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Preschool Educators' Perceptions of Practice in Facilitating/ modeling Oral Language Acquisition and Development

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICE IN FACILITATING/
MODELING ORAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY

NICOLE ALISSA JONES

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2012

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To my parents, to family and friends who have always supported me in my endeavors.

I am a teacher! What I do and say are being absorbed by young minds who will echo these images across the ages. My lessons will be immortal, affecting people yet unborn, people I will never see or know. The future of the world is in my classroom today, a future with the potential for good or bad. The pliable minds of tomorrow's leaders will be molded either artistically or grotesquely by what I do. Several future presidents are learning from me today; so are the great writers of the next decades, and so are all the so-called ordinary people who will make the decisions in democracy. I must never forget these same young people could be the thieves or murders of the future. Only a teacher? Thank God I have a calling to the greatest profession of all. I must be vigilant every day lest I lose one fragile opportunity to improve tomorrow.

—Ivan Welton Fitzwater

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ABSTRACT

Preschool educators are linguistic models for their students. They prompt students to speak. Educators who are able to understand the critical nature of their role in the students' oracy development and to deliberately encourage conversation may have a profound impact on preschoolers who may be at risk. Oracy is self-expression prompted by discourse activities such as questioning, labeling, turn-taking in conversation, and it is stimulated by a variety of speech events, such as playing or otherwise interacting with peers and adults.

This study explored how preschool educators behaved as models in facilitating oral language acquisition and development. The goals of this study were to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students?
2. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to their role in facilitating second language acquisition?
3. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students?

The research of McEwan (2002) and Wilcox (2000), Hart and Risley (2003), Ard and Beverly (2004) and Weigel (2007) suggests that oral language (oracy) development is a readiness factor for later reading, writing and listening competencies. Intentional strategies to promote oracy can narrow the reading achievement gap between students in racially, linguistically and economically discrete neighborhoods and their peers from more diverse environments.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the 1994 movie, *Nell*, actress Jodie Foster plays a thirty-year-old young woman raised in isolation by a speech-impaired mother (a 20th Century Fox Production). Ms. Foster's character, Nell, sounds like her mother, having internalized her impaired speech and conversational style. Nell, when discovered by psychologists and others after her mother's death, is unable to dialogue with those wanting to help her, until they learn the articulation patterns of her mother. The character of Nell suggests that children imitate their linguistic models. She lived with her mother cut off from human contact in an isolated hollow. Children are deeply influenced by those with whom they communicate in their language development.

Language development is also dependent on the home and child-care environments (Weigel, 2005). Children acquire and develop competencies according to the models (families, playmates, childcare and preschool educators) available. Children, who live in racially, linguistically, and economically distinguishable neighborhoods may not have the speech and language models that support later literacy.

The result can be achievement gaps, poor academic performance among linguistic, ethnic, and economically outlying groups of students. Children of low-income families may lag behind their peers in achievement, according to Lee and Burkham (2002). These researchers also found that the average scores in reading, math and general

knowledge of students whose families are in the top economic group are 60% higher than those of students in the lowest. Lee and Burkham (2002) examined U. S. Department of Education data on 16,000 kindergarteners (2001). Low socioeconomic Hispanic students entering kindergarten scaled .69 standard deviation units below the national average on tests of cognition. Low socioeconomic African Americans scaled .56 below. Their study suggests both the need for early childhood learning programs and for other ways to support the cognitive development of these children.

Blacks and Latinos (Lee and Burkham, 2002) occupy the troubling side of performance gaps in grades, state standardized test scores, drop out and graduation rates as compared to their non-Latino white peers.

Research has continually shown that when adults read to children, discussing story content, asking open-ended questions about story events, explaining the meaning of words, and pointing out features of print, they promote increased language development, comprehension of story content, knowledge of story structure, and a better understanding of language— all of which lead to literacy success (Berk, 2009).

The absence of early literary stimulation is the harbinger of sustained educational difficulties. Unfortunately, 37 percent of children arrive at kindergarten without the skills necessary for lifetime learning (Landry, 2005).

Closing that gap for Black and Latino children suggests that foundational language skills should be introduced effectively in preschools with appropriate models (Schwanenflugel, 2005). Early intervention efforts that target language skill development can affect school achievement (Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Maxwell & Wallach, 1984; Whitehurst et al., 1988).

Another way of saying this is that high-quality preschool experiences correlate with higher rates of academic success for low-income children, from kindergarten through high school. Children exposed to effective preschool facilitation are less likely later on to be retained a grade, to require special education services, and to fail to graduate from high school (Barnett, 1995).

A key to this success is a strong emphasis on oral language development. Language relies upon a set of rules shared by people that permit the exchange of thoughts, ideas and emotions. Since writing and speech are the tools students use to communicate their thoughts, ideas and emotions, early childhood educators need to have a thorough knowledge of language development and of how to help develop literacy skills. Language can take the form of talking as well as listening, reading and writing (Tomasello, 2008). Talking and listening are the primary routes for learning about language. While written language plays an important role in our lives, “oral language exchanges account for the bulk of our day-to-day communications, as the primary form of discourse all over the world” (Perogoy and Boyle, 1997). Little explicit instruction is needed to learn oral language and infants are naturally practiced in it by way of daily interaction with their family and other caregivers (Ibid.). Tabors and Snow (2002) concur:

all normally developing children learn a first language in the context of social interaction within their family structure, beginning with the production of babbled syllables at about 6 months, moving on to stable sound sequences around 1 year of age, continuing with the rapid acquisition of words and grammar throughout the early childhood period (p.160).

Lu (2000) asserts that as children learn language, they acquire culture and identity as members of a community. Oral language is a chief means by which parents or caregivers socialize children into ways of behaving, thinking, and speaking. The expressive language outputs of the surrounding adults function as receptive language inputs for the young child. The young child will eventually speak in terms of what has been heard.

Preschool educators are early language facilitators in school settings. Dickinson and McCabe (2001) observed 77 Head Start classrooms to analyze student-teacher interactions. Only 1% of the time was spent explicitly on conversation and there was no talk in almost 90% of the classrooms. In low income settings, preschool educators deepened or developed the topic only 14% of the time.

In “Laying the Groundwork for Literacy,” Dorothy Strickland and Timothy Shanahan (2004) reviewed the work of the National Early Literacy Panel’s preliminary research findings:

Oral language development is facilitated when children have many opportunities to use language in interactions with adults and with one another, both one-on-one and in small groups; when they frequently engage in extended conversations with adults; and when they listen and respond to stories read and told to them. These activities enable the students to describe events, build background knowledge, and extend their vocabulary. (p. 76)

Families (and communities) are also facilitators in the linguistic development of children. Hart and Risely (2003) compare the exposure to words among professional, working and welfare-supported families to reveal the cumulative difference in vocabulary over four years. Professional families exposed children to 45 million words; working-class families 26 million; welfare-receiving families 13 million. In a longitudinal study,

Layzer, J. (2007) found that children of families in poverty are 18 months behind their peers at age four, and that the gap remains constant (18 months) through age ten. Snow (2005) discovered that students from middle-income families know about 12,000 words by 3rd grade, while students from low-income families only about 4,000.

This finding is especially significant in that vocabulary is correlated with reading comprehension (Tabors, 2001). Language development involves acquiring competencies in understanding what words mean, how to make words, how to put words together, and what word combinations are best in what situations (ASHA-American Speech-Language-Hearing Association). According to Filmore and Snow (2000), the basic units of oral language vary according to function: sounds or phonemes, morphemes (smallest unit of meaning to signal a distinct use, such as adding -ed to jump to modify the meaning of an action), words (containing one or more morphemes), phrases (one or more words), sentences and discourses (e.g. conversational etiquette). It should be noted that the basic language units of native English speakers differ in structure and function from those of other languages. Filmore and Snow (2000) offer an example: Native Spanish speakers do not distinguish between [b] and [v]. However, ban and van have very different meanings in English.

Hasan (1996) suggests that if families and communities do not speak formal English, their preschoolers perhaps not know the terms and structures of it. If students living in racially, linguistically and economically discrete neighborhoods are not provided with as many opportunities to develop oral English language skills, reading comprehension in later school years may be significantly compromised.

Oral language competence and early literacy are foundational for later academic success. Berry (1985) and Gambell (1988) posit that oral language provides a window onto the child's ability to make sense of his or her environment via the organization of experience, information processing and critical thinking. Language is fundamental for comprehension.

Preschool oral language comprehends a number of elements: gestural and verbal expression, vocabulary and background knowledge, listening (attention to and comprehension of talk) and phonological development (Strickland, Morrow, Neuwman, Roskos, Schickedeanz & Vukelick, 2004). Literacy development must be understood in terms of print awareness, print conventions and book handling knowledge; letter name and knowledge; alphabetic principles; knowledge of text structure; comprehension of stories; interest in books and beginning writing (Ibid.).

Successful reading and writing in the upper grades depend on the development of adequate oral language skills in preschool (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; Dickinson and Tabors, 2001; Dickinson and McCabe, 1991). Lemke (1988) argues that comprehension of what is read (the text) is grounded in speech. He writes, "Spoken language is the medium through which we reason to ourselves and talk our way through problems to answers. It is for the most part, the medium in which we understand and comprehend." Slobin (1986) has it that spoken language serves to support cognition and to acquire grammatical structures.

The aforementioned research establishes the connection of oral language and cognition, general language development, literacy, and socialization. Talk is clearly a

vital skill in comprehension, communication and community coherence. It is also clear that modeling is a powerful factor in oral language development. Do preschool educators realize how essential their behaviors are in developing oral language? Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002) offer precise descriptions of what the relevant professional behaviors might look like. This study will explore what preschool educators perceive as behaviors leading to oral competency against the backdrop of Wilson's (2000) and McEwan's (2002) indicators of oral language development.

The development of oral language competencies must be part of daily classroom instruction (Routman, 2003). Preschool teachers should mention or assign good books, explicitly teach the rules of conversation (staying on the topic, taking turns, listening), teach students how to question and instruct them in the meaning of words, phrases and sentences (McEwan, 2002).

Oracy, Expressive and Receptive Language, and Language Development

Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002) describe oracy as the synergy of expressive and receptive skills as children learn to talk. "Oracy is the integration of speaking (expressive) and listening (receptive) skills" (Saracho & Spodek, 2007, p. 695). A child's first constructions of the sounds of language are based on what they hear (Hoff, 2005; Handel, 2005; Baquedano-Lopez, 2003). If their linguistic communications, experiences and/or conversations are in English, children will acquire English (Hoff, 2005). Children learn the oral language of their communities according to the feedback they receive. Children pick up linguistic rules early on by orally testing their own

hypotheses against feedback provided about verbalizations of experience (oracy). Oracy is described by Wilkinson (1970) as the verbalization of experience.

“Verbalization” is what other people write and what other people say. And we as readers read what they write and we as listeners listen to what they are speaking. This definition seems to include something essential, expressed fairly simply. (p. 71)

Oracy is the integration of receptive and expressive language as children learn to talk. Early language experiences that promote oracy involve preschool educators and parents in the creation of opportunities for children to construct meaning linguistically. The proper listening and feedback of adults and playmates are critical in oral language development (Bus et al., 2007).

Tarleton (1988, p. 4) presents a table that sets forth the features of oracy in the classroom.

Table 1

Oracy in the Classroom

Product-based activities	Process-based activities
1. Concentration on performance and the spoken word: rehearsed.	Spontaneous use of the language as it means in learning: ‘raw’.
2. Separation from other work: a special event.	An integrated part of the curriculum
3. Competition as a motivator.	Collaboration as a motivator.
4. Teacher’s agenda.	Teacher’s and children’s agenda.

Tarleton says that oracy recognizes the interconnectedness between speaking and listening in language development/acquisition. Children learn the rules of language as they talk and listen, and language facilitators capitalize on this interdependence when they converse with children and provide activities that demonstrate receptive and

expressive devices for sharing ideas, thoughts and emotions in effective communication (Weigel, 2005).

Preschool Educators' Classroom Practice and the Development of Oracy Competencies

Researchers like Amanda Wilcox-Herzog (Professor, California State University, San Bernadino); Elaine K. McEwan- Adkins, an educational consultant; and M. J. Wilcox (Professor and Director of the Infant Child Research Programs at Arizona State University) have all written extensively on language practices in preschool classrooms. Professor Wilcox-Herzog recognized the significant relationship between the preschooler and his/her caregivers/teachers. McEwan, a speech and language pathologist, focused on achievement in reading across the child's academic career from preschool to high school. Professor M. Jeanne Wilcox (also a speech and language pathologist) has studied disabled children, second language learners as well as "naturally" developing language learners. There is unanimity that adequate oral language development via preschool facilitators is necessary for later reading competency.

The table below illustrates similarities between the work of McEwan (2002) and Wilcox et al. (2000) in their emphasis upon oral language competencies preschool teachers should inculcate to prepare their students for subsequent schooling.

Both researchers suggest that preschool educators must talk/listen/respond to their students to optimize the synergy between receptive and expressive language development. Mercer, Edward and Maybin (1988) have it that children and teachers must talk together. Other studies support McEwan (2002) and Wilcox (2000) in their

Table 2

Comparison of Mcewan's and Wilcox et al.'s Oral Language Competencies And Oracy Indicators for Preschool Educators to Promote Among Their Students

Wilcox et al. (2000)	McEwan (2002)
Encourage complex verbal reasoning	Share good books
Increase use of decontextualized language	Teach students how to question
Develop personal narrative skills	Teach students how to rephrase, and summarize
Facilitate interaction among children	Explicitly teach the rules of conversation: staying on topic, turn taking, and listening enough to get information from another speaker [Is this language from the source? If so, it is also in the text some pages above.]
Teach new vocabulary words and/or concepts	Teach words, phrases and sentences
Support emerging 2 nd language skills	Teach words, phrases and sentences

claim of how these adult model/facilitator strategies can support preschool students' language development.

Sharing Good Books and Encouraging Verbal Reasoning

In a 2009 study, the Albert Shanker Institute examined the preschool curriculums of 43 states to synthesize: "What's in it for Children and Teachers?" The research was intended to offer guidance for teachers and policymakers to improve the quality of early learning programs. The discussion, the idea, that reading to students is called 'shared reading' because it shows them that print carries information. The teacher reads a book to model how a book should be held, the pages turned, the spaces between words treated, the correspondence of printed to enunciated words, the point where reading commences,

the need to read from left to right, where the names of the author and illustrator are mentioned (Morrow & Gambrell, 2004).

Teaching the Rules of Conversation and Increasing the Use of Decontextualized Language and Facilitating Interactions Among Children

“Children learn how conversations work by observing and interacting with adults, who are accomplished speakers of the language.” (Massey, 2004, p. 227; Kontos, 1999) Dickinson and Smith (1991) suggest that most teachers’ conversations are more about controlling behaviors, mediating peer relationships, celebrating appropriate behaviors, giving instructions and helping the children. What may be missing in the quest to develop and increase oral language skills is for teacher educators to prompt “cognitively challenging conversations.” (Massey, 2004, p. 227).

Teachers may not ask appropriate questions because they tend to make assumptions that their students already understand what is being asked of them (Richardson, Morgan and Fleener, 2006; Nettles, 2006). Harrop and Swinson (2003) assert that the level of children’s oral language competence determines the sophistication of their thinking.

The quantity and quality of language interactions between preschool educators and their students is very weak according to Dickinson and Tabors (2001). They found that for about 60% of the time a child is in preschool he or she is not engaged in conversation. It is critical for the teacher to engage the children in meaningful talk.

Teaching Students How to Question and Develop Personal Narrative Skills

“Children need time, resources and ample learning opportunities to develop the oral language comprehension skills they need for school.” (Roskos, Tabors and Snow, 2004, p.1) Preschool educators develop oral language by providing time for each child to practice communicating and to learn to use new vocabulary words. Preschool educators also support oral language and cognitive development by asking questions. Filmore and Snow (2000) suggest that preschool educators who give away answers in their questioning may not encourage children to employ questions to problem solve as they would by asking more open-end questions. Question asking is one of the cognitive processing components that underlies comprehension (Graesser, Singer, and Trabasso, 1994; Hilton, 1990 and Olson, Duffy, and Mack, 1985).

Questions by early learners include “ signs of seeking, noticing and incorporating new and more complex experiences into prior experiences.” (Roskos, Tabors and Snow, 2004, p. 12) Children indicate to adults that they know what they know, as well as what they want to learn and what they don’t know (Becker, 2000). Preschool educators must determine how children are making meaning of what they hear. They need to draw upon some of what children already know to create opportunities for new vocabulary growth, phonological awareness, and/or the understanding of new concepts.

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), questioning is an impetus for students to be engaged in learning, talking to others and seeking new knowledge. Questions promote memory, thinking, inquiry and begin the process for understanding complexity (Feldman, 2003; McKeow and Beck, 2003). Open-ended questions generally provoke

oral language responses and an expectation that a preschool student will linguistically demonstrate how he/she makes meaning of his/her experience.

