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Reading storybooks in Vietnamese families as a language intervention: An activity analysis

Thanh-Binh Thi Tran
(Trần Thị Thanh Bình)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

Leont’ev understood activity as a mutually influenced process between the subject and the objective world. This process makes changes in both the subject and the objective world. He described activity as a system with its own structure which is created by its basic components and interrelationships among these components and the environment in which the activity exists (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981). In this research, an adapted model of Leont’ev’s activity psychology, incorporating Gal’perin’s stage model of formation of mental action and concepts (Gal’perin, 1992), and other developmental concepts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1977; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), was employed for design, implementation and evaluation of a family storybook reading activity intervention. This new approach of joint activity to early language intervention is the original contribution of the present research.

This research aimed to describe and demonstrate effects of the intervention on individual children’s vocabulary and comprehension development, before school and over the transition to school. A semi longitudinal set of case studies combined with a single-subject experimental design was chosen. Less well educated Vietnamese parents were provided with support, in order to develop their children’s language, through storybook reading. Six families in Vietnam received storybooks, a workshop with shared reading techniques, a DVD of family shared reading samples, and home coaching sessions.

The data from the Baseline, Intervention and Maintenance phases showed that the parents made changes in their understanding of: Family shared reading benefits, how to select high-quality storybooks and how to set reading goals suitable to their
own child’s ability and interest. They also improved their shared reading techniques. Through the joint reading activity, the children’s vocabulary increased significantly, especially in using expressive words. Changes in narrative comprehension were recorded. This progress was sustained over a period of 22 weeks after the intervention.

The findings provide evidence of the completeness and generativeness of the theoretical framework for family literacy education. The model acted as a tool to guide a family literacy intervention. The research population was small and further studies in different literacy learning and teaching contexts are needed to enhance its practical implications.
Acknowledgement

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PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

In this part, an overview of the thesis is presented through three sections. “The Importance of the Research” introduces why this topic was chosen. Then, “Research Purposes” indicates the research purposes and the focus of inquiry that this project investigated. Finally, “The Structure of the Thesis” outlines the five key components that construct the thesis.

The Importance of the Research

The choice of this research topic was based on theoretical and practical problems which include the following questions: What is vocabulary? What is reading comprehension? Why is it important to develop vocabulary and comprehension for young children? How does family shared storybook reading activity affect children’s vocabulary and comprehension development? What is the structure of family shared storybook reading activity? Why did this project need to be implemented in Vietnam?

What is Vocabulary?

“A word is a microcosm of human consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1934, cited in McWilliam, 1998, p. 10). Cao Duc Tien and his colleagues also confirm that, “Vocabulary is a fundamental unit of language, is an essential material to create sentence, and to build speech” (Cao Duc Tien, Nguyen Quang Ninh & Ho Lam Hong, 1993, p. 27). The vocabulary of a language can be classified as nouns, verbs,
adjectives, adverbs and other word ‘types’ (McWilliam, 1998). Words are presented in at least two forms: oral and print. For beginning readers, oral words far outweigh print words. Knowledge of words also comes in at least two forms: receptive and expressive (or productive) (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). Receptive vocabulary is defined as a set of words for which an individual can assign meanings when listening or reading but not necessarily produce. Conversely, expressive vocabulary is a set of words that an individual can use when writing or speaking (Just & Carpenter, 1987; Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). In general, receptive vocabulary is larger than expressive vocabulary (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). The aim of the present research was to examine the receptive and expressive oral vocabulary development of young children taking place through family storybook reading.

**What is Reading Comprehension?**

Reading comprehension is generally known as the process of active extraction and construction of meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Paris & Paris, 2003; Snow, 2001, Sweet & Snow, 2002). According to McNaughton (2002), reading comprehension can be identified by “the strategies that children can use to produce these outcomes of retrieval – making inferences, interpretation, and evaluation” (p. 165). He asserted that, through reading books to children, they can learn these strategies before decoding is learned. Therefore, in the present research, the term “reading comprehension” refers to the ability to make meaning of the text being read.

**Why is it Important to Develop Vocabulary and Comprehension for Young Children?**

Learning vocabulary is seen as a central process to acquiring language. This process starts in infancy and proceeds rapidly through childhood (Senechal,
LeFevre, Hudson & Lawson, 1996). Carey (1978) estimated that, normally, children in English settings acquire about five new words each day between the ages of one and a half to six years. As a result of this, by a child’s sixth birthday, he/she knows around 10,000 words (Anglin, 1993; Ezell & Justice, 2005). According to Nguyen Xuan Thuc (1995),

Understanding of words is the first key operation to help a child perceive a language of community, and then transform it into his or her own language. Without understanding of words, children can neither develop their language, nor other psychological functions such as perception, thought and imagination … (p. 14)

