

**HOW DOES SHE DO THAT? AN EXEMPLARY PRESCHOOL TEACHER
ENGAGING LOW-INCOME CHILDREN'S EMERGENT
COMPREHENSION DURING READ-ALOUD...
IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

by

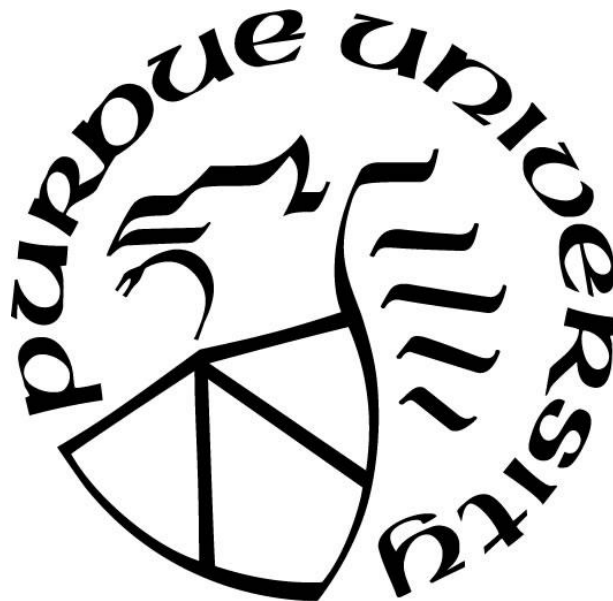
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I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Drew Martin, whose love, encouragement, emotional support and belief in me were endless.

IN MEMORY

I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my dad, Al Morey, who passed away during my coursework. Even as he lay ill in his hospital bed, he thought of me and the hard work I was doing. He told the nurses, “My daughter is going to be a doctor!”

I also dedicate this dissertation in memory of our neighbor, Larry Juzwicki. For the past eight years he yelled across our yards, “Hey Dr. Martin!” and I replied, “Not yet, Larry”. Well, Larry – I’m finally Dr Martin!

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ABSTRACT

Although young children from low-income families may (or may not) have fewer quality literacy experiences at home before attending preschool or kindergarten, instruction from an exemplary teacher matters most for emergent comprehension development. This single, intrinsic case study describes how one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic required interviews with the teacher and observations of read-alouds to be conducted via Zoom. Socio-cultural, social constructivist and semiotic theories framed this study's design as a case study. Data analysis utilized Cambourne's Model of Learning (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020) and Dooley & Matthews (2009) Model of Emergent Comprehension. Key findings were that the teacher formed positive relationships with and among her children, getting to know their families and cultural backgrounds. She used this knowledge along with what she observed during read-alouds to engage her students and personalize both academic and social-emotional instruction for them. Her young students' responses during read-alouds evidenced how they constructed meaning by making connections between school- and home-based interactions.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“Learning to read is one of the greatest accomplishments in childhood because it is the foundation for learning and academic achievement” (Paris, 2005, p. 184).

1.1 Background

Learning to read is one of the greatest gifts I have received. Since I was a child, I was drawn to books, sometimes for knowledge, sometimes for simple pleasure, but always because reading left me feeling fulfilled. Reading became a major part of my identity. As I grew into this passion, I discovered that not only was it my own internal passion, but one that metamorphosized into an external force through my life’s work. To position myself as the researcher, I have described how my experiences as a child and later as a teacher and administrator fueled my desire to examine an exemplary Head Start preschool teacher. Having grown up in a low-income home, one might expect that I struggled learning to read and struggled academically in general. In fact, children from low-income families often perform lower than those from higher socio-economic groups on standardized tests. (Comber, 2014; Willis, 2015). However, I was a bit of an anomaly. I learned to read easily, and I excelled academically despite several factors. For example, I was not frequently read to as a preschooler. My mother did not have the patience to sit and read to my brothers and I, and my father played a less active role in our academics. I did not go to preschool because my mother was a stay-at-home mom who believed she could teach us what we needed to know to be ready for kindergarten naturally through our daily lives. I did not have a vast library of books to read at home, but I had access to the public library, and I visited often. These experiences are part of my culture, my way of being in the world today.

A lack of early childhood education apparently did not hamper my school success or my passion for and dedication to education. I was the first in my immediate family to graduate from

college, and I became an elementary teacher. I enjoyed all aspects of teaching elementary children. However, later in my career I became increasingly intrigued by how children learned to read, especially those who found it difficult. Reading brought enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment to my life. I wanted all children to experience those feelings, and I believed I could help them experience them.

My experiences as a teacher and school administrator also shaped my views about low-income children, exemplary teaching, and emergent comprehension. Holloway & Biley (2011) note that “In qualitative inquiry, the researchers’ selves are involved, their experiences become a resource” (p. 968). My experiences became a resource, and a part of my self was reflected in this study as I explored how low-income children are in fact capable of deep, complex meaning making, as I had been. I have a special interest in children from low-income families, and I work hard to advocate for equitable educational opportunities for them, including access to an exemplary teacher. The following examples reveal how my experiences became resources while designing this study.

The beginning of my teaching career as a first and second grade teacher and subsequent experiences as a teacher working with students who struggled learning to read shaped this study. Even then, I wondered, “Why do some students learn to read easily, and others need significant extra support? How can teachers best provide this support?” To begin to answer those questions, I embarked on a master’s program, and shortly after earning that degree, I had the opportunity for extensive training in the Reading Recovery program. This program provided one perspective for supporting young struggling readers and writers. The individual tutoring style of instruction, in which the teacher closely observed and followed the child’s lead increased literacy skills for most children in the program. Later, I took a position as a district level administrator so I could impact

change on a larger scale. In the administrative role, I observed various ways young children learn to read as well as various approaches to teaching children to read. The district had a high percentage of low-income students, and I provided an array of support to teachers, guiding them to adopt an emergent reading perspective which I believe better serves all children and is critical when teaching children from low-income families.

1.2 Research questions

My continued desire to understand how teachers could best support emergent reading of children from low-income families then led me to doctoral studies in Literacy and Language. During these studies, I participated in a project with my advisor and became aware of an exemplary preschool teacher named Margie, whom I thought might help answer that question. While working on that project during the 2015-2016 school year, I observed Margie's practices. Often students from low-income families are not afforded opportunities for rich conversations and higher-level thinking because of the perception that they are less capable due to their socio-economic status. This was not true in Margie's classroom. In designing this current study, I wondered, "How can I describe Margie's exemplary teaching practices? How exactly does she interact with her low-income students in ways that lead them to successful meaning-making about books that are read to them?" These questions, through much refinement ultimately led to the following research questions for this current study:

1. How does one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do her students' responses to her read-aloud reflect their emergent comprehension development?

1.3 Significance

Learning to read from an emergent reading perspective encompasses multiple reading skills and behaviors such as oral language, print code and comprehension (meaning-making) which young children display before learning to read conventional print text through formal reading instruction in school (Dickinson et al., 2010; De Witt & Lessing, 2018; Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Hill & Nichols, 2014; Lysaker, 2019; Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Sulzby, 1985; van den Broek et al., 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). In fact, these behaviors begin at birth and progress through an ongoing continuum. They are visible as young children make sense of the world around them while participating in their normal daily activities with their families and other significant people in their lives. Furthermore, these early reading behaviors are legitimate precursors to conventional reading skills (Dooley, 2010; Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Harste et al., 1984; Hill & Nichols, 2014; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997; Morrow & Dougherty, 2011; Sulzby & Teale, 1996; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; van den Broek et al., 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Emergent reading practices in preschool classrooms are often heavily focused on how the sounds in oral language are represented by letters in print, otherwise known as phonics. This is especially true for students from low-income families. Often teachers perceive these children as less capable than their more affluent peers, and they may narrow their reading instruction to the print-based aspect while providing fewer opportunities for the meaning-based aspect. The perception is that children from low-income families are less capable of higher-level thinking involved with meaning-based activities such as deep, rich conversations in which language and meaning are built. Direct instruction of discrete, print-based skills is thought to be more appropriate for these “less-able” students (Comber, 2014; Dyson, 2015; Lysaker, 2019; McClung et al., 2019; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Although phonics is absolutely necessary to learn to read, it is not enough. Emergent *comprehension* must be equally valued and encouraged for all

young children to become successful readers, with particular thought and planning for low-income children to build meaning-based skills so they have equal access to all aspects of learning to read (Dyson, 2015; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Margie exhibited the deep knowledge of, and practices related to quality emergent reading instruction. She identified, understood, and valued emergent comprehension as an important literacy skill in addition to print-based skills. It was also clear that she valued each of her students, their knowledge, and the skills and dispositions they exhibited in her classroom, despite the fact they were from low-income households. Margie did not view her students as “less able” because of their socio-economic status. Instead, she held high expectations for them. One activity in which her high expectations were observed were her read-alouds. While fostering rich conversations during the read-alouds, she guided students in meaning-based skills such as understanding stories by making connections to their own lives. I was intrigued by how Margie accomplished this. As such, Margie’s success in the classroom as the focus of this case study essentially selected itself (Stake, 1995).

The findings of this study hold significance for both practitioners and researchers in the field of early childhood literacy. For teachers, the description of Margie’s emergent comprehension teaching practices and her students’ responses during read-alouds can facilitate reflection on one’s own beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and practices with students from low-income families. Reflecting in this way can result in positive changes in teaching practices leading to complex meaning-making from young students. Reflection will be particularly helpful as teachers begin teaching in normal contexts after the pandemic. Several things teachers can glean from teaching via Zoom are the need to engage children, form relationships, and personalize teaching, which were more difficult when teaching remotely. For administrators, the findings can

provide additional ways to evaluate preschool teachers, beyond what is traditionally included in evaluative tools. Talking with teachers about their beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and practices with children from low-income households prior to evaluative observations provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect and make changes to their teaching if necessary. The importance of positive relationships among teacher and students is another area not typically evaluated by administrators, but an important one to student learning, nonetheless. Early childhood researchers can also benefit from this inquiry. Many other studies were conducted with preschool teachers and students during the pandemic. However, I found none that were case studies focused on the relationships and interactions during instruction. Most were surveys collecting data around the experiences of children, parents and teachers during remote learning. I provide an example of a case study of an exemplary preschool teacher interacting with her students during read-alouds conducted remotely.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

In this section, I describe the purpose of this study, beginning with a brief description of the original research plan and ending with the modifications made due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under normal circumstances I would have built a case by interviewing Margie to gather data to describe her beliefs, perceptions and expectations of her low-income students. I would have observed her and her students in their classroom during their read-aloud time to observe her teaching practices and her students' responses. However, just as I was beginning to design this study, the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced. Margie was forced to shift her planning for her read-aloud activities which would be delivered remotely, via Zoom, a video-conferencing platform used by many educators during the pandemic. Despite these complications and the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, Margie managed to continue to foster her students' emergent

comprehension during read-alouds. The purpose of this study ultimately shifted to describe how she did this by observing the interactions between her, her students, and the stories she read via Zoom.

From a constructivist perspective, knowledge originates from interactions and relationships with others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and relationships with family members mediate young children's emergent comprehension from birth, before they enter preschool or kindergarten. Parents who struggle financially may have less time and fewer resources to provide quality literacy experiences to develop emergent comprehension (Lane & Wright, 2007), so preschool read-alouds are especially important for children from low-income families. The relationships a preschool teacher forms with their young students matter greatly for their emergent comprehension (Dooley & Matthews, 2009), and the ways in which a preschool teacher conducts read-aloud sessions are key (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Wright, 2019). A read-aloud is an ideal reading practice for teachers to focus on rich conversations and positive interactions to build relationships with their students and to promote their emergent comprehension.

1.5 Gap in the Research

There is a paucity of information around exemplary preschool teachers and their students while teaching and learning remotely, especially with students from low-income families. This study helps fill this gap by describing how one exemplary preschool teacher promoted emergent comprehension with her young students from low-income families while conducting read-alouds via Zoom. Utilizing Zoom for literacy learning was a new expectation for both the teacher and the preschool students in this study.

Several studies regarding teacher expectations of and practices with preschool students from low-income families focus on literacy curriculum that has been pushed down from first grade

to kindergarten and even preschool. This pushed-down curriculum often focuses on learning letter names and sounds, and less on meaning-making skills and emergent comprehension (Bassok, et al., 2016; Dickinson et al., 2010; Siegel, 2006). Often, promoting comprehension is purposely minimized with students from low-income families because teachers view them as lacking deeper thinking capabilities (Rist, 1970). Rist's (1970) seminal study focused on how early elementary students from low-income/low-status groups were treated in the classroom. The teacher in Rist's study marginalized the low-status group by isolating and essentially ignoring them (Rist, 1970). Rist (1970) concluded that the teacher's marginalization of these students led to their lower academic performance. I argue that an exemplary teacher who accepts and values students from low-income families can lead to higher academic performance. In this study, I argue that rich interactive discussions during read-alouds represent age-appropriate high expectations that promote emergent comprehension.

1.6 Overview of Methodology and Methods

In this study I used single intrinsic case study methodology to answer the following questions (Stake, 1995):

1. How does one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do her students' responses to her read-aloud reflect their emergent comprehension development?

Case study methodology is often used when one is interested in *how* or *why* a phenomenon occurs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). I was interested in the phenomenon of exemplary preschool teaching, and I selected the single aforementioned exemplary Head Start preschool teacher as the case to explore my questions. I had an intrinsic interest in this particular

teacher because of my prior experience observing her and her students, and I wanted to learn more about how she interacted with her students and promoted their emergent comprehension.

The interactions I observed among Margie, the child(ren) and the books during the read-aloud via Zoom were the unit of analysis in this study. Observations along with interviews with Margie provided data for answering my research questions. Due to the pandemic, there were fewer students enrolled in the Head Start program. Therefore, I observed a small group of four children, two of whom were siblings, during their read-aloud Zoom sessions with Margie. My study was conceptually bounded by emergent comprehension during read-alouds, learning capabilities of children from low-income families and exemplary teacher beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and practices. In addition, contextual boundaries included remote teaching and learning due to the pandemic, and specific to this study, read-alouds via Zoom (see Figure 1).

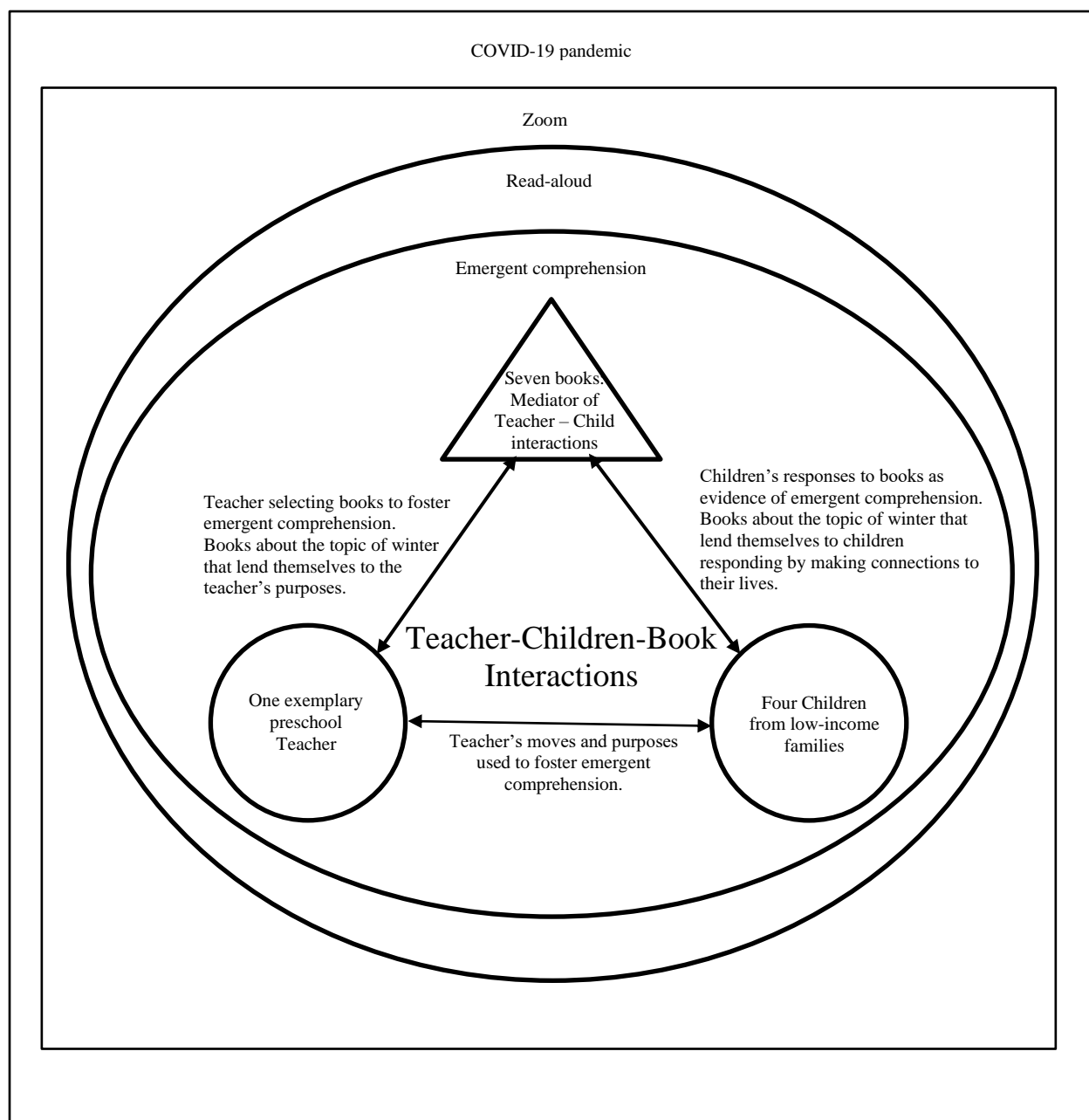


Figure 1. *Study Boundaries and Context*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to embrace a new facet of the “field” and the context in which my study took place. At the beginning of the study, Margie was in her classroom, delivering the live sessions via Zoom, with the help of her three teaching assistants. Later, Margie and her assistants were also working remotely from home, continuing to

use Zoom to read aloud to students. I observed a total of nineteen Zoom sessions from mid-December 2020 through the end of February 2021. I recorded the Zoom sessions, wrote field notes during each session, and edited and revised field notes shortly after each session. Field notes captured teaching practices and responses from the students. Of the twenty Zoom sessions I observed, eight were selected for analysis based on exemplary teaching practices that fostered emergent comprehension and on the richness of children's responses. Criteria for analysis selection is described in-depth in the methods section in Chapter 3.

My role was that of an observer-as-participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which meant I was closer to the observer end of the continuum from complete observer to complete participant. This is because I wanted to observe Margie and students in their natural environment, doing what they typically do every day during their read-aloud activity. I did not want my presence to influence Margie's practices, nor did I want students to be distracted by another adult showing up on their Zoom screen. Although Margie knew I was "there" listening and watching the read-aloud session, I was able to hide my presence from the students. I turned off both my audio and video, and a Zoom feature allowed me to hide my "square" entirely from the students.

Other sources of data were two types of interviews, guided interviews and conversational interviews with Margie via Zoom, email, phone, texts or in-person (Patton, 2015). In-person communication was paraphrased shortly after the meeting. In guided interviews, I wanted flexibility in formulating and ordering questions based on Margie's answers. Thus, I outlined possible topics without specific questions (Patton, 2015). Conversely, in conversational interviews, I derived clarifying questions directly from previous observations and used these interviews as member checks with Margie (Patton, 2015).

Data analysis began immediately after the first introductory interview with Margie. Each subsequent piece of data from observations and interviews was analyzed using the constant comparative method, checking each against previous data and using the analysis to inform further data collection. Data collection and analysis continued in this manner, and patterns between the two types of data developed. Once there were no new insights about Margie's teaching moves and purposes or the children's responses to her and the books, I knew I had reached saturation. Analysis and synthesis continued to be refined more deeply with the data collected up to that point of saturation.

1.7 Theoretical Perspectives

Three theoretical perspectives drove data collection and analysis for this study: socio-cultural, social constructivism and semiotic perspectives. Choosing interactions among Margie, her students, and the books as my unit of analysis reflects the social aspect of learning from socio-cultural and social constructivist theories. When children constructed meaning by making connections to their own lives, socio-cultural and social constructivism perspectives were at work. Margie accepted and honored the varied ways her young children constructed meaning, whether they were making connections to their lives inside or outside of school and whether they were language-based or multi-modal in nature. Margie's acknowledgement and affirmation of multi-modal ways of making meaning reflect a semiotic perspective.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. In Chapter 1 I presented the background of the study, beginning with my personal and professional interest in exemplary teachers, emergent comprehension, and students from low-income families. Next, I presented my research questions

and the significance and purpose of the study. I identified the gap in the research this study addresses, and then I provided an overview of the methodology and methods utilized. I included a visual representation of the study's complex boundaries and context to aid the reader's understanding.

In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature about exemplary teaching and emergent comprehension, and how these converge with students from low-income families. In Chapter 3, I discuss my research methodology, including my purposes for selecting qualitative research methods and specifically my choice of a single, intrinsic case study research design. Next, data collection and analysis procedures are described. I conclude Chapter 3 with a presentation of the research codes, categories, and themes identified in the case study.

In Chapter 4, I explain the findings from this case study. Each category and the related themes are described using examples from transcripts of the observations and interviews. I conclude Chapter 4 by showing how the themes answered each research question.

In Chapter 5, I review the findings and discuss them in relation to current literature. Next, I discuss implications for teachers, families, Head Start programs as well as recommendations for research. I conclude by stating my final assertion about exemplary preschool teachers and how they can promote emergent comprehension in young children from low-income families through read-alouds.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

During my elementary school years, I was not aware I was from a low-income household. I attended the school in my neighborhood where most families were lower middle-class or low-income. It was not until I entered middle school in 1976 that I became aware I was from a low-income household. Entering middle school with kids from six other elementary schools was a significant change for me, especially because the socio-economic status of each elementary school was well known to both students and teachers. I became aware that I was from one of the schools from the lower socio-economic area when my 8th grade math teacher alluded to his lower expectations of students from low-income families. We were in an advanced math class, and he asked us to raise our hands designating which elementary school we came from. There were not many from the lower socio-economic schools; he “proved” his perception of the lower abilities of students from low-income families. I wanted to prove him wrong.

2.1 Literacy and Students from Low-income Families

In fact, many teachers believe that children from low-income families will not do well in school. It is well known that the literacy achievement of children from low-income households tends to be lower than the achievement of more affluent children (Au, 1998; Duke & Block, 2012). Why is this? Is it because children from low-income families are inherently less intelligent? Is it because their parents have not surrounded them in a language- and literacy-rich environment at home before entering school? Is it because they do not have as many opportunities to gain literacy skills in school? In this section I discuss how students from low-income families fare with literacy learning in school.

Children from low-income families may be perceived as less capable of learning, leading teachers to have lower expectations for their learning (Au, 1998; Duke & Block, 2012). Often teachers do not value students' lived experiences if those experiences do not match the white, middle-class perspective from which most American curriculum evolves (Delpit, 2012). Au and Raphael (2000) and Mikkelsen (1990) found that non-mainstream students were considered deficient because their literacy skills did not match the literacy skills of mainstream students.

Neighborhood and home environments of middle-class students and those who live in poverty differ. Children from families of poverty may live in unsafe neighborhood environments; they do not play outside with their neighborhood friends, limiting their social interactions with other children and hence, oral language growth necessary for later literacy learning. Parents may feel stressed about trying to make ends meet (Comber, 2014) and may work more than one job, leaving little time and energy for responsive parenting (King, 2011) or quality verbal interactions with children (Heath, 1989). With minimal financial resources, there may be a lack of access to proper health care and adequate nutrition (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2018) leading to poor cognitive development. Cognitive delays quickly accumulate among those who are most poor.