Teaching Words, Phrases and Sentences, and Teaching New Vocabulary Words or Concepts

The significance of vocabulary (oral language) has often been underestimated because it is not a prerequisite for first or second grade reading success. It is not until reading texts involve age-normal vocabulary demands that early (kindergarten or prekindergarten) vocabulary becomes a significant predictor of reading comprehension. (Biemiller, 2005, p. 5)

Words, in particular, include recognized words that are heard and words that are spoken. Vocabulary acquisition has many complex dimensions that make it challenging to know a word. There are several levels by which one may understand the complex nature of learning words. Nagy and Scott (2000) offer a schema to explain these complexities. One level is that readers need to be exposed to the same word in different contexts frequently to really “know” the word. The next level is understanding that words have multiple meanings (like the word *sage* may mean an herb or a wise person). The third level is recognizing the interrelatedness of one word (e.g., urban) and others (e.g., suburban, urbanite, urbane).

Support Emerging Second-Language Skills

Children learning a second language (bilingualism) depend on the quality and quantity of the “new” language inputs and the opportunities to increase their fluency rates as well as the intrinsic factors of their personalities, language learning aptitudes,

motivation and interest (Bialystok, 2001; Wong and Filmore (1991). McLaughlin (1984,1995) made a distinction between simultaneous or sequential language learners. When a child learns two languages before the age of three, generally, the language developmental rate is the same as it is for a monolingual child as he or she acquire his or her first language. When a child learns the second language after age three, the developmental process is sequential. “For these children, then, second-language acquisition is not a process of discovering what language *is* but rather of discovering what *this* language is” (Tabors, 1997, p.12). Sequential bilingual children will have different patterns than their monolingual peers. They may, for instance, know fewer words in the second language. Preschool educators must understand their role in the process of second language acquisition and the creation of instructional strategies for the sequential bilingual child to develop oral language skills.

Filmore (1991) identifies five teacher roles that are effective when working with young children, especially those who are also acquiring a second language. Those roles are communicator (conversational partner); evaluator (identifying students’ linguistic challenges); educator (generalists in their knowledge of the world); educated human being (possess extended vocabulary, curiosity and the ability how to find out what they want to know) and agent of socialization (expanding relationships with language, culture, school and home). Formal teaching of the second language does not seem to hurry new language acquisition but to recognize the dynamic nature of language learning—language must be meaningful and useful (Collier, 1995; Krashen, 1996; McLaughlin, 1984).

Purpose of the Study

Competence in oral language/oracy is required before a child can learn to read and write in school. Vygotsky (1997) identifies the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the gap between a child's potential development and the actual development that a child achieves under a teacher. Vygotsky (1997) suggests that student development and gap reduction is done by modeling and joint construction by educators and students to support learning to read and write. The purpose of this study is to analyze the collected data on what 40 preschool educators in 20 early learning schools perceive they do with respect to developing oral competencies among their students. Do they share good books, explicitly teach the rules of conversation (staying on the topic, taking turns, listening enough to get information from another speaker), teach students how to question and new words, phrases and sentences? How do preschool educators perceive their role in the development of oracy?

This study will focus on educators who are working in low-income preschool environments. Researchers (Lee and Burkham, 2002; Hart and Risley, 2003) posit that preschool educators in such low-income areas can develop oral competencies like those in middle and upper-income ones. Studying how preschool educators perceive their role to model and teach oral language competencies may lead to more opportunities for students to increase their cognition, social and language achievement.

Significance of the Problem

The achievement gap in reading comprehension between students from low-income families and students from middle-class and professional families is very wide.

Oral language skills are crucial is toward developing later literacy. The preschool educator's role is critical in the development of those skills. Preschool educators may provide necessary intervention strategies toward improving oral language fluency (Kamhi, 2003). The amount of conversation is a key determinant of school success (Bowman, et al., 2001).

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions/practices of educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy?
2. What are the perceptions/practices of educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to their role in facilitating second language acquisition?
3. What are the perceptions/practices of educators in racially, linguistically and economically discrete preschool programs with regard to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction?

Limitations of the Study

1. Data collected in this study is limited to those adult respondents who facilitate interaction among children and support second language acquisition in participating low-income preschool settings.
2. Participating educators may have a variety of educational backgrounds which may affect their responses to and interactions with preschool children.
3. Responses on the survey are self-reported.

4. Observations in the classroom document only a small portion of the preschool experience. Observations are merely a snapshot and may or may not adequately reflect the total experience.
5. There may be potential researcher/participant biases relative to interpreting the observational and survey data. The researcher is a former preschool educator and in some instances will be of the same race and ethnicity as the respondents. The participants may not accurately portray their perceptions when self-reporting vis-à-vis the the survey instrument.

Summary

Preschool educators are linguistic models for their students. They are also the prompters for students to use oral language. Those educators (caregivers) who are able to understand the critical nature of their role in the students' oracy development and who deliberately encourage conversation may have a positive impact on preschoolers who may be at risk (from families living below the poverty line.)

Developmental psychology is clear today that many of the processing skills are not abilities laid down in the brain (which is not to deny individual differences in anatomical structures, Hynd & Hynd, 1985) but are very much the outcome of opportunities to learn, influenced by teaching (Clay, 1986, 155-173).

Definition of Terms

Early literacy: term used to describe the foundation for later reading competencies in school.

Emergent literacy: the dynamic relationship among communication /language/speech skills (reading, writing, oral language and listening) and their influences on each other.

Language acquisition: how humans acquire the capacity to understand and use words to both understand and communicate, used synonymously with language development.

Language development: entwined with exposure and involvement with words and phrases. Children learn what they live. Children begin to behave and talk based on their developmental abilities to successfully make themselves understood and communicate their needs and wants to the members of their community. Infants develop their language using cognition by creating schemas to categorize and think about their experiences (Hart & Risley. 1999).

Oracy (Wikinson, 1970): self-expression prompted by discourse activities (e.g., questioning, labeling, taking turns in conversation, sharing books, etc.) and stimulated in a variety of speech events (e.g., in school, at home, with playmates, etc.) (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Oracy is a tool for emergent literacy, language development and second language acquisition.

Second-language development: describes learning another language in addition to the native one.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is in early language learning that the Matthew effect begins to take hold. Those who know many words and who possess the background knowledge to comprehend what they mean will learn more words and world knowledge later on, while those who know few words in early grades fall further and further behind in later grades.

-E. D. Hirsch, *Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge*

Weigel (2005) contends that teachers who value their role in children's learning contribute to their language development.

For instance, we have found that the children with teachers who *believe* in the power of sharing books with the children (e.g. reading helps children be better talkers and listeners, stories help build children's imagination, children learn lessons and morals from stories, reading helps learn new things and important life skills) have greater language skills than children whose teachers do not hold this belief. Likewise, children tend to have greater receptive and expressive language skills when teachers believe that they play an important role in children's learning, and when teachers feel they are effective in fulfilling that role. In fact, in our data we have found that the more supportive teachers' beliefs about children's language development, the more likely they were to provide language activities for children in the classroom. (p.728)

The foundation for later literacy abilities is laid as early as preschool (Storch and Whitehurst, 2001). Studies by Hart and Risley (2003) compared the families (welfare-supported, working-class, professional) with respect to word exposure. They found children living in racially, economically and socially discrete neighborhoods by age three consistently lag behind their peers in the other groups in the number of words heard prior to speaking. Children hear words before they speak. If a variety of adults (parents and preschool educators) don't provide linguistic interaction and activities that promote

emergent literacy, the affected children will find “regular” school a difficult challenge (Podhajski and Nathan, 2005). Preschool educators prepare children for formal education.

But how do preschool teachers perceive their role in promoting oral language among their children? What do such oral language activities look like? According to researchers, the amount and nature of oral language preschool caregivers (preschool educators, included) use with children solidifies a foundation for developing literacy skills. The research of McEwan (2002) and Wilcox (2000) provide the backdrop for this investigation.

McEwan (2002) says that preschool teachers promote young children’s oral competencies/oracy through activities that integrate receptive and expressive experiences in many different situations. McEwan (2002) describes the facets of oral language as “(a) the meanings of words (lexicon), (b) how words are put together in utterances to convey a message (semantics and syntax), and (c) how discourse, or conversational interactions of various kinds, is carried out” (p.68). Children hear thousands of words before they enter school. Young children use those words in a superficial way to express their needs and feelings. As children interact with adults and peers, their oral/ “meaning pieces” of language becomes more complex.

Wilcox (2000) lists activities that give nuance to oral competencies. Peregoy and Boyle (1997) say that written language is a representation of spoken language and is abstract. The abstract symbols of oral language must be explicitly taught and practiced.

Oral language is the platform from which children learn to read and write successfully in later grades and is a key school readiness factor.

Instructional Strategies and Activities Used to Promote Oracy in Preschool

This section will review the research of the strategies and goals used to promote oracy. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) reported on a series of studies examining teacher-child interaction and found that about 60% of the low-income preschooler's time in school did not feature conversational engagement with teachers. Increasing oracy, language development and early literacy experiences and activities are likely to narrow the reading gap between students in racially, linguistically and economically discrete neighborhoods and their peers in more diverse environments.

Wilcox, Murphy, Bacon, and Thomas (2000) identified six goals for preschool educators who would promote language development: (a) encourage complex verbal reasoning; (b) increase the use of decontextualized language; (c) develop personal narrative skills; (d) facilitate interaction among children; (e) teach new vocabulary; and (f) support second language acquisition.

The indicators for the first three goals: (a) encouraging complex verbal reasoning; (b) increasing use of decontextualized language; and (c) developing personal narrative skills that Wilcox, et al. (2000) offer for teaching, prompting and modeling oral language skills are listed below:

1. Creating problems in the environment for children to solve.
2. Providing opportunities to talk about objects /events beyond the here and now.

3. Participating in and encouraging pretend play.
4. Waiting for children to request materials or turns.
5. Modeling language by describing objects and actions during play.
6. Modeling stories and sequence events during play.
7. Adding written language to activities to promote literacy.
8. Interacting at the child's eye level.
9. Following the child's interest and focus of attention.
10. Responding to children when they want to show or tell something.
11. Repeating the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences).
12. Making comments and asking questions to continue conversations.
13. Asking open-ended questions.
14. Providing positive feedback when children use new language.

Facilitating Interaction Among Children

1. Directing children to communicate and interact with peers.
2. Drawing attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing.
3. Commenting/praising children's attempts at peer interaction.
4. Selecting (and structuring) activities that require peer interaction.
5. Commenting on feelings/emotions of themselves and others.

Teaching New Vocabulary, Words, or Concepts

1. Using the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment.

2. Using words to express important concepts.
3. Defining words verbally (e.g. joyful means feeling happy).
4. Giving examples of words (e.g. green like grass).
5. Repeating unfamiliar words often during an activity.
6. Demonstrating concepts with appropriate actions and/or props.

Supporting Emerging Second-Language Skills

1. Slowing the rate of speech.
2. Using gestures with English.
3. Rephrasing questions/comments to make simpler when not understood.
4. Adding translations in the child's native language as needed to help a child understand.
5. Translating the child's non-English utterance to English.
6. Encouraging the child to use English.
7. Providing positive feedback for a child's attempt to use English.

Every goal enumerated by Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2000) indicates the synergy of receptive and expressive language. Each section will illustrate Wilcox's (2000) indicators and McEwan's (2002) language promotion ideas as a prelude to the discussion of possible strategies preschool educators might use to promote oracy as their students develop linguistically.

Sharing Good Books

Joint book reading has affects a child's literacy and language development (Van Kleeck & Vander Woude, 2003). Studies of storybook reading have found that acquisition of novel words and expressive knowledge is encouraged when children are actively participating by answering questions and discussing the book (Ewers and Brownson, 1999; Senechal, 1997; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Zevenbergen, Whitehurst, & Zevenbergen, 2003). Children who read the same book every day for a week develop literacy skills that increase their vocabulary, further their understanding of cause and effect, better enable them to make predictions, focus on relevant details and practice plot development (Wilcoxt et al., 2001).

Book sharing refers to a child assisting the educator in telling the story, whereas book reading is when the teacher reads the book to the child. As mentioned in Chapter One, when children are involved in book reading they learn how to hold a book, recognize a book's features, understand that a book is labeled and illustrated by people, and see that the printed language is a representation of the oral language that runs from left to right and from top to bottom.

Ard and Beverly (2004) examined the effect of adult questions and comments during joint book reading and recognized that adults using words in a meaningful context and with prompting promote new vocabulary acquisition. The 40 typically developing preschoolers in this study heard 10 nonsense words mapped to novel referents. Children in the experimental group identified approximately two or more of the nonsense words

Table 3

Encouraging Complex Verbal Reasoning and Sharing Good Books

Wilcox et al. (2000)	McEwan (2000)
Encouraging verbal reasoning	Sharing good books
Modeling stories and sequence of objects and actions during play.	Telling a story to students.
Interacting at the child's eye level.	Modeling how to hold a book and recognize its features.
Following the child's interest and focus of attention.	Educator teaches that books are labeled and illustrated by people.
Repeating the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences).	Student understanding that the printed language is a representation of oral language that runs from left to right and from top to bottom.
Making comments and asking questions to continue conversations.	
Asking open-ended questions.	
Providing positive feedback when children use new language.	

than the children in the control group. Comments by adults in the experimental groups appeared to be more effective in recognizing nonsense words than posing questions.

Teaching the Rules of Conversation

Curenton and Justice (2004) studied sixty-seven low-income three, four and five-year-old preschoolers' use of decontextualized language by employing a wordless picture book. Their findings suggest that the foundation for decontextualized language skills emerges during the preschool years. Decontextualized language is used to refer to the past or the future or to share information about abstract objects, events, and situations removed from an immediate context (Westby, 1991). Critical for academic success and

oracy, decontextualized language ability is significantly linked (Scott, 1994; Westby, 1991). Michaels (1981) posited that academic achievement is challenging for children whose discourse style is “at variance with the teacher’s own literate style and expectations” (p. 424).

Table 4

Increasing the Use of Decontextualized Language and Teaching the Rules of Conversation

Wilcox et al. (2001)	McEwan (2000)
Increase the use of decontextualized language	Teaching the Rules of Conversation (emphasis on teacher-child conversations)
Responding to children when they want to show or tell something.	Teaching students how to question
Repeating the child’s ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences).	Explicitly teaching rules of conversation: staying on topic, turn taking, and listening enough to get information from another speaker
Making comments and asking questions to continue conversations.	
Asking open-ended conversation.	

The type and quality of teacher-child interactions/conversations appear to influence language skills. The NICHD (2000) study examined language stimulation by childcare teachers and how often teachers responded to children, talked positively and asked questions of them over 15, 24 and 36 months in a classroom. They found expressive language and verbal comprehension significantly associated with the length of time spent in the preschool with increased vocabulary production.

Dickinson and Tabors (2001) reported on a series of studies that examined teacher-child interaction during free play and at meal times. They found when teachers

used words to stretch the children's vocabularies, the children gained receptive and expressive language skills, as evidenced by the use of more novel words. They found that children gain more language skills when teachers do not dominate the conversations but show interest, comment on their effort and ask questions that prompt children to clarify. The quantity and quality of language interactions between preschool educators and their children is very weak according to Dickinson and Tabors (2001).

Teaching Students How to Question

Roskos, Tabors, and Snow (2004) say questions by early learners include "signs of seeking, noticing and incorporating new and more complex experiences into prior experiences" (p.12). How can preschool educators prompt their students to verbally incorporate new and more complex experiences into prior experiences?

Walsh and Blewitt (2006) studied the effects of adult questioning on children's novel and word acquisition during storybook reading. Thirty-five middle and upper-class three-year-old children in childcare centers and nursery schools were studied. The children were assigned to one of three conditions: (a) vocabulary eliciting questions where the child's response was to use a target word (e.g., Adult: What is this? Child: A pagoda); (b) noneliciting questions containing the target word but child's response did not need to contain new word; and (c) control condition—no questions were asked. Children's novel word comprehension increased more in conditions (a) and (b), suggesting that the type of question was not as significant to word learning as active engagement in discussion about the novel word.

Senechal, Thomas, and Monker (1995) conducted a study that found strong results from adult questioning during joint book reading for typically developing four-year-olds. Children performed better on comprehension posttests than those who merely listened. In other words, children engaging in a dialogue with the educator along with answering questions with novel words in them did better in comprehension posttests than their passive classmates. Similarly, in the Ewers and Brownson (1999) study, where students were asked where and when questions, they did better in comprehension.

Developing a Personal Narrative

Narrative skills are valuable for three reasons: Narratives lead to the development of oral language (Morrow, 1985); narratives are a bridge to literacy (Hedberg & Westby, 1993); and narratives are related to conceptual development (Applebee, 1978; Vygotsky, 1962). Narratives are the bridge to help children move from the sharing function of conversation to the teaching function of written language by imparting lessons based on personal experience (Hedburg & Westby, 1993).