Previous research has showed that reading ability is moderately predicted by preschool and preschool vocabulary knowledge (Badian, 1982; Biemiller, 2003; Scanlon & Velutino, 1996). Children with poor vocabulary skills are at increased risk for experiencing difficulties with early and conventional reading achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000, cited in Justice, 2002). As argued by Nagy (2005), there exist reciprocal relationships between vocabulary and reading comprehension, with the correlations tending to be in the range from 0.6 to 0.7 (Anderson & Freebody, 1981). Stanovich (1986) discussed the relationships between vocabulary and comprehension development as an example of Matthew effects (the rich tend to get richer, whereas the poor tend to get poorer). Specifically, students with larger vocabularies understand text better, so they read more. The more they read, the larger their vocabularies become. Conversely, students with smaller vocabularies do not understand text well, so they read less. The less they read, the less their vocabularies develop. Gradually, the gap between less successful and more successful students can broaden (cited in Nagy, 2005). Developing vocabulary and comprehension for young children, therefore, becomes very important.
How Does Family Shared Storybook Reading Activity Affect Children’s Vocabulary and Comprehension?

Many scholars have asserted that family storybook reading activity is one of the most effective ways to promote young children’s language learning (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1966; Ezell & Justice, 2005; McNaughton, 1995; Morrow, 1983; Smith & Elley, 1997; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Teale, 1978, 1981). The activity has benefits not only for enhancing child-parent relationships, but also for developing children’s literacy (Smith & Elley, 1997). Previous research found that early readers came from families where they were read to frequently (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1966; McNaughton, 1995; Morrow, 1983; Teale, 1978, 1981). However, other scholars have argued that beyond sheer frequency, certain methods, environmental influences, attitudes, and interactive behaviours enhance the potential of storybook reading for promoting literacy development (Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, & Linn, 1994).

Prior studies also examined associations between family shared storybook reading and young children’s vocabulary and comprehension development (Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Heath, 1982, 1983; Ninio, 1980; Torr & Scott, 2006). They found that parental reading styles were linked to their children’s vocabulary and comprehension achievement.

Whitehurst and his colleagues developed a family literacy programme called “dialogic reading” in order to promote young children’s language and emergent literacy skills (Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca & Caufied, 1988; Whitehurst, Zevenbergen, Crone, Schultz, Velting & Fischel, 1999). They trained both middle-class parents and working-class parents (or low-income parents) to read books to their children in a dialogic manner. Their research findings provided positive evidence of a connection between parental reading styles and their children’s vocabulary achievement. Unlike Whitehurst and his colleagues, Justice (2002) confirmed that adults’ labeling of new words, in contrast to questioning, promoted preschool children’s gaining of more receptive
words. The effects of various parental reading styles, within the context of storybook sharing, on preschoolers’ receptive and expressive vocabulary development have not yet been properly determined. Nonetheless, these studies have highlighted the potential of family literacy intervention for promoting preschool children’s language acquisition. This will be discussed further in “Part Two - Literature Review”.

To design a family shared storybook reading intervention feasibly and also to be able to manage it effectively, the present research needed to gain a in-depth understanding about the structure of this activity.

**What is the Structure of Family Shared Storybook Reading Activity?**

Family shared storybook reading is identified as an activity with multiple dimensions, including parental beliefs, children’s motivation and attitude, parent-child interactions, tutorials, materials, reading frequency and children’s language learning outcomes (Ezell & Justice, 2005; McNaughton, 1995; Stone, Bradley & Kleiner, 2002; Tran, 2003). There are interrelations among these dimensions. Each of the dimensions has its own influence on children’s language acquisition. Moreover, previous studies also indicate that this activity often occurs within a home context (McNaughton, 1995; Tran, 2003).

Nevertheless, a specific and detailed model of the family shared storybook reading activity which can provide comprehensible guidance for researchers and practitioners to work with families of less well educated parents (or low-income parents) in developing countries, especially in the context of Vietnam has not been available. Therefore, one of the purposes of the present research was to investigate theoretically the complete structure of family shared storybook reading activity. In this project, a combination of Soviet psychological concepts (Gal’perin, 1989; 1992; Leont’ev, 1978; 1981; Vygotsky, 1962; 1978) and Western psychological concepts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1977; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990) was
employed to complete the structure of this activity (see “Part Two - Literature Review”). Then, based on the new theoretical framework, an intervention on family shared storybook reading in Vietnamese families was conducted to examine the efficiency of the theoretical model (see “Part Three - Methodology”). The following section will discuss some main reasons for implementing the present research in Vietnam.

**Why did this Project Need to be Implemented in Vietnam?**

As a result of my personal, career and social motives, I chose Vietnam to conduct this project.