However, Purcell-Gates et al. (1995) warns against perceiving all children from low-income families as a homogenous group related to their print experiences at home. "All too often we have fallen into the trap of characterizing the members of an entire group as one in terms of literacy practices" (p. 576), when in fact there is great diversity of print experiences even among low-income families. Although there are challenges for families with limited financial resources, low-income children may have quality literacy experiences originating from home. These literacies are usually ones that are valued at home but are not aligned with school expectations (Heath, 1989; Mikkelsen, 1990; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). For example, parents living in

poverty may have limited education, but even so, they and other family members may have resources that contribute positively to their child(ren)'s literacy development, even if these resources do not match school expectations. Heath (1989) wrote about the literate culture of low-income Black Americans and noted that at home, ways of *showing* what one knows was valued over merely *telling* about what one has learned. This demonstration of knowledge through oral and written language as well as multimodal means is often in conflict with how schools view learning, which is often heavily based on constricted written language formats which meet school-based norms

Schools have not been successful in meeting the needs of low-income and other non-mainstream students (Au & Raphael, 2000). Data from standardized test results confirm that often, children from low-income families perform lower than those from higher socio-economic groups on these tests (Comber, 2014; Willis, 2015). One reason may be because students from low-income families are perceived as less intelligent (Duke, 2000), and thus are provided instruction focused on basic skills. This narrowed curriculum promotes little creative or critical thinking or deeper understanding (McClung et al., 2019), and is more harmful to low-income students than to middle-class or affluent students because it is further removed from the experiences of children who are poor (Comber, 2014; Dyson, 2015; Lysaker, 2019). In fact, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) warn against a simplistic view of reading as a “package of [basic] predetermined skills” (p. 201) which allows for the quantification of literacy skills, but reduces what is a complex endeavor, and does not capture all children's strengths, especially those from non-mainstream families. From a sociocultural view, the strengths individual children bring from home must be acknowledged, honored and built upon to enhance learning (Dyson, 2015). Moll et al. (1992) agree as they aim to

understand how the knowledge and skills from home and the community can be leveraged to increase the quality of classroom literacy instruction.

A quality, equitable public education is sometimes out of reach to children who are from low-income families or are of a minority race. Often this is simply because of perceptions and assumptions (Delpit, 2012), and so the achievement gap between affluent and low-income students widens. The assumption that children from low-income households have fewer experiences from birth leads to marginalization as early as kindergarten (Rist, 1970), and even preschool. But as Delpit (2012) says, “We can educate all children if we truly want to... We must be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character... we must learn *who* our children are – their lived cultures; their interests; and their intellectual, political, and historical legacies” (Delpit, 2012, p. 49). Knowing our students’ family and community backgrounds matters because of what we know about emergent literacy.

2.2 Perspectives on Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy is the process of becoming literate that begins at birth (Dickinson et al., 2010; Dooley, 2010; Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Hill & Nichols, 2014; Lysaker & Hopper, 2015; Sulzby, 1985; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Marie Clay, as described by Doyle (2013) recognized emergent literacy skills such as oral language, vocabulary knowledge and children’s meaning-making of the world as important foundations from which to build once formal schooling begins. (Doyle, 2013). This has not always been the case. Over time theoretical perspectives on emergent literacy have changed. In this section I discuss emergent literacy from three perspectives relevant to this study: sociocultural, social constructivism and semiotic.

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) tells us children develop and learn through their interactions with more knowledgeable others, and later they internalize this learning.

A sociocultural viewpoint also emphasizes the context of learning, including the use of cultural signs and tools to mediate learning (Au, 1998). Naturally, a young child's family and other significant community members are their more knowledgeable others. It follows then, that emergent literacy develops within the context of a child's home and community where children are socialized in the cultural ways of their family (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

In fact, another tenet of emergent literacy from a sociocultural view is that language and literacy behaviors begin at birth. As babies interact with their family and their environment they learn languages successfully, rapidly, usually effortlessly and painlessly. Learning to speak a language is a social activity manifested by the culture in which one is a part and is learned rather naturally (Cambourne, 1995; Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Dooley et al., 2013; Hill & Nichols, 2014; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). When babies interact with their families and their environment, they are making sense of everything around them and communicating their needs within that environment. Babies, toddlers and preschoolers quickly begin to understand the language being spoken around them, before ever being formally taught conventional print reading and writing in school.

Perhaps because the very early development of literacy is the focus of an emergent perspective, case studies of children by their parents and other care givers are often used. For example, Bissex (1980) observed her son, Paul, as he learned to read and write at home, without formal instruction. She found that "before Paul recognized words, he recognized stories" (Bissex, 1980, p. 120). Paul did not simply retell a story – he could do that without physically holding the book, but he was looking at the pictures as he was reading, using them to guide his storytelling. Paul's behavior points to the natural development of meaning making before learning print and code concepts, and the importance of honoring this knowledge young children bring to school with

them to further develop their literacy. In fact, a sociocultural view of emergent literacy honors and values the differences in literacy experiences and knowledge children bring from their homes, their communities, their social, cultural and historical backgrounds (Davidson, 2010). Davidson (2010) points to our increasingly diverse population and says that this reality “demands that responsible educators acknowledge, respect, and draw on students’ cultural and social experiences with respect to literacy learning” (p. 255).

Social constructivism, like a sociocultural view emphasizes interacting with others and the role this plays in learning. However, social constructivists believe learners first construct meaning individually and then social interactions build on that foundation (Au, 1998, p. 300). Young children are co-constructing meaning before attending school as they interact with their environment and the people in that environment – their siblings, parents, peers, and other adults (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Dooley, 2010; Hill & Nichols, 2014; Lysaker & Hopper, 2015; Sulzby, 1985; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). They refine their skills through “experience...fine-tuning and continued orchestration” (Harste et al., 1984, p. x). Therefore, from a social constructivist view, young literacy learners are already capable language users when they enter school (Harste et al., 1984). Their language knowledge is of course, less sophisticated than that of an adult, who naturally has had more practice and more experience. And that is where teachers come in, building on the child’s foundation from home. Thus, social constructivism contributes to understandings of emergent literacy by first acknowledging and respecting where young children are in their language development when they enter school. Following this, social constructivists posit that young children’s language and meaning making will expand when provided experiences to co-construct knowledge by interacting with their teacher and classmates. However, as Kress (1999) states, “texts are also always more than language” (p. 468), and we know young children use modes

other than just language to make meaning (Lysaker, 2019). For this reason, another perspective is necessary to further understand emergent literacy.

A semiotic perspective adds to ideas about emergent literacy by recognizing all the ways meaning can be represented (Siegel & Rowe, 2011). As such, it encompasses the multimodal ways young children make meaning. Initially babies are only able to respond in non-linguistic ways, such as sounds (crying, cooing), facial expressions and body language. Babies understand how others are feeling by the intonation of voice and body language. Later, as toddlers and preschoolers, they begin to interpret the world and communicate with people around them in more sophisticated multimodal ways, through language as well as non-linguistic modes; for example, sounds (music, environmental), movement (gesture, body language, dance), facial expressions, and images. While observing young children reading images in wordless books we see the multimodal ways young children make meaning. Some children enact the story they create. They may change the volume and intonation of their voice to help create meaning. Similarly, they may voice movement from the image, such as saying, “oo-oo-oo-oo” to signify the wind is blowing. Another way young children create meaning from images is to get out of their chair and perform actions to mimic characters’ body stances or to create movement of a character in the story. All of these require a semiotic, multimodal stance in order to understand emergent literacy.

While theoretical perspectives suggest complexity, current policies make it difficult for teachers of preschool children from low-income families to encourage complex approaches, including multi-modal ways of learning. A narrowed reading curriculum, with its heavy emphasis on print skills (i.e. letter recognition, phonological and phonemic awareness, sound/symbol correlation, learning sight words) has been pushed down from first grade to kindergarten, and now into preschool, leaving little room for more engaging multimodal ways of learning and responding

(Bassok, et al., 2016; Wohlwend, 2008). In fact, Siegel (2006) believes that reading is more than letter identification and phonics, and fears that “literacy is shrinking to fit federal and state educational policies” (p. 75). Indeed, ignoring children’s natural multi-modal ways of learning is detrimental to their development. A limited focus on narrowly prescribed skills may be counterproductive, leading children to view reading simply as a mechanistic activity without meaning (Dickinson et al., 2010). Wessel-Powell et al. (2018) strongly challenge a “print-intensive paper-and-pencil, words-only, sit-quietly, follow directions regimen,” saying this type of environment creates a deadened response, the opposite of the liveliness seen in classrooms employing multimodal methods.

In sum, emergent literacy from the three perspectives I discuss above focus on the following ideas: 1) social interactions and the environment are important to learning language and early meaning making, 2) literacy learning begins at birth, 3) multimodal ways of making meaning need to be acknowledged and valued. Therefore, young children will benefit from literacy instruction focused on emergent comprehension, which allows for many variations of literacy knowledge, experiences and modes of meaning making.

2.3 Emergent Comprehension

In this section I will discuss emergent comprehension using Dooley & Matthews’ model (2009). Comprehension is the aspect of reading that deals with making sense of text. It follows that emergent comprehension is composed of skills and practices young children display as they make sense of texts before they can decode print (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Dooley et al., 2013; Gillen & Hall, 2013; Lysaker & Hopper, 2015; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Dooley and Matthews (2009) construct a model (see Figure 2 below) of emergent comprehension by merging the RAND (Snow, 2002) dimensions of reading comprehension with dimensions of meaning making from a child development perspective. The RAND Reading Study Group and Snow, who was the chair, defined reading comprehension as, “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2002, p. 11). This definition and the model are important because they emphasize that comprehending is not accomplished solely from the text. In fact, there are three dimensions of comprehension, as shown in the center of Figure 2. The reader is the person comprehending a text, and includes all aspects of the reader, for example, their prior knowledge and experiences they bring to the reading. The text is whatever is being read or comprehended and includes print or electronic text. The activity includes what happens before, during and after reading and comprehending. The outer circle, depicting sociocultural context, is also part of the RAND model. Each of the three dimensions interact with the sociocultural context of the act of reading (Snow, 2002).

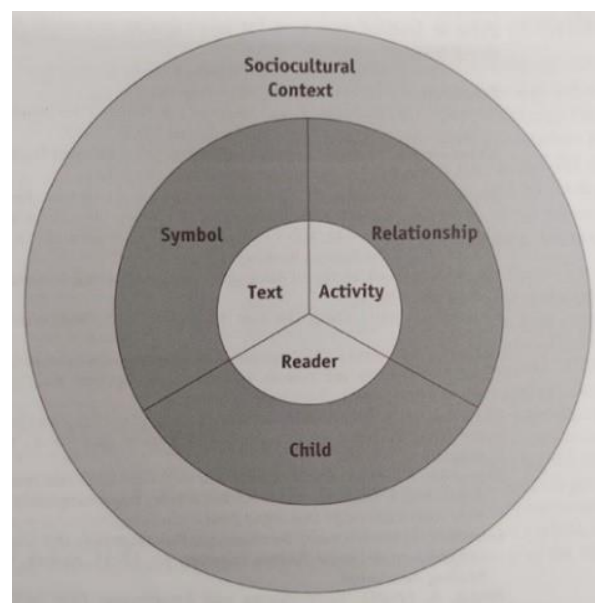


Figure 2. *Dooley & Matthews Emergent Comprehension*

Dooley and Matthews (2009) use the RAND model of comprehension and adapt the three dimensions to create emergent comprehension principles. It should be noted here that the sociocultural context envelopes both conventional and emergent reading comprehension. Readers of all ages bring different experiences and knowledge to reading text and to the meaning they are making. From the sociocultural perspective, these differences are honored and valued.

The first principle is extracted from the reader dimension of the RAND model (Snow, 2002). The reader comes to any reading task with prior experiences and interests, as well as content and linguistic knowledge that are used as tools for comprehension. Reflecting emergent comprehension, this principle explains that young children also use prior experiences and knowledge when comprehending. However, they do not simply possess less knowledge; they construct meaning differently than older children and adults, processing meaning in ways that are appropriate to their age and development. Across time, children's meaning making becomes more complex and differentiated based on personal experiences and contexts. Viewing children's meaning making practices from a child's perspective is necessary to understand how this process leads to later conventional reading comprehension (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Harste, et al. 1984).

The second emergent comprehension principle is developed from the text dimension in the RAND (Snow, 2002) model. Text is defined as written or electronic text in the RAND comprehension model. However, preschool children as emergent readers, are not yet reading print text. Instead, they are making meaning of (comprehending) symbols around them to fulfill a basic need to connect with significant others (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Hill & Nichols, 2014; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The signs and symbols preschoolers use to mediate meaning are multimodal, including images, music, body language and facial expressions, among others (Dooley & Matthews, 2009). Texts from an emergent comprehension view can include for

example, television shows (van den Broek et al., 2011). Images count as text as Lysaker, with others, have studied children reading wordless picture books. Young children's meaning-making while reading images is an extension of making meaning of the world around them as they connect with others (Lysaker, 2006; Lysaker & Hopper, 2015; Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Lysaker, et al. 2016).

The third emergent comprehension principle is created from the activity dimension in the RAND (Snow, 2002) model. In the RAND model, activity represents purposes for reading, including motivation to read. Young children's purposes and motivation for making meaning form the relationship dimension in Dooley and Matthews' emergent comprehension model (2009). This emergent principle relates how preschoolers' motivation lies in finding ways to first form relationships with important people in their lives and then to connect with the world around them. Early interactions and relationships with important others mediate young children's meaning making. Often, these relationships around reading are formed when a child sits on the lap of a family member who reads a story to them. Unfortunately, children from low-income families may have fewer lap reading experiences than their middle-class and affluent classmates. There may be fewer books in the homes of low-income families, and parents may have less time to devote to reading to their children (Lane & Wright, 2007). For these reasons, read-alouds in preschool classrooms are particularly important.

2.4 Read-alouds in Early Childhood Classrooms

In this section I discuss how teachers use read-alouds in early childhood classrooms to develop emergent comprehension. I will examine characteristics and benefits of quality read-alouds and briefly discuss children's responses to read-alouds.

The importance of teachers reading aloud to children is well documented (Conlon, 1992; Holdaway, 1982; Horst et al., 2019; Lane & Wright, 2007; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Wiseman, 2011). “Teachers reading aloud is the single most important early activity for fostering comprehension” (Teale, et al., 1987, p. 775). The classroom read-aloud is considered a best practice utilized by teachers of preschoolers to foster comprehension and build knowledge (Conlon, 1992; Horst et al., 2019; Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Wiseman, 2011).

2.4.1 Quality Read-alouds

Quality read-alouds are those conducted systematically with “researcher-designed methods, as opposed to naturally occurring methods” (Lane & Wright, 2007, p. 669). From Teale’s (2003) research, it is suggested teachers consider the following factors for preparing and presenting read-alouds in their classrooms: 1) the amount of reading time, 2) book selection, 3) connecting the story to the curriculum, and 4) method of reading aloud. Teale (2003) encourages teachers to think about the best use of their time. Done correctly, a read-aloud session can encompass many language, literacy and literary skills in the short time it takes to read one story. When planning for time for read-alouds, he also encourages teachers to consider the needs of the children in the classroom; children from low-income families may have fewer experiences with books, and therefore may need more time with read-aloud stories than their more affluent peers – more time to participate in conversation around books to develop oral language, vocabulary and sense of story.

Book selection is a common thread among researchers when discussing the quality of read-aloud time in a preschool classroom (Conlon, 1992; Horst et al., 2019; Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007; Lennox, 2013; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Wiseman, 2011). Picturebooks with

beautiful, interesting pictures, rich language and engaging characters and plots are essential for fostering children's comprehending abilities (Conlon, 1992; Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007). Wiseman suggests, "Children's literature can be a platform for discussions about how the world is, how it should be, how we want it to be..." (Wiseman, 2011, p. 438). Indeed, children's literature that is relatable to children's lives and the world around them enhances the conversations and allows for the development of students' identities as readers as well as participants in society (Wiseman, 2011).

Connecting read-aloud selections to the curriculum (Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007) is important for teachers and students alike. For teachers, the curriculum connection is imperative, so they view the time spent reading aloud as productive toward larger curricular goals and not as an optional activity or an activity to break the routine (Fisher et al., 2004). As teachers plan theme-based projects or follow a line of inquiry the class is studying, fiction or non-fiction books might add important and interesting information to the conversation (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Quality read-alouds help children make connections among multiple books and between books and other thematic or topical activities in which they participate.

To summarize, deciding how much time to allot to read-alouds is important and can be tricky, but teachers should think about their students' prior knowledge and experiences to determine what is appropriate for *their* students. Selecting books that will appeal to children and relate to their lives as well as the curriculum is also important. However, the method teachers use while reading to their students is key.

2.4.2 Interactive Read-alouds

Interactive read-aloud methods are more effective and appropriate for young children's language and comprehension development than simply reading to children who are passively

listening to a story. Young children need the adult interaction in the form of questioning, expanding ideas and prompting for details and description to develop language and comprehension skills (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Many scholars have claimed read-alouds must be interactive, responsive and conversational, allowing for lots of talk among the children (Conlon, 1992; Horst et al., 2019; Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007; Lennox, 2013; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Wiseman, 2011).

Dialogic reading is one method where teachers and children are participating in a conversation about a story; it is highly engaging for young children (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Horst et al., 2019; Lane & Wright, 2007; Lennox, 2013; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Wiseman, 2011). While scholars view dialogic reading in varying ways, I have focused on similar features among most. Teachers respond to children with sophisticated language and elaborate on concepts (Lane & Wright, 2007), fostering vocabulary and conceptual knowledge development. Teachers model their thinking, and their discourse includes confirming and extending language (Wiseman, 2011). Questioning by the teacher and by children themselves leads to deeper inferential understanding (Dickinson et al., 2010; Dougherty Stahl, 2014; van den Broek et al., 2011; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Reading using varying voices for characters, using gestures and facial expressions also add to the meaning-making, enjoyment, and engagement of a read-aloud story (Lane & Wright, 2007).

Another example of a quality, research-based method for reading aloud to young children is Text Talk (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Teachers using the Text Talk method select a book with complex ideas and the opportunities to develop language while discussing those ideas. As the teacher reads aloud, he/she asks open questions designed to foster understanding of the key ideas and develop language. When students respond based on background, the teacher scaffolds the responses to align with the key ideas of the text. Teachers select vocabulary words based on

children's prior knowledge and whether the words will be useful and interesting to them. Children are encouraged to use the words after the story is read (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Taking a different approach, McGee and Schickedanz (2007) developed a structured yet flexible process of interactive reading, one in which the same book is read to children three times. They call it simply, repeated interactive read-alouds. Each time the book is read, the goal is to increase the amount and quality of analytic talk. Analytic talk prompts deeper thinking skills such as making connections across different parts of the story or across different stories. Analytic talk is also that which elicits predictions and inferences about characters, guiding students to use social imagination to understand characters' thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions (Lysaker & Tonge, 2013). During the first reading, teachers guide students in understanding the main elements of the story, such as setting, characters, problem, plot, solution while asking a few key questions. Elaborating on a few vocabulary words and a "why" question ends the first reading. The second reading includes "enriched vocabulary explanations" and asking higher level inferential and explanation questions. The third reading asks students to summarize the story while adding explanations and commentary.

Other strategies to use during read-alouds to increase language and comprehension development include asking students to retell or dramatize stories, allowing them to play with objects related in some way to the story, asking them to describe illustrations, talking about words, phrases and concepts, reading books with the same theme or topic and reading a book multiple times (Cornell et al.; Crago & Crago; Pellegrini & Galda; Reese & Cox; Rowe; Wasik & Bond; all as cited in McGee & Schickedanz, 2007).

2.4.3 Benefits of Read-alouds

In addition to previously noted language and literacy benefits of read-alouds, there are other benefits. These include an increase in general cognitive development, critical thinking, and conceptual knowledge. Read-alouds also assist in social, emotional and other affective ways, for example, understanding one's own life, fostering empathy as well as a love of books and reading (Conlon, 1992; Foorman et al., 2002; Lane & Wright, 2007; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Sipe, 2008, Wiseman, 2011). Classroom story time is a "time to be together...to relax and renew" (Conlon, 1992, p. 15) with people who share in your well-being in an inviting and comfortable space (Knopf & Brown, 2009; Lane & Wright, 2007). Additionally, Knopf & Brown (2009) found that young children's engagement increased as they participated in interactive read-alouds with their teacher and classmates. Teachers who encourage plenty of conversation and interaction during read-alouds will notice a variety of ways children participate and respond.

2.4.4 Children's Responses to Stories

In this section I examine Sipe's (2000, 2008) analysis of young children's responses to read-alouds. His work with kindergarten, first- and second-grade children illuminated five categories of responses: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent and performative (Sipe, 2000, 2008). The analytical category was coded as such when a child was making meaning of narrative text in a generally traditional way, speaking or writing about conventional narrative elements such as characters, setting, plot, problem and resolution. The intertextual category included connections children made between texts (Galda & Beach, 2001; Short et al., 2000). Texts are defined broadly to mean books, but also movies and other cultural artifacts. Personal coding was applied when children were making connections commonly referred to as text-to-self connections; the child related a story to his/her personal life (Galda & Beach, 2001). The last two categories, transparent

and performative were displayed least frequently, but were the most interesting according to Sipe (2000, 2008). Within these two categories, students “entered the story” to learn about their feelings and life experiences (Short et al., 2000). In Sipe’s (2000) article, he related the two in this way – the transparent category reflected children being manipulated by the text; they were “lost in the book” and “into the story” as if they were a character themselves. The performative category reflected the text being manipulated by the child. Performative responses were often physical or dramatized (Conlon, 1992; Lysaker, 2019). A child responding performatively might appear to be off-task or the response may seem to be off on a tangent because of the creative, original thought and idea manipulation exhibited.

While some teachers may view performative type responses as problematic, others believe they are witnessing emergent comprehending activity. Sipe’s analysis of children’s responses to read-alouds informs our understanding of emergent comprehension by giving teachers a starting point to look for in their own students’ responses. As teachers examine students’ responses in relation to the five types Sipe describes, they may begin to see how those responses are a natural way young children make their comprehending visible. This comprehending activity is a reflection of their social and cultural background and knowledge. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Educational Theory provides an alternative way for teachers to think about children’s responses to read-alouds, and in fact, to all teaching and learning.

2.5 Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Educational Theory

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of learning offers a teaching perspective that values the social, cultural and historical backgrounds of students. According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn by being enveloped in the social, cultural and historical world of their families. He says, “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into

the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). Using signs and tools, expert, more knowledgeable others acclimate a child into the social world of their families and communities (Johnson, 2019; Verenikina, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Adopting a sociocultural perspective in school means teachers understand and plan activities based on the social nature of learning, where both adult and child are active learners, co-constructing knowledge. An important aspect of this view is the dialogical communication between teacher and students, leading to intersubjectivity, a shared understanding between the two (Verenikina, 2008). Teachers have many ways to share their knowledge with students, and to keep a social aspect out of teaching limits what students will learn (Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). Vygotsky claims children learn first from their social group and later internalize what is learned. Internalizing learning occurs best when what is being learned is within what Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development.

2.5.1 Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) argued that we should not view a child’s mental development by finding only their actual intellectual development, where the child completes a task independently. We should also find their potential development, where the child completes a task with assistance. The distance between what a child can do with and without assistance is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978; Verenikina, 2008). This is important to know because “a well known and empirically established fact is that learning should be matched in some manner with the child’s developmental level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). Teaching to match the actual developmental level is not helpful since this represents what the child has already mastered. Teaching toward the upper limit of the ZPD stretches just beyond what a child can do

independently, enhancing learning. When teaching in the zone of proximal development, the goal is for students to become self-directed, lifelong learners. Teachers as well as students are active learners, constructing knowledge together, and the socially constructed knowledge is eventually transformed into knowledge owned by the learner individually (Verenikina, 2008). The teacher follows the child; meets them where they are and takes them to a “higher, culturally mediated level of development” (Verenikina, 2008, p. 168). The resources and processes a teacher uses to support students while teaching within the ZPD are called scaffolding (Verenikina, 2008).

2.5.2 Scaffolding

Although the concept of scaffolding is often associated with Vygotsky’s ZPD, he did not use the term. Jerome Bruner (1966) used the term scaffolding in his research about the tutoring relationship between a child and caregiver (Johnson, 2019) as an instructional response to Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural concept of ZPD. Scaffolds are put in place by a variety of teacher actions used to capture the nature of support and guidance in learning (Johnson, 2019; Verenikina, 2008). Basic scaffolds include teachers modeling and demonstrating tasks to children, whereas in-depth scaffolding techniques include quality teacher-student interaction and acquisition of cultural tools.

