have with literacy acquisition.

Story was demonstrated as a method via which to facilitate the use of oral language, thereby presenting opportunities for students to learn literacy skills. Morrow (1988) and Feitelson, Kita & Goldstein (1986) found that when opportunities for elaborated language take place in or around stories, greater proficiency in comprehension, story structure, story sequence and oral language occurs. Story then appears to enable a relationship with storytelling and literacy acquisition in that story events, sequence and structure are as important to understand as print or letter sounds. This relationship is only enhanced by students' retelling of stories, which forces them to bump into the known and unknown, identify patterns, characters, and plot, sequence events, and fuse their own personal experiences with the story, elaborating both language and comprehension (Morrow 1988). This allows for experimentation, exploration, and application.

Storytelling was shown to contribute to many different aspects of literacy such as writing, reading, listening and use of oral language in addition to supporting constructivist ideals of emergent literacy (Palmer, Harshbarger, and Koch 2001). Storytelling was found to bring about both reading skills and characteristics identified as important to emerging literacy. The simple, yet powerful practices of encouraging elaborated language, informal talk centered around literacy events, and story retellings, enable the successful application of a storytelling pedagogy in the early elementary classroom, answering the controversy raised by Pellowski at the outset of this section

(1977). In terms of the challenges of introducing storytelling into the standards-based curriculum of modern public schools, emergent literacy practices must be fostered in the cracks that exist within that tightly structure curriculum. Consider a seed, dropped into a crack in a pavement sidewalk, which in time sprouts into a tree, whose roots will grow to break open, the seemingly impenetrable pavement. Standards-based curriculum is a reality, but as Reeves, Kazelskis and Barr (1989) reminded us, that reality can be wed with LEA, which, when expanded to include specific subskills, does not sacrifice creativity, imagination, or meaning-making. Thus, reading readiness and emergent literacy can be successfully combined to foster a middle ground from which to advance literacy.

#### Classroom Implications

Hansen (2004) found that story talk or discussions that take place after a story address four of the five characteristics of the National Reading Panel Report (2000): phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers need to make time for the retelling of stories (Morrow 1986 & 1987) so that students can practice putting information together and trying it out, but also that it allows students to use elaborated language and practice. Storytelling also was shown to have a positive impact on phonemic awareness, a crucial skill in the building of literacy skills.

Teacher beliefs were also shown to have a significant impact as to students' access to literacy events. Proveda (2003) and McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) both indicated that teacher beliefs about literacy directly correlated to how students were socialized to literacy events. Teachers need to be aware of the skills

developmentally appropriate to their students as well as providing avenues for creativity and meaning making.

Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler (1992), Lartz and Nelson (1988), and Dyson (1985) all provided evidence for students to engage in informal talk and elaborated language use. Play, hearing, talking about and retelling stories provided students with the opportunity to restructure information through active engagement and experimentation. Today, as classrooms move more towards skills-based assessment, students have less time to engage in playful talk, or talk that is centered on literacy events. One example is with story-reading where students are asked to be silent (Cochran-Smith 1985) until the end of the story. Teachers need to allow students the ability to use oral language when reading and writing, and provide times throughout the day for students elaborate on language (Hansen 2004).

In conjunction with talk is the notion of center time. Dyson (1985 & 1986), as an example, found that with the use center time, students were provided with democratic means of choosing a literacy activity that the she or he was personally invested in. This theme turns up time and time again in the research, most often in an emergent literacy classroom. Not only did center time allow for active participation based on student interest, but it also allowed for more elaborated language use. Pellegrini et al (1994 & 1998) found that when students were involved in more elaborated language contexts, students were able to decenter and apply metalinguistic use of language. Furthermore, Thomas, Rinehart, and Wampler (1992) found that students engaged in seven different uses of talk informally as compared to two when the teacher controlled and directed talk.

Retelling stories (Morrow 1986 & 1988) provided students with opportunities to use elaborated language, which served to enhance their ability and understanding of story structure, a crucial component of comprehension. Retelling needs to be incorporated by all teachers as a way of actively involving all students, providing rich sources of interaction, guided practice, performance skills, story structure, and confidence with presenting information. Retelling is one facet in which storytelling can be come apart of the classroom in tandem with a read aloud. Giving students the ability to talk and discuss what they have just heard and learned is a powerful form of accommodation and a worthy literacy practice (Hansen 2004).

Finally, storytelling provides an effective way for students to consider multiple perspectives from students in class, and multicultural stories throughout the world. Pellegrini et al (2004), Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004), Geist (2003), Mello (2001), and Gallas (1994) found that when students tell stories they engage in either discourse, authoring, or perspective taking (decentering). Pellegrini et al (2004) discovered that decentering correlated significantly with all measures of literacy, in that students mentally represented other people, other mental states, and past events. Geist (2003), Mello (2001) and Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004), found that when students decenter they imbue their experiences into the stories they learn. This provides a powerful bridge for connecting student experiences to the curriculum in meaningful ways.

As a first year teacher, I need to consider opportunities for my students to engage in informal talk with the choice of centers so that students have an opportunity to experiment, explore, wonder, and apply language in meaningful ways. I need to allow spaces in the curriculum for students to engage in the retelling of stories. This will allow

for numerous teachable moments to assist students with literacy learning. I must also make multiple perspectives and multiculturalism ongoing themes throughout my entire teaching career as a way of allowing students to decenter and accommodate new information. Finally, I as a teacher must be committed to reflective practice, one that challenges my beliefs towards literacy learning. The research has shown that the beliefs I hold will have a direct effect on all of my students' access to literacy events.

### Further Research

The evidence provided in this paper should serve as a call to researchers to further expand research into the realm of storytelling. More research needs to be done before storytelling and storytelling pedagogy can be viewed as a successful model from which to nurture literacy. In addition researchers need to expand storytelling research to include all people. A majority of subjects in this study were white and middle class. Research should be aimed at all so-called minority groups. Research should not only be directed towards the benefits to storytelling but also at explicitly identifying the skills associated with it so that storytelling can be given more of a research base in which to allow greater access into public schooling.

### Closing Thoughts

Storytelling has power, a power that needs to be explored further if public schools are to teach all peoples' children and create a community where learning can take place. Fox (1993) reminds us, "by developing a storytelling-reading-writing-changing-acting-drawing-sharing-culture at the center of classroom activities in the early years, they will find that children themselves through their responses to stories and their story inventions,



reflect what they know and love most” (p. 194). Storytelling must address what the research has indicated is critical: use of imagination, social interaction, elaborated language, phonemic awareness, and comprehension.

Healy (1990) stated that simply reading a text limits the imagination to visual clues that are provided in illustrations. Students who encounter storytelling learn to visualize without the use of visual aids and enlarge the tale to include their own experiences and interpretations. This ability of mind mapping (Mello 1997) gives students the foundation of a creative imagination with which can spark a student’s fire for literacy. Hansen (2004) found the use of story to address the four of the five characteristics of the National Reading Panel Report (2000) with regard to phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Imagination is messy (Gallas 2004) but a critical aspect nonetheless; whose greatest contribution to the acquisition of literacy is the enchantment (Proveda 2003) imagination provides young readers and writers. Storytelling provides a path of enchantment from which imagination and the skills necessary to acquire literacy can take flight.

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