Firstly, I am Vietnamese. I was born during the Vietnam War in 1972, and grew up after the war in a coastal village in the centre of Vietnam. Daily, I often played and went to school with many poor friends who had neither enough food to eat and clothes to wear, nor enough books to read. Their parents never read storybooks to them, and also never guided them how to do homework. I knew they were clever children. They taught me many smart and challenging games. However, most of them were not successful in their education, and left school at the age of 13 to 14. The drop-out friends were mainly girls. This happened because it was believed that girls would follow their husbands after getting married, so girls could not benefit their parents when their parents got old. As a result of this, very few of my childhood friends from the village had higher education.

Compared to the friends, in some ways I felt I was luckier. Although my family was as poor as that of the other girls, my parents valued education. They thought that education was like a dowry which they should give to their daughters from the time they are little. In fact, my mother, who just completed high school, was a dressmaker, working at home. She often recited or chanted poems which she remembered from her textbooks to me and my siblings from the time we were born. Gradually, I absorbed every word, rhythm, thought and feeling from the
poems she shared with me. I loved literature and wished that I could read and write in order to learn poems like her. I asked my parents to allow me to go to school, but at that time I was not old enough for enrolment\(^1\). Then, my father who was a secondary school teacher sent me to a Year-1 class at the local primary school to play with friends, and also to be familiar with the school environment. I attended the class without enrolment. In the primary school, with over 40 students in each class it was often very noisy and my teacher had to use a long wooden ruler to control the students. Although I stayed focused and listened to the teacher, I did not understand well the lessons he taught. I dared not ask my teacher for help. To make me feel happier and more confident at school, my father often taught me at home. When the following school year started, I had been accepted for enrolment as a Year-2 student. Therefore, I completed the curriculum for Vietnamese primary education at an earlier age.

Moreover, my father knew I was an active and stubborn girl who preferred playing games to reading books about mathematics and sciences (that belonged to his majors). He tried to foster my love of reading. He borrowed good storybooks which were suitable to my age and interest from the local school library and his friends read to me and guided me to read independently. He also often discussed each story with me after I finished. Especially, he was always willing to answer every question I asked about the stories and about real life. Then, he helped me also to be interested in reading books about mathematics and sciences. As a result of his patience and support, I turned my interest from playing games into reading many different texts.

From my childhood experience, I realised that Vietnamese parents can contribute to making equality in education for their children. In addition, experiencing the childhood hardship with the rural friends and their families prepared me somewhat to work with disadvantaged Vietnamese families and their children.

\(^1\) - Vietnamese children go to primary school when they are at the age of six, counted by birth-year. At that time, I was five years old.
Secondly, I was prompted to conduct the study in Vietnam because of the circumstances of my career. I had been employed as a lecturer in Thua Thien Hue College of Education, in Hue, Vietnam. I taught Psychology and Education to early childhood, primary school and secondary school teacher trainees. I often delivered lectures about the connections between family and school to my students. However, most of the lessons were designed from course books and other references which primarily focused on theory. I had little practical experience related to this area. Choosing to conduct the present research in Hue, Vietnam was, in part, to improve my knowledge and skills, especially my practical experience about school-family partnership in the specific context of the culture and society. Hopefully, my professional learning from this project will enable me to provide my students with higher quality lectures.

Finally, implementing this project in Vietnam was initiated from my understanding of contemporary Vietnam as a developing country. For the past five years from 2002 to 2007, annually, about 2.25% to 3.33% of primary students leave school. There were higher drop-out rates for secondary school students, with over 6% per year. There are many reasons for this problem, including low learning achievement, no interest in school and poor family circumstances (Vu Tho, 2008). A warning about the increasing trend in student drop-out has been given, if Vietnam does not have smart, powerful and timely strategies for innovation in education (Dieu Hien, 2008; Pham & Jones, 2008).

At present, improvement in educational quality which will have an important impact on the reduction of unemployment and poverty for society in the future has been demanded more urgently than ever. Thus, enhancement of the quality of community-school-family partnership to ensure a supportive learning environment for young children from disadvantaged Vietnamese families was one of the main purposes of this project. More importantly, there has been no prior language intervention programme conducted through family storybook sharing with
Vietnamese-speaking preschool children of less well educated parents (see “Part Two - Literature Review”).

In summary, my personal, career and social motives had a bearing on the current research process and outcomes. In fact, my personal experiences of disadvantaged Vietnamese children, my professional knowledge and skills, and my concerns regarding the existing challenges for education in my home country enhanced my passion and patience to complete this study.

Research Purposes and Research Questions

Research Purposes

The purposes of the present research were formed from some specific hypotheses. Firstly, based on earlier investigations on the general structure of activity (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981) and the structure of the family shared reading activity (Ezell & Justice, 2005; McNaughton, 1995; Stone et al., 2002; Tran, 2003), the present research hypothesised that a comprehensive structure of family shared storybook reading activity could be devised.