Stadler & Ward (2005) studied the narratives of preschoolers between ages 41- 68 months and have identified five levels in their development: (a) *Labeling* is characterized by naming objects and using the repetitive syntax of a story which aptly describes the conglomeration of assorted and unrelated thoughts found; (b) *listing* is described as a listing of things in a story with no temporal or causal relations among characters, objects, settings or sequences; (c) *connecting* is described as including a central topic with actions linked to related characters or events; (d) *sequencing* answers the 'when' and 'why' and contains more advanced language usage such as 'but' and

Table 5

Developing Personal Narrative Skills, Teaching New Vocabulary, Words and/or Concepts and Teaching Words, Phrases and Sentences

Wilcos et al. (2000)	McEwan (2000)
Developing personal narrative skills	Teaching students how to rephrase and summarize
Creating problems in the environment for children to solve.	Using prompts to elicit rephrasing and summarizing around story time.
Waiting for children to request materials or turns.	
Teaching new vocabulary, words and/or concepts.	Teaching words, phrases and sentences
Using the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment.	Using synonyms for words for objects or events in the classroom.
Using words to express important concepts.	Modeling different ways to say the same thing.
Defining words verbally (i.e., joyful means feeling happy).	
Giving examples of words (i.e., green like grass).	Teaching scripted conversations for students to model and practice.
Repeating unfamiliar words often during an activity.	
Demonstrating concepts with appropriate actions and/or props.	Using pictorial representations for new vocabulary words.

“because”; (e) *narrating*, which contains all the elements of the aforementioned: labeling, listing, connecting and sequencing, is described as children can now retell a story and comprehend the developed plots.

Reading involves the realization that spoken words can be written and printed in books. It is additionally important because children’s early vocabularies are dominated

by nouns that refer to people, animals, and moveable objects (Snedeker & Geren, 2003). Although adults speak to children in full sentences, complete with verbs and function words, these elements are massively underrepresented in children's early vocabularies. According to Snedeker and Geren, (2003) young children learn a disproportionate number of nouns before acquiring a balanced complement of verbs, adjectives and prepositions. What does the preschool educator think will help his/her student move from words and phrases to sentences?

Social Language Acquisition

A way for children to develop oracy is through play. Bruner (1972) views play as a way of acquiring information about one's environment and one's experiences with the environment. Play can produce the flexibility that makes tool use, invention, and creativity possible. In Bruner's (1972) view, play provides opportunities to try combinations of behaviors (including linguistic behaviors) that would otherwise never be tried. The experiences with these behaviors then can serve as the basis for later learning. For example, in play, children may master the subroutines that make later observational learning possible. Young children choose selectively those features of performance that are within the range of their capacity for constructing skilled acts. Without play, children have no experience with the subroutines on which to build skilled activities.

Piaget (1962) suggests that play is developmental and driven by the child's level of maturity. Piaget (1962) has identified three types of play. Sensorimotor play occurs during infancy through the second year of life. During sensorimotor play children are learning how to control their movements, coordinate their gestures and perceive the

Table 6

Facilitating Interaction Among Children and Explicitly Teaching the Rules of Conversation: Staying on Topic, Turn Taking, and Listening Enough to Get Information From Another Speaker

Wilcox et al., (2000)	McEwan (2000)
Facilitate interaction among children	Explicitly Teaching the Rules of Conversation
Directing children to communicate and interact with peers.	Staying on topic.
Drawing attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing.	Turn taking.
Commenting/praising children's attempts at peer interaction.	Listening enough to get information from another speaker.
Selecting (and structuring) activities that require peer interaction.	Teaching scripted conversations like "What do you say when someone says 'Thank you and how old are you.'"
Commenting on feelings/emotions of themselves and others.	

effects of the gestures (Diamond, 2004). Symbolic play occurs from ages two to six.

During the symbolic stage children are able to encode their experiences into symbols and play with the symbols. Also, symbolic play assists children with developing imaginative activities and problem solving activities (Diamond, 2004). The third stage in play deals with playing games, and at during this stage children understand cooperation and competition. All of Piaget's stages imply oracy-a synergy of expressive and receptive language skills grounded in their experiences (Wilkinson, 1970).

Piaget (1962) classifies play as children working out two fundamental characteristics involving experience and development. The first fundamental characteristic is called accommodation and this involves the child imitating and

interacting with the environment. Assimilation is the second fundamental characteristic and it involves the child integrating externally derived perceptions and motor actions. Functional play generally consists of simple muscular activities. This may involve manipulating toys and objects and this helps the child to learn about his/her environment (Smilansky, 1968). The child will continue to practice, learn his physical capabilities, explore and experience his/her immediate environment (Smilansky, 1968).

Constructive play allows children the opportunity to create activities and to enjoy the personal joy of being able to create (Smilansky, 1968). For example, a child will learn how to use various play materials in his/her play activities. In this particular form of play a child can play for longer periods of time, depict a theme and organize his/her play (Smilansky, 1968).

During dramatic play a child can freely play in a variety of ways depending on his/her physical abilities, his/her creative ability and his/her growing social awareness (Smilansky, 1968). A child during dramatic play can acknowledge situations in the real world and substitute an imagery situation in order to satisfy his/her personal wishes and needs (Smilansky, 1968). Dramatic play allows the child to be the actor, observer and participator and to use his/her abilities to the fullest (Smilansky, 1968). Game-with-rules is the highest level of play development and in this form of play development, a child accepts prearranged rules and adjusts to them (Smilansky, 1968). For instance, the child learns how to control his behaviors, actions and reactions within given limits. Games-with-rules play helps a child develop into adulthood. Social levels of play development include descriptions of solitary, parallel and group play. Solitary play involves playing

alone with materials different from those of other children who are within speaking distance (Neeley, Neeley, Justen, & Tipton-Sumner, 2001). Parallel play involves children playing with toys similar to those of other children who are in close proximity (Neeley, et al., 2001). Group play involves playing with other children. The children may or may not have assigned roles (Neeley et al., 2001).

Descriptors that guide preschool educators on increasing the quality of play in initiating play with their peers are listed below. Play is a social activity that gives children opportunities to practice their oracy skills. Children playing together assist in learning how to take turns, mastering the art of negotiating and collaborating with others. Green and Wieder (1998) give the following steps and examples to assist teachers with helping children to play with their peers:

1. Use the floor-time principles to follow the children's lead, looking for opportunities to encourage interaction, between the two.
2. Use your voice to help each child pay attention to what the other child is doing.
3. Get both children involved in problem-solving.
4. Help both children become aware of each other's feelings.
5. Help the children engage with each other.
6. Try to hold each child's attention for as long as possible in order to delay her moving away.
7. Help both children understand the other's behavior by translating that behavior into simple words.

8. Help the children interact by using shared interests.
9. Help the children stick with their play by helping them bypass tangential ideas.
10. Help each child notice the feelings and actions of the other by reiterating what each one said or did.
11. Help the children share symbolic ideas.
12. Pick up on highly emotional themes (such as separation, fears, body damage, and aggression), and help the children play these issues out symbolically.
13. Identify each child's coping strategies and solutions, and offer symbolic solutions to difficult situations.
14. Help the children resolve conflicts together.
15. Create opportunities for the children to work together.

Research suggests that expressive and receptive synergistic language development is exploited when preschool educators and their children are active listeners and participators while discussing storybooks. Further, when the child assists in reading the book, he/she learns the functions of reading books.

Teaching the rules of conversation. Preschool children learn the functions of language as they begin to understand tense and abstract objects, events and situations that are removed from an immediate context (Westby, 1991). More emphasis is placed on teacher/child interactions/conversations because it is critical that the teacher spend time talking and listening to the children. Here, it is critical that teachers are interested in what

the children bring to the conversation. Additionally, both the teacher and student are questioning, which in itself promotes conversation.

Teaching words, phrases, and sentences. Narratives are what children say, revealing how they make meaning of their environment and how they are using language to organize their thoughts. The preschool teacher stretches the narrative by teaching words, phrases and sentences to enhance, make clear, and create ways to organize the language content the child is learning.

Social language acquisition. Play is developmental (Piaget, 1962). Preschool children are using language to interact with others. Here, children get to practice the language they are developing and watch and listen to the reactions from their peers and teachers (caregivers). Green and Wieder's (1998) list of ways to assist teachers with helping children to play with their peers is in tune with Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002) in that it describes strategies/ activities used to promote oracy in preschool.

Second-Language Acquisition

To learn a language, a child must be able to perceive linguistic input, store it, analyze it, recall linguistic elements, and recombine them (Snedeker and Geren, 2003). The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) reports that about three-quarters of students who receive special assistance to learn English come from homes where other languages are spoken. Although students can learn, on average, basic English reading skills in two years, their chances of failing later in school are still greater than native English-speaking children (Research Points, 2004). English language learners may not catch up with the native speaker unless they acquire a rich vocabulary.

Native speakers typically know at least 5,000 to 7,000 English words before kindergarten (Research Points, 2004). English language learners must close that initial gap and also keep pace with the native speakers as they steadily expand their vocabularies. It is only through structured talk about academically relevant content that students will learn the words needed to engage in class discussions and to comprehend what they read in various subjects (Research Points, 2004).

Tabors and Snow (2002) categorize English language learners' stages of development as follows:

1. Home Language Use – Young students continue to use their home language and do not yet realize that others don't speak their home language
2. Nonverbal period in the new language – The young student will watch and listen to the English language speakers and may use nonverbal communication behaviors like crying, copying, and/or pointing.
3. Telegraphic and formulaic language – Children name people and objects and use a few phrases that they learn in social situations
4. Productive use of new language – The children combine phrases and new words and make new sentences. The children will make mistakes as they try out the new language to be learned.

Table 7 lists the teaching strategies that support English language learners in preschool. Tabors and Snow (2002) say there is a strong suggestion that preschool educators can create a bridge from a student's home language as he/she transitions to

English by using some phrases to help the student comprehend what is being said in English.

Table 7

Supporting Emerging Second-Language Skills

Wilcox, et al. (2000) Supporting emerging Second-Language Skills
Showing the rate of speech
Using gestures with English
Rephrasing questions/comments to make simpler when not understood
Adding translations in the child's native language as needed to help a child understand
Translating the child's non-English utterance to English
Encouraging the child to use English
Providing positive feedback for child's attempt to use English

Literacy instructional programs that use the English language learner's (ELL) native language or use paired bilingual strategies for early reading instruction seem to be more effective (Slavin & Cheung, 2004). There are no typical ELL students. Some arrive at school with no English-language skills; others may have dual language deficiency in their native language and English, and still others may present limited language proficiency. Key findings from Slavin and Cheung (2004) (Florida State Department of Education, 2003) indicate that teachers need a strong foundation in language learning and the reading process. Solomon and Rhodes (1995) suggest preschool teachers need to use specific interactive strategies to support English Language Learning. While research does not support the best way to teach all ELL students, it does support the necessity that

preschool classroom teachers have some core understandings of effective language instructional strategies to flexibly support preschool students who do not speak English.

Acquiring language proficiency on a second language is a complex endeavor, particularly while developing a first language. There are two major models of second language acquisition in the literature that will be discussed below.

Model 1. Krashen (1985) identifies five hypotheses that promote language learning:

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis – Acquisition is the subconscious process of learning language in a natural environment – the message heard has meaning. The learning aspect, however, is the conscious, “knowing about a language” (Krashen, 1985, need page number here).
2. The Natural Order Hypothesis – Language learners acquire the rules of the language in a predictable sequence – errors will occur but will gradually disappear.
3. The Monitor Hypothesis – Language learners must be concerned themselves to speak and write and know the language rule.
4. The Input Hypothesis – There must be comprehensible inputs, using context – gestures, pictures, and background knowledge-- to acquire the language.
5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis – Social and emotional factors impact students’ ability to acquire language.

Model 2. Interdependence Hypothesis: Cummins (1984) uses terms like BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Style) which describes the development of

conversational fluency, whereas CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) which describes the use of language in decontextualized academic situations. Cummins (2000) says that cognitive and literacy skills established in the native language will transfer across languages. He also describes language proficiency in terms of surface and deeper levels of thinking. He says that deeper levels of cognitive processing (synthesis, analysis, induction, deduction) are necessary to academic progress.

Preschool Educator Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding Literacy Instruction

Only 50% of those preschool educators who teach 3 and 4-year-old children in early-childhood programs (child-care, school-based prekindergarten, Head Start) have earned a Bachelor's degree (Morgan et al., 1973; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Preschool educators with limited academic experience can affect the quality of language and literacy instruction. There has been a paucity of research on early childhood teachers' knowledge about early language instruction and practices (Spodek & Saracho, 2002). However, one study by Kowalski, Pretti-Fronteczak, and Johnson (2001) surveyed 268 Head Start teachers, 58 in public schools, 144 in preschool special education, about their beliefs regarding the importance of a variety of developmental skills including language and literacy skills. Teachers in all three groups indicated that social and emotional lessons were more important for preschoolers to learn than language and literacy.

The focus of this investigation is about adults who participate in the language development of young children. Parents and preschool educators present factors that influence the strength of a child's oracy. Weigel (2007) examined the influences of home

and childcare on the development of children's speaking and listening skills before they begin school.

In Figure 1, Weigel (2007) says that a child has three assets that promote language development. The external assets include the home environment, such as family demographics and situational characteristics that may include how the family functions financially and socially relative to purchasing books, going to the library, and the neighborhood culture. Parents who strongly engage in conversation with their children may increase verbal reasoning, develop personal narrative skills and teach new vocabulary. Weigel (2007) says mothers in poverty tend to use more directive speech, which is less complex. Other external environmental assets include childcare, preschool educators' conversational style and language activities chosen that may teach new vocabulary and/or concepts; facilitate interaction among children and support emerging second language acquisition. The child himself/herself also contributes to his/her own language development through maturation, speech and hearing capabilities, motivation, birth order and native language. Finally, the childcare environment can optimize a child's language development by the kind of language activities that are chosen and the teacher's conversational style. Weigel (2007) says preschool teacher beliefs are tied to their effectiveness in promoting oracy.

Teacher beliefs are a significant asset in developing a child's oral language. Pajares (1992) says that teacher belief systems are a "messy construct" and says that their belief systems are established before they enter college and are often tacit and unconsciously held. What this means is that teacher beliefs about teaching are formed

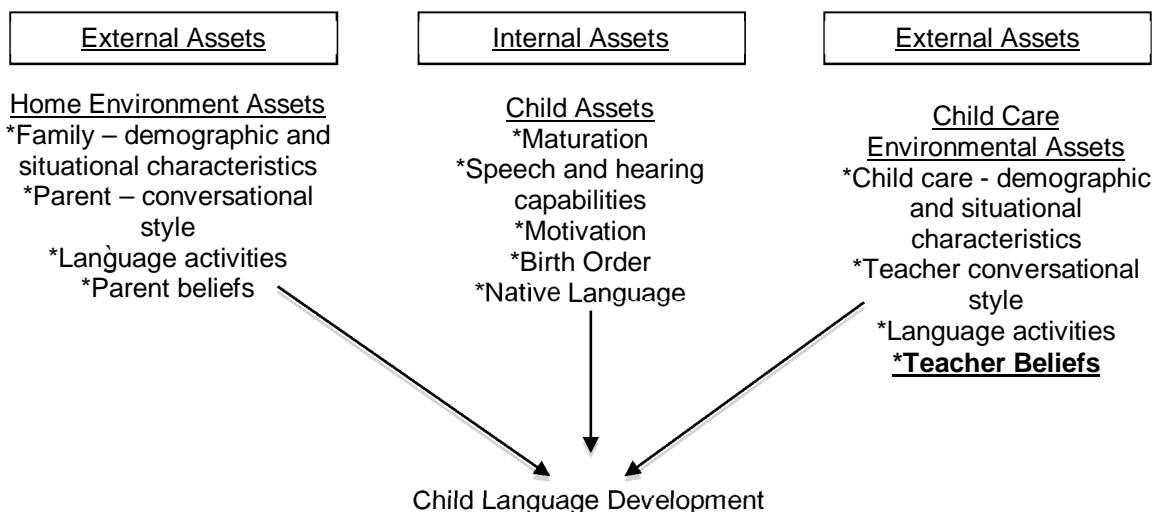


Figure 1. Key assets in the home and child care settings that have been shown to optimize the children’s language development.

Note: From “Language Development in the Years Before School: A Comparison of Development Assets in Home and Child Care Settings,” by D. J. Weigel, J. L. Lowman, and S. S. Martin, 2007, *Early Child Development and Care* 177, p. 722. Copyright 2007 by Taylor & Francis Group. Reprinted with permission.

early and may not be based on rationality or on the latest educational research. Pajares (1992) says teacher belief systems are a major determinant of classroom decision-making. Smith and Croom (1993, 2000) say that teacher belief systems and choosing developmentally appropriate classroom practices are often teacher constructed which may or may not be suited to promoting oracy among their students. Mullen (1999) examined the relationship between educational background and the philosophical orientation of early childhood educators who worked as caregivers and teachers of preschoolers, ages 3 to 6 years old in a Midwestern state. He found a positive correlation between the level of education and teacher beliefs related to child-initiated learning.

Kontos (1999) says preschool educators adopted the role of stage manager most of the time. The sample of Kontos’ (1999) investigation was small but showed that

preschool teachers were playmates (not play enhancers) and made more statements than asked questions.

The early childhood error is committed when early child educators prepare an appropriate, stimulating environment for young children but then stand back and fail to follow up with guidance, “scaffolding,” or supportive, responsive interactions with the children as they play (p. 364).

There is conflicting data on teachers’ involvement in children’s activities. One camp reveals the relative infrequency of adult involvement (Farran, Silveri, & Culp, 1991; File & Kontos, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog, & Kontos, 1998). They claim that teachers craft the activities but are really not directly involved and the other camp suggests that because the educator is directing the activity, that demonstrates involvement (Lazer et al, 1993).

Little research has been done on teachers’ knowledge of early literacy. The empirical literature suggests that many early childhood teachers do not perceive oral language and literacy as important as other areas, like social/emotional development (Kowalski et al., 2001).