Scaffolding as a teaching strategy is interpreted broadly by some and more limited by others. For example, some people have defined direct instruction as a highly supportive one-way scaffold from teacher to child (Verenikina, 2008). I prefer a broader, two-way operational definition of scaffolding; it seems more in line with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory for learning in school as a social activity among teachers and students as they co-construct knowledge. From this definition, teachers offer assistance based on what they know about the mental development of a child. Assistance may be in the form of leading questions, demonstrations or modeling, or a

teacher might initiate a task and ask the child to complete it either independently, or in collaboration with other children. (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). Teachers would ask follow-up questions contingent on children's original answers, thereby constructing knowledge *with* the child, not delivering knowledge *to* the child.

Scaffolding has been separated into two categories, planned and interactional (Johnson, 2019; Reynolds & Daniel, 2018; Verenikina, 2008). Planned scaffolds are those which teachers plan in advance for a lesson or activity. This might include deciding to arrange students in small groups based on their instructional needs. Interactional scaffolds are those that “emerge during exchanges between teachers and students during class” (Reynolds & Daniel, 2018, p. 109). Reynolds and Daniel (2018) claim these are more effective for developing young children's emerging comprehension because of the “dynamic, contextual, and affective nature of comprehension” (p. 367). Effective scaffolding requires strong pedagogical knowledge and skills to differentiate and personalize learning for students.

2.6 Sociocultural Perspectives

Several scholars besides Vygotsky speak of literacy teaching, learning and research from a sociocultural lens. Purcell-Gates and Tierney (2009), Au and Raphael (2000), and Davidson (2010) are among them. Their stance is that a sociocultural perspective is necessary to meet the needs of all children, especially as the student population becomes increasingly diverse.

Differentiated, personalized learning is dependent on the teacher knowing something about their students' families and cultural communities (Purcell-Gates & Tierney, 2009). In their Public Policy Brief, Purcell-Gates and Tierney (2009) make it known that one-size-fits-all curricula and pedagogy limit the effectiveness of literacy instruction for all students. Teachers must know what

students bring to the classroom from their home and community experiences to provide instruction to meet their needs. Anything less leads to inequities for some.

Addressing equity in literacy teaching and learning is at the heart of Au and Raphael's (2000) article. Au and Raphael were projecting the future of literacy instruction and research and acknowledged the difficulty in doing so. However, they posited that students would become more diverse, and consequently teachers must adjust their literacy instruction to provide opportunities for all students based on their language and culture to assure equity.

Davidson (2010) agreed in her argument that taking a sociocultural view as well as a cognitive view is necessary to fully realize equity in literacy education. She stated, "North America's increasingly diverse population demands that responsible educators acknowledge, respect, and draw on students' cultural and social experiences with respect to literacy learning, and that they adopt pedagogical perspectives that foster social and educational equity" (p. 255).

2.7 Context

Teachers are strongly influenced by and embedded in the social and cultural context of the families and community in which they teach (Verenikina, 2008). Teachers have the daunting task of combining their formal and practical knowledge with their understandings and beliefs about their students' social, cultural and historical lives. Other aspects of the context in which teachers work include the instructional materials they have available to them, the condition of the physical buildings, as well as parental and administrative support. Under normal conditions, teachers must pull this wide variety of contextual resources together to provide optimum conditions for student learning. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the context of teaching and learning changed dramatically.

A number of studies have been published about preschoolers and their remote learning during the pandemic. I reviewed three which were of particular interest to me as they related to this study. Based on these three studies, I briefly summarize the nature of preschool instruction during the pandemic, as well as a few challenges and benefits of pandemic teaching and learning. One study described a California school's comprehensive instruction provided to its preschoolers (Samuelsson, Wagner, & Odegaard, 2020). Another study presented survey data from parents about the experiences of their preschoolers learning remotely during the pandemic (Stites, Sonneschein, & Galczyk, 2021). A third study used an experimental design to compare learning outcomes of read-alouds presented through different approaches (Gaudreau et al., 2020).

Teachers in one California school, which housed preschool through grade 8, provided three hours of synchronous instruction to their preschool students (Samuelsson, Wagner, & Odegaard, 2020). The school is a private, non-profit laboratory school which depended on tuition for funding, so they felt compelled to provide as many academic and developmental activities as possible while children were learning remotely from home (Samuelsson, Wagner, & Odegaard, 2020). The three hours consisted of many of the same activities they participated in while in-person - "music and movement, story time, gross motor activities, free-choice time, and teacher-directed literacy, science and mathematics activities" (Samuelsson, Wagner, & Odegaard, 2020, p. 138). Teachers there also created YouTube channels with language arts, STEM, social science and dramatic play activities for parents to access asynchronously beyond the three hours of synchronous instruction. Some of the challenges were privacy and safety in online platforms, limited time for parents to assist their young children, and children's loss of academic skills. Teachers noted one positive outcome of remote teaching –new technology skills they learned would be useful even after things return to normal (Samuelsson, Wagner, & Odegaard, 2020).

Stites, Sonneschein, and Galczyk (2021) used a descriptive study to report results from surveys sent to U.S. parents about remote learning with their preschool children during the COVID-19 crisis. The survey asked about the “types of activities parents engaged in, obstacles to preschool distance learning, and the types of resources parents needed” (p. 923). Parents in this study mirrored parents in the study above as they commented about the limited time they had available to work with their children. Another challenge mentioned by parents was the lack of opportunity for their children to interact with peers while learning remotely. Parents commented positively about asynchronous activities as these allowed parents flexibility with their time. Other positive comments regarded activities that were explained well and could be done in short segments with little parental supervision.

The third study compared comprehension and vocabulary learning of preschoolers when a storybook was read to them in three different modes – live in-person, live (synchronous) via a video platform, and a recorded reading (asynchronous) via a video platform (Gaudreau et al., 2020). Researchers found that the students did in fact learn from read-alouds presented by each format, as compared to students in the control group who had not been read the story. Among the three experimental formats, children performed similarly on comprehension and vocabulary measures. One difference was that the children who were read to live and via a live video platform were more responsive to prompts from the reader/experimenter than those children who viewed a pre-recorded story reading. This was interesting because the experimenter used the same prompts in the two live formats and the recorded version, and even paused to give children time to respond. However, the children seemed to understand that the prompts were contingent with their responses during the two live formats. This lends credence to my assertion that an exemplary teacher matters during a read-aloud with preschoolers. A teacher who is responsive and provides individualized

support elicits increased engagement and learning from children, and according to Cambourne (1995), engagement is required for learning to occur.

2.8 Cambourne's Conditions of learning

Cambourne described eight conditions necessary for learning (Cambourne, 1995; Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). Of those, five are most pertinent to this study of an exemplary teacher engaging her low-income preschoolers in making meaning during a read-aloud. These five conditions are immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectation, and response. Cambourne's immersion is when someone is involved in a "visual and/or aural experience" (Cambourne, 2020, p. 27) of a learning activity. It includes physical, social, emotional, and intellectual contextual aspects of the experience, and approximations are typically seen from novice learners. In this study, Margie immerses her students in a class read-aloud activity. The class read-aloud is a holistic way of promoting emergent comprehension, where Margie guides students in making meaning of the story, with all the "physical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects" (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020, p. 27) of the read-aloud experience in place. Margie guides students to make connections across the story and allows for their approximations as evidence of emergent comprehending activity. Demonstration is relatively self-explanatory; someone demonstrates something to learn to others. The participants observe and engage in the demonstration, with the goal of being able to apply the learning in other situations on their own at a later time. In this study, Margie's act of reading a storybook to her students is the demonstration. The goal is for students to both observe and engage in meaning making of the story. Engagement is the third condition evident in this study. It is at the center of all learning. Even with high levels of immersion and high-quality demonstrations, without student engagement, learning will not occur. Cambourne names four principles of engagement: 1) active, confident learners, 2) relevance to learners' lives, 3) risk-free

learning environment, and 4) a person who is liked, respected and trusted who performs the demonstrations. In this study, the four principles of engagement are reflected in these ways: 1) the active, confident learners are the preschool students participating in a read-aloud, 2) Margie chooses a book that is relevant to students' lives and her feedback connects students' responses with their lives, 3) Margie creates a risk-free environment where students' meaning-making responses are honored and encouraged even if they are not typical school-defined responses, and 4) Margie is someone whom the students like and trust. Cambourne's condition of expectation is directly related to this study. Significant others' beliefs of children's learning capabilities "can dramatically affect his or her sense of self as a learner" (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020, p. 28). Similarly, in this study, Margie's expectations of low-income children's learning capabilities may affect their learner identities and their achievement. The response condition of learning is the feedback a more knowledgeable other gives a learner. In this study, Margie's feedback to young children's responses to the read-aloud must be timely and relevant to be effective in promoting young children's comprehending activity.

In addition to the conditions of learning, Cambourne identified four processes that empower learning. He called them transformation, discussion/reflection, application, and evaluation. These four processes are described as the practices teachers use and the interactions they have with students. Cambourne found that teachers who applied the conditions of learning also utilized these processes which then strengthened the effect of the conditions on student learning.;j;k

In sum, when Cambourne's eight conditions of learning are present in classrooms, learning will take place. Engagement is the one essential condition for learning to occur. However, engagement alone is not sufficient; immersion and demonstration must also be present. In this study, two other

conditions function as ways to make student engagement more likely. A teacher who provides timely, relevant feedback and who holds high expectations for all students will likely observe greater student engagement. Teachers' expectations originate from their beliefs and perceptions about students.

2.9 Teacher Beliefs, Perceptions, and Expectations of Low-Income Students

In this section, I discuss how teacher beliefs, perceptions and expectations of low-income students affect their actions and practices. Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the capabilities of students from low-income families influence their expectations of and, ultimately, the achievement of low-income students. Indeed, "the belief systems of the adults immediately surrounding the students matter most" (Wolter, 2016, p. 33) for student achievement.

Too often, teachers make assumptions about the home life of low-income families that exacerbate deficit thinking. These assumptions include parental lack of interest in their child(ren)'s education or possibly parents' own illiteracy. Other assumptions might be that literacy is not valued in the home, as shown by few books, few reading activities in the home, and limited library visits (Auerbach, 1989, 1995; Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2018; Cummins, 2001). These ideas of *lacking* and *limited* emphasize that there's a deficit in the lives of children from a low-income household. These deficit-based assumptions often lead teachers to perceive low-income students as having fewer experiences with literacy and less academic capital than their more affluent counterparts (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2018; Siegel, 2006; Washington, 2001; Wessel Powell et al., 2016; Wolter, 2016).

As a result of this deficit view, teachers may perceive students from low-income families as less intelligent (Duke, 2000) than their more affluent peers, causing teachers to lower their expectations of students. Along with lowered expectations, a "pedagogy of poverty" (Haberman,

2010, p. 81) might be utilized. From this pedagogy of poverty perspective, teaching and learning are two separate activities. Teachers provide direct instruction of basic skills with little student input, and rank students by their academic achievement (Haberman, 2010). Based on the class ranking, this pedagogy of poverty provides evidence (though skewed) that children of poverty are less intelligent. Children and families are then seen as the problem and are blamed for their poverty (Compton-Lilly, 2014). When teachers view families as the problem, they are less likely to change their low expectations of "at-risk" students (Jalongo, 1996).

In contrast to a deficit view, some people have a cultural mismatch view regarding children of poverty (Banks, 2005; Duke, 2000). As stated previously, it has been shown that, in fact, students from low-income families do not achieve as well as middle- and upper-class students (Au, 1998; Duke & Block, 2012). However, it may be because they have literacy strengths that do not translate into academic success when viewed from inflexible school-defined expectations. Their literacy capital may in fact, just be different from school-defined literacy experiences (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). There may be children from homes where playing games and watching television are more common than reading books. It may be that expecting all students to interpret and communicate in "school-defined" ways perpetuates their lower achievement. From this mismatch perspective, students may have difficulty forming "academic literate identities" (Compton-Lilly & Delbridge, 2018, p. 532).

Another example of the mismatch view is teachers' perceptions of literacy as an individual learning activity. Such perceptions ignore the benefits of social collaboration for learning, consistent with a sociocultural viewpoint. In fact, Heath (1989) noted that school literacy activities are usually done individually, in sharp contrast to children from Black communities who have opportunities to learn socially at home. "The insistence of the school on individualizing literacy

and separating it from its social and oral roots has ignored traditional oral and literate habits of Black Americans. Yet, ironically these traditional habits match the demands and needs of employers in the late 20th century far better than those of most classrooms" (Heath, 1989, p. 372). And today, students need collaboration and communication skills more than ever to succeed in the workplace and society.

Both a deficit and a mismatch view can marginalize students from low-income families and create an inequitable learning environment. In Rist's (1970) study, the kindergarten teacher's actions are examples of widespread marginalization and discrimination of her low-income students. The teacher clearly stated her beliefs, saying, "I do not think that it is the teaching that affects those that cannot do it, but some are just basically low achievers" (Rist, 1970, p. 425), thus removing her responsibility from the students' achievement. The teacher discriminated against the low-status group by seating them further away from her, virtually isolating them; limiting communication with her; decreasing their instructional time, involvement in class activities, and opportunities to show what they knew (Rist, 1970; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Washington, 2001). They also enjoyed fewer privileges and rewards, as well as more punishment. The teacher used a more authoritarian, control-oriented demeanor with them, and the low-status children seemed disinterested in the lessons. A classic "chicken or egg" question begs to be asked, Does the students' disinterest cause the teacher to use more control-oriented behavior, or does the control-oriented behavior cause student disinterest (Rist, 1970)? Rist (1970) posits the latter, "that teachers themselves contribute significantly to the creation of the 'slow learners' within their classrooms" (p. 441), and this becomes a vicious cycle. On the other hand, good teachers contribute significantly to increased student achievement. Several scholars speak of the importance of a good teacher.

2.9.1 Importance of the Teacher to Student Learning

While attempting to uncover the best method for teaching beginning readers, the First-Grade Studies found that good teaching mattered more than any particular method for higher reading achievement (Chall, 1999). Block et al. (2002) concluded that teaching expertise was more significant to students' literacy growth than the materials teachers used or teachers' philosophies. Duke and Block (2012) concur, "It appears that teachers make more difference than programs in developing reading comprehension" (p. 66). Allington et al. (2002) studied fourth grade teachers and found much the same, that good teachers matter more than materials and standardized lessons. And finally, King (2011) states teachers are one of the most critical factors for all students' success, especially those from low-income families.

Clearly the role of the teacher is important to student learning, and even more crucial for children from low-income families. Reflecting on findings from the First-Grade Studies, Pearson (1997) stated that "future research should center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials" (p. 431). Therefore, knowing how exemplary teachers set up conditions for learning and the teaching practices they use for children from low-income families is important. In fact we know a lot about exemplary teachers.

2.10 Exemplary Teachers

In this section I will discuss how exemplary teachers excel in the following areas: 1) student engagement, 2) relationships and interactions with students, 3) meeting individual student needs, and 4) student ownership and choice. Exemplary teachers set up these conditions and use effective practices with all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Exemplary teachers, in general, utilize a complex mix of motivational, managerial, curricular, environmental, and instructional practices (Allington, 2002).

2.10.1 Student Engagement

Exemplary teachers prioritize student engagement, knowing that without engagement, no other condition for learning matters (Allington et al., 2002; Cambourne, 1995; Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). Cambourne expressed four principles of engagement, and two of them appear most often in exemplary teaching studies. The first of these two principles is that children are active learners and they have a “can do” belief about their learning (Crouch & Cambourne, 1995). Exemplary teachers foster a sense of “I can do this” by accepting approximations and promoting effort and improvement, enhancing children’s belief that they are capable learners (Allington, 2002; Duke et al., 2018). The second principle is that teachers create a risk-free environment where children feel free to make mistakes and learn from them (Crouch & Cambourne, 1995). Morrow et al. (1999) found that exemplary teachers begin by creating a happy, productive, safe learning environment. It goes without saying, young children must be in classrooms where they are physically safe. My focus is on safety beyond the physical. Young children must feel emotionally safe before any academic learning can take place. Exemplary teachers are warm and caring, enthusiastic, encouraging, and passionate about their teaching craft (Block et al., 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Gentry et al., 2011; Morrow et al., 1999). Warm, caring teachers purposely work to create positive relationships with their students (King, 2011).

2.10.2 Relationships and Interactions with Students

One crucial move teachers can make is to get to know their students inside and outside of school (Wolter, 2016). Teachers who care enough to get to know their students' out-of-school interests, including their family makeup, favorite activities, concerns, and strengths, can better meet their diverse academic, emotional, and cultural needs (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Children will talk and engage with their teachers when they feel their teacher cares about them, and this

dialogue helps to create positive relationships (Noddings, 2012). Gentry et al. (2011) agree that exemplary teachers strive to form strong positive relationships with students by connecting with them beyond school and academics, visiting homes and finding out what interests their students, and what activities they participate in. Jackson (2016) found that many low-income black and Latino males he encountered "...want to be educated like any other student. They are hungry to learn. They just need educators with empathy who care enough to build relationships with them" (Jackson, 2016, p. 42). Exemplary teachers are empathetic and they genuinely like their students (Baker, 2019; Gentry et al., 2011; Soundy, 2003). Making a conscious effort to build relationships (King, 2011) and to learn about their students' strengths (Barone, 2002) and struggles lead to valuing what students know and can do and then creating opportunities and experiences for students to use their strengths to demonstrate learning. Exemplary teachers honor their students' meaning-making that stems from their previous knowledge and experiences (Allington, 2002; Cambourne, 1995; Duke et al., 2018; Pressley et al., 1996). To create appropriate learning experiences, teachers need to know and care about individual students' lives inside and outside of the classroom.

2.10.3 Meeting Individual Student Needs

The exemplary primary-grades teachers in Pressley et al.'s (1996) study had a solid understanding of the many facets of teaching literacy to young children. When asked about teaching students who struggled, exemplary teachers were aware that weaker students are often relegated to lower-order, disconnected, skills-based instruction. Knowing this was not effective nor equitable, they balanced explicit lower-order decoding skills with higher-order meaning-based skills and strategies (Duke et al., 2018; Pressley & Allington, 2015; Pressley et al. 1996). Morrow et al. (1999) found that teachers' practices were based on their articulated philosophies and

multiple decisions about their students' learning needs. Meeting students' needs meant personalized, responsive instruction was necessary (Allington, 2002; Block et al., 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996) and many forms of scaffolding were used to meet this challenge (Baker, 2019; Soundy, 2003).

One common way exemplary teachers provide scaffolding is by forming small groups of students with similar instructional needs to personalize and target learning (Duke et al., 2018; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996). Exemplary teachers construct small group lesson plans to scaffold learning for those students, blending standards-based instruction with the needs of the children in the group (Allington et al., 2002). Another scaffolding technique used by expert teachers is first modeling a task or a process for students, then stepping back and guiding or coaching from the side (Block et al., 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Pressley et al., 1996).

Scaffolding also involves personalizing learning by valuing students' social and cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Exemplary teachers plan flexibly to allow conversations to emerge from the students' social and cultural experiences. They encourage a collaborative classroom learning environment (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020; Duke et al., 2018). Fostering supportive classroom conversations and collaboration among students allows them to learn about and from their classmates (Allington, 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Duke & Block, 2012; Soundy, 2003).

2.10.4 Ownership and Choice

Another strategy exemplary teachers utilize for engaging children of any age is to allow choice and foster ownership of classroom decisions (Allington, 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996). They share power with children regarding classroom activity decisions. Students in Pressley et al.'s (1996) study were encouraged to self-select books to read. Allington (2002) agreed that student choice of books to read increases engagement as well as

volume of reading, which in turn increases reading achievement. Teachers can offer student ownership and choice in the classroom with little time, energy or money spent, which are common barriers to many instructional tools.

2.11 Sociocultural Perspectives

Several scholars since Vygotsky speak of literacy teaching, learning and research from a sociocultural lens. Purcell-Gates and Tierney (2009), Au and Raphael (2000), and Davidson (2010) are among them. Their stance is that a sociocultural perspective is necessary to meet the needs of all children, especially as the student population is increasingly diverse.

Differentiated, personalized learning is dependent on the teacher knowing something about their students' families and cultural communities (Purcell-Gates & Tierney, 2009). In their Public Policy Brief, Purcell-Gates and Tierney (2009) make it known that one-size-fits-all curricula and pedagogy limit the effectiveness of literacy instruction for all students. Teachers must know what students bring to the classroom from their home and community experiences to provide instruction to meet their needs. Anything less leads to inequities for some.

Addressing equity in literacy teaching and learning is at the heart of Au and Raphael's article (2000). Au and Raphael were projecting the future of literacy instruction and research and acknowledged the difficulty in doing so. However, they posited that students would become more diverse, and consequently teachers must adjust their literacy instruction to provide opportunities for all students based on their language and culture to assure equity.

Davidson (2010) agreed in her argument that taking a sociocultural view as well as a cognitive view is necessary to fully realize equity in literacy education. She stated, "North America's increasingly diverse population demands that responsible educators acknowledge, respect, and draw on students' cultural and social experiences with respect to literacy learning, and

that they adopt pedagogical perspectives that foster social and educational equity” (p. 255). Margie knew her students would not reach their potential for learning if she did not accept, honor, and encourage them to draw from their own family culture and social experiences as she fostered their emergent comprehension and learning about the world around them.

Building on scholars like these, this study draws from sociocultural, social constructivist, and semiotic views of young children’s emergent comprehension. In this study, the relationship between Margie and her students proved to be the most important factor in the children’s emergent comprehension. In fact, I claim relationships are required for emergent comprehension to develop. This aligns with sociocultural and social constructivist views in which interactions (and relationships) with others are at the heart of all learning. Through relationships and interactions with others, young children make meaning of their world using cultural symbols which reflects a semiotic view of emergent comprehension. Each of these ideas – relationships and symbols are parts of Dooley & Matthews’ (2009) emergent comprehension model. Positive relationships interactions between teachers and children around books produce evidence of emergent comprehension. By observing and analyzing children’s responses during read-aloud interactions, we learn how they create meaning in their own way. The concept of children creating meaning differently than older children and adults is the third dimension of Dooley and Matthews’ emergent comprehension model. Fostering children’s meaning making in their own way is precisely what Margie accomplished, even while conducting read-alouds via Zoom. Keeping students engaged via Zoom was one of the biggest challenges for Margie, yet she found ways to overcome this challenge. Margie’s belief in her children’s capabilities was one factor that drove her to persist in finding ways to meet her students’ needs even under the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning.

Beliefs and perceptions of low-income children's learning capabilities often limit their opportunities for quality instruction. Fortunately, this is not always the case. Some children are afforded an exemplary teacher such as Margie, who does not hold a deficit view of their potential for learning. Exemplary teachers do not act from preconceived beliefs of children based on the socio-economic status of their families. Instead, they honor and encourage the sociocultural knowledge and experiences all children bring to the classroom. They hold high expectations for all children's learning, and provide support, often in the form of scaffolding, for all children who have a need. This study describes the practices of Margie, one such exemplary preschool teacher and the emergent comprehending activity her low-income students exhibit.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe my study design as well as explain the procedures I used while conducting this qualitative, single, intrinsic case study. A case study is conducted when the researcher wants to answer *how* or *why* questions about a social phenomenon as it occurs in its natural setting. A case is selected as an example to explore, explain or describe the phenomenon, and the inquiry is bounded by a specific context with particular participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). To provide a rationale for this design choice, first I discuss epistemological and ontological perspectives. Next, I show how qualitative research in general matches my beliefs about knowledge and reality. Then I discuss case study in particular – how case study has evolved historically, how case study has been used in education broadly, and how case study has been used in literacy and preschool literacy specifically. Next, I describe the broad context of this study – the COVID-19 pandemic and remote teaching and learning using Zoom. Narrower boundaries of this study include the read-aloud sessions and the focus on emergent comprehension during these sessions. Within this context and these boundaries, I position myself as the researcher and provide a timeline of the study. Then, I describe my case of Margie, the exemplary teacher, and my unit of analysis as the interactions she has with her students. Next, I introduce the students and the books used during the read-alouds. Lastly, I describe the data sources and the methods for collecting and analyzing the data in this study that answer the following questions:

1. How does one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do her students' responses to her read-aloud reflect their emergent comprehension development?