Secondly, Tran (2003) found that there was a lack of high-quality storybooks and effective reading guidance, in Vietnamese families where parents were less well educated. On this basis, it was supposed that not every preschooler from less well educated Vietnamese families experienced shared storybook reading at home. Moreover, based on the research outcomes from the family literacy programmes of Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst et al., 1999), this project assumed that a planned intervention could make some changes in the shared storybook reading activity in less well-educated Vietnamese families. It was also predicted that the intervention could influence on Vietnamese young children’s vocabulary and comprehension development.
Nevertheless, in a study of word understanding ability of Vietnamese preschool children in urban and rural areas of Hanoi, Nguyen Xuan Thuc (1995) pointed out that the level of word understanding of young Vietnamese urban children was higher than that of their rural counterparts. He argued that differences in children’s living and learning conditions between rural and urban areas might be causes of this gap in their vocabulary development. On this basis, the present research considered that Vietnamese young children’s family storybook reading activity and its effects on their vocabulary and comprehension development might be different between urban and rural areas in Thua Thien Hue province. Moreover, it was supposed that, after transition to school, new activities at primary school might influence their routinized storybook reading activity in their home setting as well as their language development.

Therefore, firstly, the purpose of the present research was to examine the complete structure of family shared storybook reading activity. In fact, the structure of shared storybook reading in home setting was devised and implemented to examine its effectiveness. Secondly, this study aimed at determining short- and longer-term effects of a family shared storybook reading activity intervention on preschool children’s vocabulary and comprehension development, before school and over the transition to school. Thirdly, this project aimed to discover differences and similarities of this activity in families of less well-educated parents between urban and rural areas of Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam, before, during and after the intervention. These research purposes are concretized by the following research questions.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the structure of family shared storybook reading activity?
2. How familiar was the storybook reading activity to preschool children in less well-educated Vietnamese families?
3. What changes in the shared storybook reading activity in the less well-educated Vietnamese families occurred through the planned intervention?

4. Did the intervention regarding the family shared storybook reading activity positively influence Vietnamese children’s vocabulary and comprehension development?

To have a more explicit research direction, the focus of inquiry is defined by the following issues: (1) The social context (including home, school and community) in which the family shared storybook activity occurs, (2) the reading participants and their motives for shared reading, (3) the types of storybooks selected for reading, (4) the frequency of storybook reading at home, (5) parental shared reading styles (actions, operations or social interactions) through storybook reading, (6) children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary development before, during and after intervention, (7) children’s narrative comprehension development before, during and after intervention, and (8) connections between family and preschool or school.

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five parts. The current part, Part One has given an overview of the current research, including the importance of the research, the research purposes with the main issues of the focus of inquiry, and the structure of the thesis. Part Two provides a theoretical framework that supports the present study, and also discusses reasons for undertaking this project. Particularly, the literature is analysed and reviewed from a general to a specific level in order to address the first research question “What is the structure of family shared storybook reading activity?” In this part, a comprehensive model of the family shared storybook reading activity is presented, and contextualized within Vietnamese culture and society. Part Three describes the methodology and the theoretical basis for this project, an intensive set of case studies in a quasi experimental design. Part Four introduces the participants’
school and home contexts, as well as related personal information about the six
cases. In this part, the research findings are reported, analysed and discussed in
relation to the research questions and the literature. Part Five summarises key
contributions of the present research, and raises some implications for promoting
the family shared storybook reading activity practices. In addition, the limitations of
the present study are identified, and future research is also discussed.
PART TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

The “Literature Review” provides a theoretical framework for the present study, and also elaborates questions that this research is designed to answer. The first research question “What is the structure of family shared storybook reading activity?” is answered in this part. The “Literature Review” comprises five short chapters, sequenced from a general level of analysis to a particular level. Specifically, Chapter One discusses the perspective of Marxist psychology on the nature of human psyche, which is considered as the principal philosophy directing this research. Next, the two supporting theories rooted in Marxist psychology, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Leont’ev’s activity theory, are analyzed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. The application of Leont’ev’s activity theory to family storybook reading is also examined in Chapter Three. Chapter Four reviews previous research that relate to this project. Finally, Chapter Five presents necessary information about the Vietnamese context where this study is carried out.
Chapter One- Marxist Psychology on
the Nature of Human Psyche

This chapter introduces the term “Marxist psychology” and its perspective on the nature of human psyche. The relationship between Marxist psychology and the present research, and the research context, Vietnam, is also discussed.

What is Marxist Psychology?

Marxist psychology in the USSR has its theoretical foundations in Marxism – Leninism. In other words, Soviet psychology accepts Marxism – Leninism as its basic philosophy. Wertsch (1981) stated that “regardless of whether or not a Soviet psychologist takes Marxism seriously, it still has a very strong influence on his or her work because the founders of Soviet psychology were serious Marxists” (p. 9). In the course of development of Marxist psychology, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) and Aleksei Nikolaevich Leont’ev (1903 – 1979) have been the most important figures. Vygotsky’s sociocultural approach and Leont’ev’s activity theory approach have “… come to dominate Soviet psychological theory” (Wertsch, 1981, p. 17). Their approaches were widely applied in general and developmental psychology, engineering psychology, psychiatry, training, education, and other disciplines in the former Soviet Union.