Weigel (2007) says that there are external and internal assets from parents and caregivers that support a young child’s language development. Teacher beliefs about their role promoting literacy influence that early language development.

Teacher Beliefs About Their Role Promoting Literacy That Influence Early Language Development

Using data collected from an early childhood longitudinal study by Palardy and Rumberger (2008), teacher qualifications, attitudes and instructional practices for student learning were investigated. The authors reported tension in the research community

between whether the background of a teacher or the teaching had an impact on student learning (Palardy and Rumberger, 2008). It measured teacher's attitudes about their own ability to teach and the abilities of their students to understand what has been taught. Ultimately, their conclusions strongly suggest teacher effectiveness is a powerful determinant of student success in reading.

Summary of Chapter 2

The research of McEwan (2002) and Wilcox (2000) among others (Ard & Beverly, 2004; Hart & Risley, 2003; Weigel, 2007) suggests that oral language (oracy) development is a readiness factor for later reading, writing and listening competencies. Intentional strategies to promote oral language/oracy can narrow the reading achievement gap between students in racially, linguistically and economically discrete neighborhoods and their peers from more diverse environments.

McEwan (2002) says that preschool educators promote oral competencies (oracy) through activities that include sharing books, teaching the rules of conversation, teaching words and phrases, teaching children how to rephrase and summarize. Wilcox (2000) fleshes out McEwan's ideas by offering six strategies for preschool educators to promote oral language: (a) encourage complex verbal reasoning; (b) increase use of decontextualized language; (c) develop personal narrative skills; (d) facilitate interaction among children; (e) teach new vocabulary, words and/or concepts and (f) support emerging 2nd language skills. Second language acquisition and language development can complicate oracy development. Studies by researchers Tabor and Snow (2002)

Slavin and Cheung (2004) support the compelling argument for preschool educators to intentionally use interactional strategies for oral language development

McEwan (2002) and Wilcox (2000) offer similar strategies that support oral language development among preschool children. All of those strategies are dependent on the actions of the adult. These researchers offer a framework or lens by which to “see” how the development of oral language might be described. The role of preschool educators is essential to support oracy and/or ANY oral language development, including 2nd language learners.

Finally, the research in the area of preschool educators’ knowledge and attitudes regarding literacy instruction, particularly oral language development, has been limited (Kowalski, Prett-Franteczek, & Johnson, 2002; Spodek & Saracho, 2002; Weigel, 2007). Palardy and Rumberger (2008) and Weigel (2007) connect these factors to a preschool educator’s self-perception of their effectiveness, strengthening the argument that their role in promoting oracy can strongly influence a student’s literacy success in school.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Oral language/oracy development is the foundation for literacy in school (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). The review of existing literature supports the idea that adults' interactional activities influence oracy and language development in children (McEwan, 2002; Dickenson & Tabors, 2001; Wilcox, et al., 2000; Michaels, 1981). Many preschool educators, however, do not perceive oral language development as critical as social/emotional development (Kowalski, 2001). This perception about developing oral competencies (oracy) among preschool students may contribute to deepening achievement gaps particularly for students living in racially, linguistically and economically discrete neighborhoods. As stated earlier, strong literacy abilities are dependent on vocabulary, phonics, grammar, language comprehension are built on exposure and practice. This study is germane in examining and potentially identifying not only the perceptions but also the behaviors of preschool educators in teaching oracy and language development.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate through a self-reported survey and the use of an observational protocol what preschool educators perceive they do to promote oracy, use oracy-related strategies and prompt second language acquisition (specifically English as a second language). By using two methods of data collection, the researcher

will determine what patterns emerge between the self-reported perceptions and ‘actual’ classroom practice. Current research suggests that teachers’ personal teaching beliefs and philosophies are connected to their actual classroom decisions around how children learn language (Maxwell et al, 2001; McMullen, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Smith, 1993). This study is intended to provide helpful information to understand oracy development behaviors of preschool educators that may lead to the training and the assessment strategies of preschool educators strategies to promoting oracy among preschoolers.

Research Questions for the Study

1. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students?
2. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to their role in facilitating second language acquisition?
3. What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students?

Instrumentation

The two instruments that will be employed for data collection in this research study are (a) a self-administered survey and (b) an observational protocol. The survey is an adapted checklist (Wilcox et al., 2000) for preschool educators to report how they are teaching oracy or oral language development in their preschool classrooms. This

researcher organized the survey items and the observational protocol for data collection based on concepts developed by Wilcox and colleagues (2000).

Research Design

This is a mixed methods design in which the researcher will analyze survey responses and conduct an observational protocol to describe preschool educators' perceptions and behaviors in developing oracy.

The quantitative survey of 31 items provides an opportunity to gather data from preschool educators to express what they perceive their roles to be and what they do to promote oracy among their students. The initial data analysis of the survey items is designed to illuminate the core concepts of teacher behaviors in developing oracy for preschool students. This research offers an opportunity to articulate what preschool educators view as central to oracy development among preschool students. The quantitative instrument employs the use of a Likert Scale with responses (1 to 5) in which the participants indicate their level of agreement (or disagreement) with the various survey statements: (5) *Always* – This statement reflects my classroom practices on a daily basis in the promotion of oral language activities; (4) *Very Often* – This statement reflects classroom practice several times a week in promoting oral language activities; (3) *Sometimes* – This statement reflects some days when my classroom practice promotes oral language activities; (2) – *Occasionally* – My classroom practice rarely reflects this practice; and (1) *Never* – My classroom practice does not reflect this practice. There is a category marked DNA (Does Not Apply) for those statements that do not reflect the participant's perception and/or practice with English Language Learners at their site. The

analysis of the survey items is primarily designed to ascertain if the statements drawn from Wilcox's (2000) work can be used to measure the core concepts of oracy teaching and language development. The quantitative aspect of the study is intended to investigate the self-reported beliefs about how oracy is encouraged by preschool educators in publicly funded preschool programs in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In addition to the quantitative data collection, the researcher will compare the results to classroom observations (qualitative data collection), which will allow a more in-depth exploration of several participants to understand how classroom practice compares to the self-reported data. The qualitative observations will allow the researcher to confirm the subsample of respondents' behaviors in developing oral competencies, promoting English as a second language and using instructional strategies. The qualitative observational protocol will be used with ten preschool educators chosen at random among the survey participants to study their behaviors based on nine survey statements (three statements representing each of the research questions will be analyzed). The surveys rely on what people say they do, but the observation provides an opportunity to glean what they actually do in the classroom. The observational protocol is designed to discuss the paradoxes in the classroom. The observation protocol (see marked survey items in the Addendum to this Chapter) will be used to observe classroom during circle time, student lunchtime, and free play. Three observations at different times of the same day will be used to address the research questions. The observation protocol/observation checklist was chosen by the researcher to correspond with more 'observable' descriptors of the phenomena for each research question.

The comparison of the quantitative results to the qualitative observations provides a deeper discussion of how the themes of the hypotheses are manifested among the preschool educators. Simply, the quantitative data will be a descriptive analysis to measure the internal consistency (reliability) of the survey concepts for the sample of respondents.

In addition to the primary data collection methods, demographic information will be collected to describe the participants and used to summarize the sample set. The criteria used to determine a disadvantaged neighborhood will be those preschool programs receiving Head Start funding.

Lists of publicly funded programs are generally found in local health centers in the city. A list of those publicly funded schools is attached (Appendix IV). This study will employ a convenience sample of preschool programs that are NOT connected with the local school district. These preschool programs would be in neighborhoods and will generally resemble storefront establishments catering to students whose families likely are experiencing economic, linguistic and racial challenges.

Sample, Participants, and Setting

The participants are preschool educators who work in publicly funded programs in a large urban midwestern city (population over 2,800,000 inhabitants). The number of participants will be 50 preschool educators who may be: (a) teachers with state certifications, (b) teacher assistants (with some college courses in early childhood) or a high school diploma, and (c) teacher assistants with some early childhood training or bachelor of art/science degrees and/or an associates degrees from a community college.

Table 8

Quantitative and Qualitative Methods and Data to Be Collected

Research methods	Data collection
Quantitative – 31 item survey instrument; categorized by original author (Wilcox et al, 2000) with approximately 10 items per category.	Likert-scale responses to each item
Qualitative – 9 observational items generated from the quantitative survey that are potentially observable; approximately 3 items per category	A tally and field notes describing preschool educator’s use of various techniques to promote oracy during key times (circle, free play and lunch) in preschool students’ day

Each participating preschool educator will be asked to: identify their role (teacher, teacher –assistant, lead teacher); educational background; the number of courses in early childhood education completed, professional workshops, seminars or sessions on literature and language during the last year, number of years working with preschool students, predominant language spoken by the students at the present time, age groups of students they are working with at the preschool, other language spoken in the students’ homes, identification of the chief funding sources for their preschool.

Each survey will be coded using a combination of four numbers and letters in order to protect the identity of each participant. Only the researcher will know the coding scheme for the surveys. All surveys and related materials will be kept in a locked cabinet belonging to the researcher. Participants willing to be observed will be contacted to establish a convenient time to get consents for the observation. The researcher will schedule two possible meeting dates for each observation using the observation protocol below, after receiving consents, from participant and site director. The observations will

be coded the same as the survey in order to match the observational data with the survey data.

Pending IRB approvals, a participation observation consent form and a copy of the survey will be placed in the preschool educators' school mailboxes. The forms will be placed in potential participant's mailboxes because the researcher would not know the email addresses. Attached in Appendix I are the instructions for submitting their participant observation consent and surveys to the researcher. Participant surveys will be limited to those preschool educators who are working with 3 to 5-year-old students. Participants will be asked if they are willing to be observed during circle time, student lunchtime, and free play. If they are willing to be observed, they will be asked for their name, phone number, site address, and director's name. Participants will complete and return the consent forms separately. The survey will be returned in a large self-addressed envelope if they indicate a willingness to participate. Each consent form will be coded to obfuscate the name and location of the participant willing to be observed. The coding schema will be known only the researcher who will keep that information in a locked cabinet in a secure location. The researcher will assure each participant on the day of the observation that they can choose not to participate at any time and there will no consequences if they choose not to participate.

Data Analysis

The mixed research design will examine preschool educator behaviors, recognizing this may not offer “ a broad enough perspective to inform decisions about change” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, p. 176). However, this study does offer insights to

preschool educators' perceptions and practices of the development of oral language competencies.

Bias or distortion in interpreting the data from the researcher is often evident if there are similar ethnic, experience and/or racial characteristics. The researcher will use a second person to observe classroom practice. That person will be described as an 'expert' teacher selected from available retired early childhood teachers who are members of the Chicago Council of Exceptional Children (over 400 members). The researcher is a member of the Chicago Council of Exceptional Children who can choose one or two if necessary, from among 25 retired early childhood teachers. Their notes will be compared to provide legitimacy of results.

Although, the researcher will ask each participant to be as honest as they in their responses to the survey items, there may be some response bias as the survey results may not accurately portray the participants' perceptions. At least 10 willing participants will be asked to take a survey again where the questions are out of order, to offer some reliability measure. Those 'reordered' survey items will be administered again to compare answers for changes from one week to the next. Those results will be included in the data discussion to support the reliability of the survey instrument.

There are three themes that correspond to each of the research questions:

1. Preschool Educators' perception/practices of their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students.
2. Preschool Educators' perceptions/practices of their role in facilitating language acquisition for English Language Learners.

3. Preschool Educators' perceptions/practices of instructional strategies that facilitate interaction among their students.

The quantitative data analysis will be a factor analysis to measure the internal consistency or reliability of the survey responses from the sample of participants. For the quantitative data collection report, the median, mode and relative frequency of responses who answered the mode response will be reported for each survey statement. In addition, Cronbach's alphas will be reported indicating how well the body of statements measures the three key concepts as well as how the alphas would change if a statement was deleted in measuring each concept. The Cronbach's alpha estimates how closely related a set of items (survey statements) group together as evidence that the items measure an underlying concept/construct. While a high alpha does not imply that the concepts are unidimensional, it does provide evidence that the scale (the group of survey items) in question is unidimensional. The rationale for using this data design is to establish if the three hypothesized concepts can be articulated in the current instrument or if alterations need to be made.

The analysis of the qualitative data collection will include a summation of the observed findings for the nine corresponding items as they relate to the overall findings of those items in the self-administered survey. Tally marks will be used to record how often interactions are observed. The researcher will describe whether or not the observational findings on the whole reflect the self-reported data results. Anecdotal notes and findings may also be reported in the final analysis but in such a manner as not to identify any specific participant in the study.

Table 9

Descriptive Analyses for the Summary of Responses for Each Survey Item

Statement #	# of responses (N)	Median	Mode (most frequent # of responses)	Frequency and percentages of response in each category	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha if Item is deleted
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The data of the nine questions from the survey to the nine observed interactions listed on the observational protocol will be compared. A match agreement will be made if the survey data for an item is between 3-5 and there are at least a cumulative tally for the observed interaction is over 4 marks. Outliers will be also reported. See Table 10.

Table 10

Comparison Between Survey Items and Observational Protocol on Selected Items

Item	Mode of survey item	Cumulative tally from observations from circle, free play, lunch	Match
10. I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers.	3.5	4	Yes
29. I give the child time to talk.	1.2	8	No
18. I give examples of words (green like the grass”).	4.0	1	No

Ethical Considerations

McNamara (1994) identifies five ethical concerns to be considered when conducting survey research. These guidelines deal with voluntary participation, no harm to respondents, anonymity and confidentiality, identifying purpose and sponsor, and analysis and reporting. Each of these guidelines will be dealt with individually.

Researchers need to ensure that the participation is completely voluntary. The researcher will visit the various sites and request participation. By holding a brief informational meeting if preschool director permits, the researcher will tell potential

participants about the study. The researcher will put the survey and consent forms in the mailboxes and then give participants at least a week to complete. If a survey participant agrees to be observed, the researcher will contact the preschool director and/or owner to discuss the study and then arrange for a time to conduct the observation. No actual work time will be affected because the survey can be done at home, on the lunchtime or at a convenient time for the preschool educator.

McNamara's (1994) second ethical concern is to avoid possible harm to the respondents, including embarrassment or feeling uncomfortable about the survey statements. The survey does not include any sensitive statement that could cause embarrassment or uncomfortable feelings or harm. The survey items are not uncomfortable and there is strict confidentiality in report guidelines.

The third ethical guideline that McNamara (1994) recommends is to protect of each participant's (respondent's) identity. Each survey is anonymous and coded by the researcher who will keep information under lock and key. To cover this guideline, each participant gets the promise from the researcher not to disclose the individual's identity. Participant identification is kept confidential and would only be acknowledged if he or she agrees to an observation. Those observations will also be confidential.

McNamara's (1994) fourth guideline is to let all prospective participants know the purpose of the study, survey, and observational protocol and its sponsors. The purpose of the study, survey and observational protocol are provided in the cover letter and consent form.

The fifth ethical guideline described by McNamara (1994), is to accurately report both the methods and the results of the survey and observational protocol to professional colleagues in the educational community. The researcher assumes the responsibility to report problems and weaknesses experienced as well as the positive results of the study.

Limitations

Measurement Limitations

One of the major measurement limitations is the respondents' tendency to give socially desirable answers to any self-reported survey (Hawthorne Effect). However, in this study, the researcher is conducting direct observation of an anonymous subsample to support or refute information given about each survey statement. The researcher will draw conclusions about the congruency of the self-reported data with the observational data.

Sampling Limitations

The sample is a convenience sample and is small, thereby not making it generalizable to larger preschool educator population. The resulting information, however, may will extend the dialogue on measuring oracy development.

Response Bias

The researcher will be the only person to see the results and participant privacy will be guarded. There will be a plea to each participant when survey is handed to them to be honest with their responses.

Procedural Limitations

In direct observation (collecting the information using the observational protocol), respondents know they are being watched and may be reacting specifically to the observer. Just as in the self-reported data, this could be seen as participant behaving in socially desirable way. However, the respondents for this subset of observations will not know specifically the observational protocol. Below in Table 3.4 is a schedule of activities for the research design.

Table 11

Schedule of Activities for the Research Design

Expected time	Activity	Expected results
4 weeks	1. Identify and collect permissions from site administrators and potential participants from at least 25-50 Headstart sites; some sites must have English Language Learners (see Appendix)	50 preschool educators who teach 3-5 year old students
4-6 weeks	2. Administer and collect quantitative instrument to identified participants and readminister selected items to certain persons to reduce respondent bias	Expect 50 responses
2-3 weeks	3. Randomly select participants who agreed to be observed and observe them	Expect 10 participants
3 weeks	4. Input survey data results into SPSS and analyze results (Cronbach's alpha)	Information about the internal consistency of the survey
1 week	5. Input and analyze the observational data – Nvivo, perhaps	Confirmation of the use of techniques
4 weeks	Summarize results for Chapter Four	Explanations of survey results

Note. The time frame of some of these activities may overlap.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students?

Corresponding Survey Statements

1. I provide opportunities to talk about object/event beyond here and now.
2. I participate in and encourage pretend play.
3. I wait for children to request materials or turns.
4. I model language by describing objects and actions during play.
5. I respond positively to children when they want to show me something.
6. I repeat the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences.
7. *I make comments to continue conversations.
8. Observable interaction: Student will ask a question; Preschool educator will ask more questions and/or continue the dialogue.
- *8. I ask open-ended questions.