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

This study employs an ontological perspective of idealism and an epistemological perspective of interpretive/constructivist (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ontological and epistemological perspectives, that is to say, views about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge, help shape research study design. Each generally lies on a continuum, where the nature of reality ranges from an objective, absolute truth to truth that is subjective, dependent on the context. The nature of knowledge generally ranges from research purposes of controlling variables and generalizing findings (quantitative inquiries) to questioning and interrupting results or findings (qualitative inquiries) (Merriam, 2016). I lean toward an ontological view of reality being dependent on the context of the situation, which creates context-based realities. A context-based belief about reality aligns with an Interpretive/Constructivist epistemological view of the nature of knowledge. Through an interpretive/constructivist lens, a researcher is constructing knowledge of a phenomenon and interpreting it based on the context of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another aspect of using an interpretive/constructivist lens is considering the importance of interactions in understanding human behavior (Patton, 2015). The focus of this study is on one exemplary teacher, her teaching practices, and her interactions with her students. The purpose is to describe how her interactions with her students foster emergent comprehension during read-alouds. Considering my epistemological and ontological points of view and wanting to answer *how* questions by describing a phenomenon, a qualitative study was the best design choice.

3.2 Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative studies observe social phenomena in their natural settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018), and are used when we want to understand “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Typically,

teachers and students in their natural classroom settings align with qualitative inquiries. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this study was not conducted in a typical classroom. The setting for this teacher and her students at the time of the study was shifted to accommodate remote teaching and learning. Accounting for remote teaching and learning required changes for the participants as well as for me, the researcher. Each of us would be “meeting” within an “unnatural” setting at the time, via Zoom. Regardless of this change, this inquiry into the phenomenon of exemplary teaching still included observing the exemplary teacher promoting emergent comprehension with her students as they participated in read-aloud activities. Understanding how Margie constructed her new reality within a completely new context lent itself to this qualitative stance, and to a case study design in particular.

3.3 Case Study

This study employs a qualitative case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). As Stake (1995) defines case study, he notes the “particularity and complexity of a single case.” The researcher is trying to understand the case in its particular context. Stake continues refining case studies as either intrinsic or instrumental. An intrinsic case study selects itself, and the researcher is almost “obligated to take it as the object to study” (Stake, 1995, p. 3). There is intrinsic interest in that one particular case. This study follows the definition of intrinsic case study. I was particularly interested in Margie, an exemplary teacher whom I had known for eight years as we both were employed at the Creekside School District. My experiences as a primary grades teacher and later as an administrator, along with my doctoral studies and an earlier project with the Creekside Head Start program provided prior knowledge of exemplary teaching. Margie’s teaching practices and her interactions with her students clearly exemplified emergent comprehension teaching with preschool children. Along with my professional experiences, the

literature about exemplary teachers articulates multiple areas in which exemplary teachers excel. In this study, Margie excels in the following areas: 1) student engagement (Allington et al., 2002), 2) relationships and interactions with students (Baker, 2019; Gentry et al., 2011; Soundy, 2003), 3) meeting individual student needs (Duke et al., 2018; Pressley & Allington, 2015), and 4) student ownership and choice (Allington, 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1996). Besides meeting these criteria for an exemplary teacher, Stake says that the case should be “hospitable to our inquiry” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). Selecting Margie as my case was hospitable to my inquiry in two ways – I had already established a positive working relationship with her, and her classroom was located in close proximity to my office at the time.

Case studies are defined by the boundaries, such as a classroom, that are set to narrow the focus of a particular case. Merriam and Tisdell define qualitative case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). They believe one important difference between case study and other qualitative designs is the boundaries set for a case – “You can ‘fence in’ what you are going to study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). These boundaries create a narrow lens. In this inquiry, the phenomenon is exemplary teaching, and I am studying this phenomenon through the case of one exemplary teacher and her interactions with her students. The first boundary is the read-aloud sessions of the exemplary teacher and her students. While Margie engages her students in many activities throughout the day, the focus of this study is the read-aloud. A second boundary is emergent comprehension. During a read-aloud, a teacher may foster several literacy skills and strategies. However, I am interested in how this teacher fosters emergent comprehension during read-alouds with her young students. During the sixteen weeks of data collection for this study, Margie read seven books about the topic of winter to four of her students. The interactions between Margie, the books she read and her students were the

unit of analysis in this study. These interactions are important because they exemplify both the phenomenon of exemplary teaching and the students' responses to the exemplary teacher.

In this study, the phenomenon of exemplary teaching becomes blurred with the context of read-aloud activities conducted via Zoom. Yin (2018) speaks of this blurriness of the phenomenon and the context as a factor to be considered when designing a study and when collecting and analyzing data. The context helps define the boundaries of the case. It is virtually impossible, and in fact undesirable, to separate teaching practices with a group of children from the context of the classroom, and in this case, from the context of remote teaching and learning. Figure 1 shows how I defined the phenomenon of exemplary teaching within the broad context of the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated utilizing Zoom. Two boundaries, read-aloud and emergent comprehension were nested within the broader context, and exemplary teaching was positioned within these two boundaries. To summarize, this case study analyzed the interactions between Margie, the books she read and her students during read-aloud sessions via Zoom with an emphasis on fostering emergent comprehension.

3.3.1 Case Study Historically

Historically, case study as a methodology is relatively new. In the 1960's and 1970's, quantitative experimental studies were the norm. Arguing that quantitative methods cannot capture the complexity of teaching and learning nor the diversity of teachers and students in the natural context of classroom settings, case study became more accepted. However, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act (2002), and its emphasis on improving education, narrow scientific-based quantitative research was again being exhorted as the preferred research method. While there is value in this type of knowledge about learning, it removes teachers' voices from the conversation, and as such, does not provide practical information that teachers can use in their

classrooms to improve education (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012). Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier (2012) explain this best:

This ‘scientific’ approach is also in danger of seriously disempowering those at the heart of the education process while failing to recognize the value of different forms of engagement with issues in education. In the face of such challenges to education research, case study emerges as a possible champion that might be able to deepen understanding in real contexts rather than simply providing decontextualized ‘evidence’. (p. 4)

Case study methods allow for deep understanding of teaching and learning within the real-life context of classrooms. As such, results from case studies may be more beneficial for practitioners and researchers alike (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

3.3.2 Case Study in Early Literacy

Besides being used in education in general, case studies have been used in literacy research as well to document family and school literacy. Compton-Lilly’s longitudinal case study of family literacy practices began with her dissertation in 2003 and continued through 2013; she followed the same group of then-first graders for a decade and published their cases along the way. These cases were examples of low-income African American children who, despite negative assumptions about their learning capabilities, encountered positive literacy experiences and practices at home, and at school (as cited in Compton-Lilly, 2021, p. 18). Dyson’s (1989) case study work chronicles a teacher and her first graders as they form a community of writers. Dyson argues that children’s writing needs to continually become more embedded in their “social, affective, and intellectual parts of their lives” (Dyson, 1989, back cover). Although Dyson focused on writing, while this study looks at emergent comprehension, I posit that young children’s reading and specifically comprehension development is also influenced by the social context of a classroom community of learners.

3.3.3 Case Study in Preschool Literacy

There are fewer examples of case studies of literacy interactions in the preschool years specifically. Bissex's (1980) seminal case study of her own child's emergent literacy was conducted in her home and spanned her son's preschool years and beyond. Her detailed description of her son's emergent literacy illuminated much about the natural inquisitiveness and development of young children learning language and literacy. A study by Klenk (2001) included cases of two preschool teachers who introduced play-based literacy in their classrooms. Results showed that in addition to the students' increased literacy engagement, teachers learned to create new opportunities for reading and writing, utilizing play-based literacy. Rowe's (1998) study investigated preschoolers who had many experiences of being read to and how they made connections between dramatic play and the meanings they derived from books. Case studies that took place in classrooms as Klenk's (2001) and Rowe's (1998) were difficult to conduct during the pandemic, and as such, there are few of them.

3.3.4 Case Study in Preschool Literacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

My study makes a specific contribution to the literacy field because it documents a preschool teacher's interactions during interactive read-alouds with her low-income children during the pandemic, an emerging body of research. While there is a plethora of articles about the effects of the pandemic on preschoolers' learning, few are qualitative case studies. A Google Scholar Search of "case studies of preschool literacy during Covid 19" yielded about 36,000 results. However, after reviewing fifty of the resulting studies, I found the search algorithm did not accurately differentiate case studies. Instead, most of the articles reflected survey data collected from families and teachers. These articles were primarily seeking to ascertain the effects of remote or digital learning on preschool children and their families; there were few that focused on teachers

and their practices. The same search criteria, “case studies of preschool literacy during Covid 19” in the Education Source and Education Full Text databases yielded 3,379 studies. I reviewed the first 60 in the list from most to least relevant. There were ten studies which focused on preschool children and these focused on teachers’ adaptations and perspectives of preschool online learning during the pandemic, student learning loss and the pandemic’s effect on the social-emotional health of young children, as well as multiple studies about parents and families of preschoolers. Again, I found no studies utilizing case study methodology around the phenomenon of an exemplary preschool literacy teacher and her interactions with her students through remote learning during the pandemic.

To summarize, I have outlined methodological parameters that comprised my intrinsic case study of the interactions of an exemplary preschool teacher during read-alouds via Zoom. The study is bounded by an important outer layer: the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is undergirded by ontological subjectivity to epistemological constructivism, which allowed flexibility during an uncertain time. In the following sections I describe the context of this case in more detail.

3.4 Methods – Context

The broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic affected teaching and learning around the world. To place this study in its context, first I provide general information about the Federal Head Start program, followed by demographics of the encompassing school district and the Head Start program itself, as well as demographic information for Margie and the four student participants. Next, I position myself as the researcher in this study. Then, I describe the original setting in which I planned to conduct this study, followed by the changes that were made due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of these changes were the use of Zoom for teaching and learning and an administrative shift with subsequent schedule changes.

3.4.1 Federal Head Start Program

According to the federal Office of Head Start, “Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs” (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>). Creekside Head Start is a delegate site of Geminus, the grantee which holds the direct federal grant that has fiscal and program oversight. Geminus is accountable to the Federal Administration of Children and Families, while Creekside Head Start reports to Geminus. The Creekside Head Start program has earned the highest mark of quality in early childhood education by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (<http://www.naeyc.org/academy/interested/whyaccreditation>). The curriculum, The Creative Curriculum, from Teaching Strategies (<http://teachingstrategies.com/curriculum>) was selected by the Geminus Corporation for use at Creekside. However, according to the Creekside Head Start Director (email communication, 12/7/2020), teachers have flexibility to use The Creative Curriculum, or they may choose other “high-quality, research-based curricula that aligns with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) and State Early Care and Education Standards”

3.4.2 Demographics

Creekside Head Start is housed in the Central Office building of the Creekside School District. In Table 1, socio-economic and race/ethnicity demographics for the Creekside School District, Creekside Head Start program, the Head Start staff, and the study’s student participants are presented. Margie identified as White and middle class. All information was accurate at the time of this study.

Table 1. Demographics

Demographics	Poverty	Race/ethnicity: White	Race/ethnicity: African- American	Race/ethnicity: Hispanic	Race/ethnicity: Multi-racial
Creekside School District	85%	36%	31%	26%	7%
Creekside Head Start students	95%	52%	28%	15%	5%
Creekside Head Start staff	N/A	80%	10%	10%	0%
Student participants (4)	95%	25%	25%	50%	0%

Creekside School District enrolled about 1,650 students in kindergarten through grade 12. It is a high poverty (85%) and high mobility (30-50%) district with approximately 36% White, 31% African-American, 26% Hispanic, and 7% Multiracial students. The school district and Head Start program lie in an unincorporated township. Census data show that the township in which these families live was comprised of about 65% African American, 27% White, and 7% other or multiple races. A statistic for the percentage of Hispanic of any race was not available for the township area. However, the Hispanic (of any race) population in the surrounding county was 19%. The education level of township residents revealed 13% were not high school graduates, 87% were high school graduates or higher, and 14% held bachelor's degrees or higher. These township statistics compare to the state of Indiana, where 10% of residents are not high school graduates, 90% are high school graduates or higher, and the percentage of Indiana residents who hold bachelor's degrees or higher is almost double that of the township at 27%. Most families were English-speaking only, with 6% speaking languages other than English; the vast majority of these speak Spanish, according to the Census bureau (2019). The median income was \$34,477, and 29% of individuals live at or below the federal poverty level of \$24,600 for a family of 4 (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/2017-poverty-guidelines# thresholds>).

The Creekside Head Start site provides services for families and their children who are three, four and five years old. The Creekside Schools Head Start student population was about 52% white, 28% African American, 15% Hispanic, and 5% multi-racial. All children received free or reduced-price lunches. During the study period, the Creekside Head Start program had 60 students enrolled in three half-day classrooms and one full-day classroom. This represents half of the 120 students enrolled before the onset of the pandemic. The drop in enrollment was indeed attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Head Start director (email communication, 12/7/2020).

3.4.3 Self as Researcher

The drop in enrollment along with teaching and learning remotely affected teachers, students, and their families as well as me, the researcher. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument for data collection typically gathered through observations and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study is no different in that regard. However, observing and interviewing remotely via Zoom required a shift of methods. I describe the procedures I used for collecting data via Zoom in a later section, focusing next on me as the researcher.

Prior to and during most of this study, in addition to my role as a doctoral student, I was the Title I and English Learners (EL) Director for Creekside School District (pseudonym), a small, high-poverty, urban school district in a mid-sized Midwestern city. The Title I and EL programs have a focus on literacy and language and as such, I worked closely with teachers, observing in their classrooms, helping them create literacy curriculum and guiding them to improve their classroom literacy practices. Several years ago, after observing in two kindergarten classrooms and talking with teachers about their reading practices, I became concerned with the mechanistic way read-alouds were being used. Teachers were not self-selecting books to read, nor were they

creating thoughtful questions designed to engage their students in rich conversations. In other words, they were not valuing and encouraging meaning-making with their students during their read-aloud sessions. Instead, the kindergarten teachers were following the narrow curriculum prescribed in the basal readers, often highly focused on print-based skills and less on meaning-based strategies. Yet meaning-based strategies such as conversations around complex ideas with rich vocabulary are one way to foster emergent comprehension with young children. Moreover, the students did not appear to be engaged. Discouraged by the teaching practices and disengaged children I saw in these classes, I turned to the Creekside Head Start (pseudonym) preschool program down the hall from my office. I knew their teachers were given more autonomy to plan lessons; they were not bound quite as tightly to a standards-based curriculum as the kindergarten teachers were, and the children seemed to be more engaged. I was intrigued, and I took the opportunity to write a small grant with my advisor to conduct a synergistic project with Purdue College of Education and my district's Head Start program. During this project, I spent 2-3 hours each week throughout the 2015-2016 school year in three Head Start classrooms, and after observing the teachers' high-quality practices and children's high engagement during their read-aloud time, I decided to focus my dissertation around one exemplary teacher and her classroom read-aloud activity. She clearly valued deep, rich conversations around books and held high expectations for her young children from low-income families to engage in this meaning-making work. In these dual roles as doctoral student and school district administrator, I developed this single, intrinsic case study, situating Margie as the case of exemplary teaching.

Based on the literature on emergent literacy and exemplary teachers (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Lysaker, 2019; Sulzby, 1985; Duke et al., 2018; Allington, 2002; Pressley et al., 1996), along with my extensive experience in teaching language and literacy to young children from low-

income families, I assert that an exemplary teacher can effectively engage low-income preschoolers in higher level meaning-making during read-alouds, even while doing so remotely.

3.4.4 Changes to the Head Start Classroom During the Pandemic

At the onset of this study, I envisioned working in an in-person classroom of an exemplary Head Start preschool teacher. There would be young children bustling with activity, playing and learning together. They would be participating in whole class, small group, partner and individual activities around topics of numbers, letters, words, stories, science and math. They would learn social skills as they played and worked with their friends. They would role play in the housekeeping area, build with blocks and Legos, move to music, draw and paint in the art area, and experiment at the water and sand tables. There would be spaces where each of these activities took place, and the walls would be covered with student work as well as instructional and procedural displays. This is the setting I imagined as I began conceiving this study.

In reality, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered day-to-day operations for schools everywhere. Teachers and children were at home teaching and learning remotely. Creekside Head Start was closed to students for in-person learning from the beginning of the school year in August 2020 until March 1, 2021. While teachers began the school year in-person, they were back at home teaching remotely from mid-November 2020 through February 1, 2021. Two types of remote instruction were utilized at Creekside Head Start – synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous instruction meant students and teachers were “live” together at the same time during instruction, whereas asynchronous instruction consisted of activities posted in an online portal that students and their grown-ups could access on their own time. I note here that Margie referred to her students’ parents/guardians as their grown-ups. This is a term she used purposely to be inclusive of students who lived with their biological parents as well as those who lived with grandparents, step-parents,

other relatives or who were in foster care. Margie was tasked with developing both synchronous and asynchronous remote instruction for her students. One platform used for synchronous instruction was Zoom, and during this study, observations of Margie's read-aloud sessions were conducted using Zoom.

3.4.5 Using Zoom to Teach and Learn

Instead of the hustle and bustle of children playing and learning together, children would each be sitting in their individual homes in front of an electronic device. Imagine three- and four-year olds at home listening to their teacher reading a story via Zoom. Learning about the different features of Zoom took time and practice, so Margie was not always certain how each child was viewing her story reading. In speaker view on Zoom, children would see a full screen view of their teacher reading the book. However, if gallery view was used, the children would only see their teacher and classmates in small squares on a screen. Margie asked children to use speaker view so they would see the book pages up close, simulating an in-person read-aloud as much as possible. However, in the remote environment, Margie could not be certain children were using speaker view or if they knew how to do so. In addition to viewing each other in small squares, students may not have known Margie or their classmates they were seeing. Some students were in the class the previous year, but some were new to the class. Imagine trying to get to know your teacher and classmates through the tiny little Zoom squares on your device! Interactive conversations that would normally occur during in-person learning was difficult in the Zoom platform because the nature of the platform does not lend itself to people talking simultaneously; speech was garbled and unintelligible. Children were instructed to stay muted except when it was their turn to speak. Therefore, learning to use the mute/unmute button was an important first step that Margie taught her students. She made a card with a microphone icon; one side showed the symbol for being

muted with a line through the microphone, and the other side showed the microphone without the line, which symbolized being unmuted. The children quickly learned how to click the microphone on their device to mute and unmute. More importantly, they learned when it was appropriate to be muted or unmuted. However, this conflicted with Margie's normal organic style of teaching. She preferred to follow the children's ideas. Their conversations would often get lively, with several children speaking at once. Margie spoke of this in one of the interviews, "The organic teaching; I feel like it's just out the window" (Margie, personal communication January 22, 2021) Margie was also frustrated with not being able to "maintain focus from the children" (Margie, personal communication, September 6, 2021). She could not influence the environment to meet her children's needs as she did when they were face-to-face in her classroom. She missed not being able to "give a child a gentle touch without missing a step" (Margie, personal communication, September 6, 2021) during a read-aloud. The children's engagement during the Zoom read-alouds depended on their home environment. At times, the background action of family members was distracting. Other times, the internet connection was unreliable, making it difficult for the children to engage. Fortunately, most of the time an adult was near the children during the read-aloud, assisting them as they navigated the Zoom platform.

For asynchronous learning, Margie sent home lessons and activity packets with instructions and materials for grown-ups to use with their children at home. Although all four children in this study were from low-income families, they were not a homogeneous group with regards to grown-up availability and involvement. For some grown-ups, work, home and family obligations required attention, so all children did not have the same opportunities to participate in the activities sent home. In addition, sometimes the activities required items from home that low-income families such as those in this study may not have had access to. This included access to a reliable device

and/or internet service. If families did not have their own devices and internet service, they relied on those provided by the Head Start program. Devices and hot spots for connectivity were not available to every family at the beginning of the school year; some families had to wait. This is one illustration of the impact the pandemic had on families of low socioeconomic status – less access to technology and a higher variability of support for children. Considering the goal of Head Start is to level the playing field for low-income families compared to more affluent families, the pandemic exacerbated the equity issue.

3.4.6 Timeline of the Study

Despite issues of equity complicated by the pandemic, decisions needed to be made when school began in late August 2020. Safety was the top priority considered when decisions were made regarding how school would be conducted. As the pandemic situation changed, so did the decisions regarding how the Head Start program would operate (see Table 2 for these changes).

Table 2. Classroom Changes Timeline

Time period	Head Start and Study Activity
August 31, 2020	Head Start classes begin
August 31 – November 13, 2020	Head Start students learning from home Head Start staff teaching remotely from the classroom
November 1, 2020	Head Start Director retires; new Director hired and made schedule changes
November 5, 2020	Data collection began with initial Guided Interview with Margie (held in-person)
November 16, 2020 – January 29, 2021	Head Start teachers and students both working from home
December 14, 2020	First Zoom read-aloud session observation
December 21, 2020 – January 1, 2021	Winter Break
February 1, 2021	Head Start teachers return to teaching remotely from classroom
February 24, 2021	Final Zoom read-aloud session observation
March 1, 2021	Students return to in-person, hybrid learning
March 2021 – January, 2022	Conversational Interviews with Margie continued as needed.

*Note: Data collection dates/activities highlighted

Original Head Start Schedule

Table 2 reflects Creekside Head Start’s timeline for operation during the time of this study. At any given time, individuals might have been working remotely from home depending on their unique situation regarding COVID-19. As shown in Table 2, during most of the first semester, Margie and her teaching assistants taught from their classroom while students learned from home. The three assistants helped create the virtual classroom and set up the technology used during the Zoom read-aloud sessions. Their role throughout this study was to support Margie during remote teaching. The students’ original schedule was from 7:30-3:30, and they attended four one-hour Zoom sessions each day, Monday through Thursday. Fridays were teacher planning days, as they normally were, before the pandemic. In between Zoom sessions, students accessed the virtual classroom and participated in an online program called Ready Rosie (Pascal Learning, Inc., 2018). Ready Rosie is an early education mobile technology tool that helps Margie meet the family engagement goals of Head Start. In each of these programs there were literacy, math and science

activities. Students self-selected activities in the virtual classroom, while Margie assigned activities in Ready Rosie. Margie created hands-on and large motor activities for children to complete with their grown-ups at home. When the grown-ups picked up weekly meals provided by the school district, they also received materials and directions for the activities. Lastly, there was time set aside in the daily schedule for meals, snacks and relaxation.

Communication

Normally, with children present in the classroom, Margie preferred an organic style of teaching, re-directing lessons and activities to follow the children's interests. Teaching via scheduled Zoom sessions changed the organic, spontaneous style of her classroom, and Margie had to adjust and accept this change. Without live, in-person contact with the grown-ups, Margie also adapted her communication with them. Grown-ups had access to Margie's cell phone to call or text with questions. She created color-coded schedules for grown-ups to aid their understanding of when the child needed to login to a Zoom session and when the grown-up was to work on activities with their child in between Zoom sessions. Margie found she needed to use multiple platforms to communicate effectively with her students' grown-ups. Some preferred phone calls, while others preferred texts or emails. Interestingly, all the grown-ups preferred one of these three methods to the app that was purchased for this purpose.

Administrative and Schedule Changes

Communicating with her students' grown-ups was especially important at the beginning of November, when a new Head Start Director began, following the retirement of the previous director. The new director changed the students' schedule to a hybrid schedule, where each student was either part of Group A or Group B. Group A attended remotely on Mondays and Wednesdays,

and Group B attended remotely on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The day lasted from 8:30-2:00, which was a shorter day than previously. On remote instructional days, there were still four Zoom sessions, but each lasted only 30-45 minutes instead of an hour. Zoom sessions 1 and 2 were in the morning, and sessions 3 and 4 were in the afternoon. Table 3 shows the focus of each Zoom session. The read-aloud Zoom sessions (in bold print in the table below) are the focus of this study and I joined those sessions with the four student participants two times each week for ten weeks.

Table 3. *Zoom Session Times and Focus*

Time of session	Focus
Zoom #1 8:30-9:15	Open circle: sense of community with their school family; Greetings/classroom jobs; Attendance (math focus using 10-frame, more/less, number sense); Message Time Plus (MTP) – statement or question about the day’s activities, focus on print: letters, words, punctuation, letter sounds, etc.
Zoom #2 10:30-11:15	Read-aloud to whole group Small groups in break-out rooms led by Margie
Zoom #3 12:00-12:45	Read-aloud to whole group Small groups in break-out rooms led by Margie
Zoom #4 1:30-2:00	Activity time – free choice; staff provides encouragement and focuses on language, interaction, dramatic play

On the days students did not attend class remotely, they continued to participate in the “between Zoom sessions” activities. Seesaw (<https://web.seesaw.me/>), another online program for preschoolers was added. Meals, snacks, large motor exercises, relaxation time and the virtual classroom were still a part of the daily schedule.