Since the 1950s, many Vietnamese psychologists and educators have been trained at Universities of the previous Soviet Union. One of them was the former Vietnamese Minister of Education Professor, Academician Pham Minh Hac (1935 -). He, presently, is the director of the Institute of Human Studies, the Vietnamese
Academy of Social Sciences, and also the president of the Vietnam Association of Psychological-Educational Science. He used to be a doctoral student of Professor, Academician Luria, and then a postdoctoral student of Professor, Academician Leont’ev. In 1972, Pham Minh Hac started doing his postdoctoral research with the title “Behaviour and activity” which compared the development of American psychology with the development of Soviet psychology since the beginning of the 20th century (Pham Minh Hac, 2003). Under guidance of Leont’ev, he completed successfully his study, and made important contributions to establishing psychological science in Vietnam. As a result of this, Marxist psychology has become the foundation of contemporary Vietnamese psychology and education.

For the English-speaking nations, some concepts of Marxist psychology are well known, such as the zone of proximal development, and elements of activity theory. Works of theorists such as Cole, Wertsch and their colleagues have significant influence. However, detailed understanding of the other original Soviet works is still limited. Nowadays, approaches of Marxist psychology continue to be developed globally (Elhammoumi, 1997). For example, in Finland, through a synthesis of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Leont’ev’s general activity theory, Engestrom has developed the application of the activity theory to understanding organizational change and development (see Engestrom, 1987). In America, Bedny and Meister has outlined applications of his systemic-structural approach of activity in engineering psychology, ergonomics and training (Bedny & Meister, 1997).

In the present study, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Leont’ev’s activity theory serve as central principles to the design of the storybook reading activity in the home setting, and to the analysis of the relationship between this activity and children’s language development. Thus, first of all, it is necessary to grasp their point of view on the nature of human psyche which leads to these theories.
The Perspective of Marxist Psychology on the Nature of Human Psyche

Human psyche is not born by the will of God nor does it pre-exist in our brains. Marxist psychology explains the human psyche as a function of the brain, the human psyche as a subjective image of objective reality, and having a social–historical nature (Leont’ev, 1978). In other words, the human psyche is a reflection of natural and social existence by the human brain, through ‘filtering’ of the subject. The human psyche is the product of the social-historical process. This position is unlike idealism which considers spirit as the source of all that exists on earth, and matter as secondary and subordinate. Materialism recognizes the independent existence of matter as detached from spirit and considers spirit as decided by matter. This point of view stated clearly in Lenin’s definition of matter, “Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations while existing independently of them” (Lenin, 1960, p. 130). In this case, the human brain and bodily organs, and the objective reality are primary, exist independently from the human psyche, and decide the human psyche. Specifically, the nature of human psyche is analyzed as follows:

**The human psyche as a function of the brain.** The human brain is a material organ which has developed at the highest level in the course of evolution of the material world. As a result of this development, the human brain becomes the means of the reflection of reality with the highest form, consciousness, which is unique to human beings. Unlike other forms of passive reflections, for example mechanical, optical, chemical, and biological reflections, the human psychic reflections are active, creative and subjective. Leont’ev (1978) asserted,

The Lenin theory of reflection considers sensory images in human consciousness as prints, photographs of an independently existing reality. This is also what brings psychic reflections close to ‘related’ forms of
reflection peculiar also to material that does not have a ‘clearly expressed capability of sensing’. But this forms only one side of characterization of psychic reflections; the other side consists of the fact that psychic reflection, as distinct from mirror and other forms of passive reflection, is subjective, and this means that it is not passive, not dead, but active, that into its definition enters human life and practice, and that it is characterized by the movement of a constant flow, objective into subjective. (p. 33)

The process of psychic reflections of the human brain occurs through the mechanism of reflex, including unconditioned and conditioned reflexes. Leont’ev (1978) emphasised the reflex theory of Pavlov, “Reflexive, psychic reflections of the brain were presented as a product and condition of real ties between the organism and the environment impinging upon it” (p. 30). Conditioned reflexes, and “mobile physiological organs” or new “functional systems” play an important role in the formation of higher psychological functions. Simply speaking, the human psyche is not produced by the human brain, but its function. Leont’ev (1981) explained that,

In human beings, the formation of uniquely human functional systems takes place as a result of mastering tools (means) and operations. These systems are nothing other than external motor operations and mental (for example, logical) operations that have been deposited and consolidated in the brain. But this does not consist of simply “tracing” them; rather, it involves the physiological instantiation of these systems. In order to analyze this counterpart, one must use another language, which involves different units. These units are the brain functions and their ensembles. (p. 67)