Observable interaction: Preschool educator will ask open-ended questions to engage in extended student talk.

9. I provide positive feedback when children use new language skills.
27. I give the child enough time to respond.
28. My speech and instructions are provided slowly and clearly.
- *29. I give the child time to talk.

Observable interaction: Preschool educator waits at least 5 second after the preschool educator's open-ended questions during story time - like: What would you like to do next? Or why do you think the boy in the story is wet?

31. I create problems in my environment for child to solve

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to their role in facilitating second language acquisition?

21. I slow my rate of speech, when speaking to second-language learners.

22. I use gestures with English.

23. I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood.

*24. I add translations in the child's non-English utterance to English. Observable interaction: Student will use words or phrases in home language; educator will translate to English.

*25. I encourage the child to use English.

Observable interaction: Preschool educator will encourage English when student speaks in home language.

*26. I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English.

Observable interaction: Educator will compliment the child's attempts to "use English" words.

Research Question 3

What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable preschool programs with regard to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction?

*10. I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers.

Observable interaction: Preschool educator encourages students who are playing alone to play with other children or share their toy or game or mediate conflicts by encouraging students to interact with their peers.

11. I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing.

12. I comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction.

*13. I select (and structure) activities that require peer interactions.

Observable interaction: Preschool educator will direct activities where students work in groups or teams

14. I comment on feelings/emotions of myself and others.

15. I use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment.

16. I use words to express important concepts.

17. I define words verbally ("joyful means feeling happy").

*18. I give examples of words (green like the grass"). Observable interaction: Preschool educator will use words like green for grass or red like a fire engine or like a balloon up, like the sky is up.

19. I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity.

20. I demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props.

30. I let the child direct the activity/interaction as much as possible.

Summary

Participants for this study include at least 50 preschool educators who will be asked to respond to a 31-item survey to gather data around how they perceive and how they promote oracy among their students. Of the educators, at least ten who agree will be observed to compare with the survey data. This mixed methods design analysis is to describe a sample of preschool educators' perceptions (working in racially, linguistically and ethnically identifiable neighborhoods) for developing and/or promoting oracy among their students.

A Likert Scale response for each of the statements that was categorized to measure the core concepts will be analyzed. Likert Scales are commonly used to measure attitudes providing a range of responses. The researcher will study the internal consistency of a cross-sectional survey geared to measure core concepts of oracy. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the researcher will see if the survey items actually measure that core concept.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Language and its usage is essential to the human condition. It has been estimated that nearly one half of all kindergarteners do not have the “skills necessary for lifelong learning” (Landry, 2005). Among the many skills early learners need and don’t have- are oral language skills (oracy). The researcher examined what preschool educators (in racially, linguistically, and economically discrete neighborhoods) perceived and practiced as their teaching behaviors that lead to their students’ oral competency against the backdrop of Wilson’s (2000) and McEwan’s (2002) indicators of oral language development. This chapter contains demographic information of the participants in this study, the results of their self-reported survey data, and the observational data given the study’s three proposed research questions.

Description of the Participants

This study was conducted in a large mid-western city in the United States. According to the 2010 census, there are nearly three million inhabitants (2,695,598). Of these 32.9% classified themselves as African-American, 31.7% as White American, 28.9% as Hispanic, 5.5% as Asian America, and 0.5% as Native American (American Indian). Fifty-one percent of the residents are female and 32.2% have at least a college bachelor’s degree or higher. The average income for the city residents was a little over

Table 12

Description of the Communities

Comm. code	Community poverty level (%)	% of female-headed households	% of college educated	Median income	Racial make-up of the communities' residential population (%)				
					White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
A	34.4	27.4	6.0	\$25,647	13.1	35.3	50.2	0.28	1.18
B	38.7	43.6	7.7	\$31,601	1.13	97.2	0.99	0.12	0.57
C	36.5	42.4	12.4	27,916	0.38	97.8	0.71	0.07	1.02
D	39.4	29.8	6.1	\$27,916	13.1	35.3	50.2	0.28	1.18
E	30.6	20.0	9.3	\$33,000	10.15	1.76	86.9	0.27	0.92
F	21.2	27.0	14.0	\$42,854	0.52	97.8	0.69	0.06	0.92
G	30.7	18.7	4.7	\$32,320	3.52	12.9	83.00	1.00	0.41
H	35.0	43.8	18.2	\$30,948	1.14	95.5	1.03	0.14	1.18
I	26.3	27.4	10.3	\$44,763	0.89	93.5	4.64	0.04	0.90

forty-six thousand dollars annual; and 20.9% households were just below the national poverty level. Nearly 7% (6.9%) of the city's residents are under the age of five.

There were nine area neighborhoods where teachers were invited to participate. Table 4.12 provides a description of the neighborhoods. All nine neighborhoods had an average income that was lower than the city average income (\$46,350), ranging from as little as \$25,647 annually to \$44,763 annually. With the exception of two area neighborhoods, all had poverty levels higher than the city average (between 30.6% and 39.4%). As reported earlier the Midwestern city where the research took place had an estimated 19% of female headed households. Of the nine neighborhoods within the city examined for this study all but two had notably higher estimates of female-headed households (between 27% and 44%). The estimated percentages of college educated people ranged from 4.7% to 14%. Of the nine neighborhoods five had over 90% of their population classified as African American, two which had over 80% of their population classified as Hispanic America, and two communities which had over 50% classified as Hispanic America and 35% classified as African American.

Fifty preschool educators participated from nine schools. Ten of the surveyed respondents were further observed to confirm their practices in promoting oracy among their young learners. Thirty-three (70%) of those surveyed were classified as either head-teacher or teachers and fourteen (30%) were assistant teachers. The number of years of teaching experience of the participants ranged from two to twenty-five years, with the average number of years being 9.45 years. The average number of professional workshops/seminars on literature and language learning attended in the last year was six

(with a range from one to thirty). The average number of college courses in early childhood development the respondents reported having was eighteen (with a range from three to sixty-four). One half of those surveyed had an Associate's degree or some college courses, eighteen (36%) reported having a Bachelors degree, and seven (14%) reported having a Masters degree or more. It should be noted that twenty (40%) of those surveyed considered themselves to be bilingual. Only seven study participants of the fifty reported having all bilingual students in their classrooms. Twenty six educators had some students who spoke only one language other than English and others who were learning English. Of the fifty teachers surveyed, three had some missing descriptive data. However, they were included where applicable in the other parts of the study analysis.

Funding for particular classrooms for this study have been provided through the state's early childhood block grant, consequently certain criteria must be met in order to establish and maintain a school, center or program for at-risk preschool students (NIEER [National Institute Early Education Research – State of Preschool], 2011). The state's Early Childhood Block Grant coordinates services for at-risk infants and toddlers. For centers with 20 students or more of preschool ELL (English Language Learners) students, instruction will be provided in the home language. For centers with fewer than 19 preschool ELL students, a locally determined transitional program of instruction will be provided. Headstart, State Pre-Kindergarten, and Pre School for All programs are eligible to apply for the block grant. The maximum 20 - student class size are mandated. The ratio of educator to student is 10 students to one educator. One educator must be state certified, the other educator must have some early childhood courses and

Table 13

Description of Study Participants

Descriptor	<i>n</i> (%)
Number of participants	50 (100)
Current teaching title	
Head teacher/ teacher	33 (70)
Teaching assistant	14 (30)
Average number of years teaching preschoolers	(9.45)
Average number of courses (in the last year) on literacy learning	(6)
Average number of college courses in early childhood learning	(18)
Educational degrees of participants	
Associates degree or less	25 (50)
Bachelors degree	18 (36)
Masters degree or more	7 (14)
Teachers who reported being bilingual	20 (40)
Teachers who reported having bilingual students	27 (54)
Age of students	
3 years only	1 (2)
3-4 year olds	20 (40)
3-5 year olds	29 (58)
Number of institutions	9

professional development. All programs in this study fall under the aegis of block grant funding requirements.

Table 4.14 provides information of the racial makeup of the study participant educators and students, along with student-educator ratios. The funding sources for both Head Start and State Pre-K are a combination of federal and state agencies. A center-based preschool setting is a state-approved child development center for students aged 3-5 years.

Table 14

Educator Participants' Classrooms: Racial Make Up of Students, Teacher-Pupil Ratio, and Racial Make Up of Teachers

School	Educator race	Educator–student ratio	Student racial descriptors	Funding source	Program
A	African-American and Latina	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 40% Latino = 60% White = 0%	State pre K	Center-based
B	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 89% Latino = 11% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
C	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 95% Latino = 5% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
D	African-American and Latina	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 70% Latino = 30% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
E	Latina	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 5% Latino = 90% White = 5%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
F	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 90% Latino = 10% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
G	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 90% Latino = 5% White = 5%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
H	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 95% Latino = 5% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based
I	African American	2:20	Afr. Amer. = 96% Latino = 4% White = 0%	Headstart & state pre K	Center-based

This study collected two types of data from the surveyed respondents. First, each of the fifty respondents was given a 31-statement item survey to evaluate their perceptions about their role in developing oracy among their preschool learners. In addition, a total of ten of the surveyed teachers were observed to determine if they

contributed to the development of oracy, based on nine items extracted from the survey. A tally of the total number of observed preschool educators was collected to determine if as a group they promoted oracy. Thus, a minimum of four episodes would have to be observed of the educator doing the task, for there to be some agreement between self-reported teaching oracy and observed teaching oracy. An episode would be described as the preschool educator doing the descriptor at least four times. For example: S18 – I give examples of words (“green like the grass” is an ‘episode’ that would have to be observed at least four times for the protocol item to be counted as observed.

A 31-item survey was created with preexisting oracy descriptors (Wilcox, et al., 2000 and McEwan, 2002) to measure and understand the characteristics of the decisions for the grouping of items under each of the hypotheses. For each of the three hypotheses, the Cronbach’s Alpha is reported to establish the reliability of the survey in measuring perceptions of oracy development among educators from racially, linguistically, and economically discrete neighborhoods. This information was coupled with the self-reported data and observational data collected for each hypothesis to support reliability and validity concepts. Cronbach’s alpha is an index of reliability associated with the variation accounted for by the true score of the “underlying construct.” Construct is the hypothetical variable that is being measured (Hatcher, 1994).

Using an adapted checklist (of 31 statements) from Wilcox and colleagues (2000) study, participants were asked to report on a Likert scale what they were doing to promote oracy (oral language development) in their preschool classrooms. For each of the research questions, the researcher reported the overall Cronbach’s Alpha for the

grouping of statements. The researcher grouped statements to match each hypothesis. Cronbach's Alpha was used to support whether the statements fit together. The measure is an indication of the reliability of items to determine the study participants' perception relative to promoting oracy among their students. The researcher also reported the inter-item relation and what the overall Cronbach's Alpha would have been if a survey item was removed from the measurement. Biggs and Cheek (1986) have suggested that the mean of the inter-item correlations for the Cronbach's Alpha measurement provides information about whether that measurement is unidimensional or not. Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of a group of items by measuring the homogeneity of the group of items – it is an indication of well the different items complement each other in their measurement of different aspects of the same variable or quality.” (Litwin, 2003, p. 22). The internal consistency of a scale can be examined with item-to-scale correlations and inter-correlations of items within a scale (DeVellis, 2003). If a group of items measures a single latent construct, we should assume that each item alone correlates with the scale overall and that items within such a scale are positively correlated.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students? The perceptions and practices of preschool educators with regards to their role in developing oral

competencies or oracy were examined. There were thirteen survey statements used to examine the respondents' perceptions regarding their roles in general development oracy.

Given the findings (See Table 4.15), an overall scale Cronbach's Alpha of 0.884 was calculated. This is an indication that the item was reliable in measuring the study participants' perceptions with regards to their roles in developing oracy. Some items were less reliable in measuring participants' perceptions of developing oracy and these included: 1) (S3)" I wait for children to request materials or turns" (correlation= 0.457, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted = 0.881); and 2) (S31) 'Create problems in my environment for a child to solve' (correlation=0.427, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.883). Items that were more critical to the measurement of participants' perceptions of developing oracy were: (S7) "I make comments to continue conversations" (correlation=0.690, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.870); 2) (S8) "I ask open-ended questions" (correlation=0.648, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.872); 3) (S27) "I give the child enough time to respond "(correlation=0.733, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.867); 4) (S28) "My speech and instruction are provided slowly and clearly"(correlation=0.803, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.863); and 5) (S29) "I give the child time to talk"(correlation=0.626, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.873).

The inter-item correlation is used to gauge how well each item measures the same construct as the remaining items. Another way of thinking about this is that inter-item correlations can help identify "bad" questions, in the sense that the correlation will tend to be noticeably lower than the remainder and removal of that question will increase

alpha. In this case the correlations are all >0.425 and removal of any question has a small impact on the value of alpha; all remain >0.860 , a very good indicator of consistency.

Of all of the responses, only three responses were not in the categories of “sometimes,” “very often,” or “always” with regards to the development of oracy among young learners. All of the survey items had an average of four (“very often”) or higher from the Likert scale used in the survey. The statement that had the overall lowest averages was: 1) (S1) “I provide opportunities to talk about objective/event beyond here and now,” in part because it had a significant number of participants who responded as “sometimes” doing the stated task. The second statement with the lowest average was (S3) “I wait for children to request materials or turns” in part because of the significant number of participants who responded “sometimes” doing the stated task but also because at least one participant said that she “never” did the stated task. Another participant said that she “never” created problems in the environment for children to solve. So, whereas 15 to 27 respondents reported being “very often” likely to do these tasks and between 11 and 27 reported “always” doing these tasks in developing oracy, there were as many as 15 [in the case of (S1) “I provide opportunities to talk about objective /event beyond here and now”] and as few as four [in the case of (S7) “I make comments to continue conversations”] who indicated that they did these tasks with less frequency as the majority of respondents.

Classroom Observations

Observations were conducted with ten of the surveyed respondents to determine if in fact they engaged (as they perceived themselves to be) in the development of oracy

Table 15

The Reliability of the Scale to Measure the Development of Oracy

Survey statements	Number of respondents	Inter-item correlation	The Cronbach's alpha if the item was deleted from the measurement
S1-I provide opportunities to talk about objective/event beyond here and now	49	0.478	0.881
S2-I participate and encourage play	49	0.465	0.881
S3-I wait for children to request materials or turns	49	0.457	0.881
S4- I model language by describing objects and actions during play	49	0.524	0.879
S5-I respond positively to children when they want to show me something	49	0.560	0.876
S6- I repeat the child's idea/utterances	49	0.529	0.876
S7-I make comments to continue conversations	49	0.690	0.870
S8-I ask open-ended questions	49	0.648	0.872
S9 – I provide positive feedback when children use new language skills	49	0.504	0.880
S27- I give the child enough time to respond	49	0.733	0.867
S28-My speech and instruction are provided slowly and clearly	49	0.803	0.863
S29- I give the child time to talk	49	0.626	0.873
S31- Create problems in my environment for a child to solve	49	0.427	0.883

Table 16

Distribution of Responses Regarding the Perceptions Developing Oracy

Survey question	Number of respondents	Mean of responses	Modal response	Distribution of responses if the item was deleted from the measurement				
				Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Very often	Always
S1-I provide opportunities to talk about objective/event beyond here and now	48	4.00	4	0	1 (2%)	14 (29%)	20 (41%)	14 (29%)
S2-I participate and encourage play	50	4.35	5	0	0	7 (14%)	20 (40%)	23 (46%)
S3-I wait for children to request materials or turns	42	4.14	4	1 (2%)	0	7 (15%)	27 (59%)	11 (24%)
S4- I model language by describing objects and actions during play	50	4.39	5	0	0	8 (16%)	15 (30%)	27 (54%)
S5-I respond positively to children when they want to show me something	50	4.37	5	0	0	6 (12%)	20 (40%)	24 (48%)
S6- I repeat the child's	50	4.22	4	0	0	9	22	19

Survey question	Number of respondents	Mean of responses	Modal response	Distribution of responses if the item was deleted from the measurement				
				Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Very often	Always
idea/utterances						(18%)	(44%)	(38%)
S7-I make comments to continue conversations	50	4.39	4	0	0	4 (8%)	23 (46%)	23 (46%)
S8-I ask open-ended questions	48	4.40	5	0	0	5 (10%)	19 (39%)	25 (51%)
S9 – I provide positive feedback when children use new language skills	50	4.33	5	0	0	9 (18%)	15 (30%)	26 (52%)
S27- I give the child enough time to respond	48	4.24	4	0	0	8 (16%)	21 (43%)	20 (41%)
S28-My speech and instruction are provided slowly and clearly	47	4.28	4	0	0	7 (15%)	21 (44%)	20 (42%)
S29- I give the child time to talk	48	4.37	5	0	0	6 (12%)	19 (39%)	24 (49%)
S31- Create problems in my environment for a child to solve	48	4.20	4	1 (2%)	0	7 (14%)	24 (49%)	17 (35%)

Table 17

Comparison Between Survey Items and Observed Protocol on Selected Items Relative to the Development of Oracy

Survey Question	Group average number of times observed doing the task	Number of teachers observed do the task greater than the group average	Number of teacher observed do the task less than the group observed average	Mode of survey item	Match
S7-I make comments to continue conversations	4.17	7	3	4.0	Yes
S8-I ask open-ended questions	4.27	7	3	5.0	Yes
S29- I give the child time to talk	4.20	7	3	5.0	Yes

(see Table 4.17). Using three statement items from the survey: 1) (S7) “I make comments to continue conversations”; 2) (S8) “I ask open-ended questions”; 3) (Q29) “I give the child time to talk,” the researcher observed that the seven of the ten teachers did these tasks during the specified periods of the educational day (reading circle, free time, and lunch).