In addition to the schedule change, more adaptation to teaching was necessary beginning in mid-November. Due to the increased spread of the coronavirus at that time, it was decided the Head Start staff would begin working from home until after the winter break. Margie had to move some of the technology equipment and other materials to her home, and she tried to re-create the environment there to match the remote classroom environment the students were accustomed to.

Even though students were viewing the environment via Zoom, and this provided a narrow view, it would still be different when Margie was broadcasting from her home.

Home

There is normally a heavy emphasis on family involvement in Head Start programs, but just as teaching and learning changed due to the pandemic, so did the nature of family involvement. First, Margie helped facilitate distribution of devices and hot spots to families. Then, she taught grown-ups how to use Zoom so that they could teach their children. Next, Margie communicated her expectations for the students and grown-ups during Zoom sessions, explaining that she did not expect the students to sit through an hour-long Zoom session (the original time frame). It was entirely acceptable for the children to stand, jump and walk around and come back during the lesson. She preferred grown-ups to be near their children to offer assistance when needed, but to allow them to learn independently as much as possible. Grown-ups gained a new perspective about expectations for family involvement in their child's learning.

To summarize, I described the multiple layers of the context and boundaries of this study. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about uncertainty and continual change as we had never experienced before. In Figure 1, the outermost contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of Zoom are important to this study because of the unique changes required of the teacher, the students and their grown-ups, and me, the researcher. While these broad contexts are unique, the narrow boundaries of read-alouds and emergent comprehension are commonplace in preschool classrooms. My interviews focused on Margie's beliefs, perceptions, and expectations of her low-income students. My observations focused on Margie's moves and practices as she promoted emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while the children's responses during the read-

alouds demonstrated their emergent comprehension. In the following section I describe my research design and study procedures in detail including participants, data collection and analyses.

3.5 Participants

Participants in this study included Margie, the exemplary teacher and four of her Head Start students. All persons' identities have been changed, and pseudonyms are used instead. My selection of Margie for this study was a purposeful sample – I purposely selected her because she had the characteristics of an exemplary teacher of preschool students from low-income families; characteristics such as caring and engaging, among others (Duke et al., 2018; Haberman, 1995; Lowman, 1996; Morrow et al., 1999; Noddings, 2012). Noddings (2012) suggests that if students feel their teacher cares about them, they will more readily engage in dialogue which helps to create a positive relationship between teachers and their students. Cultivating positive relationships with students creates an environment of care and trust. Within this caring, trusting environment, teaching and learning happen more easily. Learning is also increased when certain conditions are met. Crouch and Cambourne (2020) speak of engagement as the most important condition for learning. Engagement is increased when children like, trust, and respect their teacher, in other words, when they feel cared for by their teacher. Another aspect of engagement according to Crouch and Cambourne (2020), is that what is being taught is relevant to children. Making learning relevant to children is another way teachers show they care about them; they are teaching *children*, not a predetermined curriculum (Haberman, 1995). This idea follows Noddings' (2012) differentiation between *assumed* and *expressed* needs. When a teacher has engaged in authentic dialogue with their students, they have heard the students' expressed needs. This knowledge lends itself to teaching that is relevant to students as opposed to assuming their needs by teaching a predetermined curriculum.

Margie was a master at knowing her students' expressed needs and tailoring her instruction to meet those needs. Her practices illuminated how she cared for and engaged her students intensely. She was continually engaged with the children whether as a small group or individually. Margie drew on her vast knowledge and experience to focus on individual student's academic and social emotional needs and made adjustments instinctively. She exuded high-energy through her varied tone of voice and body language, drawing from both to engage students while conducting the Zoom read-alouds. As such, Margie was an intense sample (Patton, 2015). Intensity sampling, one form of purposeful sampling is described by Patton as "...excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases... cases that manifest sufficient intensity to illuminate the nature of success or failure, but not at the extreme" (2002, as cited in Suri, 2011, p. 67).

While Margie provided a rich example of an exemplary teacher, she was not highly unusual. Her practices were not so extreme that they would be unattainable by others given a similar context. It is possible, and in fact desirable, for other teachers to learn from her and replicate her teaching practices. Another characteristic of intensity sampling, according to Patton (2015) is that it requires prior information and exploratory work to be able to identify intense examples. I knew Margie to be an exemplary preschool teacher based on my project in her classroom in 2015-2016.

3.5.1 Consent from Participants

Once I selected Margie as the case for this study, I needed consent from her and various stakeholders. First, although not a participant from whom I would collect data, I needed consent from the Creekside Head Start Director to conduct the study in her facility with one of her teachers and various students. I discussed the study with her and obtained her consent.

Then, I met with Margie to explain her role in this study if she chose to participate. I had held previous conversations with Margie several months prior to this formal step in the process of obtaining consent, so she was fully aware of and excited about the study. She agreed to participate and signed the Research Participant Consent form. Next, I joined a regularly scheduled Zoom session with Margie and her students' parents/guardians (referred to as their "grown-ups") to explain this study and their child's role, should they agree to their child's participation. I read the Research Participant Consent Form and allowed time for questions from the grown-ups. I explained that the consent form would be included in the meal bag the grown-ups would pick up the next day. The meal pick-up was a weekly event the school district provided due to the pandemic. The consent form was written in English and Spanish to accommodate those families speaking Spanish. Grown-ups could sign and return the form any time during the next week or when they returned for their meal pick-up the following week. A bright pink cover letter was attached to the consent form as a clear visual reminder. Margie often provided visual reminders to assist grown-ups. She also communicated with them using multiple platforms including hard copy notes, phone calls, texts and via the Zoom sessions. After the consent forms were distributed, I received four signed forms from the grown-ups, and those four children became my student participants.

I add a note here for clarification – I received consent from the original director in September 2020, and in October 2020, she retired. When the new director was hired at the end of October 2020, I scheduled a meeting with her to explain the study and her role in it. She signed the Research Participant Consent Form and was highly supportive of this study and enthusiastic about learning what I would find from my interviews and observations in one of her classrooms.

3.5.2 Meet Margie and Her Students

Much of Margie's expertise was derived from her formal education, experience and drive to continue learning, growing, and perfecting her teaching craft. She has an Associate's and a Bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies, with a Concentration in Early Childhood Education (ECE). She also has a Master Teacher certification and has spent her entire 21-year career teaching preschoolers at Creekside Head Start. Her future goal is to become an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Instructional Coach.

Three parent(s)/guardian(s) gave consent for their children to participate in this study. Two children were siblings, so there was a total of four child participants. See Table 4.

Table 4. *Descriptions of Child Participants*

Student	Ethnicity, gender, age at the beginning of the study	Year in Head Start program	Characteristics	Grown-up involvement during Zoom read-alouds
Brandon	White male 4 years, 8 months	First year	Brandon presented as an energetic little boy whose responses to Margie and the books she read were often highly connected to events in his life outside of school and only loosely connected to the book or classroom activities.	Brandon's grandmother, with whom he lived, sat next to him during every Zoom session, and helped scaffold Margie's instruction.
Sean	Black male 4 years, 9 months	Second year	Sean was an enthusiastic learner who did not hesitate to contribute to book discussions even though he required significant scaffolding to support his meaning-making due to language development delays.	Sean's grown-ups were in the background, but not directly assisting him during the Zoom sessions.

Table 4. continued

Lydia (Tony's sister)	Hispanic female 5 years, 3 months	Second year	Lydia presented as a conscientious learner who was also keenly aware of her own and others' emotional states and needs.	Lydia and Tony's mom or dad were close by, supervising and assisting when needed.
Tony (Lydia's brother)	Hispanic male 3 years, 11 months	First year	Tony was an observant little boy who created meaning for himself by first listening to and observing others, especially his sister, Lydia, before responding. After observing, he would often repeat the responses of Lydia and the other students.	Lydia and Tony's mom or dad were close by, supervising and assisting when needed.

Margie was aware of and honored the unique qualities of these four children. She established an individual relationship with each child and encouraged their voice as they constructed meaning in books in unique ways. She anticipated each child's learning and social-emotional needs and planned accordingly, first through book choice and then through scaffolding during the read-aloud.

3.6 Books Margie Read

Margie used several criteria to select the books for her read-aloud sessions during this study (see Table 5). She began by gathering books from the suggested list in the curriculum guide that supported the topic of Winter. Next, based on formative assessments she had done with students, she selected books that lent themselves to teaching skills and strategies within the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, during this study, one emergent comprehension strategy the four students learned was using the book's illustrations to aid their meaning-making. Then, Margie considered individual children's needs and interests, selecting

books she thought would engage particular students through linguistic, topical, experiential, or cultural connections. For example, she selected a book written in Spanish, since as Margie said, “I usually have Spanish speaking students in my classroom” (Margie, personal communication, December 20, 2021). In fact, the two siblings in this study were students whose native language was Spanish. Margie always looked for books that represented diverse races/ethnicities, especially those reflecting the students in her class at the time. She felt strongly that selecting books with connections to children’s lives would be more engaging and more meaningful to them (Margie, personal communication, December 20, 2021). These connections allowed children to draw from their background knowledge to aid meaning making. An example of this is when Margie selected two books knowing one student would see himself reflected in the personality of the main character. Another way Margie thought about making books more meaningful to her students was to look at the language and vocabulary the books contained. She said, “You want to give them those words, that language, that extra vocabulary.” By this she meant language and vocabulary within her children’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). – that space just above where children can work independently. With carefully selected books and scaffolded instruction from Margie, the children’s language and vocabulary were enhanced (Bruner, 1966; Johnson, 2019; Verenikina, 2008). Lastly, books with captivating, colorful pictures that were easy to see were critical for viewing on Zoom especially since some children were accessing Zoom on their grown-up’s phone, with a smaller screen than that of an iPad or laptop.

Table 5. Books Read During Zoom Read-Aloud Sessions

Title	Author	Date read	Summary	Publisher	Publication Date
<i>Winter</i>	Vic Moors	Jan. 6, 2021, morning	Simple patterned text, with a single illustration matching the text, <i>The _____</i> , on each page.	www.readinga-z.com	n.d.
<i>There Was a Cold Lady Who Swallowed Some Snow</i>	Lucille Colandro	Jan. 6, 2021, afternoon	A cold lady swallows some snow, and other items needed to make a snowman, following the familiar song, “There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly”. She hiccups and a snowman is built!	Scholastic	2003
<i>Winter – Invierno</i>	Ailie Busby	Jan. 13, 2021	This short board book is written in both English and Spanish, English in black text on top, and Spanish in red text under the English. It is a story about things kids do in the winter.	,Child’s Play (International) Ltd	2018
<i>I Have to Go!</i>	Robert Munsch	Jan 20, 2021	A little boy, Andrew, is asked multiple times throughout the day if he has to go to the bathroom. He always says, “No”. But when the family takes a long trip or when Andrew needs to put on a snowsuit to go out and play, he DOES have to go to the bathroom.	Annick Press	1986

Table 5. continued

<i>Winter Hats</i>	Edie Evans	Jan. 25, 2021 & Feb. 3, 2021	Simple patterned text, with a single illustration matching the text, <i>This winter hat has _____</i> , on each page.	www.readinga-z.com	n.d.
<i>Thomas' Snowsuit</i>	Robert Munsch	Jan. 27, 2021	Thomas won't put on his snowsuit until he wants to, and after his teacher's and principal's clothes get mixed up!	Annick Press	2018
<i>The Happy Day</i>	Ruth Krauss	Feb. 17, 2021	Animals sleeping in the winter awaken when they sniff a flower signifying spring is coming.	Harper Collins Publishers ¹	1949

During the eight Zoom read-aloud sessions, seven books were read. One book, *Winter Hats* was read twice, each time with a different focus. The focus of the first reading was to talk about the different features of each hat, and to relate the hats to the children. For example, Sean wore a hat last year that looked like one of the hats in the book, and Margie reminded him of that. During the second reading, Margie focused on connecting the actions in the illustrations to other class activities or to activities the children did in their own lives. For example, Margie compared the illustration of a child sliding down a hill on a sled to the penguins they just saw in a video. Of the seven books, two were nonfiction and five were fiction. The nonfiction books contained simple text and high support from the illustrations. They were from readinga-z.com and were projected onto the children's devices. They were used for concept development as well as print concepts. These projected books had some advantages as well as some limitations. The ability to "write" on

the book was an asset when teaching print concepts and phonics, but this feature sometimes proved distracting to meaning-making.

The fiction books were trade books that further developed the concepts of things people and animals do in the winter, as well as provided experience listening to and discussing narrative stories. For four of the fiction trade books, Margie tried to re-create the read-aloud experience on camera as close as possible to how she would do it in person. She held the book up to the camera and showed her facial expressions in the camera. However, with the last fiction trade book, she scanned the pages and inserted them into a slideshow, thinking the children could see the book pages better this way. The trade-off was that they couldn't see her facial expressions, so she focused on using her voice, both volume and intonation, and she maintained an interactional element with students through questions throughout the read-aloud, to further help children create meaning as she read this book. Making instructional adaptations such as this became commonplace for Margie while navigating remote teaching during the pandemic.

Engaging children via Zoom was more difficult than when in person. However, Margie's thoughtful selection of books for read-alouds, with special consideration for presenting them via Zoom allowed her to create positive meaning-making experiences for her children despite the challenges. Next, I describe my data collection of observations during the Zoom read-alouds and interviews with Margie.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, I provide a description of the procedures I used when collecting and analyzing data from two sources: interviews and observations. Although observations provided the primary set of data, I began collecting data with an introductory interview. Therefore, I begin this section describing interview data collection and then analysis. The introductory interview data

provided a framework to begin organizing observation data. I follow this with observation data collection and its analysis. Observation data led to subsequent interviews as member checks. Interviews with Margie focused on her beliefs about and expectations of her students as well as her teaching moves and practices with them. Observations focused on the interactions between Margie and her young students during read-alouds via Zoom.

3.7.1 Interviews with Margie: Data Collection

I began collecting data with a Guided Interview with Margie on November 5, 2020. The purpose of this interview was to gain her broad perspective on teaching students from low-income families before I began observing her in action with her students. Using the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis, I immediately began initial analysis of this interview. I describe this analysis in the next section. Here, I describe the two types of interviews I utilized throughout the study to deepen my understanding and aid my interpretation of Margie's practices and interactions with her students (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I called one type Guided Interviews and the second type Conversational Interviews (Patton, 2015). These were derived from Patton's (2015) Interview Guide Approach and Informal Conversational Interviews, respectively. My approach to conducting each interview essentially matched Patton's (2015). However, I simplified the terms by shortening them and using a parallel structure. Patton (2015) described his Interview Guide Approach as interviews with pre-determined topics, but with the flexibility of the wording and sequence of questions during the interview. Similarly, I created a list of topics and/or questions and kept the interview "fairly conversational and situational" (Patton, 2015, p. 438). Patton (2015) described his Informal Conversational Interviews as being less formal than his Guided Interview Approach, and they were "built on and emerge(d) from observations" (Patton, 2015, p. 438). Informal Conversational Interviews occurred spontaneously and "flow[ed] from the immediate

context” (Patton, 2015, p. 437). In contrast to Patton’s, my Conversational Interviews did not occur spontaneously but were scheduled every week or two as needed. Margie and I were both engaged in our full-time work during the study period, so meeting spontaneously was not feasible. Instead, I kept a running list of questions as I observed the read-aloud Zoom sessions. When I had several questions about a particular topic or in reference to one or two read-aloud sessions, I would schedule a Conversational Interview with Margie. In this way, we were efficient with our time while still being thorough in my data collection. Conversational Interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes, whereas Guided Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to over an hour.

I conducted five Guided Interviews – an introductory interview before I began observations, three member check interviews, and a final post-observation follow-up (see Table 6 for a timeline of both interviews and observations). All Guided Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded. Transcripts were created using Temi, a speech-to-text transcription program (temi.com, 2020). The first two member check interviews occurred during the fifth and eighth weeks of data collection, while the third was conducted in April after observations had concluded. See Appendix A for a list of questions for each Guided Interview.

I held Conversational Interviews via Zoom, phone, emails, texts, and face-to-face. Questions were derived from previous observations. For example, during one Zoom read-aloud, I inadvertently left the meeting just as Margie commented about changes she made to her read-alouds. I later emailed Margie to ask her about those changes (Margie, personal communication, December 15, 2020). Text-based documentation was provided for all types of interviews. Texts and emails were inherently written documents. Using Temi, I created transcripts of the Zoom interviews. I took extensive notes during and after phone calls or in-person communication. I used these Conversational Interviews to ask clarifying questions and to add details to my notes.

Table 6. *Guided Interviews and Observations Timeline*

Guided Interviews and Observations	Date conducted	Purpose
Interview: Introductory	Nov. 5, 2020	To ascertain Margie's beliefs, perceptions, and expectations of her low-income students
Eight read-aloud Zoom observations	Dec. 14, 2020 – Jan. 20, 2021	To observe Margie's interactions with her students
Interview: Member Check #1	Jan. 22, 2021 Week 5	To add Margie's voice to observation data collected so far for clarity, accuracy, etc.
Seven read-aloud Zoom observations	Jan. 25, 2021 – Feb. 4, 2021	To observe Margie's interactions with her students
Interview: Member Check #2	Feb. 12, 2021 Week 8	To add Margie's voice to observation data collected so far for clarity, accuracy, etc.
Four read-aloud Zoom observations	Feb. 17-24, 2021	To observe Margie's interactions with her students
Interview: Member Check #3	Apr. 14, 2021	To add Margie's voice to observation data collected so far for clarity, accuracy, etc.
Interview: Post-observation follow-up	Dec. 20, 2021	To clarify and extend information about book selection

3.7.2 Interviews with Margie: Data Analysis

Initial analysis of the introductory Guided Interview began immediately. To begin this analysis, first, I read through the entire transcript of the interview, unedited, and began open coding – jotting words and phrases in the margins of the transcript, reflecting my initial thoughts about Margie's beliefs, perceptions, and expectations of her children from low-income families. These notes in the margins represent initial codes. When a researcher utilizes open coding, they are not looking for information to fit preset codes but is instead open to whatever appears in the

data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When I had applied open coding to about half of the interview transcript, I noticed a pattern – the codes fit into categories of Teacher and Child. The Teacher category contained comments Margie made about her beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and practices. The Child category contained comments reflecting characteristics of her students. This procedure resulted in a total of 34 codes. These were consolidated into twelve sub-categories, five under Teacher and seven under Child. The Teacher sub-categories were teacher beliefs/characteristics, classroom environment, teaching practices, teaching changes due to the pandemic, and teacher-parent communication. The Child sub-categories were child's home environment/background, social-emotional needs, academic/instructional needs, learning pathways, learning changes due to the pandemic, equitable educational opportunities, and student ownership of learning. The two broad categories of Teacher Moves and Purposes and Children's Responses were incorporated into how I coded the teacher-children interactions during observations of the read-aloud Zoom sessions which I describe next.

3.7.3 Read-aloud Zoom Observations: Data Collection

In addition to interviews with Margie, I observed Margie and her students during their read-aloud Zoom sessions. Observations are firsthand encounters (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and thus are important because they add to the internal validity or credibility of the study. My observations of Margie's read-alouds confirmed the information I gathered from the interviews with her.

My role during Zoom observations was that of an observer-as-participant. Johnson and Christensen's (2020) distinction between participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant lies mainly in the amount of time per session and total time one spends with the participants. Both lie on a continuum from full participant to full observer. As a participant, one would become a part of the classroom "family" as an insider, and spend a substantial amount of time daily, observing

over a long period of time, for example, an entire semester, school year or longer. As an observer, one would observe just a few times and over a short period of time. My timeline fell between these two types. I was a peripheral member, establishing an “insider’s identity without participating” in the read-aloud itself (Merriam, 1998, p. 101). Halcolm, a fictional character created by Patton (2015) as his “internal philosophical alter ego and muse” (p. xiii) clearly describes this role: “Enter into the world. Observe and wonder. Experience and reflect. To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from” (p. 327). In this study, I was a part of the Zoom sessions; Margie knew I was “in the background” observing. However, she admitted me to the room before the students logged in, and I had hidden my Zoom “square” and muted my microphone, so the students had no visual or audio sense of my presence. In this way, I was also “apart from” (Patton, 2015, p. 327) the Zoom space. I chose this stance because I wanted to capture how Margie fostered her young students’ emergent comprehension as I had seen her do naturally on a daily basis. Therefore, I limited the effect my presence had on Margie (Merriam, 1998) by being there, observing, but not participating in the read-aloud conversations. I had no effect on the student participants as they could not see nor hear me.

I began observing read-aloud Zoom sessions in mid-December 2020 (see Table 6). During the live Zoom sessions, I observed and took field notes. Shortly after each session ended, I reviewed my field notes and added further comments. These comments might have clarified or expanded on what I observed; some were questions I wanted to ask Margie later in Conversational Interviews, and others were methodological notes to guide my future observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). I recorded each Zoom session in both audio and video formats so that I could review them later. In all, I had nineteen 30-minute Zoom read-aloud session recordings. I

chose to focus on eight of them that were part of Margie's *Winter* unit of study. Focusing on one unit of study helped narrow my inquiry to better answer my research questions. I uploaded the audio recording files of these eight Zoom sessions to Temi, which created a transcript. I downloaded each transcript into a Word document, and from there, I copied and pasted the transcript into an Excel spreadsheet, where a new line indicated a new speaker. Reading through the transcript the first time, I corrected the obvious errors, such as names spelled incorrectly. There were many of these errors, and I attribute this to the Temi program transcribing a recording from Zoom as opposed to live speech. Also, during the first reading, I inserted pseudonyms for participants' names. While reading the transcript the second time, I listened to the audio recording and deleted extraneous words and phrases, such as "uh" or "um". Some instances of the use of "uh" or "um" were meaningful, such as when Sean said, "Uh," and looked up with a facial expression that showed he was thinking. I interpreted that utterance and expression as meaningful; he was taking time to think. With clean transcripts of eight Zoom sessions, I began analysis of the observations.

3.7.4 Read-aloud Zoom Observations: Data Analysis

Data analysis of the Zoom read-aloud observations began by reading through each selected transcript a third time. This time, I was looking for interactions between Margie and the children that would best answer my research questions. Those interactions that provided rich examples of Margie's exemplary teaching practices, such as scaffolding to match an individual child's background knowledge and emergent comprehension development or the students' deep thinking as they made meaning of the stories would accomplish this. Interactions which were long enough to have multiple exchanges between Margie and the child, were often the best. I deleted interactions without an emergent comprehension focus, such as those focused on phonics. Others

were deleted if there was only surface level thinking being exhibited by the students. Still others were deleted due to technical issues that made the interaction difficult to hear or understand in its entirety. I highlighted 30 interactions that met the criteria above. I read through each of those 30 interactions again, being more discerning about what constituted a high-quality interaction. I wanted equal representation among the four children as much as possible. I found there were more high-quality interactions between Margie and two of the children, so I deleted some interactions that didn't provide novel data about the emergent comprehension development of those two children. This left 21 high-quality interactions which I copied into another spreadsheet and titled Analysis Master – Interactions. For each of the interactions, the following labeling information was listed in the spreadsheet: 1) a Zoom session number, 2) an interaction number, 3) a line number, 4) child's name, 5) title of interaction, 6) the speaker of each line, and 7) the time stamp from the original Zoom recording transcript (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Interaction Labels*

Labeling information for each interaction	Explanation	Example
Zm#	Zoom session number	Z09
Interaction#	Interaction # within the Zoom session	8
Interaction line	Each line of an interaction was numbered	5
Child	Child's name	Lydia
Label	Title of interaction (child's first initial. descriptive. word. phrase)	L.clothes.mix
Spkr	Speaker of each line of the interaction (first initial)	M (Margie)
Time stamp	Time stamp where this line occurred in the Zoom session	11:53

Once I had these 21 high-quality interactions selected and labeled, I began the next process, writing a short narrative about each interaction, describing Margie's moves and their respective purposes. If there was a multimodal aspect to the utterance, such as when she pumped her arms as

if she were running up a hill, I noted that. This is also when I realized the interview data served to flesh out questions that arose during classroom observations. I added notes from the interviews to the narratives when applicable. After writing these narratives for three interactions, I noticed patterns. I created preliminary codes based on those patterns and applied these to the first three interactions. Each code started with either a **T** if it was the teacher speaking or **ch** if the child was speaking. Then, I coded each utterance three ways – *what*, *why*, and *how*. The *what* code was for what the teacher or child said. The *why* code for the teacher was her purpose as it related to fostering emergent comprehension, and the *why* code for the children was how their response reflected emergent comprehension. This was really a *how* code, but my *how* column was strictly used for multi-modal moves from either the teacher or child. I continued reading each interaction and applying these codes to all 21 interactions. To keep track of the codes, I created another spreadsheet and called it the Codebook. I added, deleted and otherwise revised codes as necessary depending on what appeared in the interaction transcript text. Table 8 shows examples of some of the codes I used and their definitions. The complete codebook with definitions is in Appendix B.

