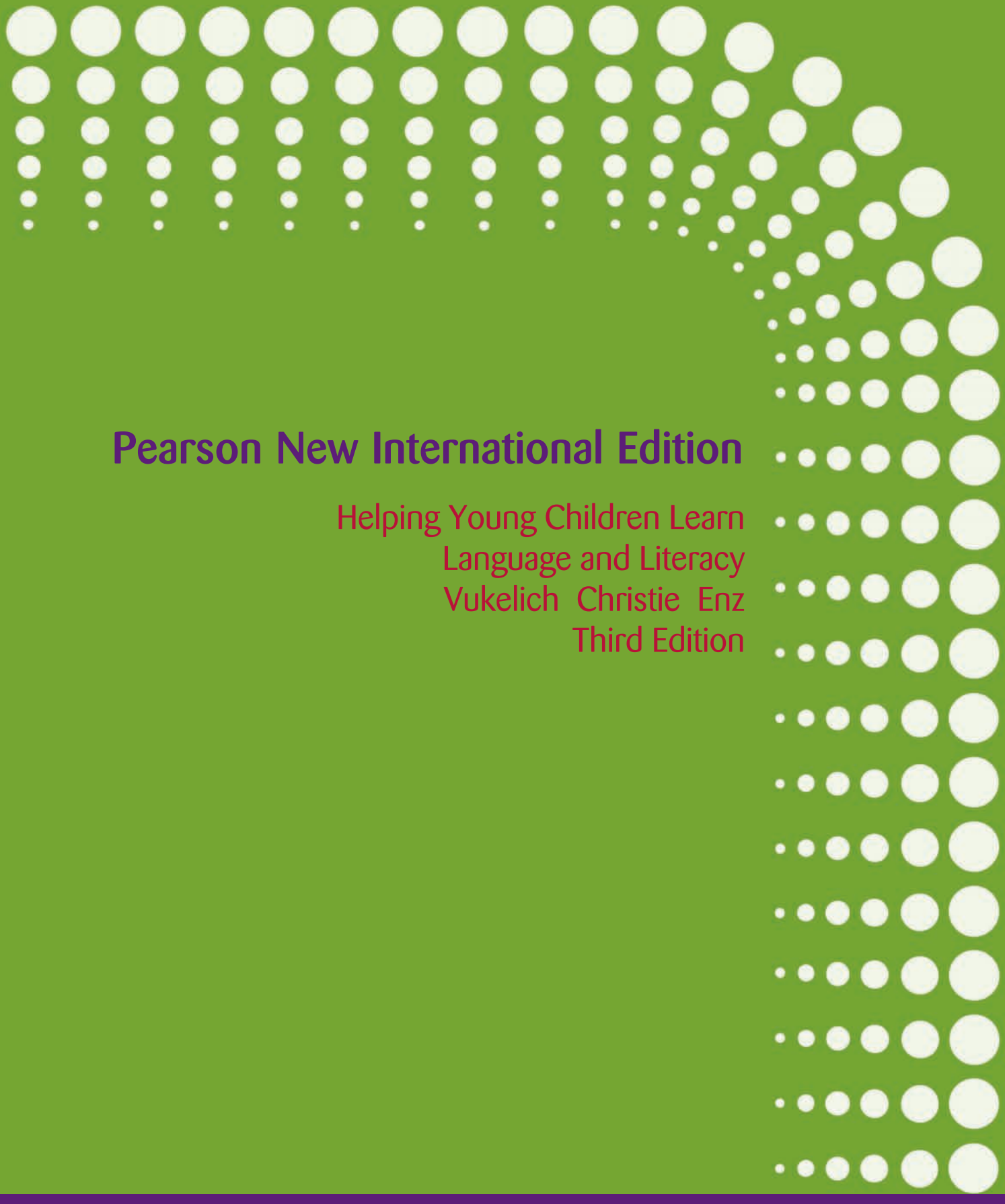

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It is within this verbal exchange that the parent and child engage in negotiating the meaning of the story. Obviously, the adult's understanding exceeds the child's understanding of the text. Through scaffolding, the adult gently moves the child toward the adult's understanding of the text. The adult questions the child about the text's meaning. The child replies, and this reply gives the adult a cue. Based on the child's response, the adult adjusts the kind of support (the scaffold) provided. To aid the child's construction of the meaning, the adult behaves in three ways: (1) as a corespondent who shares experiences and relates the reading to personal experiences, (2) as an informer who provides information, and (3) as a monitor who questions and sets expectations for the reading session (Roser & Martinez, 1985).