S7: I Make Comments to Continue the Conversation

Three participants used hand gestures to encourage students to communicate more in the classroom. One participant told students “please tell me more” as a cue to get each of her students to continue conversations. At least two participants asked questions as a way of getting students to continue talking. One participant gave students examples of

colored objects as a way of encouraging students to describe similarly colored things in their environments.

Students in one class were asked to tell stories about their experiences “at the park” and students were encouraged to actively respond to their book during story time (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*). Students were actively responding to the story because the classroom dramatic play area reflected the story. A bilingual participant questioned her students in English and Spanish and gave students positive feedback with praise and constructive comments.

Three study participants did not employ techniques to encourage students to continue conversations. One participant would change conversation topics when students did not respond to her questions. Another participant focused her conversation with one student and did not involve the other students. When it was time to get ready for lunch, another participant refused to speak with her students.

S8: I Ask Open-Ended Questions

Five participants asked questions about the students’ life experiences – what they had for dinner the night before; what they ate for breakfast; what they (the students) like during the last field trip to the zoo; what were their favorite classroom activities; and what activities they liked to play during “free time.” Two participants asked students to question one another. One participant gave an example of her own special talent and then asked her students to reveal their own special talent.

Two of the participants did not ask their students any questions and when students had questions, their attention was deflected and they were ignored or sent to “play” in other areas of the classroom (i.e. the dramatic play area).

S29: I Give the Child Time to Talk

Seven of the ten teachers allowed students ample time and opportunity to speak, encouraging them to slow down and having other students listen to their classmate who was speaking. One of the bilingual participants spoke to the students in English and Spanish which gave the students an opportunity to hear both languages. She waited about 30 seconds in between speaking both languages. She stated that this allows students time to process the information before they respond in class.

However, two participants appeared to feel uncomfortable with classroom silence and gave answers to their students or reacted too abruptly not allowing students to process what was happening during the conversation. Another participant dominated the classroom conversation and directed students without having much exchange with the students.

After analyzing the data of the survey responses and the observations, the researcher found in racially, economically, and linguistically identifiable neighborhoods, seven teachers had oracy perceptions that were consistent with the observed data. It was clear from the observational notes that three teachers were not as engaged as their counterparts in developing oracy among their students.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions and practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to their role in facilitating second language acquisition? For the second study question, the perceptions and practices of preschool educators in their role in facilitating second language acquisition were examined. Of the total number of study participants, twenty-seven reported having bilingual students. Of the twenty-seven, seven reported not being bilingual themselves. There were six survey statements used to examine the respondents' perceptions regarding their roles in facilitating second language acquisition.

Given the findings (See Table 4.18), it should be noted that these six statements are reliable in measuring the facilitation second language acquisition (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.865). It appears that the third statement in this scale-- (S23) "I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood"-- was the weakest measure of facilitating second language acquisition because its inter-item correlation was 0.608 and the Cronbach's Alpha if statement number twenty-one was removed would be 0.840. The two strongest reliable items of the scale measuring the facilitation of second language acquisition were: 1) (S22) "I use gestures with English" (correlation=0.710, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.834); and 2) (S24) "I add translations in the child's non English utterance to English" (correlation=0.713, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.835).

Of the twenty-six respondents who had bilingual students, twelve indicated that they were "very often" involved in promoting second language acquisition among their

young learners. Of the twenty-six respondents who had bilingual students, nine indicated that they were “always” involved in promoting second language acquisition among their young learners. Of the twenty-six respondents who had bilingual students, three indicated that they were “sometimes” involved in promoting second language acquisition among their young learners. One respondent did indicate that she “never” (S21) “slow[s] my rate of speech, when speaking to second language learners.” All of the scale items had a mode of four and an average of four or higher as the respondents either said that they very often or always completed the tasks listed in the items for this scale. The three items that had the highest average responses among all the statements: 1) (S22) “I use gestures with English”; and 2) (S24) “I add translations in the child’s non-English utterance to English”; and 3) (S25) “I encourage the child to use English.”

Twenty-seven of the total 50 respondents reported having bilingual students in their classrooms and/or being bilingual themselves. Seven of the ten observed study participants reported being bilingual and having bilingual students. These seven respondents were observed to determine if they engaged (as they perceived themselves to be promoting second language acquisition by: 1) “I use gestures with English; (2) (S24) “I add translations in the child’s non English utterance to English.”; 2) (S25) “I encourage the child to use English.”; 3) (S26) “I provide positive feedback for a child’s attempts to use English.” (See Table 4.19). The researcher observed the following.

Table 18

The Reliability of the Scale to Measure the Facilitation of Second Language Acquisition

Survey statements	Number of respondents	Inter-item correlation	The Cronbach's alpha if the item was deleted from the measurement
S21- I slow my rate of speech, when speaking to second language learners	27	0.631	0.856
S22 – I use gestures with English	27	0.719	0.834
S23- I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood	27	0.608	0.851
S24- I add translations in the child's non English utterance to English	27	0.713	0.835
S25 – I encourage the child to use English	27	0.678	0.839
S26- I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English	27	0.678	0.839

Table 19

Distribution of Responses Regarding the Perceptions of Role in Facilitating Second Language Acquisition

Survey question	Number of respondents	Mean of responses	Modal response	Distribution of responses if the item was deleted from the measurement				
				Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Very often	Always
S21- I slow my rate of speech, when speaking to second language learners	26	4.00	4	1 (4%)	0	4 (15%)	13 (50%)	8 (31%)
S22 – I use gestures with English	26	4.35	4	0	0	3 (12%)	13 (50%)	10 (38%)
S23- I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood	26	4.14	4	0	0	3 (12%)	12 (46%)	11 (42%)
S24- I add translations in the child's non English utterance to English	26	4.39	4	0	0	2 (8%)	13 (50%)	11 (42%)
S25 – I encourage the child to use English	26	4.37	4	0	0	4 (15%)	13 (50%)	9 (35%)
S26- I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English	26	4.22	4	0	0	4 (15%)	13 (50%)	9 (35%)

S22: I Use Gestures With English

Of the observed participants, five were observed using visual and verbal cues (i.e. pointing, singing) to gesture with English. All of the seven bilingual teachers used English and Spanish vocabulary to help students grasp the concepts of what objects were and their purposes. For many of the students however, some objects were unfamiliar and in several instances students seemed unsure as to what the study participants were trying to convey. This was particularly true for the second-language learners in the classrooms of the three non-bilingual teachers. It was evident that some second language learners who did not understand the instructions or non-verbal cues of their teachers, were delayed in completing some of the easiest tasks such as getting in line for lunch or gathering together for story time.

S24: I Add Translation in the Child's Non-English Utterance to English.

All seven of the bilingual teachers used both languages in their classrooms while the three non-bilingual teachers did not attempt to have their students use both languages. While the bilingual teachers used both languages, no translation of non-English utterances into English was observed among any of the participants. What was observed instead with eight of the ten participants was use of encouragement for the children to gather their thoughts and self-correct their utterances into meaningful dialog. Two participants appeared to ignore the children when they were unable to clearly communicate in English what they were trying to express. These participants often tried to refocus the children's attention to other activities without addressing the utterances (correcting or translating the utterances).

S25: I Encourage the Child to Use English

Three participants actively encouraged their students to speak English offering praise and rewards (i.e. stickers). Two other teachers told students to “try” to speak English and “not be shy” when speaking English. Five participants had the second-language learners interact with their peers to promote English language learning. Students were asked to repeat vocabulary, speak with their non-bilingual peers both in groups and one-on-one, and were encouraged to create an environment of English by getting their other bilingual classmates to only speak English even during free time. There was one participant who did not encourage her second-language learners to speak English. She visibly showed her frustration with the second language learners by frowning and seemed to dismiss opportunities to take time during lunch and circle time to encourage them to use more English.

Table 20

Comparison Between Survey Items and Observed Protocol on Selected Items Relative to the Facilitation Of Second Language Acquisition

Survey question	Group average number of times observed doing the task	Number of teachers observed do the task greater than the group observed average	Number of teacher observed do the task less than the group observed average	Mode of survey item	Match
S24- I add translations in the child's non-English utterance to English	4.17	7	3	4.0	Yes
S25 – I encourage the child to use English	4.27	7	3	4.0	Yes
S26- I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English	4.20	7	3	4.0	Yes

S26: I Provide Positive Feedback for a Child's Attempts to Use English

All seven of the bilingual preschool educators provided positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English. The bilingual teachers accepted the use of English and Spanish explanations that were meaningful. For example, if a student said something in Spanish with an English word or two in a sentence, the bilingual teacher provided a compliment. If the interaction between the preschool educator and the English Language Learner was in Spanish, the student may use English and Spanish as a response. If the response was appropriate, the preschool educator provided the positive feedback to the student. Three of the preschool educators who did not speak Spanish were offered lots of positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English.

After triangulating the data of the survey responses and the observations, the researcher found that in racially, economically, and linguistically identifiable neighborhoods, seven teachers had oracy perceptions that were consistent with their overall their abilities to facilitate second language learning. It was clear from the observational notes that three teachers who were not bilingual but who had bilingual students had some difficulty in facilitating second language acquisition.

Research Question 3

What are the perceptions and practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students? For the third research question, the researcher examined what were the perceptions and practices of preschool educators with regard to their instructional strategies in promoting student

Table 21

The Reliability of the Scale to Measure Instructional Strategies to Promote Student Interaction

Survey statements	Number of respondents	Inter-item correlation	The Cronbach's alpha if the item was deleted from the measurement
S10 – I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers	50	0.415	0.851
S11 - I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing	50	0.284	0.862
S12 - I comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction	50	0.564	0.842
S13- I select (and structure) activities that require peer interactions	50	0.655	0.834
S14 – I comment on feelings/emotions of myself and others	50	0.637	0.837
S15 – I use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment	50	0.501	0.845
S16- I use words to express important concepts	50	0.684	0.832
S17 – I define words verbally	50	0.554	0.841
S18 – I give examples of words	50	0.483	0.847
S19 – I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity	50	0.929	0.836
S20 – I demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props	50	0.569	0.840
S30 – I let the child direct the activity/interaction as much as possible	50	0.436	0.849

interaction. There were twelve survey statements used to examine the instructional strategies in promoting student interaction. All respondents provided responses for this concept.

Given the findings (See Table 4.10), it was noted that the twelve survey statements are reliable except for S11, in measuring the concept of educators using instructional strategies to promote student interactions (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.854). The second statements in this grouping – (S11) “I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting” – was the least reliable in the scale in measuring the use of instructional strategies to promote student interactions (correlation = 0.284, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.862). In fact the scale would have had a stronger Cronbach's Alpha if survey statement item S11 were dropped from the scale and therefore, is not included in the analysis. The scale is being used to measure instructional strategy. The strongest reliable item of the scale measuring the use of instructional strategies to promote student interaction was (S19) “I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity” (correlation=0.629, Cronbach's Alpha if item was deleted=0.837). Values closer to one indicate a higher internal consistency; values closer to zero indicate a lower internal consistency. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) suggest that groups of items with an alpha below .70 should be used with caution.

Of the 12 survey statement items, four statements, (S10), (S11), (S18) and (S20) had a greater variation in participants' responses. Survey statements (S13) and (S18) had the lowest average because a significant number of responses were in the “sometimes”

Table 22

Distribution of Responses Regarding the Usage of Instructional Strategies to Promote Student Interaction

Survey question	Number of respondents	Mean of responses	Modal response	Distribution of responses if the item was deleted from the measurement				
				Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Very often	Always
S10 – I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers	48	4.31	5	0	1 (2%)	6 (13%)	17 (35%)	24 (50%)
S11 - I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing	50	4.22	4	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	5 (10%)	22 (44%)	21 (42%)
S12 - I comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction	50	4.36	4	0	0	4 (8%)	24 (48%)	22 (44%)
S13- I select (and structure) activities that require peer interaction	48	4.08	4	0	0	12 (24%)	21 (43%)	16 (33%)
S14 – I comment on feelings/emotions of myself and others	50	4.16	4	0	0	7 (14%)	28 (56%)	15 (30%)

Survey question	Number of respondents	Mean of responses	Modal response	Distribution of responses if the item was deleted from the measurement				
				Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Very often	Always
S15 – I use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment	50	4.30	5	0	0	8 (16%)	19 (38%)	23 (46%)
S16- I use words to express important concepts	50	4.34	5	0	0	8 (16%)	17 (34%)	25 (50%)
S17 – I define words verbally	50	4.36	5	0	0	11 (22%)	10 (20%)	29 (58%)
S18 – I give examples of words	50	4.06	5	0	1 (2)	14 (28%)	16 (32%)	19 (38%)
S19 – I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity	49	4.15	5	0	0	12 (24%)	18 (37%)	19 (39%)
S20 – I demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props	50	4.08	4	1 (2)	0	9 (18%)	24 (48%)	16 (32%)
S30 – I let the child direct the activity/interaction as much as possible	50	4.22	4	0	0	7 (14)	25 (50)	18 (36)

Table 23

Comparison Between Survey Items and Observed Protocol on Selected Items Relative to the Usage of Instructional Strategies in Promoting Students' Interactions

Survey question	Group average number of times observed doing the task	Number of teachers observed do the task greater than the group observed average	Number of teacher observed do the task less than the group observed average	Mode of survey item	Match
S10 – I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers	4.17	7	3	5.0	Yes
S13- I select (and structure) activities that require peer education	3.63	7	3	4.0	Yes
S18 – I give examples of words	3.47	5	5	5.0	Yes

category on the Likert scale (i.e. (S13) – 12 “sometimes,” (S18) 14 “sometimes.”

Statement items (S13), (S18) and S(19) had more a more even distribution of responses.

Observations were conducted with 10 surveyed respondents to determine if they used (as they perceived themselves to be) instructional strategies to promote students’

interactions. Three statement items from the survey were identified for classroom

observations. The three items were: 1) (S10) “I direct children to communicate and

interact with their peers”; 2) (S13) “I select (and structure) activities that require peer

education”; 3) (S18) “I give examples of words, I observed that none of the respondents

directed children to interact with their peers. ” Four of the respondents selected activities

that required peer education.

S10: I Direct Children to Communicate and Interact With Their Peers

As with the activities related to facilitating second-language learning, the seven bilingual participants often encouraged overall peer communication interactions with all of their students. One participant structured students to interact in groups of four. Two others had students interact during other classroom activities such as story time or during a lesson discussing their experiences with food. One participant was successful in having the students interact with one another to resolve conflicts around issues of sharing classroom materials (i.e. toys and books).

In the observations of three participants, it was noted that educators did not actively encourage peer communications and interactions. In one incident where three students were arguing over a toy, instead of encouraging the students to interact and

resolve the situation, one of the non-bilingual participants took the toy away from all three of the children, placing it high on a shelf.

S13: I Select (and Structure) Activities That Require Peer Education

All of the observed participants structured various activities that required peer education and interaction. Some of these activities included a word wall and phonetic exercise, matching puzzle pieces and shapes and color and using letters both capital and lowercase letters. One participant structured a geography activity on the city of Chicago that required peer education.

Another participant structured math activity using beans to promote peer interaction. One participant structured a scientific experiment in which children shared what they could detect with their senses and having their peers share in their understanding of the five senses.

S18: I Give Examples of Words

Study participants were observed at giving examples and again giving clear verbal cues to encourage language learning. One participant gave examples of items that began with the letter “S” (i.e. snake, salad, soup) and then asked students to do the same. Other participants used cues about color (i.e. “red” items) or about function (i.e. “transportation). Teacher participants also gave examples of people’s responsibilities (i.e. “postal workers,” “construction workers” etc) or physical activities (i.e. “walking,” “swimming,” etc. or various foods healthy snacks (“yogurt,” etc.), different beans, or things that were sweet.

While directing children was appeared to be somewhat difficult for some of the participants, structuring activities that require peer interaction and giving examples of words were tasks that the majority of the participants were well versed in using.

After triangulating the data of the survey responses and the observations, the researcher found that in racially, economically, and linguistically identifiable neighborhoods, seven teachers had oracy perceptions in their instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students with regard to directing students' interactions and structuring peer education that were consistent with the observed data. Not as many educators were observed giving enough examples of words during the observed periods; but enough were observed for the research to conclude there was congruency between what was self-reported and what was observed.

Re-administration of the Survey

In order to confirm the initial survey responses, 10 participants who were observed by the researcher were invited to take the survey again several weeks after completing their participation in the original survey. The questions were randomly reordered as a measure against recalling previous responses and are now labeled as RS# for resurvey statement. Once again the majority of the responses were "very often" or "always" engaged in the survey statements. Twelve of all of the responses given were "sometimes" and one response was "never". "Sometimes" was the response given for ten items: (RS1 – Originally S6) "I repeat the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences)" ; (RS4 –Originally S14)" I comment on feelings /emotions of myself

and others”; (RS5 – Originally S3) “I wait for children to request materials or turns”; (RS6 – Originally S1).