Table 8. Data Analysis Codes Sample

WHAT code	Definition of WHAT codes
Trep	Repeated either a student or herself
Tafm	Affirmed a child's response
chown	Used their own way of thinking
chlwd	Gave a one-word response
WHY code	Definition of WHY codes
Tcncptdevp	To develop a concept
Tengagem	To keep child engaged
chcxn	Emergent comprehension strategy of making connections to their lives or a classroom activity
chMpix	Emergent comprehension strategy of using the illustrations to make meaning
HOW code	Definition of HOW codes
TMM-G	Teacher used multi-modal: gesture
TMM-V:I	Teacher used multi-modal: voice intonation
chMM-G	Child used multi-modal: gesture
chMM-V:I	Child used multi-modal: voice intonation

Next, I inserted a formula into the spreadsheet to count instances of each teaching move and child response in the *what*, *why* and *how* coding columns. After I had these counts, I sorted each list of codes with the most frequent occurrences at the top for both Margie's teaching moves and the children's responses in each category, *what*, *why* and *how*. The most frequent teaching moves were important because exemplary teachers utilize those practices they know to be effective consistently (Morrow et al., 1999). For instance, Margie's most frequent teaching moves would give me an idea of what she thought was most salient for fostering emergent comprehension with her students. Children's most frequent responses would reflect the skills and strategies they used most consistently as they constructed meaning from the books and discussion. There were very few discrepancies; those few were rectified, and the codes maintained their positions of frequency.

The next step of my analysis was to approach Teacher Moves and Purposes as a separate entity from Children's Responses before looking at how they interacted. After sorting by

frequency of codes for Teacher Moves and Purposes, I looked for connections by matching each Teacher *why* code to the corresponding *what* codes. For example, Margie’s purpose (*why* codes) was often to develop concepts, and the most frequent *what* code was “repeats student or self”. This meant that Margie used repetition often as she was fostering concept development with her children. See Table 9 for each purpose that Margie consistently worked toward and the teaching move that promoted that purpose. From the Table, Margie’s most consistently used teaching moves were repetition and asking a variety of questions, often open-ended questions, for the purposes of fostering concept development, scaffolding, and engagement. Developing comprehension strategies such as using pictures and making connections to make meaning and fostering deep, high-level thinking were other purposes Margie consistently focused on through repetition and questioning. However, when her purpose was to attend to social-emotional needs, she acknowledged and affirmed students.

Table 9. Teacher Moves and Purposes

Teacher Purposes (<i>why</i>)	Frequency	Teacher Moves to Promote Purpose (<i>what</i>)
Concept development	33	Repetition, asking multiple types of questions
Scaffolding	26	Repetition, asking mostly open-ended questions
Engagement	26	Repetition, asking mostly open-ended questions
Using pictures to make meaning	25	Repetition, asking mostly open-ended questions
Social-emotional	25	Acknowledgement and affirmation
Making connections to make meaning	21	Asking multiple types of questions, mostly open-ended questions
Deep, high-level thinking	20	Asking multiple types of questions, mostly open-ended questions

In the same way, I looked for connections in the children’s codes by matching each child *why* code to the corresponding *what* codes. For example, collectively, the children’s most frequent *why* coded responses were “chcxn” which meant they were making connections between the book and either their school or their home lives. They made these connections most often by using their

own line of thinking to respond to Margie and the book as they constructed meaning. These responses were coded as “chown” in the *what* column. See Table 10 for the behaviors, skills or strategies (*why* codes) children used that represented their emergent comprehension and the ways in which they exhibited those behaviors, skills and strategies (*what* codes). From the Table, the children’s most consistent emergent comprehension behaviors were making connections to their own lives, using pictures in the books, and referring to what was relevant and important to their lives as they constructed meaning. These behaviors were exhibited by their one-word responses and by pointing to or verbalizing something in the book’s pictures. The children also drew from their own knowledge and experiences as they made meaning, which often meant their responses were approximate answers to questions.

Table 10. *Children’s Responses*

Children’s Emergent Comprehension Behaviors, Skills, and Strategies (<i>why</i>)	Frequency	Children’s Responses (<i>what</i>)
Making connections to make meaning	24	Making approximations, giving one-word responses
Using pictures to make meaning	22	Pointing to, verbalizing something in the pictures, giving one-word responses
Relevant and important	19	Using their own knowledge and experiences as they made meaning

Finally, I looked at the codes within each of the 21 interactions to find connections between Margie’s questions and comments and the children’s responses. I analyzed the connections in two ways: Teacher WHAT→WHY codes, and Teacher WHY codes→Children’s WHY codes. Several connections were apparent, most notably those in which Margie was focusing on building relationships through attention to her students’ social-emotional needs, and when she was promoting emergent comprehension behaviors, skills and strategies around using pictures in books and making connections to construct meaning. Connections between the Teacher WHAT codes

(used to denote what Margie said or did) and the Teacher WHY codes (used to denote Margie's purpose or goal) showed that she often affirmed, acknowledged and repeated students or herself to build their confidence for sharing their thinking. This helped build her relationship with them. Margie's overarching focus on building relationships and attending to her students' social-emotional needs led them to feel comfortable and confident responding in ways which were relevant and important to them and their lives, which reflected their emergent comprehension. Connections between the Teacher WHY codes and the children's WHY codes (used to denote why their response reflected their emergent comprehension) showed that when her purpose was to teach emergent comprehension behaviors and strategies, the children's responses matched Margie's instruction. For example, she would remind them to look at the picture for clues or she would ask them a question about their own life that related to the characters in the story, and they would then respond based on their background knowledge from their life or from Margie's instruction.

To summarize my data collection and analysis of interviews and read-aloud observations, first I described two types of interviews I used – Guided Interviews and Conversational Interviews. Next, I explained the procedures I followed to conduct each type of interview. After this, I provided a table of the timeline of the study to show how interviews and observations were woven together to gather data. Then I described how I analyzed the introductory interview. Next, I described data collection during the read-aloud observations via Zoom, and the procedures I used to organize the transcripts from the Zoom recordings to begin analysis. After I analyzed data from both sources, three categories emerged - Teacher Moves and Purposes, Children's Responses and Teacher-Child-Book Interactions. Among these three categories, seven themes were revealed. See Table 11.

Table 11. *Categories and Themes*

Category 1 – Teacher-Children-Books Interactions to Develop Emergent Comprehension	Theme 1 - Relationships
	Theme 2 - Engagement
	Theme 3 – Personalization of Teaching to Children’s Needs
Category 2 – Teacher Moves and Purposes	Theme 4 – BrainWork
	Theme 5 – Heart Work
Category 3 – Children’s Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension	Theme 6 – School-Based Responses
	Theme 7 – Home-Based Responses

These seven themes are discussed in the Findings chapter. In the last section of this Methodology chapter, I describe how I address trustworthiness in this qualitative case study.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is used to show the study’s credibility and rigor. There are many ways to address trustworthiness. One way is to use member checking to address emic validity. Emic validity means the interpretation of the data satisfies a participant’s view, and member checking is when the researcher shows a participant what the researcher wrote about an event during the study for verification from the participant (Merriam, 2016). The Member Check Guided Interviews were conducted for this purpose. During these interviews, I asked Margie clarifying questions about my observations and I asked her to review my field notes to verify that I captured her “thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 285) accurately, from her viewpoint. Using low-inference descriptors is another way to indicate emic trustworthiness. Low-inference descriptors use participants’ comments verbatim or language very close to participants’ exact words to capture their perspective. I used low-inference descriptors from Margie and the students as often as possible while also maintaining clear, concise, easy-to-understand language so that the reader heard the voice of the participants. Triangulation has also been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of

information from different sources (Patton, 2015). To address theoretical validity, I drew from multiple theoretical perspectives to analyze and explain the data. The overarching perspectives were sociocultural and social constructivism. Both focus on the social aspect of learning – how we learn through our interactions with others. Finally, triangulation of data sources also increases trustworthiness in qualitative studies. I used both interviews and observations to add to the trustworthiness of this study.

In this chapter, I described and provided a rationale for my study design, a qualitative, single, intrinsic case study. Next, I described the broad context of this study – remote teaching and learning via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this study, the methods I used to collect data were most affected by the pandemic – I interviewed and observed remotely rather than in person. Data analysis was not drastically changed from what it would have been if I had been in person for interviews and observations. Then, I positioned myself as the researcher and described the exemplary teacher and her students as well as the books used in the read-alouds. Lastly, data collection and analysis were described in detail, followed by steps I took toward trustworthiness. In chapter four, I present findings from the interactions of Margie, the books, and her students based on the seven themes mentioned above.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe an exemplary preschool teacher's interactions with her low-income students during small group read-alouds via Zoom, and how her students' responses reflected their emergent comprehension. In this chapter I aim to discuss the findings of this study in answering the following research questions:

1. How does one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do her students' responses to her read-aloud reflect their emergent comprehension development?

In response to these questions, I found the following: Margie's beliefs, perceptions and expectations of her students' emergent comprehension capabilities were reflected in her consistent teaching moves and purposes. The interactions between Margie and her students exhibited how her instructional moves and purposes influenced the children's responses. Margie focused on the whole child, both their academic and social emotional needs. The children's responses reflected their emergent comprehension as they exhibited behaviors, skills and strategies for constructing meaning based on connections they made between their learning from school and their learning from their home environment.

4.1 Categories and Themes

In this section I revisit how the data analysis described in Chapter 3 evolved into findings representing three categories and seven themes. Then, I present evidence from this study's data substantiating the findings. Lastly, I restate my final assertion based on the findings.

From the introductory interview, two broad categories developed, (1) Teacher Moves and

Purposes, and (2) Children's Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension. I defined Teacher Moves and Purposes as what Margie said and did to promote the emergent comprehension of her students. Two examples are when she asked questions to develop concepts and when she praised students for their response attempts. In the interview, Margie described her teaching moves and purposes. She expressed how she strove to create a classroom environment where children felt safe and part of a community of learning. She spoke of her organic teaching practices, how she followed the children's lead and created different learning pathways for different children. She also conveyed information about her formal education and many years of experience teaching preschoolers from low-income families. I defined Children's Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension as responses from children showing their use of emergent comprehension behaviors, skills, and strategies such as using pictures and making connections to their own lives to construct meaning. In the introductory interview, Margie also described how she learned about the children's home environment and their literacy background through home visits. From these home visits, she learned that children's basic needs must be met first, before any learning would occur. Even with little income, most parents were able to provide basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing as well as love and care. Margie's first step was to create an emotional connection with every child, and from there, to create meaningful instructional activities. These two categories, Teacher Moves and Purposes, and Children's Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension guided the coding of the Zoom read-aloud observations following the introductory interview. From each of these two categories, two themes emerged. The two themes from the Teacher's Moves and Purposes category were Brain Work and Heart Work. While I understand that teachers are integrated beings, I have bisected the findings in this way to better describe how Margie's teaching decisions and practices had both academic (Brain Work) and social-emotional

(Heart Work) purposes specifically designed to foster her students' emergent comprehension. An example of her Brain Work is when she asked questions or directed comments about the pictures in a story, while an example of her Heart Work is when she asked a child to help another child feel better after being frustrated with her device. The two themes from the Children's Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension category were School-Based Meaning-Making and Home-Based Meaning-Making. The children's responses were multi-faceted, and bisecting the findings helped to describe their responses as they interacted with the books and Margie in relation to their emergent comprehension. An example of a School-Based response was when a student described what was happening in the picture of a story, while an example of a Home-Based response was when a student commented about something from their home or family life that was similar to a character or action in a story.

After I synthesized the data from the four themes by looking at how Margie's Brain Work and Heart Work influenced her children's School-Based and Home-Based responses to the book and her questions, another category formed, Teacher-Children-Books Interactions to Develop Emergent Comprehension. Within this new category there were three additional themes, Relationships, Engagement, and Personalization of Teaching to Children's Needs (see Table 12). Interactions between Margie, the books and each child are described next, showing how relationships, engagement, and personalized teaching evolved as themes from the data and helped answer my first research question.

Table 12. *Categories and Themes*

Category 1 – Teacher-Children-Books Interactions to Develop Emergent Comprehension	Theme 1 - Relationships
	Theme 2 - Engagement
	Theme 3 – Personalization of Teaching to Children’s Needs
Category 2 – Teacher Moves and Purposes	Theme 4 – Brain Work
	Theme 5 – Heart Work
Category 3 – Children’s Responses as Evidence of Emergent Comprehension	Theme 6 – School-Based Responses
	Theme 7 – Home-Based Responses

4.1.1 Teacher-Children-Books Interactions to Develop Comprehension

In this section I describe each of the three themes that evolved from the read-aloud observation data around the first category in Table 12. The themes are Relationships, Engagement, and Personalization of Teaching to Children’s Needs. I provide examples of portions of the read-aloud transcripts to further illustrate these themes.

Theme 1: Relationships

“Now I know you need a little more time.”

Building relationships with her students depended on Margie noticing and addressing their social-emotional needs as well as their academic needs. Margie commented in an interview about her belief regarding social-emotional learning and building relationships saying, “those basic needs need to be met before you can begin their education” (Margie, personal communication, November 5, 2020). Cultivating relationships with her students by attending to their social-emotional as well as their academic needs was more difficult via Zoom. In an interview, Margie commented, “...they didn’t get that much of a foundation” of the social-emotional curriculum because they were on Zoom. She continued by saying “...this is why we need to be in the classroom” as she described how her students normally would learn how to self-regulate their emotions and help classmates as well when they were in-person. Despite the challenges, Margie

attended to the social-emotional needs of her students alongside teaching emergent comprehension skills and strategies. This prioritization of building relationships and social-emotional learning was a prevalent pattern that showed up in the data during interviews as well as during observations of the read-aloud Zoom sessions.

Lydia – “Need More Time”

When describing Lydia, I mentioned her keen awareness of her own and others’ emotions and how she applied this awareness as she self-regulated. In this interaction titled, “Need More Time,” Lydia was having a rough moment and she used language to self-regulate. She was having a difficult time hearing Margie because of the wi-fi connection, and she was frustrated. She frowned, did not answer Margie when asked a question about the story, and then she covered her face with her arms and hands. Margie shifted her focus from the book to helping Lydia by acknowledging that she needed more time. Lydia uncovered her eyes but wasn’t ready to talk with Margie yet. In Table 11, the transcript shows how Lydia used language to express her need at that moment, after which Margie thanked her.

Table 13. Lydia: “Need More Time”

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>The Happy Day</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration is black and white and shows trees in the woods with snow on the ground. Snails in their shells are shown inside a tree.</i>	
Margie	It says the snails are sleeping inside the tree and in their shells. They're sleeping, Lydia. Look at how cute they are. Have you ever seen snails sleeping in your trees? What do you think, Lydia?	Margie tries to engage Lydia by asking her a question directly.
Margie	Aw, I think she needs a little more time.	Margie acknowledges Lydia's need for more time.
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration is black and white and shows trees in the woods with snow on the ground. Groundhogs are shown inside holes in the trees and underground.</i>	
Margie	Ah! The groundhogs sleep in the ground and the squirrels sleep in the trees. What do think that squirrel put in that hole to be ready for winter?	
Lydia	Miss Margie?	
Margie	Yes, Lydia	
Lydia	You can, um...I wanna wait, and you can go ahead and ask a different friend.	
Margie	You would like me to go on to a different friend? You know what Lydia? Thank you for using your words and expressing yourself. Thank you. So now I know you need a little more time.	

Margie's relationship with Lydia, verbalized through her support of Lydia expressing a need for wait time and in the respectful validation of her words, mediates Lydia's engagement in the read-aloud. Within a couple minutes, Lydia was participating again, listening with her arms and hands away from her face, and using the pencil tool to circle the animals in the picture to show where they were running. By giving Lydia the opportunity to opt out of directly answering questions for just a few minutes, Lydia self-regulated and rejoined the story discussion on her own.

Margie's relationships with her students helped her personalize her teaching of concepts and specific emergent comprehension strategies. Likewise, students' relationships with each other

added to social learning and meaning making. Margie cultivated these relationships among her students as well as with her. She called classmates “friends” which I believe added a more meaningful, community-oriented tone to any classroom discussion, and especially ones in which Margie was modeling how to help a “friend” as in the example above.

Theme 2: Engagement

“Are they engaged? Can they hear me? Are they frozen?”

One of Margie’s concerns about conducting read-alouds via Zoom was maintaining the children’s engagement. Indeed, this was a valid concern because as Crouch and Cambourne (2020) state, engagement is a necessary condition of learning, and without it, no other conditions matter. In an interview, Margie mentioned the importance of engagement, “When I’m in the classroom [in-person], I have to read the room [to determine] if they’re interested, am I getting their attention? Now, it’s not only are they interested, [but] are they engaged? Can they hear me? Are they frozen?” (Margie, personal communication, January 22, 2021).

Brandon – “Stolen Sled”

This interaction between Margie and Brandon shows how Brandon became engaged in the story as he made strong connections between the book and his own life. He put himself into the story, not wavering from his version of a story about his own sled. Margie validated his story by praising him for making a connection to his life, and then reiterated her earlier connection between the character in the story and a previous classroom discussion.

Margie was reading the book, *Winter Hats*, a Reading A-Z book that was projected onto the Zoom screen. Brandon had walked away from his device for a brief moment and when he returned, Margie asked him a question about an illustration showing a little boy sledding. Margie

wanted Brandon to make a connection about the boy sledding to a previous class discussion about penguins and how they slide on their bellies. See Table 14 for the transcript of this interaction.

Table 14. *Brandon: “Stolen Sled”*

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>Winter Hats</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Photo shows a little boy on an orange saucer-type sled ready to slide down a hill.</i>	
Margie	What is he doing Brandon, that looks like a penguin. What is he doing?	
Brandon	Sledding, and he took my orange sled.	
Margie	Did you have an orange sled like that?	
Brandon	It was at my old dad's house.	
Margie	It was at your dad's house?	
Brandon	I had it and he stole it.	Brandon is pouting and crossing his arms because he's aggravated by this.
Margie	Oh, well he might have one that's similar to you because it doesn't look like he lives close to you, but I'm glad that you made a connection that, that sled...	
Brandon	he moved there.	

Margie maintained Brandon’s engagement by accepting his interpretation of the story illustration as he entered the story and made the sled his own. Brandon continued living in the story and responded, “He moved there!” when Margie suggested the sled in the story was similar to his own real sled. Margie continued by commenting about the boy sliding just like the penguins did on their bellies. Brandon’s responses revealed that young children don’t always respond to us in the way we’re expecting; they construct knowledge differently than older children and adults (Dooley and Matthews, 2009). By allowing Brandon to continue his way of making meaning with this illustration, she was promoting his emergent comprehension by validating his thoughts. Another strategy Brandon used to construct meaning and to stay engaged was to use multi-modal methods, as described in the next example.

Brandon – “Running”

Margie knew Brandon used multi-modality himself to aid his emergent comprehension. For example, he got out of his chair during one story and matched the character’s action. Margie complemented his meaning construction mode to increase his engagement. While reading the book, *Winter Hats*, Margie asked Brandon what the girl in the picture was doing. He responded with a one-word answer, “Running,” while he slapped his hands on the table to signify the girl running. Margie wanted Brandon to tell more, so she asked where the girl was going as she ran. Brandon again responded multimodally saying, “Up the hill”, while pointing his two index fingers up. The expression on his face along with his voice intonation added to his very matter-of-fact multimodal response (see Table 13).

Table 15. Brandon – “Running”

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>Winter Hats</i>		
<i>Book Illustration</i>	<i>Photo shows a little girl running up a hill.</i>	
Margie	This winter hat has furry flaps. Oh my goodness. She's doing something, Brandon, what is she doing? Tell me about it. Brandon, what is she doing?	Margie is waving her arms as if she were running uphill.
Brandon	Running (inaudible)	Brandon is slapping his hands on the table like feet running.
Margie	She's running!	
Margie	Where is she running to?	
Brandon	up the hill	Brandon points his two index fingers up, saying it very matter of factly, with a matter of fact look on his face.
Margie	Up the hill. She's running up a hill.	Margie points her 2 index fingers up, matching Brandon's multi-modal move.
Margie	How can you tell she's running up a hill?	Margie has a questioning look on her face.
Brandon	Cause I see "up" things.	
Margie	You see up things,	
Margie	You see the snow sloping upward.	Margie's arm and hand are positioned at an upward slant.

Margie purposely matched Brandon's specific multi-modal moves – his move with his two fingers, and a facial expression. Brandon's expression was a “matter-of-fact” expression to match his finger movement while Margie's was a questioning look to match her asking a question. She finished the interaction by using another body movement along with a vocabulary word (slope) to develop a concept. Each of these multi-modal gestures were ways Brandon constructed meaning for himself, and Margie personalized this interaction (and many others) with Brandon and the other three children. Examples of her personalized instruction are described next.

Theme 3: Personalization of Teaching for Children's Needs

"I ask questions per the child and what they need"

Margie personalized her questions and discussion based on her knowledge of her students' academic and social-emotional needs. She typically began by asking broad questions to prompt students' deeper thinking and scaffolded in ways that met individual children's needs. She demonstrated superior skill in redirecting students' responses that at first might have seemed unrelated to the question and the discussion. She did this by first affirming and acknowledging their response and then asking further probing questions to foster higher order thinking. For example, she asked Tony why the kids in the story illustration were playing inside. She wanted him to use higher level thinking to make the inference that they were inside because it was cold outside. He described what the kids were doing, and Margie affirmed Tony's response, "They are doing that inside," and then she probed for higher level thinking, by asking, "...but it's wintertime and they're not doing it outside. They're doing it inside. Why do you think they're doing it inside?" She valued the thinking process, not just initial responses. Margie mentioned this in the second interview, "Who knows why they're doing what they're doing; they have a reasoning behind it" (Margie, personal communication, January 22, 2021). It was important to Margie to continue probing to discover the child's reasoning because she would not know their higher order thinking capabilities otherwise.

Sean – "Inside Play"

In this interaction between Margie and Sean (see Table 11), first she asked a broad cause-and-effect question about a picture in the book, *Winter (Invierno)*. Then, she reminded Sean to unmute by holding up the unmute icon sign and gave him time to think. Next, she provided personalized scaffolding until Sean understood the cause and effect of the story illustration.

Table 16. Sean: Inside Play

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: Winter: Invierno		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration shows kids participating in a variety of inside activities, such as dress-up, reading books, hide-and-seek, and playing with cars.</i>	
Margie	Why do you think they're inside playing?	
Margie	Unmute	
Margie	(...)	This represents wait time
Margie	Hmmm. Why do you think they have to play inside instead of outside sometimes?	
Sean	Cause they're um, Cause they're um...	
Margie	Tony thinks it's because it's so cold.	Margie repeats another student's response
Sean	eating	Margie doesn't hear Sean say "eating"
Margie	Why do you think Sean?	
Sean	I think they're eating?	Sean is unsure of himself
Margie	They're eating? You think so?	Margie repeats Sean's response
Margie	Well, this is when they were eating soup. Remember? They were eating soup to keep their bodies warm.	Margie turns back to a previous page.
Margie	But in this page they're saying we have to play inside sometimes during the winter time. Why do we have to play inside (...) during the winter?	
Margie	Hmmm...when you ask your grandma and grandpa and you say, I want to go play outside right now. What does grandma and grandpa say?	Margie asks a personalized question
Sean	uh	
Margie	Do they [your grown-ups] say "Yes, go outside and play" or "No, it's too cold and wet outside. You have to stay inside?"	Margie asks a personalized question
Sean	Ooooh.	Sean is making a sound like he's cold.
Margie	Ooooh. It's cold. Right? They're saying it's wintertime. It's cold. You can't go outside and play.	Margie repeats Sean's response and extends it.