In fact, people whose brains and/or bodily organs are injured, then their psychic reflections are also unusual. Furthermore, at the different ages with different levels of physical development, the human psyche has certain changes, for example, dysfunction of memory for some old people. However, according to Marxist psychology, the biological factor does not completely determine human psyche. Rather, it plays a role as the essentially material pre-condition for human development. As discussed before, it is the means of psychic reflection. Therefore,
in studying the psychological development of each individual, the level of his/her bodily development must be paid attention to. Moreover, to develop the brain functions and their ensembles of each individual, he/she needs to participate actively in social activities suitable to him or her.

**The human psyche as a subjective image of objective reality.** The objective reality understood is natural and social existence, including the human individual him/herself. Also, the objective reality is the living environment around him or her. It creates motivations and goals. It provides him or her with conditions and tools to achieve his/her goals (Nguyen Anh Tuyet, 1986). As stated above, when the objective reality impinges on the brain, and its impingement is received by the brain, then reflexive, psychic reflections are made. In other words, to have psychic reflections, besides the indispensable existence of the objective reality and the human brain, a real relationship between them must be established (Leont’ev, 1978; Nguyen Quang Uan, 1997). In this relationship, the brain plays a role as the means of the psychic reflections, while the objective reality is the origin, and also the content of the human psyche. Nevertheless, as a special capability of the human brain, its psychic reflection of the objective reality is active and subjective. Leont’ev (1978) indicated that, “…all perceptive activity finds the object there where it really is – in the external world, in objective space and time” (p. 36), but “… the psychic reflection of reality is its subjective image” (p. 33). This means that, the concept of subjectivity of the image must be understood as its belonging to an acting-subject.

For instance, an image of the Match Selling Girl (Andersen, 2002) in a child’s mind was produced from the story that he/she listened to. However, this image might be different each time of his/her listening. The construction of the image depended on all factors that formed this individual’s personality such as his/her need, feeling, prior knowledge and experience, attention and state of health. In fact, these factors were not stable all the time. Also, this image of the Match Selling Girl in his/her mind might be different from that of other classmates who were read to by the same
teacher. These differences might be a result of variation in interest, experience, gender, bodily development, family background and so on among them.

In brief, without the human brain or the objective world, the individual cannot survive as a human being nor exist within his/her psychic life. The brain and the objective reality are necessary conditions. However, they are not sufficient conditions for psychic reflections. In addition to these, more importantly, there is the actively participative role of the individual as the subject of establishing interactions between the brain and this objective world. As a result of a combination of the necessary and sufficient conditions, the human psychological image has its objective and subjective features.

**The human psyche has a social – historical nature.** Between natural existence and social existence in the objective reality, the social factor plays a central role in the development of the human psyche. Firstly, the human brain and his/her bodily organs, which are the means of the psychic reflection, are the products of the social – historical process. Leont’ev (1978) highlighted this in Marx’s own words,

‘The eye,’ says Marx, ‘became a human eye precisely when its object became a social, human object, made by man for man’… And further, ‘The education of the five external senses – this is the work of all the history of the world that has passed to this time.’ (p. 22)

Secondly, besides a natural being, man is also a social being. Marx pointed out that, “… the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the ensemble (aggregate) of social relations” (Marx & Engels, 1938, p. 198).

With his creative understanding, Vygotsky (1981) stated,

To paraphrase a well-known position of Marx’s, we could say that humans’ psychological nature represents the aggregate of internalized social relations that have become functions for the individual and forms of his/her structure. We do not want to say that this is the meaning of Marx’s position,
but we see in this position the fullest expression of that toward which the
history of cultural development leads us. (p. 164)

Consistent with this, Leont’ev (1978) affirmed, “… [A] separate individual does not
exist as a man outside society. He becomes a man only as a result of the process of
carrying out human activity” (p. 22). In fact, since birth, a baby is in contact with a
social and cultural environment. Around him or her, there are social experiences
and cultural products presented in conditions and ways which his/her mother and
other adults use to look after the baby. From a helpless being with the
incompleteness of his/her bodily structure and the immaturity of his/her physical
and mental ability, in order to become a real member of society, the baby requires
not only constant care to mature his/her physical ability, but also assimilation of
social experience to develop his/her mental power. Furthermore, throughout the
long course of history of mankind, the social experience is stored into their material
and spiritual products, and also into their ways to create these products. Only a
small and selective part of the material and non-material culture of mankind is
purposefully and systematically transmitted to the child through formal education.
In all stages of development, the child receives the social experience spontaneously,
through various forms of contact with people around him or her, in everyday life
and in various activities (Zaporozhets & Markova, 1980/1983).