“I provide opportunities to talk about objects/events unseen (beyond the here and now)”; (RS14 – Originally S8) “I ask open-ended questions” (one response was “sometimes”); (RS16 – Originally S31) “I create problems in my (their) environment for the children to solve”; (RS17 – Originally S18) “I give examples of words (:like grass”); (RS22 – Originally S30) “I let the child direct the activities/interactions as much as possible”; (RS27 – Originally S27) “I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity”; and (RS30 – Originally S22) “I use gestures with English.” More than one participants indicated that they “sometimes” (RS16 – Originally S31) “create problems in my (their) environment for the children to solve.” Lastly, one of the participants indicated that she “never” (RS31 – Originally S21) “Slows her rate of speech, when speaking to second-language learners.” Of the aforementioned ten items, all had the lowest averages as in the first administration of the survey; thus it appears that readministration of the survey the findings showed similar results.

Summary of Results

Given the overall study results, it can be noted that the Wilcox (2000) and McEwan’s (2002) ideas that describe oracy are helpful in delineating the perceptions of oracy development among preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identified neighborhoods. Observing the surveyed study participants, it appeared teacher self-perceptions and classroom practices were similar. The means were on the lower end for questions S13 (I select and structure activities that require peer

education; 4.08), S18 (I give examples of words; 4.06.) and S26 (I provide positive feedback for child's attempt to use English; 4.22) in comparison to all of the other survey questions. More preschool educators, however, were observed doing these those tasks, which indicate a discrepancy between what was self-reported and was observed.

Although there were no clear discrepancies between "perceptions and practice," the findings may suggest the need for further research toward providing preschool educators with more strategies to actively promote oracy in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable neighborhoods.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

A variety of studies say that preschool educators rarely use effective strategies to explicitly teach language skills to second language learners (Cunningham, Zibulsky and Callahan, 2009; Hindman and Wasik, 2008;) despite the recognition that these practices are necessary for students who are at risk of school failure (Farver, Lonigan, and Eppe, 2009; Girolametto and Weitzman, 2002; Hamre, Justice et al, 2010). A host of studies suggest that there are a whole system of concerns for preschool students in racially, linguistically and identifiable neighborhoods: disjointed and low-level curricula, less prepared teachers, weak instruction, worries about safety, unsteady leadership, tangled bureaucracies and acute resource shortages. (Bryk, Sebring, Aleensworth, Luppescu, and Easton, 2010; Lipman, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Oakes and Rogers, 2006; Payne, 2008). Too, there are studies in early childhood that provide evidence that educator beliefs may be an important target for interventions (educator and student interactions to promote oracy) that may change educator behaviors in developing language competencies (LaParo et al., 2009, McMullen et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2005; Spear-Swerling and Brucker, 2004; Stipek and Byler, 1997).

There is a significant reading and writing gap for students from racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhoods. Lee and Burkham, 2003, say the average cognitive scores in reading, math and general knowledge of students whose

families are in the highest economic group is 60% higher than the average scores of students in the lowest socioeconomic group. Closing the reading and writing gap for Black and Latino students suggests that foundational skills, like oral language development, should be introduced in preschools with appropriate language modeling (Schwanenflugel et al., 2005).

In neighborhoods that are racially, linguistically and economically identifiable, one might assume that the Hart and Risley's study of 2003 which identified preschool students who have heard approximately 13 million words by age three and their wealthier peers who have heard approximately 45 millions by age three contributes to a significant achievement gap. Landry (2005) says that 37% of students entering kindergarten without oracy don't have the skills for lifetime learning. The study participants work in such neighborhoods with students who may be at profound risk for future school failure and may present a significant achievement gap among their peers.

This research was designed to survey and observe what some preschool educators report and do to promote oral language development or oracy among preschool students. What does the promotion of oral language, by preschool educators, look like in practice? Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002) suggested, in their research, descriptors of what those activities resemble when employed in a preschool classroom. This researcher created: (a) a survey from those descriptors of what oral language interaction might look like and (b) an observational protocol (adapted from the survey).

The 31- item survey was used to collect and analyze preschool educators' self-perceptions of how they view their practice in promoting oracy in their classrooms. The

9 - item observation protocol was used to observe ten of the study participants to determine their classroom practice to promote oral language development. Each survey item was designed using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = *Never* – my classroom practices does not reflect this practice; 2 = *Occasionally* – my classroom practice rarely reflects this practice; 3 = *Sometimes* - this statement reflects some days when my classroom practice promotes oral language activities; 4 = *Very Often* – this statement reflects classroom practice several times a week in promoting oral language activities; and 5 = *Always* – this statement reflects my classroom practices on a daily basis in the promotion of oral language activities.

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency that measures how closely related a set of items are as a group. Cronbach's alpha is not a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (or consistency). Simple descriptive statistics were generated for each component item and two versions of the Cronbach Coefficient, a measure of the consistency of responses within each participant were generated - one for raw data and the other after standardization to a common variance. The use of raw data was used to determine these calculations. The “standardization “ alpha is useful when there is considerable disagreement among responses.

For all three research questions, the responses were very consistent between raw and standardized values, with research question one having a raw alpha = 88.4% and standardized alpha = 88.5%; research question two having a raw alpha = 84.7% and standardized = 85.3%; and research question three having a raw alpha = 85.3% and standardized = 85.9%. Similar consistencies are evident for all three research questions

when reviewing results after removing each question on a one-by-one basis and recalculating either the raw or standardized alpha.

This study examined three main issues. The self-reported responses of 50 educators and the observed classroom practice of ten of the 50 preschool educators to determine how they perceive their role in developing oral competencies among their students.

1. The self-reported responses of 50 educators and the observed classroom practice of ten of the 50 preschool educators to determine how they perceive their role in facilitating second language acquisition.
2. The self-reported responses of 50 educators and the observed classroom practice of ten of the 50 preschool educators to determine the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students.

This study examined what preschool educators report and what the researcher observed as to the activities used to promote oral language development in those specific neighborhood schools. The preschools used in this study all receive government subsidies and have strict family income requirements for student enrollment. These preschools meet the criteria for racially, linguistically and economically identifiable schools.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that preschool educator participants in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable communities perceive themselves as able to promote oracy development, facilitate second language learning, and use instructional

strategies. The observational tallies and notes match the self-reported survey responses. Preschool educators perceived themselves and were observed to engage in the descriptive tasks that are critical to the promotion of oracy as identified by Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002).

The fifty study participants were employed in nine schools in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhoods. The majority of those surveyed identified themselves as head teachers or teachers (70% of respondents) and the others identified themselves as assistant teachers. All respondents had some college courses with 36% earning a Bachelor's Degree and 14% earning a Master's Degree. Eight of the neighborhoods had majority of African American Students and one of the neighborhood preschool programs had a majority of Latino Students. All but one school had some Latino students ranging from 4% to 90%. Only two schools had some White students (5% in each case). The findings for each research statement are listed below:

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions/practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to their role in developing oral competencies/oracy among their students? There was agreement with the observations and the survey protocols for all items. Between 40% and 50% of the respondents indicated that *very often* they provide opportunities to talk about objective events beyond here and now; participate and encourage play; wait for children to request materials, respond positively to children when they want to show something, repeat the child's ideas/utterances, make comments to continue conversations, give the child enough

time to respond, speak slowly and clearly, give child time to talk and create problems in the environment for a child to solve. Over 50% of the respondents said they *always* model language by describing objects and action and actions during play, ask open-ended questions and provide positive feedback when children use new language. The researcher observed that most participants asked open-ended questions.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions and practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to their role in facilitating second language acquisition? Again, there was agreement with the observations and the survey protocols for all items, except for three observed respondents who were not bilingual. There were 26 respondents who had bilingual students. Most of the respondents (between 40% to 50%) indicated that *very often* they: slow their rate of speech, when speaking to second language learners; use gestures with English; rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood; add translations in the child's non English utterance to English; encourage the child to use English and provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English.

The researcher observed that seven of the ten respondents exhibited the following teaching behaviors: add translations in the child's non-English utterance to English; encourage the child to use English and provide positive feedback for the child's attempts to use English. Those seven respondents were bilingual. Three of the respondents were not bilingual and appeared to have difficulty facilitating second language acquisition as evidenced by the descriptors.

Research Question 3

What are the perceptions and practices of preschool educators in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable preschool programs with regards to the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students? Although there was agreement between the observational protocol and all survey items, the distribution of responses for this question had the most variation. For the questions: I give examples of words and I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity, the distribution was closely spread among *always*, *very often* and *sometimes*. Between 40% and 50%, respondents agreed that *always* they: direct children to communicate and interact with their peers; draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing; comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction; use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment; use words to express important concepts; define words verbally. Twenty-eight of the respondents said they *very often* comment on feelings/emotions of myself and others.

The researcher noted that educator participant respondents were not offering examples of words during the observed periods, but there was congruency between what was self-reported and what was observed in the following area: selection of activities that require peer interaction.

Interpretation of Results

Oral Language Development

Developing oral language oracy and/or expressive language competencies are essential for reading and writing achievement in school (Hecht, Burgess, Torgesen,

Wagner, and Roashotte, 2000). The preschool educators in this study self-reported that they were promoting oracy in the highest degree possible given the instrument used.

Although the observations supported the preschool educators' survey responses, the quality, degree and nature of those interactions could not be determined, because the researcher did not attempt to provide professional comments on the observed behavior of the study participants. This researcher did not attempt to judge the quality of the interactions and merely reported on the presence of the strategies.

Second-Language Acquisition

The perceptions and practices of preschool educators in facilitating second language acquisition showed agreement with the descriptors in the survey. The observations did not. The majority of the preschool educators who were surveyed did not speak a second language, however the majority of the preschool educators who were observed spoke English and Spanish. The three preschool educators who were observed that did not speak Spanish and had students who spoke Spanish in their classrooms did not exhibit evidence of ability to facilitate second language acquisitions to their students. The researcher saw that those English only preschool educators did not for example: rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood, add translations in the child's non English utterances to English, and providing positive feedback to the child's attempt to use English.

Instructional Strategies

There was agreement between the observational protocol and all survey items. Again, the preschool educators perceived that their variety of the oral language

instructional support (via the Wilcox and McEwan descriptors) was robust. There were several survey statements, which described routine tasks for language development that preschool educators might use to promote oral language development: such as giving examples of words, asking open-ended questions, and providing slow and clear speech and instruction. Other stated survey tasks may have been less obvious to observe, like: providing opportunities to talk about objects/events unseen (beyond the here and now), creating problems in the environment for a child to solve; and directing children to communicate and interact with peers.

Conclusions

The goal of this research was to report the perceptions that the educators of preschool students have relative to developing oral competencies/oracy among their students. The preschool setting provides an opportunity for young students to develop oral language skills. Developing oral language skills gives educators a window into how a child processes the world around him/her (Berry and Gambell, 1988). Oral language skills are an indicator for writing and reading success in school. Educators who can provide robust strategies for students to verbally express themselves must be aware of their current practices and seek to improve them.

Dickenson and Tabors (2001) found that if preschool educators are not engaged in meaningful talk, then preschool students may not develop adequate oral competencies for school success (Dickinson and Tabors, 2001). Do preschool educators notice what they do relative to their beliefs, knowledge and practices to promote oracy? This research

says they do self-report that they notice what they do and that they practice what they do to promote oral language.

This research also sought to examine how preschool educators facilitate second language acquisition by acknowledging/incorporating in the following activities: slow rate of speech when speaking to second language learners; use gestures with English; rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood; add translations in the child's attempts to use English; encourage the child to use English; and provide positive feedback for a child's attempt to use English. There were no clear discrepancies between survey responses and observed practices among the educators in this study. In three classrooms, participants that were observed where bilingual students had a non-bilingual preschool- educator, it was noted that those educators could not model, add translations or provide positive feedback for a child's attempt to use English.

Was this research question able to capture what specific educators' strategies are for facilitating second language acquisition during individual, small group, and large group interactions with students? The researcher concludes that the survey and/or the observational protocol were unable to determine the deliberate practice of the preschool educators' facilitation and/or promotion oracy among English Language Learners relative to quality of feedback, language modeling and literacy focus. The preschool educators who spoke English only may not have been able to support those English Language Learners without training and/or support to model the language and provide opportunities to expand vocabulary and concept development.

Preschool educators were asked to report the instructional strategies used to facilitate interaction among their students through the following descriptors: direct children to communicate and interact with their peers; draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing; comment/phrase children's attempts at peer interactions; select and structure activities that require peer interaction; comment on feelings/emotions of myself (educator) and others; use correct word for objects/events in immediate environment; use words to express important concepts; define words verbally; give examples of words; repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity; demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props and let the child direct activity/interaction as much as possible.

Again there was congruency between what was self-reported and what was observed. Students gain more language skills when educators do not dominate the conversations but show interest, comment on their efforts and ask questions (Dickenson and Tabors, 2001). Play is an opportunity for students to practice their oracy skills with the help and intentional guidance from the educators in the preschool environment (Neeley, Neeley, Justen and Tipton-Sumner, 2001). Was this research question able to capture quality and amount of educator instructional strategies to facilitate interaction among their students during individual, small group, and large group interactions with students? While the survey and observational protocol reported the occurrence of the interactions/instructional strategies, the researcher did not attempt to determine the quality of these activities.

Limitations of the Study

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know.

—Donald Rumsfeld, Former Defense Secretary of State

This quote suggests that the intention of this research was to understand the descriptors and strengths of the role of preschool educators in promoting oral language/oracy. The knowns were identified through research that attempts to make clear what preschool educators do to promote oracy. A survey was created to test those descriptors. Also, the knowns were preschool students in neighborhoods that were racially, linguistically and economically identifiable. The unknowns were the view of OTHER neighborhoods that did not have such homogenous demographics. Too, the unknowns were capturing the strength of what educators said they did and what they actually do in their classrooms. When the researcher observed each of preschool educators, it was merely a snapshot of their behaviors and not what went on for the whole day or week relative to language development. No rubric was created to make a judgment on the preschool educators' observed behaviors over the nine descriptors. The researcher was making a judgment that may or may not have been reflective of the preschool educator's intention to execute the elements of the descriptors.

The survey responses were self-reported. Research participants tend to under-report behaviors deemed inappropriate by researchers or other observers, and they tend to over-report behaviors viewed as appropriate. This tendency for individuals to respond in socially desirable ways may have influenced the results of this study.

The classroom observations were merely a snapshot of what was occurring in the classroom and a different picture might be observed on a different day at a different time. Any group that is studied is altered to some degree by the presence of the researcher. Researcher bias can enter into the data collection – as one interprets what one sees. The preschool educator interactions observed may have been altered to some degree by the very presence of the researcher. It also takes time to build trust with participants – short term observational studies like this one are at a particular disadvantage where trust building is concerned.

Suggestions for Further Study

Studying the interactions between preschool educators and their students is both a compelling and legitimate phenomenon that needs more attention if the achievement gap among preschool students in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhoods is to be significantly reduced.

Ultimately, how preschool educators deliver instructional support relative to language-stimulation and facilitation during those interactions does influence students' later school successes. Language modeling that supports making sense of what is expected in school could include: activities that promote higher-order thinking versus rote and fact-based regurgitation, offering feedback that extends learning self and parallel talk, open-ended questions, repetition, expansion/extension, and use of advanced vocabulary (McEwan, 2002; Wilcox, 2000) will promote oracy among preschool students.

This study attempted to offer some evidence of current practice to inform those in the field of early childhood educator preparation with regard to educator's beliefs, knowledge and skills about promoting oracy among early learners. This information may be useful to closing the achievement gap for students in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhoods. This study was able to capture the preschool educators' beliefs through the self-reported responses. This study was not able to differentiate between the delivery of effective and ineffective interactions during language and literacy activities.

First, more research needs to be done to create target activities that focused in the following areas:

1. Emotional Interactions (commenting on feelings of themselves and others) between preschool educator and peers to find words to express emotions.
2. Classroom organization (school routines) between preschool-educator and peers to facilitate oral language peer interactions
3. Instructional language activities (following directions, taking turns) – learning academic language including vocabulary
4. Literacy activities to encourage higher order thinking skill. One particular way to promote not only better preschool educator peer interaction but develop better oracy skills is to implement training for preschool educators – particularly those in racially, linguistically, and economically identifiable neighborhood- that help them improve their own language to help children learn. Although the study was small, preschool educators must know that

students who gain early-language skills and preliteracy skills are more likely to be successful in the early grades (kindergarten through third grade).

Second, there is a need for a greater number of bilingual preschool educators who can address the needs of students who speak a language other than English. Although the observations of the bilingual educators yielded no observable data in facilitating second language learning, the use of these techniques when teaching an entire class of second language learners seem pertinent to include in preschool educator preparation and professional development. It is possible that an educator with a mixed class of students with some who speak another first language may translate or rephrase in more private (one-on-one) moments that are not as easily observable during group activity times such as reading circle, free time and lunch. Future studies and professional development workshops may focus on understanding the appropriate timing for promoting second language acquisition and a way of making second language learning an activity that peers who speak a dominant language can also engage in to strengthen the student's sense of community (i.e. during reading time have the students learn both the non-dominant and dominant language vocabulary – such as green in English or verde in Spanish).