Adults play these roles differently depending on the child's response and age:

- With a baby or toddler (12 months or younger), the adult tends to do most of the talking. Mostly adults label the pictures. "Look, Licky, a train! Yup, that's a train—choo, choo!" Typically adults point as they label.
- Between the ages of 12 and 15 months, adults tend to ask the child rhetorical questions (e.g., DeLoache, 1984): "And that's a kite. Isn't that a kite, Josh?" The questions function to reinforce the picture's label; the adult does not really expect the child to answer. The adult's playing of both roles, asking the question and giving the answer, provides the toddler with experience in the question–answer cycle before the child is required to participate verbally in the exchange.
- Beginning around 15 months, the adult's expectations rise, and the child is expected to be a more active participant in the story reading. As the child acquires more facility with language, the adult expects the child to answer more of the questions posed. First, the adult asks the child to provide the label for the picture. The adult says things like "Look!" or "What's that?" or "It's a what?" If the child hesitates, the adult intervenes and provides the answer. When the child seems to be correct (Joseph says, "Pithee" in response to his father's query), the adult typically repeats the label or positively reinforces the toddler's response (Joseph's father says, "Yeah. These are peaches."). When the child shows competence at this task, the adult ups the ante, requesting perhaps a description, like asking for information about the color.

Researchers have discovered that this story-reading sequence (adult question, child response, adult feedback) is just like the typical interaction sequence between teacher and student in many classrooms (Mehan, 1979).

Hence these storybook readings also begin children's socialization into the response pattern typical of many classrooms. Researchers like Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1984) and Denny Taylor and Dorothy Strickland (1986) discovered that adults from all socioeconomic levels do the same thing when they introduce a child to a new concept in a book. They try to make the concept meaningful for the child by linking the text to the child's personal experiences. For example, Ann Mowery (1993, p. 46) describes how, when young Joseph and his father read *Wish for a Fish,* Joseph's father made numerous text-to-life connections: "That sure looks like where we go, doesn't it?" "See, that's a can of worms just like what we fish with." "That's a bobber just like ours." "That boy is waiting quietly for a fish. You usually play with the worms and throw rocks, don't you?"

When children approach about 3 years of age, adult story readers tend to increase the complexity of the questions. Now they question the child about the characters and the story's meaning—and they expect the child to raise questions about the characters and the story's meaning. It is this talk surrounding the reading that researchers judge to be the most valuable aspect of the storybook-reading activity for enhancing children's language development. David Dickinson and Miriam Smith's (1994) and Bill Teale and Miriam Martinez's (1996) careful analyses of the teacher/student book-reading interactions suggest that the best talk is the kind that invites children to reflect on the story content or language. The focus of teacher/student talk is: What are the important ideas in this story?

Recently researchers have learned that, in addition to the child's age, the book's genre, whether it is a fictional narrative with a problem with attempts to solve the problem and a solution or an expository text with information about a topic, affects how parents interact with

their young children during a book sharing. When reading an expository text, parents of young children tend to read less and talk more. To help their children negotiate the meaning of the text, they tend to ask a greater number of more cognitively demanding questions; they ask questions that require their children to hypothesize, predict or explain. Further, the vocabulary used in expository texts tends to be more challenging than in narrative texts. Each of these adult book-reading behaviors has been shown by other researchers to have a positive effect on children's language and literacy growth. These findings led Lisa Price, Anne van Kleeck, and Carl Huberty (2009) to conclude that sharing this genre with young children and having adults support the children's ability to take information from the text add much to children's preschool language and literacy experiences.

CHILD BEHAVIORS DURING READING. What do children do when they are being read to by a caring adult? Several researchers (e.g., Baghban, 1984; Morrow, 1988) have studied young children's behavior, often their own children, during adult–child readings. These researchers tell us that even infants focus on the book. They make sounds even before they are speaking, as if they are imitating the reader's voice. They slap at the picture in the book. A little older child with some language facility begins to ask questions about the pictures. They play the "What's that?" game, pointing and asking "What's dat? What's dat? What's dat?" almost without pausing for an answer.

CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN STORY READING. Do children from nonmainstream families have similar early childhood home reading experiences? Shirley Brice Heath's answer to this question is no. In her classic book *Ways with Words* (1983), Heath provides a rich description of the literacy experiences of working-class African American, working-class Caucasian, and mainstream families in the Piedmont area of the Carolinas. From her research, Heath learned that the parents from mainstream families read to their children well into elementary school; use a wide variety of complex questioning strategies to develop their children's understanding of story, plot event sequence, and characterization; and look for ways to connect the text information to their children's experiences. Parents from the working-class Caucasian families also read to their children, but what they do while they read is different. They stress the sequence of the stories and ask children literal meaning questions ("What did the little boy do then?" "What's the hen's name?"). Further, they make few attempts to connect the events described in the books to their children's experiences. Finally, Heath learned that the African American families tell lots of stories, but reading is strictly for functional purposes. These families read forms, recipes, and the newspaper. They tend not to read books to their children. Of course, Heath's work cannot be generalized to all mainstream, Caucasian working-class, or African American families. As Teale (1987) notes, there is a great deal of variation among and within social and cultural groups. Teachers need to learn from their students' parents about the experiences their young children have had with books.

We believe that children who have had experiences with books and have experienced dialogic interactions with adults with books are advantaged over children who have no experiences with books and whose parents or early teachers have not shared books with them. Therefore, we strongly encourage teachers and parents of young children to read, read, read to their children—and to talk, talk, talk while reading about the important content, allowing children sufficient time to reflect on the content.

CLASSROOM READ-ALOUDS. When a parent and a child read together, they cuddle. Like 24-month-old Aslan, whom readers met at the beginning of this chapter, the child typically sits in the parent's lap or snuggles under the parent's arm. Many parents establish a bedtime reading ritual, cuddling with the child for a quiet reading time before the child goes to bed. Parents report enjoying this ritual as much as the child, and it establishes a mind-set that encourages the child to read before going to sleep when the child can read independently. Teachers of the very youngest children, infants, and toddlers should follow parents' lead and apply what is known about how parents read to infants and toddlers to their reading to their young students. The low teacher–child ratio recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for infant (one adult to one infant) and toddler (one adult to four toddlers) programs helps permit this kind of adult–child interaction—though with toddlers,

such one-on-one reading together requires some careful arranging (Bredekamp, 1989). We recommend that teachers create a daily reading ritual, perhaps just before nap time. Some day care centers connect with church groups or nearby residential facilities for elderly citizens for the explicit purpose of adults coming to the center just before nap time to read to the children. Now, like at home, every child can have a lap, a cuddle, and a "grandparent" all alone.

We are concerned when we hear infant and toddler teachers say, "Read to the kids in my classroom? You must be kidding!" We are even more concerned when we read that this response about reading to young children is not uncommon (Kupetz & Green, 1997).

Two former early childhood teachers, Barbara Kupetz and Elise Green, acknowledge that it takes organization and working together to structure the infants' and toddlers' day to include story reading. "Reading to infants and toddlers is certainly not a large-group activity. It can effectively occur only in very small groups or in one-to-one pairing" (p. 23). Like us, they recommend the center attempt to make appropriate extra-adult arrangements to ensure the inclusion of this important activity in infants' and toddlers' days.

The older the young child, the larger the permitted-by-law number of children in the group. The typical kindergarten class, for example, is often one teacher and 20 (unfortunately, sometimes even more) children. Teachers of these children are challenged to keep read-alouds enjoyable, pleasurable experiences. Of course, selecting age- and interest-appropriate books is important. Read-aloud experiences are one means to ensure that high-quality literature is accessible to all students, something that is especially important for children who have had few storybook experiences outside school.

The *how* of reading is also important. Now there are too many children for everyone to cuddle next to the adult reader. Yet physical comfort is important. Having a special carpeted area for reading to the group is important. Often this area is next to the library center. Nancy asks her young learners to sit in a semicircle. Patty asks her young learners to sit on the *X* marks she has made using masking tape on the carpet. Lolita asks her 3-year-olds to sit or lie wherever they like in the small carpeted area—as long as they can see the pictures. Each day a different child gets to snuggle with her. In each of these classrooms, the teacher sits at the edge of the circle or the carpet on a low chair, holding the picture book about at the children's eye level. The chair the teacher sits in to read from is a special chair, used both for teacher read-alouds and for the children to read their own writing to the class. Each teacher calls this chair *the author's chair*.