In reality, the human psyche is not only created by social relations which he or she
enters, but also exposed through his/her social relations. In other words, through
activity and communication, by internalisation, the child transforms mankind’s
social experience into his/her individual experience. Also, through activity and
communication, conversely, by externalization, his/her individual experience is
revealed. On this basis, not only the child affirms him/herself as a real member of
society, but his/her individual experience may become social experience. However,
as discussed before, the human physic reflection of the objective reality is active and
subjective. The social and cultural environment does not entirely determine
individual development. Its influence on the individual is in the degree to which

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the individual participates, shares and creates the environment (Marx, C, cited in Nguyen Ke Hao & Nguyen Quang Uan, 2004). Therefore, transformations of the social and cultural experience of mankind into each individual’s experience and vice versa, are different from one to the other. As a result of this, the individual experience has both a shared/common feature of social experience and a distinct feature of the subject.

In short, from the perspective of Marxist psychology, the human psychological nature is seen as a function of the brain, a subjective image of objective reality, and it has a social – historical nature. In other words, according to Marxist psychology, in the process of human psychological development, the biological factor plays a role as the primary material pre-condition. The environmental factor, especially the social environment, acts as the important external condition that provides source, content, object, motivation, way and tools (including material and cultural) for psychological development. Nevertheless, both these factors do not decide human psychological development. Another factor, that plays the most important role and directly determines psychological development of each individual, is him/herself as the subject of the process of psychic reflection. This suggests that, when doing research about human development, it is essential to examine the influences of the environmental factor, the biological factor and the subjective factor, in their reciprocal relationships. Accordingly, in the present research, the participants selected have to be considered as active participants in an activity that is constructed by a set of external conditions.

This perspective of Marxist psychology on the nature of human psyche is concretized through Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of higher psychological functions and Leont’ev’s activity theory. These theories of Vygotsky and Leont’ev will be analyzed in the following chapters.
Chapter Two - Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Introduction

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 - 1934) was a Soviet psychologist and educationalist with a background in literature, philosophy and the arts. His theory encompasses the development not only of language, but also of other higher mental processes of thought and memory (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). With his great contributions to establishing the foundation of psychology in Soviet Union at the stage when the controversy about different perspectives on human psyche was at the forefront, Vygotsky is seen as one of the founders of psychological science in this country.

He did not agree with the behaviourist theory of the reflexologists who believed that human psychological life is created by biologically determined reflexes, or with Freud’s theory which focused more on the unconscious. For him, these theories provided neither a consistent nor a coherent system of psychological science. Vygotsky took a dialectical perspective of Marxist philosophy to study psychology. Especially, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of higher psychological functions is based on a well-known position of Marxist philosophy which assumed that human nature is the integration of social relationships (see Part Two - Chapter One).

In this chapter, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is discussed. Specifically, his perspective on direction and origin of child psychological development in general, and the relationship between social interaction and child language development in particular, are analysed. In addition, Neo-Vygotskyan perspectives on social interaction and language development are also introduced.
From the worldview of dialectical materialism, Vygotsky observed that, “Development, as often happens, proceeds here not in a circle but in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56) (see Figure 2.2.1). For him, the course of child development is characterized by a qualitatively radical transformation in the very structure of behaviour. At each new period, the child alters his/her reaction as well as the ways which he/she carries out that reaction, establishing new “instruments” of behaviour and replacing one psychological function with another. Furthermore, the course of child development is characterized by constantly inheritable changes, building on previous experiences.

![Figure 2.2.1 - Child psychological development proceeding in a spiral](image)

Vygotsky (1978) indicated that “psychological operations that were achieved through direct forms of adaptation at early stages are later accomplished through indirect means” (p. 73). For instance, children may be directly guided to read letter-by-letter, and word-by-word, before they can read stories. After that, when they are reading stories, they call on already learned relevant symbol systems to help them...
shape the new reading skill that they are learning. Thus, these learned letters and words are indirectly enhanced through their story reading. He wrote:

We believe that child development is a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes which overcome impediments that the child encounters. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 73)

Consistent with Vygotsky’s point of view, Rogoff, another scholar of cognitive development has regarded development as multidirectional or following multiple pathways, rather than aimed at a specified endpoint in a unique and unidirectional course of growth. Also, according to her, development is comprised of qualitative and quantitative alterations that allow a person to manage more effectively the problems of everyday life, relying on resources and constraints offered by companions and cultural practices to define and solve problems (Rogoff, 1990).