Third, a more comprehensive survey should be generated that might describe the perceptions of preschool educators in a variety of racially, linguistically and economically heterogeneous neighborhoods to compare what preschool educators say and do to promote oracy.

For another researcher to understand the phenomena of student-preschool educator interactions to promote oracy, the sample size might be increased substantially

to include a more heterogeneous mix of racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhoods to see what and if there is a difference in educator behaviors. Too, perhaps additional observers making multiple classroom visits at circle, free, and lunch-time with video taping may provide a more useful data base.

The difficulties with observing the stated tasks were likely because of reasons beyond the scope of this study; however there may be some specific directions for future study using the Wilcox (2000) and McEwan (2002) descriptors of oral competency to enhance the preparation and professional development of preschool educators toward promoting oracy.

Fourth, classrooms should be visited more than once to view practice using a rubric to determine the effectiveness of the preschool educators' practice. Assuming there are opportunities for professional development (around oracy) with video-taped and/or recorded teaching episodes in conjunction with having administrative or collegial second observers, preschool educators' interactive behavior might be assessed and enhanced in the following areas: providing more opportunities to talk about objects/events beyond the here and now; modeling language and actions during play; asking open-ended questions; creating problems in the environment for a child to solve; facilitating second language acquisition; repeating of unfamiliar words often during an activity; defining words verbally; and giving examples of words.

This study sought to examine what preschool educators report and what the researcher observed as to the interactive behaviors used to promote oral language development in racially, linguistically and economically identifiable neighborhood

preschools. There was congruency between what was surveyed and what was observed in most areas. However, the quality and strength of the interactions (between the preschool educator and preschool student) was not observed or reported.

The preschool educator may significantly improve school success through clearly understanding what oracy is and how to develop it in the earliest school settings.

They [children] are autonomously capable of making meaning from their daily life experiences through mental acts involving planning, coordination of ideas, and abstraction.... The central act of adults, therefore, is to activate, especially indirectly, the meaning-making competencies of children as a basis of all learning. They must try to capture the right moments, and then find the right approaches, for bringing together, into a fruitful dialogue, their meanings and interpretations with those children.

—Loris Malaguzzi, Italian Early Childhood Education Specialist

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT SURVEY REQUEST

Date:

Dear Participant:

I am a Loyola University doctoral student interested in the classroom practices/perceptions of early childhood education regarding oral language development. Will help me to learn more about how you think about your role and classroom practice in promoting and developing oral language competencies and/or second language acquisition among the students with whom you work. There are no right or wrong responses. The general results of the survey will include responses from at least 40 other preschool educators just like you.

If you agree to participate and respond to the survey, please:

1. Sign and date your consent at the end of this letter (a copy of your letter is included for your records)
2. Complete the demographic profile
3. Respond to statements on the two page survey
4. Place the consent, demographic profile and responses to the survey in the sealed envelope for pick up by me only.

Your responses will be coded to protect your identity and INDIVIDUAL survey results including your personal demographic information. All of the individual responses will be kept by me under lock and key and not shared, under any circumstances, with anyone. Your personal responses will be shared with no one except me. All completed sealed envelopes will be picked up by (date)_____.

There is no penalty for not participating in this investigation. At any time, you have the right to not participate in the survey. Thank you so much for your time, and your willingness to help me investigate how preschool educators work with work with preschool students. If you have any questions, you may contact me, Nicole Jones at (773) 368-3802 or my dissertation Chair, Dr. Giroux at (312) _____.

Sincerely,

Nicole Jones

Please sign your consent here: _____ **Date:** _____

YOUR COPY OF THE CONSENT FOR YOUR RECORDS

Date:

Dear Participant:

I am a Loyola University doctoral student interested in the classroom practices/perceptions of early childhood education regarding oral language development. Will help me to learn more about how you think about your role and classroom practice in promoting and developing oral language competencies and/or second language acquisition among the students with whom you work. There are no right or wrong responses. The general results of the survey will include responses from at least 40 other preschool educators just like you.

If you agree to participate and respond to the survey, please:

5. Sign and date your consent at the end of this letter (a copy of your letter is included for your records)
6. Complete the demographic profile
7. Respond to statements on the two page survey
8. Place your consent, demographic profile and responses to the survey in the sealed envelope for pick up by me only.

Your responses will be coded to protect your identity and INDIVIDUAL survey results including your personal demographic information. All of the individual responses will be kept by me under lock and key and not shared, under any circumstances, with anyone. Your personal responses will be shared with no one except me. All completed sealed envelopes will be picked up by (date)_____.

There is no penalty for not participating in this investigation. At any time, you have the right to not participate in the survey. Thank you so much for your time, and your willingness to help me investigate how preschool educators work with work with preschool students. If you have any questions, you may contact me, Nicole Jones at (773) 368-3802 or my dissertation Chair, Dr. Giroux at (312) _____.

Sincerely,

Nicole Jones

Please sign your consent here: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHICS

Please complete the profile below:

1. Please circle your role: Teacher Teacher-Assistant Head Teacher

2. Please check your highest level of schooling experiences and /or degrees earned:

<input type="checkbox"/> High School Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/> Associates Degree
<input type="checkbox"/> 30 hours or more of college credit	<input type="checkbox"/> less than 30 hours of college credit
<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor of Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor of Science
<input type="checkbox"/> Master of Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Master of Science
<input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate	

3. Indicate the number of college courses in early childhood education you have completed _____

4. Approximately how many professional workshops, seminars or sessions did you attend in 2009-2010 on language and literacy _____

5. Indicate the number of years working with preschool students. _____

6. What age groups are you working with at this time? _____

7. What is the predominant language spoken by your students, now? _____

8. What other languages are spoken in your students' homes? _____

9. Are you bilingual? _____ What other language, please? _____

10. Do you have bilingual students in your class? _____

11. Please circle the chief funding sources for this preschool:

State Pre K Headstart PrivatePreschool for All

APPENDIX C
COPY OF ADDITIONAL REQUEST FOR CLASSROOM
OBSERVATION FOR YOUR RECORDS

Dear Participant:

Will you allow me to observe your classroom practices at a mutually agreed time? I am interested in the classroom practices/perceptions of early childhood education around oral language development. I am using a simple checklist during fifteen-minute intervals during circle, free play and lunch times at your site. If you agree **PLEASE CIRCLE YES OR NO AND PROVIDE YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER:**

I agree to be observed: Yes No (please circle yes or no)

Please provide us with your Name _____

Please provide us with your phone number _____

I will:

- a. Call you for your supervisor's/owner's name and phone number
- b. Call them and tell them about the project and get their permission to observe
- c. Arrange a time that is mutually convenient for you and me to observe you – also letting your supervisor/owner know when the observation will take place
- d. Do the observation with an anonymous coding scheme – your name and center will NOT appear on the observation form.
- e. Keep your observation checklist under lock and key in a secured cabinet for review by me only.
- f. Will not release any individual information on the checklist under any circumstances
- g. Review the collection of observation checklists to make general comments on the findings
- h. Destroy the individual checklists after I have reviewed the general results for incorporation for the final paper
- i. Additionally, you have the right to stop the observation at any time

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. An additional copy of this consent form is available for your records. Thank you.

Please sign your consent below, if you are willing to be observed:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Additional Classroom Observation

Dear Participant:

Will you allow me to observe your classroom practices at a mutually agreed time? I am interested in the classroom practices/perceptions of early childhood education around oral language development. I am using a simple checklist during fifteen-minute intervals during circle, free play and lunch times at your site. If you agree **PLEASE CIRCLE YES OR NO AND PROVIDE YOUR NAME AND PHONE NUMBER:**

I agree to be observed: Yes No (please circle yes or no)

Please provide us with your Name _____

Please provide us with your phone number _____

I will:

- a. Call you for your supervisor's/owner's name and phone number
- b. Call them and tell them about the project and get their permission to observe
- c. Arrange a time that is mutually convenient for you and me to observe you – also letting your supervisor/owner know when the observation will take place
- d. Do the observation with an anonymous coding scheme – your name and center will NOT appear on the observation form.
- e. Keep your observation checklist under lock and key in a secured cabinet for review by me only.
- f. Will not release any individual information on the checklist under any circumstances
- g. Review the collection of observation checklists to make general comments on the findings
- h. Destroy the individual checklists after I have reviewed the general results for incorporation for the final paper
- i. Additionally, you have the right to stop the observation at any time

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. An additional copy of this consent form is available for your records. Thank you.

Please sign your consent below, if you are willing to be observed:

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO USE THE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

You have to be kidding? Do they think I would post it on my website and NOT want people to use it. Try printing out this email instead. I give you permission to use the self-assessment tool for your dissertation.

Best,

M. Wilcox

P.S. I am also attaching an updated version of the Self Assessment if you would prefer to use that.

M. Jeanne Wilcox, Ph.D.
Director, Infant Child Research Programs
Professor, Department of Speech & Hearing Science
Editor, *Early Childhood Services: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Effectiveness* (https://www.pluralpublishing.com/journals_ECS.htm)

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<http://tnt.asu.edu> (Tots and Tech Research Institute)
<http://shs.asu.edu> (Department of Speech and Hearing Science)

APPENDIX E
SURVEY

USE AN 'X' to indicate your perceptions and/or classroom practice as you plan for and implement oral language development for your students in your preschool setting during circle time, student lunch time and/or free play. DO NOT RESPOND TO STATEMENTS THAT DON'T APPLY TO YOUR PRESCHOOL POPULATION. (for example: statements 21-26).

Always – This statement reflects my classroom practice on a daily basis promoting oral language activities.	Very Often – This statement reflects my classroom practice several times a week in promoting oral language activities.	Sometimes This statement reflects some days my classroom practice promoting language activities	Occasionally- My classroom practice <u>rarely</u> reflects this practice.	Never – My classroom practice <u>does not</u> reflect this practice.	Does Not Apply – no English Lang. Learners at my site
5	4	3	2	1	DNA

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	DNA
1. I provide opportunities to talk about objects/events unseen (beyond the here and now).						
2. I participate in and encourage pretend play.						
3. I wait for children to request materials or turns.						
4. I model language by describing objects and actions during play.						
5. I respond positively to children when they want to show or tell me something.						
6. I repeat the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences).						
7. I make comments and ask questions to continue conversations.						
8. I ask open-ended questions.						
9. I provide positive feedback when children use new language skills.						
10. I direct children to communicate and interact with peers.						
11. I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing.						

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	DNA
12. I comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction.						
13. I select (and structure) activities that require peer interactions.						
14. I comment on feeling/emotions of myself and others.						
15. I use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment.						
16. I use words to express important concepts.						
17. I define words verbally ("joyful means feeling happy").						
18. I give examples of words ("green like grass").						
19. I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity.						
20. I demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props.						
21. I slow my rate of speech, when speaking to second-language learners.						
22. I use gestures with English.						
23. I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood.						
24. I add translations in the child's attempts to use English.						
25. I encourage the child to use English.						
26. I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English.						
27. I give children enough time to respond.						
28. My speech and instructions are provided slowly and clearly.						
29. I give the child time to talk.						
30. I let the child direct the activity/interaction as much as possible.						
31. I create problems in my environment for the child to solve.						

APPENDIX F
OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST

Observational Checklist: Date: _____ Participant Code: _____

Preschool educator will be observed for 15 minutes at three different times: circle time; student lunch time and free play.

A tally mark will be made each time the action in the statement is observed.

Observational Protocol	Circle Time	Student Lunch Time	Free Play
<u>Developing Oral Competencies</u>			
Statement 7: <i>I make comments to continue conversations</i> Student will ask a question; Preschool educator will ask more questions and/or continue the dialogue			
Statement 8: <i>I ask open-ended questions.</i> Preschool educator will ask open-ended questions to engage in extended student talk.			
Statement 29: <i>I give the child time to talk.</i> Preschool educator will wait at least 5 second count after preschool educator's thinking type question during story time – like: What would you like to do next? Or Why do you think the boy in the story is wet?			
<u>Second Language Acquisition</u>			
Statement 24: I add translations in the child's non-English utterance to English. Student will use words or phrases in home language, preschool educator will translate to English.			
Statement 25: I encourage the child to use English Preschool educator will say "use English" when student speaks in home language.			
Statement 26: I provide feedback for a child's attempts to use English. Preschool educator will compliment the child's attempts to use English words.			
<u>Instructional Strategies</u>			
Statement 10: I direct children to communicate and interact with their peers. Preschool educator will encourage students who are playing alone to play with other children or share their toy or game or mediate conflicts by encouraging students to interact with their peers.			
Statement 13: I select (and structure) activities that require peer interactions. Preschool educator will direct activities where students work in groups or teams			
Statement 18: I give examples of words (green like the grass)- Preschool educator will use words like green for grass or red like a fire engine or like a balloon up, like the sky is up			

APPENDIX G
CHILD CARE CENTER PARTICIPANTS

List of Child Care Centers Participants that have two or more classrooms for three to five year older students.

*Many classrooms have English Language Learners but some have only English Language Learners

School	# of classrooms for three to five year old students	English Language Learners Only
Albany Child Care Center 5954 S. Albany Chicago, IL 60602 (773) 737- 7810	2	Yes
Dorsey Developmental Institute 2050 East 93 rd Street Chicago, IL 60617 (773) 375-4300	1	Yes
El Hoga Del Nino 1710 S. Loomis Chicago, IL 60608 (773) 829-5419	4	Yes
Ersuala Howard Child Development Center 7222 South Exchange Avenue Chicago, IL 60649 (773) 221-9711	4	
Little Genius 11439 South Michigan Chicago, IL 60628 (773) 629-8091	2	
Little Hands 7146 South Ashland Avenue Chicago, IL 60620 (773) 471- 0062	2	
Love Learning Center 228 East 61 st Street Chicago, IL 60637 (773) 752-0243	2	
Maggie Drummond Child Development Center 4301 South Wabash Chicago, IL 60653 (773) 373 – 8200	2	
Montessori Academy 11028 South Halsted Street Chicago, Il 60628	1	
Roseland Child Development Center 11400 South Edbrooke Chicago, IL 60628	3	Yes
Stepping Stones 1300 East 75 th Street Chicago, IL 60653 (773) 493-0000	1	

School	# of classrooms for three to five year old students	English Language Learners Only
Teach 21 4343 North Clarendon – Suite #210 Chicago, IL 60613 (773)-264-5171	1	
School	# of classrooms for three to five year old students	English Language Learners Only
The Children's Center, Inc. 12803 South Halsted Avenue Chicago, IL 60628 (773) 264-5171	3	
The Children's Center, Inc 7956 South Western Avenue Chicago, IL 60620 (773) 471 – 4927	3	
Trumbull Park Child Development Center 2400 East 105 th Street Chicago, IL 60617 (773) 60617	3	
Vireva Nursery School and Kindergarten, Inc. 1935 West 51 st Street Chicago, IL (773) 925-8417	5	Yes
Wright Renaissance Child Development 7939 South Western Avenue Chicago, IL 60620 (773) 476-8805	4	

APPENDIX H
OBSERVATION SHEET

Research 1:7:I make comments to continue conversations.	1	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 6	2	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	3	Circle Time: 7 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 7	4	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	5	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 6	6	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 4	7	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 5	8	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	9	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	10	Circle Time: 2 Free Play: 2 Lunch Time: 2
Research 1:29: I give the child time to talk.	1	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 6	2	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 6	3	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	4	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 7	5	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 6	6	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 7 Lunch Time: 7	7	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 6	8	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	9	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	10	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1
Research 2:24: I add translations in the child's non-English utterance to English	1	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 6	2	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	3	Circle Time: 7 Free Play: 7 Lunch Time: 7	4	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 6	5	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 7	6	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 3	7	Circle Time: 7 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 5	8	Circle Time: 0 Free Play: 0 Lunch Time: 0	9	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	10	Circle Time: 2 Free Play: 2 Lunch Time: 2

Research 2:26: I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English.	1	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 6	2	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 6 Lunch Time: 5	3	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	4	Circle Time: 4 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 4	5	Circle Time: 4 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	6	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 4	7	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 6	8	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	9	Circle Time: 1 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 1	10	Circle Time: 2 Free Play: 2 Lunch Time: 2	
	Research 3:18: I give examples of words (green like the grass).	1	Circle Time: 3 Free Play: 3 Lunch Time: 3	2	Circle Time: 4 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 4	3	Circle Time: 6 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 4	4	Circle Time: 3 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 3	5	Circle Time: 4 Free Play: 3 Lunch Time: 4	6	Circle Time: 5 Free Play: 4 Lunch Time: 4	7	Circle Time: 4 Free Play: 5 Lunch Time: 5	8	Circle Time: 2 Free Play: 1 Lunch Time: 2	9	Circle Time: 2 Free Play: 2 Lunch Time: 2	10	Circle Time: 3 Free Play: 3 Lunch Time: 3

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Nicole Alissa Jones was born and raised in Chicago, Il. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended Florida A & M University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1994. From 1994–2001, she attended Chicago State University, where she earned a Master of Arts in English and Master of Science in Special Education. Also, she attended Concordia University Chicago from 2008–2010, where she earned a Master of Science in School Counseling.

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