Nancy, Patty, and Lolita have mastered reading from the side. Thus the children can see the illustrations while the teacher reads. These teachers know the story they are about to read. They have carefully selected it and read it through, practicing how it will sound when read aloud, in advance. They know how to read it with excitement in their voices. They are careful not to overdramatize, yet they use pitch and stress to make the printed dialogue sound like conversation. They show that they enjoy the story.

The following suggestions for effective read-alouds are recommended by several groups of researchers based on their survey of research studies, reading methods textbooks, and books and articles about reading to children.

- *Read to students every day:* Research done during the 1980s indicated that only 50 to 60 percent of teachers read aloud to their classes on a regular basis (Lapointe, 1986; Morrow, 1982). A more recent study by James Hoffman, Nancy Roser, and Jennifer Battle (1993) presents a much more positive picture. These researchers found that, on a given day, 84 percent of kindergarten teachers read to their classes.

- *Select high-quality literature:* A key element to a successful read-aloud experience is the book that is being read. Find books that will appeal to the children's interest, evoke humor, stimulate critical thinking, stretch the imagination. Find books from multiple genres (fictional narratives, concept, poetry, informational/expository). Find books that include "diverse representation of characters and family structure, including people of differing race, gender, ability and language" (Smith, Brady, & Anastasopoulos, 2008, p. 26).

- *Show the children the cover of the book:* Draw the children's attention to the illustration on the cover ("Look at the illustration on this book!"). Tell the children the title of the book, the author's name, and the illustrator's name. ("The title of this book is . . . The author is . . . The illustrator is . . . ") Tell the children that the author is the person who wrote the book and

the illustrator is the person who drew the pictures. Later, ask the children what the author and the illustrator do. Draw your finger under the title, the author's name, and the illustrator's name as you read each. Remind the children that the title, author's name, and illustrator's name are always on the front of the book. Remember that these are new concepts for young children.

- *Ask the children for their predictions about the story:* ("What do you think this story might be about?") Take a few of the children's predictions about the story's content. ("Let's read to see what this story is about.")
- *Or provide a brief introduction to the story:* This can be accomplished in a number of ways. You might provide background information about the story ("This story is going to be about . . ."), connect the topic or theme of the story to the children's own experiences, draw the children's attention to familiar books written by the same author, draw the children's attention to the book's central characters, clarify vocabulary that might be outside the children's realm of experiences, and so on. Keep the introduction brief but sufficient to build the children's background knowledge, so there is ample reading time.
- *Identify where and what you will read:* Two important concepts about print for young children to learn are that readers read the print on the pages, not the pictures, and where readers begin reading. Begin read-alouds by identifying where you will start reading and what you will read. Repeating this information often ("Now, I'll begin reading the words right here") weaves this important information into the read-aloud. Be sure to point to the first word on the page as you say where you will begin. Eventually the children will be able to tell you where to begin reading. After many exposures to this important concept, you might playfully ask, "Am I going to read the words or the pictures in this book?" "Where should I begin reading?"
- *Read with expression and at a moderate rate:* When teachers read with enthusiasm and vary their voices to fit different characters and the ongoing dialogue, the story comes alive for children. It is also important to avoid reading too quickly. Jim Trelease (2006), a leading authority, claims that this is the most common mistake that adults make when reading aloud. He recommends reading slowly enough that children can enjoy the pictures and can make mental images of the story (not too slow and not too fast, just right). Miriam Smith, Joanne Brady, and Louise Anastasopoulos (2008) agree, adding that exemplary reading is characterized by "expressiveness and fluency, which supports children's understanding of the book, characters, and/or content" (p. 32).
- *Read favorite books repeatedly:* Not every book you read has to be a book the children have never heard before. In fact, repeated readings of books can lead to enhanced comprehension and better postreading discussions (Martinez & Roser, 1985; Morrow, 1988) and increased likelihood that the children will retain the new vocabulary word, both expressive (words the children produce) and receptive (words the children understand) (Justice, 2002; Penno, Wilkinson, & Moore, 2002). In addition, reading a book three or more times increases the likelihood that young children will select that book during free-choice time and will try to reenact or read it on their own (Martinez & Teale, 1988). Of course, the benefits of repeated reading need to be balanced against the need to expose children to a wide variety of literature.
- *Allow time for discussion after reading:* Good books arouse a variety of thoughts and emotions in children. Be sure to follow each read-aloud session with a good conversation, with questions and comments ("What part of the story did you like best?" "How did you feel when . . . ?" "Has anything like that ever happened to you?" "Who has something to say about the story?"). This type of open-ended question invites children to share their responses to the book that was read. After listening to a book read-aloud, children want to talk about the events, characters, parts they liked best, and so forth. As children and teacher talk about the book together, they construct a richer, deeper understanding of the book. Reader response theorists, like Louise Rosenblatt (1978), provide theoretical support for the importance of teachers' talking with children about shared books. Rosenblatt believes that, as children listen to stories, they are constructing meaning based on the previous experiences they bring to the text and their purpose for listening. Listeners focus on two kinds of information: remembering information (e.g., the story's main idea, the three main events) and connecting through personal images, ideas, feelings, and questions evoked