Margie personalized this interaction with Sean by bringing his life experience into the story. She made this teaching decision, knowing Sean may have trouble answering an inferential question about why an event was taking place in a story. She purposely did not ask a lower-level literal question that would have been easier for Sean to answer, at least not initially. She explained this decision in an interview, stating, “Because every child deserves to be asked that higher order thinking question...why would I take that away from him?...I am never going to assume that they're not going to be able to respond or understand...Even if they don't, they are still hearing the language; they are still getting the same opportunity that any other child would get...And he might not understand that open-ended question at that time... but he's heard me break it down even more.” Depending on how Sean responded to the higher-level inferential question, Margie decided how to frame her subsequent questioning sequence to scaffold Sean’s understanding of the original inferential question. Providing personalized scaffolding for Sean in order for him to grasp the higher-level question is one way exemplary teachers foster comprehension (Duke et al., 2017), and for young children, their meaning-making of stories read to them.

To summarize the three themes from the Teacher-Children-Books Interactions category, Margie’s moves and purposes intersected with the children’s responses as interactions during read-aloud sessions via Zoom to personalize teaching according to their needs, facilitate engagement, and relationship-build. These interactions proved valuable for children’s emergent comprehension as they constructed meaning around books together with their teacher.

4.1.2 Teacher Moves and Purposes: Brain Work and Heart Work

The interactions between Margie and her students were largely dependent on her Brain Work and Heart Work. Her Brain Work modeled thinking and helped children make meaning by focusing on emergent comprehension skills and strategies, such as using pictures in the story and

making connections from the story to the children's own lives. Her Heart Work modeled understanding each other's feelings and helped children make meaning of their world by developing relationships, building their confidence and engaging them in the read-aloud. Examples of interactions that show how Margie's Brain Work and Heart Work evolved as themes from the data are described next. These themes helped answer my first research question: How does one exemplary teacher's interactions with her low-income preschoolers promote their emergent comprehension during read-alouds, while on Zoom, during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In this section I describe the two themes that evolved from the read-aloud observation data around the second category in Table 12. The themes are the teacher's Brain Work and her Heart Work. These are always connected to the interactions with students through books but looking at the teacher's moves more closely enables me to determine how the interactions begin. I provide examples of portions of the read-aloud transcripts to further illustrate these themes.

Theme 4: Teacher: Brain Work

"And he was reading the pictures, reading it (the book) to me."

What I call Margie's Brain Work derived from codes related to emergent comprehension behaviors, skills and strategies such as using pictures and making connections to their lives that she fostered to help children make meaning of stories read to them (Dooley & Matthews, 2009). Margie fostered these behaviors, skills and strategies with the purpose of developing concepts such as what animals do during the winter to stay alive. Her teaching moves and purposes encouraged students to make sense of the books in their own way, while at the same time, guiding them toward established knowledge of the concepts. The strategies most consistently used by the children were making connections between the story and their own lives and using the pictures as clues to construct meaning. The next two examples illuminate how two of the children learned to use

pictures as clues to make sense of the story. This behavior is evidence of their emergent comprehension (Dooley & Matthews, 2009).

Brandon – “Look at the book!”

One very short exchange between Margie and Brandon began with the question, “What happened?” (see Table 17) The clothing of the characters in the illustration had been interchanged, and Brandon was having difficulty explaining this situation. He looked at the picture and made an approximation, to which Margie asked again, “What happened?” She knew Brandon was grappling with language to describe what he saw. He was a bit frustrated by this, and then commanded Margie to, “Look at the book!” Margie proceeded by praising Brandon for reminding her of the strategy to “look at the pictures for clues”. Then she provided the language he needed to explain the clothing switch.

Table 17. Brandon: Look at the Book!

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: Thomas' Snowsuit		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration shows the teacher in Thomas' snowsuit, and Thomas in the teacher's dress!</i>	
Margie	And she tried to stick the snowsuit and Thomas together. But something happened instead. Uh! Brandon, what happened?!	
Brandon	Heee took the teacher's clothes off and made her into him! And made her into her!	
Margie	What happened?	
Brandon	Look at the book!	
Margie	You know what! That's a great idea because what did we learn? What does miss Margie teach you? Look at the picture for clues.	
Margie	And now I'm going to listen to you. Thank you for teaching me, Brandon and I'm gonna look, I see Brandon.	Margie acknowledges and thanks Brandon for his contribution, and then takes his advice. Margie shows Brandon that what he says is important.
Margie	He's got on the teacher's dress and the teacher's got on the snowsuit! WHAT?! That's crazy!	
Brandon	LOLOLOL	Brandon is fully engaged after Margie praises him, and she uses the strategy he taught her and explains the illustration. He is laughing robustly.

In this interaction, Margie also used multi-modal moves. She knew Brandon often constructed meaning for himself by using voice intonation or whole-body physical movement. She did the same to personalize her teaching to Brandon. Margie used voice intonation to signify her extreme surprise about what happened with the characters' clothing. When she told Brandon she would use the strategy he taught her, she utilized other multimodal moves such as looking back

and forth from the book to the camera and pointing to the pictures to model using them to look for clues, as she had taught them.

Tony – “Inside Play”

In this short exchange between Margie and Tony, when Margie asked *why* the children were playing inside, Tony merely described what was happening in the picture. He said, “Cause they're reading books and putting on costumes and sitting down and playing games.” Although he did not fully respond to a “why” question, it is understandable that he described the illustration. Using the pictures to create meaning and understanding of the story was a skill Margie modeled and fostered during read-aloud discussions. Although it seemed as though he didn't understand how to answer this cause-and-effect question, upon closer examination, we see he started his response with ‘*cause*’, a word indicating Tony does in fact understand something about how to answer cause-and-effect questions.

Table 18. Tony: Inside Play

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: Winter: Invierno		
<i>Book illustrations</i>	<i>Illustration shows kids participating in a variety of inside activities, such as dress-up, reading books, hide-and-seek, and playing with cars.</i>	
Margie	I know it's winter when we play indoor games like hide-and-go-seek. And we do some dressing up.	
Margie	Why do you think they're playing indoor games during the winter time? Tony, why do you think they're staying inside during winter?	
Margie	Tony? Oh, I see that you're dabbing. You're a good dabber,	
Margie	but tell me, why do you think they're staying inside, Tony?	
Margie	Unmute Tony.	
Tony	Cause they're reading books and putting on costumes and sitting down and playing games.	Tony describes what he sees in the picture, but does not answer Margie's question about why.
Margie	They are doing that inside, but it's wintertime and they're not doing it outside. They're doing it inside. Why do you think they're doing it inside?	Margie honors Tony's approximation.
Tony	Cause it's cold.	
Margie	Oh, that's a good answer because it's cold outside.	She doesn't "give up" on a student; she just provides more narrow scaffolds until the student understands.

The Brain Work Margie supported here is using pictures while also thinking about the cause-and-effect of the action in the illustration. Another note about Tony's response is that he incorporated four things that were happening in the illustration in his description. Tony's prior responses were typically one word or short phrases or repeating someone else's response, so this multi-phrase descriptive sentence was evidence of growth and development of emergent comprehension for Tony.

While Margie fostered concept development as one emergent comprehension strategy through Brain Work, she also promoted children's engagement, especially if she thought their emotional state might be hindering their engagement. As Margie stated in the introductory interview, she completely understands the connection between children's learning and their emotional state.

Theme 5: Teacher: Heart Work

"You cannot break through with any academics, unless you have met the needs of their social-emotional state."

Margie spoke of the need to first engage and connect with her students (Margie, personal communication, November 5, 2020). One principle of engagement is the need for children to feel safe, both physically and psychologically (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). Learning remotely minimized Margie's ability to directly affect her students' physical safety. However, children felt psychologically safe with Margie even via Zoom because she created positive relationships with them. Her first step was to closely observe her children to get to know them. She was a keen observer of her children, even though she was seeing them through a computer screen via Zoom. She read her students' faces and body language to determine their current emotional state, and nurtured their social-emotional needs, what I call her Heart Work.

Lydia – "Wish Her Well"

One instance of how Margie built positive relationships was when she asked Lydia a question about the picture in the book, and Lydia didn't answer. Margie realized Lydia's sound wasn't working properly and Lydia was frustrated. Margie said, "She doesn't look very happy. Her eyebrows are going down." Determining students' emotional state was difficult when viewing children in the small, "Brady Bunch"-type spaces on the screen in Zoom. In an interview, Margie

spoke of how this was different than when children were in person in the classroom, where she could “read the room” to determine their emotional needs and adapt her instruction at that moment. [Margie, personal communication, September 6, 2021]. Margie gave Lydia two choices for how the group could help her feel better, but Lydia didn’t respond. So Margie asked who the “You Can Do It” helper was. She explained the You Can Do It helper in an interview (Margie, personal communication, September 6, 2021), “The peer helps other peers when they are struggling emotionally or academically, by wishing them well, saying, ‘you got this’, or asking ‘how can we help’. This helper is giving the peer strength, inspiration and the feeling of having the classroom family/community behind them”. On this particular day, the You Can Do It helper happened to be Lydia’s younger brother, Tony, and he chose for everyone to “wish her well”.

Table 19. Lydia: Wish Her Well

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>The Happy Day</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Front cover shows a bear and several other animal friends smiling and dancing.</i>	
Margie	Oh, and you know what? This is one of Miss Margie's favorite books. I love this book and it's called <i>The Happy Day</i> .	
Margie	How do we know they're so happy, Lydia? How do we know they're happy?	
Margie	Uh-oh, I think she can't hear me right now.	
Margie	She doesn't look very happy. Her eyebrows are going down.	
Lydia	Ugh (she "grunts")	Lydia grunts in frustration because of the technology audio issue
Margie	This says <i>The Happy Day</i> , Lydia. You don't look like that Bear looks. Would you like us to wish you well, or breathe with you?	
Margie	Lydia doesn't respond. Hmm, Who's the "You can do it" helper today?	
Teaching Assistant	Tony is our "You can do it" helper	
Margie	Well Tony, what can we do to help Lydia? (...) I want her to feel happy. Just like this book says, <i>The Happy Day</i> . What can we all do together to help Lydia? {...}	
Margie	Tony, you're the You can do it helper. What would you like to do? {...} Do you want to breathe or wish her well?	
Tony	Wish her well.	
Margie	Ok, we're gonna wish her well. And let's put our hands over our heart, Brandon and Sean. Let's wish Miss Lydia well. <i>We wish you well, we wish you well, all through the day today, we wish you well. (2X)</i> Did you feel that love Lydia? Did you feel our love? I hope you did. I hope you did. Maybe if we read <i>The Happy Day</i> , YOU will feel happy.	

Building relationships with and among students was an important first step of Margie's Heart Work, and she continued to foster this skill throughout the year. Another facet of Margie's

Heart Work was building students' confidence in both academic and social-emotional areas. Margie's Heart Work fostered her students' confidence so that engagement and learning were enhanced. One way she did this was by affirming, acknowledging and praising students. Another way Margie built her students' confidence was by repeating their responses, just as she repeated key points to develop concepts.

Brandon – “Strawberry Pop”

In the interaction titled “Strawberry Pop”, Margie was reading the book, *The Happy Day*, a fiction story showing how some woodland animals adapt to the winter. Prior to this interaction, Brandon was yawning, and he seemed to be losing interest in the conversation. Then he raised his hand, and Margie asked him a question about what the squirrels in the picture put in the holes in the tree to help them adapt to the winter.

Table 20. Brandon: Strawberry Pop

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>The Happy Day</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration shows trees in the woods, with snow covering the ground. Squirrels are in holes in the trees.</i>	
Margie	Brandon, what do you think the squirrels put in those holes to help them adapt to the winter?	
Brandon	Oh, they need a home. That's why they made holes.	
Margie	Yes. They need a home to keep them warm.	Margie acknowledges, affirms and repeats Brandon's response.
Margie	But what did they put in there? What do you think they keep in that hole?	
Margie	What do they put in the hole?	
Brandon	Nothing, only squirrels.	
Margie	Only squirrels?	
Margie	Hmm...What did we learn about what some animals do to help prepare...	
Brandon	The squirrels go to all the way to the tippy top.	
Margie	They do go to the tippy top.	Margie acknowledges, affirms and repeats Brandon's response.
Margie	But some animals need to do what, to adapt to the winter. So their bellies aren't empty and they're not hungry. What do they need to do?	
	What's a squirrel put in its belly?	Brandon's grandma rephrases the question for Brandon about what they put in their bellies.
Brandon	Food!	
	I know food, but what kind of food.	Brandon's grandma rephrases the question again.
Brandon	Strawberry pop!	
Margie	So, we know they put food in those holes to help keep them warm and fed.	

Margie's Heart Work built Brandon's confidence by acknowledging, affirming and repeating his approximations, relating them back to how the squirrels adapt to the winter by building their homes and storing food in the trees. She continued scaffolding to explain the winter

survival concept. Margie chuckled at his “strawberry pop” response and then reviewed the concept of animal winter adaptation saying, “So we know they put food in those holes to help keep them warm and fed.” By acknowledging Brandon’s responses and at the same time reiterating the main points of the concept of animal survival in winter, she built his knowledge base for future meaning making.

Two other themes that evolved from the data were used to answer my second question, How do her (the exemplary preschool teacher’s) students’ responses to her read-aloud reflect their emergent comprehension development? Examples of interactions that demonstrate the children’s School-Based and Home-Based responses are described next.

4.1.3 Children’s Responses: School Based and Home-Based Meaning-Making

In this section I describe the two themes that evolved from the read-aloud observation data around the third category in Table 12. The themes are the children’s School-Based and Home-Based Meaning-Making. I provide examples of portions of the read-aloud transcripts to further illustrate these themes.

Theme 6: Children: School-Based Meaning-Making

“And you remembered what our message was today”

Young children’s approaches to knowledge construction are unique to their interactions with the world, and these approaches are evidence of young children’s emerging comprehension (Dooley & Matthews, 2009). As the children in this study participated in read-alouds, they were making meaning in multiple ways. They would often make connections to previous classroom activities and experiences or other books they’d heard and read in class. To be clear, since students were not physically in the classroom during this study, I define classroom activities and

experiences as those provided by Margie that the children did at home with their adult or those done via Zoom.

Sean: “Thomas (book character) said, ‘NOOO!’”

One very short exchange showed Sean making a connection between an earlier part of the book being read and the current illustration Margie asked him about. Multiple times in the story, the character refused to do what was asked of him, so in this exchange when Margie asked Sean what the character said, Sean said, “No!” This response reflects Sean’s meaning-making of the story line and understanding the character’s actions.

Table 21. *Sean: Thomas said, “NOOOOO!”*

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>Thomas’ Snowsuit</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>The illustration shows the principal with an angry face and he’s pointing right at Thomas, telling him to put on his snowsuit.</i>	
Margie	And what do you think Thomas said? Hmm. Sean, what do you think Thomas said?	
Margie	Unmute my friend. {...}	
Sean	He said No!	Sean responded confidently, “No!”
Margie	Did he just say no, or did he say NOOOOOO!	Margie was using a loud, drawn-out voice intonation for emphasis.
Sean	NOOOOOOO!	Sean repeated his response with the same loud, drawn-out voice intonation for emphasis as Margie had.

When Sean initially answered “No!” to Margie’s question, he was confident in his answer because he was using what he had learned about the character’s actions from previous parts of the story. This is an example of Sean using what I called a School-Based Response. Another example of a child using a School-Based Response was Brandon’s Strawberry Pop interaction above. Although he answered, “strawberry pop!” at the end, which was not connected to the story, an

earlier response illustrated how he used what he had learned during a prior reading and discussion of this book.

Table 22. Brandon: Strawberry Pop

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>The Happy Day</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration shows trees in the woods, with snow covering the ground. Squirrels are in holes in the trees.</i>	
Margie	Brandon, what do you think the squirrels put in those holes to help them adapt to the winter?	
Brandon	Oh, they need a home. That's why they made holes.	Although Brandon doesn't answer Margie's question specifically, he does respond with information he learned in a previous school activity.
Margie	Yes. They need a home to keep them warm.	Margie acknowledges, affirms and repeats Brandon's response.

Children's school-based meaning-making responses illuminated how they were applying emergent comprehension strategies they had learned from Margie (Dooley & Matthews, 2009). These strategies most often included using pictures and making connections to their lives to make meaning of the stories she read to them. At other times, children were constructing meaning by drawing from experiences outside of school, mostly from daily life with their families. I called these ways of meaning-making, Home-based Responses.

Theme 7: Children's Home-Based Meaning-making

"When you build this snowman, what season is it outside?"

The children often responded by making connections to their experiences at home with family members. When children responded from this perspective, they were exhibiting their emergent comprehension by constructing meaning based on what was relevant and important to

them from their family and cultural backgrounds (Sipe, 2000). This represented the learning they acquired from the significant more knowledgeable people in their lives.

Tony – “Ooooooh!”

When Margie read the book, *Winter Hats*, Tony responded to her question about which hat he liked best in one illustration by saying, “sliding down a hill”. She affirmed his answer and asked what the story character was using to slide down the hill, and he answered, “a sled”. Margie inserted social-emotional teaching about reading faces into her next response to Tony and said, “Look at their faces.” Tony simply responded, “Ooooooooo-ooo!” This multi-modal response was drawing from reading the character’s face and thinking about what the character was probably saying based on his own fun experience sledding.

Table 23. Tony: “Ooooooh!”

Speaker	Transcript	Notes
Book: <i>Winter Hats</i>		
<i>Book illustration</i>	<i>Illustration shows three children on a sled ready to go down a hill. They have wide smiles on their faces!</i>	
Margie	I forgot to ask you a question today. Which hat do you like best Tony?	
Tony	sliding down a hill.	Tony doesn’t answer Margie’s question, but again answers according to the picture and what is relevant and important/familiar to him.
Margie	He is riding down a hill.	
Margie	What is he using to ride down that hill?	
Lydia	(answered for Tony) sled	
Tony	sled	
Margie	A sled!	
Margie	Look at their faces.	
Tony	Ooooooo-ooooooo!	Tony gives a one-word response, with multi-modal voice intonation to add meaning to what he was thinking.
Margie	Is that what they're doing? Tony. They're going, Ooooooo! As they go down that hill. I think you might be right.	
Margie	She looks like she's laughing and she's going AAAHHHH! all the way down that hill.	

Home-based responses from students served purposes for them as well as for Margie. When children drew from their prior knowledge and experiences from home, they strengthened important connections for future meaning-making. Whereas, Margie learned more about her students and their lives outside of school, which she could then utilize to further personalize their emergent comprehension.

4.2 Summary of Findings

The findings from this study revealed that the interactions among Margie, her children and the books she read them focused on three main themes – relationships (Cambourne, 1995; Dooley & Matthews, 2009), engagement (Cambourne, 1995), and personalization of teaching (Reynolds & Daniel, 2018) to students' needs, both academic and social-emotional needs. Margie's caring demeanor and the relationships she formed with her students mediated their emergent comprehension and led to high engagement from her students (Dooley & Matthews, 2009). Her students liked and trusted her to teach and care for them (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). Additionally, Margie held high expectations for her students' emergent comprehension development and personalized scaffolds based on her knowledge of their academic as well as their social-emotional needs.

When analyzing Margie's teaching moves and purposes separately from the children's responses, the data revealed what I called Margie's Brain Work and Heart Work. Margie's Brain Work was mainly comprised of modeling emergent comprehension behaviors, skills, and strategies such as using pictures and making connections to their own lives. Then, as she read to her students, she observed their responses to detect whether they were applying the strategies as they constructed meaning from the stories. This formative assessment through observing children helped Margie know whether each child was meeting curricular goals, and how to plan accordingly in the future. In much the same way, Margie modeled behaviors and strategies for understanding people's feelings as well as story character's feelings and observed for application from her students. It is important for young children to learn empathy so that they can develop positive relationships throughout their life, while understanding story character's feelings and intentions assists comprehension (Lysaker, 2019). Although I discussed these and showed examples of these

types of interactions separately, I fully view Margie as an integrated person whose academic and social-emotional purposes were interwoven during her read-aloud sessions.

While analyzing data to answer my second question about the students' responses and how they reflected their emergent comprehension, two themes emerged, School-Based and Home-Based responses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this work was done via Zoom, other online platforms, and with their grown-ups at home using materials and directions provided by Margie. Of course, I could be certain of the distinction between a school-based versus home-based response. However, I interpreted their responses based on interview and observational data I gathered. As a teacher, it might be important to know which type of response children are giving. For example, school-based responses should reflect teaching, and paying attention to these responses is one type of formative assessment a teacher can conduct while teaching, without adding another task or additional time to an already tight schedule. On the other hand, home-based responses reflect children's home and family backgrounds, providing the teacher with valuable knowledge from which to continue to plan and scaffold for individual children.

With appropriate scaffolding, the students' responses revealed their growing understanding of the world around them, meaning their emergent comprehension while reading books together was one way they learned about the world around them.

These findings strongly uphold my final assertion that young children from low-income families are capable of higher-level thinking as they develop their emergent comprehension of stories read aloud to them. The key factor is an exemplary teacher who engages her students by personalizing her teaching and forming positive relationships with students by believing in their potential, and by understanding, honoring, and accepting their literacy, family and cultural backgrounds.

Teaching young children requires first creating positive relationships with and among them. Strong relationships lead to a higher probability of student engagement, which is necessary for any learning to occur. Once children are engaged, teachers utilize many strategies for maintaining engagement and for delivering content and explaining concepts. For young children, this is accomplished during read-alouds among other daily activities.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION: EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT AND EMERGENT COMPREHENSION FOR PRESCHOOL LEARNERS DURING REMOTE LEARNING

In this chapter I revisit and extend two key theories in the field of literacy studies, informed by my findings: (1) Engagement, defined by Cambourne (1995) as “the center of all learning” (p. 28) facilitated through active participation, relevancy, safe environment, and teacher relationship and (2) Emergent Comprehension, defined by Dooley & Matthews (2009) as “the period when young children, prior to conventional reading, engage in meaningful experiences that stimulate the development and use of meaning-making strategies with potential to affect later reading comprehension” (p. 269) through the young child’s meaning making, symbolic development, and relationships with adults. While these theories served to define many aspects of my findings, the unique setting of Margie teaching her students on Zoom also revealed limitations to each theory. My findings imply a new way to think about Dooley & Matthews’ (2009) relationship principle of emergent comprehension, and about Cambourne’s first principle of engagement, in which students feel they are capable and actively participate in learning. I close with implications for teachers, children, Head Start and researchers.

5.1 Engagement

During remote learning, Margie was concerned about engaging her children. Before the pandemic, when instruction was face-to-face, Margie’s students would be sitting on the floor in front of her during read-alouds, and she could reach over and tap the shoulder of a student near her to address them. She could give a non-verbal look to one of her teaching assistants so they could go sit by a student who needed extra attention. She could ask a child to stand next to her and explain their response to a story. None of this was possible during remote learning; Margie could

only see and hear her students on a 2-dimensional device screen. However, despite this, Margie found new ways to engage with her students. One way was set by the new Head Start director, who set up class time in smaller groups of children. This allowed Margie to personalize her teaching more easily when there were fewer students at one time. Margie capitalized on this by directly addressing every child during the read-aloud at the most opportune time for a particular child. For instance, she knew Lydia was aware of her and other's emotional needs, as in the interaction titled, "Need More Time".

Engagement has been theorized with four principles (Cambourne, 1995) in which learners:

1. view themselves as active and capable of participating in the learning task or activity,
2. view learning as important and relevant to their lives,
3. feel physically and psychologically safe, and
4. like, trust, respect and want to emulate the teacher.

Engagement is the most important of Cambourne's (1995) eight Conditions of Learning. The others are Immersion, Demonstration, Engagement, Expectation, Responsibility, Employment, Approximation, and Response. Although they work synergistically, according to Cambourne, (1995; Crouch & Cambourne, 2020) without engagement, learning will not occur even if the other conditions are present.