while listening. Through good conversations about books, teachers and children can explore ideas of personal importance and thus can analyze and interpret the book. Teachers want to work toward being a member of the book circle, one of the discussants who takes turns talking with the children. When the teacher does ask questions, they are open-ended questions that encourage children to interpret, extend, and connect with the text. In Trade Secrets 6.1, Cory Hansen describes how Chris Boyd engages her kindergartners in discussions that help them jointly construct deeper meaning for the stories they are read. Chris's strategy lays the foundation for literature study groups in the primary grades.

- *Read stories interactively; that is, encourage children to interact verbally with the text, peers, and the teacher during the book reading:* In interactive reading, teachers and children pose questions throughout their book reading to enhance the children's meaning construction and to show how one makes sense of text (Barrentine, 1996). Teachers encourage their students to offer spontaneous comments, to ask questions, to respond to others' questions, and to notice the forms and functions of print features (words, punctuation, letters) as the story unfolds. They use the during-reading book discussions to help children understand what to think about as a story unfolds. Interactive storybook reading provides an opportunity for children's engagement with the story. "Adult-child interactive storybook reading . . . is . . . one of the most potent and frequent contexts for . . . incidental language and literacy learning of young children" (Justice & Pence, 2005, p. 7).

But merely inviting children to talk during storybook reading is not sufficient. Various literacy experts and researchers have proposed interactive storybook reading strategies. For example, in their book *Scaffolding with Storybooks: A Guide for Enhancing Young Children's Language and Literacy Achievement*, Justice and Pence describe how to use specific storybooks and interactive storybook-reading strategies to assist children in developing print knowledge, word knowledge, phonological knowledge, alphabet knowledge, narrative knowledge, and world knowledge. The multiple examples of the "extratextual conversation" language (what does it really sound like when teachers engage in conversations with their students during storybook reading?) scaffold teachers new to interactive storybook-reading strategies as they work to change or develop their storybook-reading behavior from "just" reading to reading interactively.

Anne Gregory and Many Ann Cahill (2010) describe an interactive reading strategy used by a kindergarten teacher. This teacher taught her young learners how to use three hand signals to show how they were comprehending a story. They hold their hand in the shape of a *C* to indicate that they are making a connection to the story, a *V* to indicate that are picturing something in their mind, and wiggle a finger to indicate a question. While reading, the teacher periodically stops to ask the children to share their connections, mind pictures, and questions.

Grover Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst et al., 1988) call their interactive reading approach "dialogic reading." Dialogic reading is often used by teachers of young children. In Trade Secrets 6.2, Silvia Palenzuela describes how preschool teachers in several early childhood classrooms in the Miami, Florida, area are using this approach with their young children.

While each of these interactive reading strategies is different, all share the need for teachers to prepare for the read-aloud by reading the storybook ahead of time and considering which questions are important to ask the children to aid them in comprehending the story. Some of these questions will be literal (e.g., who, what, where, when, in what order), and some will be inferential (e.g., relate text to life experiences, predict outcomes, compare and contrast, determine cause and effect). If the story is a narrative one, some will focus on the story's structure (sometimes called the story grammar). That is, the teacher will draw the children's attention to story's setting, the main character, the story's problem, how the character attempts to solve the problem, and how the problem is solved. Such questions are key to supporting young children's development of story structure knowledge (Stevens, Van Meter, & Warcholak, 2010). All of these interactive reading approaches aim to help children comprehend the stories read to them. In addition, all of these approaches help children acquire the early reading standards deemed important for their success as readers. In Special Feature 6.2, we provide examples of typical standards like those used in various states and the common core standards.

TRADE SECRETS 6.1

Getting Children to Talk about a Story

Cory Hansen and Chris Boyd

I had the opportunity to observe in Chris Boyd's kindergarten classroom on the day she read De Paola's (1975) *Strega Nona,* a wonderful story of what happens when Big Anthony ignores good advice and overruns his town with pasta from the magic pasta pot. As Chris was reading the book, the carpet in front of her was scattered with children. Some were lying flat on their backs looking up at the ceiling; others were on their sides, only a finger wiggle away from good friends; and others were sitting up, cross-legged, their eyes never leaving the pages of the story. The last page of the story is wordless. Big Anthony's expression tells it all as he sits outside the house, his stomach swollen almost to bursting, with one last strand of pasta lingering on his fork. The children burst into laughter, and as Chris motioned with her index finger, they regrouped, calling out, "I think . . . , I think . . ." on their way to forming a large circle. And for the next half hour, that was what was talked about: what the children thought about the story.

The conversation began with what the children thought was going to happen and comparing it to what really did. Chris asked the children why they thought the way they did, and then the serious business of making meaning together began. (She gradually lowered herself down from the reading chair and joined in as one participant in this group talked about the story: the one with a copy of the text and the one writing comments into a notebook.) The kindergartners called on her only when they needed someone to reread part of the text to settle disputes. Chris did not enter the conversation unless the children lost sight of her one rule for talk about the story or unless an opportunity to seize a literary teachable moment emerged.

After the group examined Big Anthony's motives and explored connections from this story to their own lives, Chris and I had an opportunity to talk about how she structured and scaffolded meaningful talk about the story with young children. My first question was why the children were all over the room as she read. She explained that she offered the children the opportunity to "go to wherever they could do their best listening." In this way she felt she respected the children's choices and could hold them accountable if they acted in ways that did not show good listening by moving them to a different part of the room. By respecting their choices, focus was on listening and thinking rather than sitting or being still.

"So why," I was quick to ask, "do they form a sitting circle after the story?"

"Well, first, it is easier to hear what is being said if they are in a circle. I teach them to look at the person who is talking. I think it encourages them to listen carefully and think through what others are saying. As well, when they are all in a circle they begin to watch for nonverbal cues that show that another person has something to add or introduce to the conversation."

I noticed that the kinds of questions Chris asked her kindergartners during the talk were different than those I had heard in other classrooms. When the children were arguing about why Big Anthony didn't know to blow the three kisses, Chris's question to the group was, "Was there any clue that that might have been a problem for him?" Matthew was quick to suggest that Chris should read the part when Strega Nona was singing to the pot again. The children listened very carefully as Chris reread that part of the story and used the information from the book to settle their disagreement. While that particular part of the conversation was going on, Chris was writing hurriedly in her notebook. I asked her why she recorded what the children were saying as they talked about story.

"When I write down what they say, they see and feel the importance of their words. They know I value what they say and what they think is special enough to write down. It makes them realize how important talk about story really is. Also, I can bring the conversation back around to something a child said when everyone gets talking at once or if a soft-spoken or shy child makes a comment that may otherwise go unnoticed. Like when they were arguing about Big Anthony, Sara made a really smart comment about how the pot needed someone to be nice to it. Her comment was lost in the discussion, but later on, after the issue was settled, I could bring it up again and then the conversation started anew."

I wondered why Chris didn't just have the children raise their hands when they had something to say. She told me that even though it takes a long time and lots of patience to teach children to follow her one rule for talk about story—talk one at a time and talk to the whole group—they eventually learn more than just being polite. Chris found that if she had children raise their hands to talk, they just sat there, waving their arms, waiting to say what they wanted without listening to and considering what other people were saying or connecting their ideas to the book or the opinions of others. Even though it is loud and messy at times, the results are worth the effort.

The kindergartners in Chris Boyd's classroom obviously loved the chance to talk about the story with each other. They used talk about the story to learn more about how things worked in the world and, in the process, learned more about the world of story.

When teachers follow the preceding guidelines, they can help ensure that their story reading has the maximum impact on children's language and literacy learning.