Margie easily adapted her teaching to Zoom to continue to honor Engagement principles 2-4: that is, she cultivated relationships with her students, thereby creating a space of trust and respect, where they felt safe to create meaning in their own way. Her relationships also allowed her to scaffold instruction to make it relevant to students. However, she was unable to fully realize

the first principle, providing her students with active participation in the same ways as she might have in person.

5.1.1 Realized Engagement Principles

Margie accomplished the second part of Cambourne's first engagement principle – her students' belief and confidence in themselves. She conveyed this during her initial interview in which she clearly held an asset-based view of her children, all of whom were from low-income families: "You've got to have that belief in that child and the belief that you can have them reach their full potential...and then they will have that belief in themselves." (Margie, personal communication, November 5, 2020). Margie demonstrated her belief in her students by challenging them during read-alouds. One way she did this was by asking extension questions leading to deeper thinking. An example of this is when she asked Sean to explain his answer in the "Inside Play" interaction. She said, "They're eating? You think so?" Margie fostered deep thinking via Zoom through her questioning, just as she would if they were in person.

Marge was also able to realize the principle of relevancy and importance to students. First, she planned the read-alouds based on the required curriculum along with assessments of her students' needs. She selected particular books such as *Thomas' Snowsuit* (Munsch, 1985) based on Brandon's personality. Then, during read-alouds, Margie made learning relevant to her children by restating their responses and her questions to make connections to their lives. For example, when a child responded to stories in ways that did not seem to be making sense of the story, she continued to question and tried to understand the child's thinking. When Sean was having difficulty understanding why the children in the story were playing inside, Margie restated the question. She asked Sean what his grandparents would say to him in a similar situation. In this

way, she assisted him in making a connection, enhancing his engagement and ultimately his emergent comprehension.

Margie created the psychologically safe environment stated in Cambourne's (1995) third engagement principle. For example, Brandon regularly made connections to his life independently, and Margie honored his unique thinking, maintaining his engagement by acknowledging his responses. On the contrary, if Margie had scolded him for being silly when he responded with "strawberry pop", I claim this would have had strong potential to silence Brandon in the future, thus limiting his engagement and emergent comprehension development. Instead, Brandon learned much about squirrels and what they do to adapt to the winter because Margie affirmed his approximations, scaffolded questions specific to his responses, and briefly summarized the concept at the end of the interaction.

Margie enacted Cambourne's fourth principle of engagement by cultivating positive relationships with her students. Thus, they trusted her, wanted to please her and learn from her. When Lydia asked Margie for more time, she trusted that Margie would acknowledge and honor her request. In fact, this is what Margie did, and this move allowed Lydia to continue constructing knowledge about the story as she calmed herself and resumed active participation.

5.1.2 Limited Engagement Principles

Margie was limited in her ability to have her students engage through the active participation aspect of Cambourne's first principle. Active learners participate by thinking and conversing with others around a topic or activity (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). My findings suggest physical contact and being in the same physical space is another necessary piece for engagement to occur. Normally, during in-person instruction, Margie could reach out and tap a child to help them stay engaged. During remote learning, children were in their own homes, not

sharing the same physical space as their teacher and classmates. Being in the same physical space allows young children to actively converse with their classmates spontaneously. Young children's conversations often consist of overlapping dialogue, and this was not feasible on Zoom, where only one person can talk at a time, or the sound is distorted. Active learning also refers to being physically active during a discussion or activity. Normally during a read-aloud children would be physically active some of the time, such as walking up to the book to point out a part of the picture that helped explain their thinking and understanding of the story or standing up to enact what a character is doing. In the Zoom context, this was also not feasible. For these reasons, Margie's students were not as engaged online as they were when in person, suggesting teaching preschool children online is not ideal, but with a few adaptations, can still be productive.

Margie alleviated the issue of distorted sound on Zoom by teaching her children when and how to mute and unmute. She held up signs with icons depicting each action, and her students quickly learned to take turns talking during conversations. Another strategy Margie adapted was to ask children if they could hear her so that she knew whether they were having a technology issue or were just using wait time to think. Being flexible allowed Margie and her students to continue learning while being apart physically.

5.2 Emergent Comprehension

Emergent comprehension has been theorized by Dooley and Matthews (2009) as three principles that undergird young children's meaning-making while reading. The three principles from Dooley and Matthews' (2009) model are centered on the child, symbol, and relationship:

1. The Child principle suggests that young children process knowledge and construct meaning differently than older children, and their understanding becomes more complex and differentiated across time.

2. The Symbol principle suggests that young children learn about familial and cultural symbols by interacting with others before they learn print symbols for reading.
3. The Relationship principle suggests that young children's purposes for making meaning and understanding their world are driven by their relationships with caregivers and other important adults, such as teachers.

Margie achieved two Emergent Comprehension principles while teaching via Zoom: the Child and the Symbol principles. She honored and encouraged her students to construct meaning according to their knowledge and developmental level, and by doing this, she developed their understanding of symbols, which were often multi-modal. However, she was unable to fully realize the Relationship principle in the same ways she might have with face-to-face instruction.

5.2.1 Realized Emergent Comprehension Principles

In this study, children were encouraged to create meaning in their own way, drawing from their own life and classroom experiences. Their emergent comprehension was manifested in their responses as Margie accepted their unique way of making meaning from the books she read. Brandon exemplifies this in almost every interaction he had during the read-aloud sessions. He often created meaning by putting himself figuratively into the story. One such example is when he argued the little boy in the illustration stole his sled! Margie allowed Brandon to carry his life-connection throughout the interaction as well as introducing vocabulary about the slope of the hill in the illustration at the end. Another example is when Tony simply replied, "Oooohhh!" as he described what the character in the illustration was probably saying as she slid down the hill, based on his own experience sledding.

In the interaction between Margie and Sean titled, "Inside Play", Margie fostered symbolic development through the emergent comprehension strategy of using story illustrations

to make meaning of the story. Sean attempted to answer Margie's cause-and-effect question by referring to a previous illustration in the story. He was learning this strategy, but he wasn't sure how to apply it to Margie's cause-and-effect question until she related it to his own similar experience.

Margie realized the two emergent comprehension principles of young children making meaning in their unique ways and symbolic development by following the children's lead, and validating their thinking and personalizing her responses to them.

5.2.2 Limited Emergent Comprehension Principles

As evidenced by the data in this study, learning on Zoom presented a different dynamic regarding children's relationships with important adults. When children are in their classroom face-to-face, they share the physical space with their teacher and classmates for a number of hours each day. The classroom procedures and routines are a part of how they relate to others in the class. The relationship that is formed with their teacher revolves around these classroom procedures, routines and activities. After the school day, the children return home where there are a different set of procedures and routines with their families. This dynamic was altered when children were learning from home. The relationship with their grown-ups and the routines and procedures at home were merged with their relationship with Margie and school routines. One example of this is when Brandon's grandmother, who was seated right next to him, provided scaffolding in addition to Margie during the interaction titled, "Strawberry Pop." For Brandon, this personalized attention from both grandma and Margie helped propel his emergent comprehension. However, other grown-ups were not able to be directly involved with their children during Zoom instruction. Therefore, they did not have the same support for their learning and could only draw from the limited time they had with Margie individually.

The importance of adult support during remote instruction became apparent through my findings. When children are in a classroom with several adults (a teacher and teaching assistants) as well as other children, the opportunity for learning from others is greatly increased. Remote learning from home greatly reduced this opportunity, and so required more from the adults at home. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, many adults were juggling their own job-related responsibilities as well, making it more difficult to attend to their children's learning (Stites et al., 2021).

The pandemic has changed our lives in many ways (Pramling Samuelsson et al., 2020; Stites et al., 2021) and using Zoom is one way teachers and families adjusted to schooling during this time. Access to technology – devices as well as connectivity – became issues to rectify first. Next, learning the technical aspects of using the Zoom platform was necessary. Finally, for teachers and researchers, deciding how to apply best educational practices through the Zoom platform needed to be considered.

5.3 Implications

This study describes how one exemplary teacher and her students and their families managed to conduct productive learning activities despite the limitations of remote learning. Implications for teachers, families, Head Start programs, and researchers interested in emergent comprehension might benefit from the findings of this study if remote learning is either required or purposely chosen in the future.

5.3.1 Implications for Teachers

Several implications can be made from this study for teachers utilizing Zoom during read-alouds, if there is ever a need for remote teaching and learning again. Teachers who are

flexible and adaptable to change will be more effective (Pramling Samuelsson, 2020). Getting to know their children and their families and foster positive relationships with them is still possible, albeit in a different manner. Focusing on social-emotional needs of their students is another implication for teachers whether teaching remotely or in-person (Stites et al., 2021). And lastly, appropriate scaffolding based on children's academic and social-emotional needs was key to Margie's and her students' success (Allington, 2002; Duke et al., 2017).

When teachers purposely get to know students, their families and cultural backgrounds, they can more easily recognize young children's potential for learning. Positive relationships must be cultivated before academics, and a consistent focus on the social-emotional needs of students needs to be present.

An interesting idea that stemmed from this study is how an exemplary teacher is exemplary, no matter the circumstances. Margie had the same high expectations for her students to engage in deep thinking during a read-aloud as she normally did. Although there were many barriers to student engagement and learning, Margie's flexibility allowed her to find a way around them, and she still promoted her students' emergent comprehension. This was done in a world of great change and great stress for all participants.

5.3.2 Implications for Families

Access to devices and connectivity are issues for families during online learning, especially for low-income families. Even when devices and hot spots are available, the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place, and this is a problem in some low-income areas such as the city in which this study took place. In addition, online learning needs to be as flexible as possible, providing asynchronous activities as much as possible, which allows parents to manage their own work and daily activities schedule along with their child's schooling (Stites et al., 2021). Figuring

out a way to add social activities to online learning continues to be difficult, especially under restrictions of physical contact during a pandemic. However, parents were concerned about the limited social opportunities their children had during remote learning (Stites et al., 2021).

5.3.3 Implications for Head Start

This study implies family involvement and communication is important but must adapt with COVID circumstances. When the new director was hired at Creekside Head Start, one of the first things she implemented was a survey to parents about the daily Zoom schedule. Based on the survey, she made changes for a more family-friendly schedule. Family involvement is a key aspect of Head Start, and a survey is one way families can be involved and have their voices heard even while their children are attending class remotely. Head Start programs can be prepared for remote learning by having devices and hot spots available, as well as meal pick-up procedures outlined ahead of time. Head Start teachers can prepare home activity packets in advance to be ready for any unexpected online learning, such as during the pandemic. Another strategy Margie used to assist grown-ups with their child's remote learning was to hold what she called "Coffee with Miss Margie." This was an open forum for parents to ask questions about how to work with their child at home, either through Zoom or the home activity packets. After working through the unexpected changes needed during the pandemic, reflecting on what worked and how to improve what did not work as well will prove useful for the future or other similar Head Start programs.

5.3.4 Implications for Researchers

This study opens up possibilities not thought of before for studying young children's emergent comprehension. Though not ideal, observing a classroom via Zoom provided useful data about the lives of teachers and their students during a read-aloud. While many of the same

challenges of engaging young children were present as when teachers and children are face-to-face, there were others that were unique to remote teaching and learning.

Using Zoom or other similar platform for interviews has the advantage of the researcher and participants being able to “meet” even though they are located in distant geographic places. Another advantage of using Zoom is that a written transcript is provided when a Zoom session is recorded. I am most familiar with Zoom, so I do not know whether this is the case with other similar platforms. I anticipate researchers continuing to find new methods for their studies, utilizing video conferencing platforms.

5.4 Limitations

The main limitation to this study is that I describe only one teacher with four students as they interact during their read-aloud Zoom sessions. We cannot generalize across other teachers and children with such a small sample size. Perhaps most importantly, it is atypical to have only four children participating in a Head Start classroom. However, based on other studies about exemplary teachers and emergent comprehension, I have shown the possibility that exists for emergent comprehension development of young children from low-income families when they are provided opportunities for learning from an exemplary teacher.

5.5 Conclusions

Although young children from low-income families may (or may not) have fewer literacy experiences before entering preschool or kindergarten, teachers cannot assume they have less potential to learn about the world around them. In fact, they are capable of deep learning when they have an exemplary teacher who cultivates positive relationships, encourages students to draw from their own life experiences and cultural backgrounds and to create meaning in their own way.

Margie, the exemplary preschool teacher in this study, accomplished this as she navigated teaching her young children remotely during a pandemic. Margie fostered emergent comprehension through a balanced technique of cultivating relationships and personalizing instruction during read-aloud interactions with her children via Zoom. I conclude that these two teaching practices, cultivating relationships, and personalizing instruction are absolutely required for emergent comprehension.

5.5.1 Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Margie's teaching practices always aligned with her stated beliefs. According to Morrow et al. (1999), exemplary teachers are consistent between their stated beliefs and their enactment of those beliefs in their classrooms. Margie began the school year drawing from her beliefs, knowledge and experience teaching young children. She repeatedly stated during interviews how her beliefs about and perceptions of her students from low-income families were reflected in her high expectations of their capabilities. She interacted with them to get to know them and designed instruction accordingly. During observations, it was clear that Margie practiced the ideas and beliefs she stated. She interacted with her children in ways that acknowledged and affirmed their current knowledge and scaffolded instruction to meet their individual academic and social-emotional needs. As I searched for any disconfirming evidence of a mismatch between Margie's comments and her actions, I found none.

5.5.2 Relationships and Social-emotional Needs

In the introductory interview with Margie, when asked how she helped each child reach their learning potential, she indicated that it's her job to get to know each child so that she can design an individualized path of instruction. "...it depends on their background...it could be completely two different pathways I take" (Margie, personal communication November 5, 2020).

This required forming relationships with students as a first step. Building relationships with students begins with genuinely caring about them and attending to their social-emotional needs (Duke et al., 2018; Morrow et al., 1999; Noddings, 2012). Once students know their teacher cares about them and gets to know them, dialogue is more likely to occur, and relationships can be cultivated (Noddings, 2012). Positive relationships with students create trust and a safe learning environment, two principles of Cambourne's Engagement condition of learning (2020). According to Cambourne (2020), no learning will occur unless students are engaged. Margie also believed and knew from her many years of experience that children would not be engaged if their emotional state was not regulated. Thus, in order to focus on her primary purpose of fostering emergent comprehension, she needed to meet her students' social-emotional needs and form relationships first so children could then engage in learning. Block et al. (2002) found the same to be true, "Effective teachers relate to students by caring about the whole child's well-being first and, when that is assured, take students into literacy..." (p. 187). Student engagement was difficult for Margie to maintain via Zoom. However, she was able to accomplish this by employing responsive, personalized teaching practices that supported children in recognizing their own and others' emotions. Beyond recognizing emotions, Margie taught her students to self-regulate emotions so that they could continue to be engaged in the learning tasks and therefore benefit from her instruction.

5.5.3 Responsive, Personalized Instruction

Exemplary teachers use effective teaching practices routinely (Morrow et al., 1999). In this study, I define effective teaching practices as those teaching decisions and moves that Margie used consistently. Margie had a large collection of teaching practices from which to choose, and she knew them to be effective based on her vast professional knowledge as well as many years of

experience (Allington, 2002, Morrow et al., 1999). Thus, she was able to assess children's needs spontaneously and respond appropriately. Responsive, personalized teaching is a common characteristic of exemplary teachers (Allington, 2002; Block, 2002; Duke et al., 2018; Pressley, 1996). Margie responded to her students by frequently repeating what they said, to acknowledge and affirm their response. After this, she personalized scaffolding (Baker, 2019; Soundy, 2003) to develop her students' conceptual knowledge. One way she personalized scaffolding was by beginning with broad, open-ended questions, posed in a conversational style (Allington, 2002). Drawing from her knowledge of an individual student's prior knowledge and skills, she then narrowed the questions to promote deeper thinking. Allington (2002) claims that teacher expertise is the key to personalized, targeted replies to students' responses such as Margie's. According to Knapp (as cited in Allington, 2002, p.745) exemplary teachers utilized this style of teacher response and reading comprehension was improved, especially in high-poverty schools. Emergent comprehension with young preschoolers from low-income families was fostered by Margie by utilizing thoughtful classroom talk during read-alouds via Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6 Future Research/Next Steps

The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for the exemplary teacher and I as the researcher. Challenges for teachers like Margie included their limited ability to actively engage their students (Cambourne, 1995). Challenges for parents included having to facilitate their child(ren)'s learning at home, which was difficult while also managing their own work from home. Research calls for future studies that seek ways to address these two issues. Even with these challenges, this study presented and discussed findings about young children from low-income families and how they flourished when they were provided instruction from an exemplary teacher.

There are multiple possibilities for next steps I could take with my research. From this study, I might examine individual students' responses more closely and write case studies for them. I might explore Margie's questioning strategies more deeply. For example, what types of questions elicit particular student responses. Lastly, I have considered revisiting my original plan for my dissertation, which was to examine whether there was a connection between children's responses during read-aloud and their talk during play, in which they have choices among several areas in the classroom.

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APPENDIX A. GUIDED INTERVIEW TOPICS/QUESTIONS

November 5, 2020 – Introductory Interview

Questions to ascertain Lisa's beliefs and perceptions about, expectations of and teaching practices with young children from low-income families.

1. Devil's advocate question:
 - a. Some people would say that a child living in a low-income family does not have much learning potential. How would you respond to those people?
2. Hypothetical question:
 - a. By definition, almost all Head Start students are from low-income families. Suppose you have a new student who comes in looking very "un-kempt". What are your first thoughts about his/her learning capabilities?
3. Ideal position question:
 - a. What would be an ideal situation/way to help this child reach their learning potential?
4. Hypothetical question:
 - a. What would you do to acclimate he/she and their grown-up to your current Zoom classroom?
5. Interpretive question:
 - a. Would you say that... (based on previous answers, ask a question that seeks to advance my tentative interpretation and asks for a response).
 - b. POSSIBLE QUESTION: Would you say that the culture you try to establish in your classroom whether in-person or virtually is one of inclusivity and a high level of student agency? (classmates = "friends", parents/guardians = grown-up that you live with)
 - c. How do you establish that type of culture?

January 22, 2021 – Member Check #1

Clarifying questions about Margie's questioning and responses to children:

- You ask a more rigorous, open-ended question first, and adjust to lower-level, closed questions, (i.e. yes or no) as needed per child
- You match the instruction to the child, their needs, their abilities, even their mood at the moment
- You always act as though they're doing exactly what you asked, even if they're not
 - if they give you some strange answer or they start doing something totally off task, you still like praise them for their efforts and approximations.
- You immediately stopped with the academics and started singing to Lydia, giving virtual hugs and sending her well-wishes – social-emotional learning is most important to you
- So, you're saying that the social-emotional is almost even more important now with remote learning than when they were in person; the emotion doesn't come through the screen, like if they were in person.

February 12, 2021 – Member Check #2

Questions about book selection

- How do you select the books you'll read?
- How do you decide which ones you'll read live vs. which ones you do the online version?
- Do you change your plans mid-stream, so to speak? When? Why?

Clarifying / Follow-up questions:

- How many students do you have now?
- Your goal when we talked previously was to make everything about remote learning as close as possible to in-person learning. How's that working out?
- Planning in general – you talked a little bit previously about how the planning the four of you do would take about 10 minutes when you were in the classroom, and when you were all at home, it would take closer to an hour. Talk about planning again, now that you're back in the classroom again.
- Previously you talked about how doing a true interactive read-aloud was difficult via Zoom because two people can't talk at once. So, what do you do to make it as interactive as possible in the Zoom platform?
- You also mentioned asking higher order thinking questions was harder via Zoom. This was in relation to a day when the students' technology connectivity was not working so well, and you switched to lower level, closed questioning because you could read their lips with shorter answers! Is there any other reason it is harder to ask higher level questions via Zoom?

April 14, 2021 – Member Check #3

Clarifying / Follow-up questions:

- Clarifying titles of two books – different books with the same title
- Asked about Sean usually not initiating a conversation
- I missed a book introduction on the Zoom recording; what did you say?
- How were the hybrid groups put together?
- How was Lydia able to use self-regulation language when she was frustrated?
- Why did you ad lib one of the books? Do you do this with every book? If not, which ones? How/why do you choose to ad lib a particular book?
- How has Conscious Discipline (the social-emotional curriculum she used) changed your classroom?
- Why is teaching students to “read” faces important? What is your goal for teaching them to do that?

December 20, 2021 – Post-observation follow-up

Additional questions about book selection:

- How do you choose books for read-alouds?
- How did you choose the books for the Winter unit during this study?
- Did you take into account: race, ethnicity, SES?

APPENDIX B. CODEBOOK

This codebook housed the codes I created to capture the Zoom read-aloud observation data. For each utterance by the teacher and a child, I coded the utterance three ways: WHAT, WHY and HOW. My WHAT codes were how I labeled what the teacher or child said or did. My WHY codes were how I labeled the teacher's purpose and why the child's response was evidence of emergent comprehension. My HOW codes were how I labeled any multi-modal moves by either the teacher or the child. A "T" at the beginning of the code represented the teacher's utterance, and "ch" at the beginning represented a child's utterance.

WHAT codes	Definition of WHAT codes	# of occurrences
Trep	Repeated either a student or herself	27
Tafm	Affirmed a child's response	17
TQprdxn	Questioned for prediction	16
Tcncpt	Named a concept	15
TQopen	Asked an open-ended question	12
Tack	Acknowledged a child's response	12
TQ1	Asked a question with a single answer	12
Tpic	Used the illustrations to make meaning	12
TQevid	Asked a child for evidence to support their previous response	10
Ttech	Had a technology issue	9
Tpraise	Gave praise to a child for their response	8
Text	Extended a child's response	8
TQ2	Asked a question with two possible choices of response	5
TQclarif	Asked a question for clarification	5
TQchthk	Asked what a child thought, broadly	4
TQYN	Asked a question requiring only a Yes or No response	4
TWT	Provided wait time to think before responding	3
Tcxn	Made a connection to child's life in some way	2
Tlife-inanim	Spoke of an inanimate object as if it were alive	2
chown	Used their own way of thinking	19
chlwd	Gave a one-word response	10
chapprox	Gave a response that is an approximate answer to the question	9

chpic	Used the illustrations to make meaning	8
chrep	Repeated what they, another child or the teacher said/did	8
chinf	Made an inference	6
chMM	Only multi-modal, no spoken language	6
chevid	Provided evidence to their response	4
chext	Extended their response	4
chYN2	Provided a Yes or No or other two-choice response	3
chelab	Elaborated on a previous response	2
chNI	Used narrative imagination to understand a character's feelings or actions in their response	2
chlife-inanim	Spoke of or used an inanimate object as if it were alive	1
chQclarif	Asked a clarifying question	1
chtech	Any response regarding technology	1

WHY codes	Definition of WHY codes	# of occurrences
Tcncptdevp	To develop a concept	33
Tscaff	To scaffold meaning making	26
Tengagem	To keep child engaged	26
Tconfid & TSEL combined	To build child's confidence or attend to their social-emotional needs in some way	25
TMpix	To foster using illustrations to make meaning	25
Tcxn	To foster making connections to child's life or classroom activity	21
TThkg	To promote deeper, higher-level thinking	20
chcxn	Emergent comprehension strategy of making connections to their lives or a classroom activity	24
chMpix	Emergent comprehension strategy of using the illustrations to make meaning	22
chrel,imp	Emergent comprehension strategy of using what is relevant and/or important to them	19
chmoreknoth	Emergent comprehension strategy of learning from or emulating a more knowledgeable person	8
chSEL	Strategy for self-regulation of emotions or a social skill	7
chMfwd	Emergent comprehension strategy of understanding the story line and carrying the meaning forward	4
chtech	Having a technology issue	2
chevid	Emergent comprehension strategy of providing evidence to their response	1
chinf	Emergent comprehension strategy of making an inference	1

HOW codes	Definition of HOW codes	# of occurrences
TMM-G	Multi-modal: gesture	33
TMM-V:I	Multi-modal: voice: intonation	10
TMM-F	Multi-modal: facial expression	6
TMM-GV	Multi-modal: gesture & voice	5
TMM-Vz	Multi-modal: visual cue	5
TMM-V:V	Multi-modal: voice: volume	2
chMM-G	Multi-modal: gesture	14
chMM-V:I	Multi-modal: voice: intonation	7
chMM-F	Multi-modal: facial expression	1
chMM-GV	Multi-modal: gesture & voice	1
chMM-V:V	Multi-modal: voice: volume	1