**Social Origin of Child Psychological Development**

Child psychological development is not just derived from biological nature nor formed under social influences only. Child development, as discussed by Vygotsky, comes from the interdependence between external and internal factors; from the interaction between changing social conditions and the biological substrata of behaviour. He asserted,

Within a general process of development, two qualitatively different lines of development, differing in origin, can be distinguished: the elementary processes, which are of biological origin, on the one hand, and the higher psychological functions, of sociocultural origin, on the other. The history of child behavior is born from the interweaving of these two lines. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 46)
Vygotsky believed that, without social life, the higher psychological functions unique to humans will neither be created nor be developed. Individual development, thus, needs to be understood with reference to the social setting, both institutional and interpersonal, in which the child is embedded. Although child development originates from social interactions, the individual plays an active role in her/his development. Vygotsky considered the child as a subject of social relationships that he/she is involved in (Vygotsky, 1987). The child may not absorb every influence from the social relationships. He/she may filter them, and then internalize what are suitable to him/herself, in his/her own ways. Moreover, the child also can make new contributions to changes in this social environment. The subjective role of the child him/herself is the most important and direct factor, which determines his/her development. As Steward (1995) affirms, “In Vygotskian theory, knowledge is not in the world to be absorbed, nor is knowledge latent in our brains waiting to be awakened. Rather it is generated and constructed by humans acting in the world” (p. 16). Rogoff (1995) also argues that the relationships between individual development and social and cultural environment are “mutually constituting processes” (p. 141).

Nevertheless, young children are often very sensitive and their filtering ability with regard to environmental influences is still limited. Therefore, Vygotsky commented that children’s interactions with others also could lead to delays in development, abnormal development, or even regression according to the standards of the culture. These often occur under conditions in which social partners, seen as having better skills, may in fact enter mismatched relationships with children or when adults doubt that children are capable of further development (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989).

Vygotsky’s notions of the social origin of child psychological development are reflected more specifically through his sociocultural theory of higher psychological functions, including language.
Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory of Language Development

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is developed from Marx’s famous position of human nature’s social origins as discussed above. Individual development of higher mental processes, for Vygotsky, therefore, “… is rooted in society and culture” (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 7). In particular, the child internalises the mental processes initially made evident in social activities, and moves from the social plane to the individual level, from interpsychological functioning to intrapsychological functioning. In other words, the higher psychological functions of an individual are determined by social functions, and the structure of an individual’s mental processes reflects the social milieu from which it is shaped. He described this process of internalisation as a long chain of transformations:

a) An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally. Of particular importance to the development of higher mental processes is the transformation of sign–using activity …

b) An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological) … All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals.

c) The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events. The process being transformed continues to exist and to change as an external form of activity for a long time before definitively turning inward. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56–57)

According to Vygotsky, the internalisation of cultural forms of behaviour involves the reconstruction of psychological activity on the basis of sign operations. Like tool systems, sign systems or mediators including spoken and written language, as well as number systems are all created by societies over the
long historical course to meet uniquely human needs. He indicated, “Distinctions between tools as a means of labor of mastering nature, and language as a means of social intercourse become dissolved in the general concept of artifacts or artificial adaptation” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 53-54). Moreover, Vygotsky confirmed that these systems are altered by historical and societal changes. The mastery of the sign systems marks individual development for both the child and society historically and culturally (Cole & Scribner, 1978; Garton & Pratt, 1998). While the tool’s function is externally oriented to lead to changes in objects, the sign changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. “It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55).

Moreover, the developmental changes in sign operations are similar to those that occur in language. Vygotsky (1962) stated, “… speech development follows the same course and obeys the same laws as the development of all the other mental operations involving the use of signs” (p. 46). He described the course of child language development as proceeding through the following four stages. The first is the primitive stage, corresponding to preintellectual speech and preverbal thought, when these operations appear in their original and primitive form. The second stage or the “naïve psychology” stage is clearly defined in the speech development of the child. In this stage, the child can imitate and use correctly grammatical forms and structures before he/she has understood the logical operations for which they stand. The third stage is characterized by the emergence of egocentric speech, when the child often uses external signs, external operations as aids in his solution of internal problems. The fourth stage is called the “ingrowth” stage. In this final period, the external operation turns inward and undergoes a profound change in the process. The child can use inner, soundless speech to solve tasks (Vygotsky, 1962).

According to Vygotsky, clearly, the course of language development is initiated from external speech, followed by egocentric speech, then inner speech.
Moreover, there always exists between outer and inner operations of language a constant interaction, an interchangeable relationship, with no sharp division (Vygotsky, 1962). In fact, these transformations of speech are carried out through social interactions in the everyday life of children. Initially, children find that they are unable to solve a problem by themselves. Then, they turn to an adult for help. In order to do this successfully, they have to describe verbally the nature of the problem and the method by which they have attempted to solve it. Children use their language as a problem-solving tool to appeal to the adult. In this situation, their language use takes a social or interpersonal function. Later in their development, instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves. Therefore, the use of language assumes an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use. “Aspects of external or communicative speech as well as egocentric speech turn ‘inward’ to become the basis of inner speech” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Social speech becomes thoroughly integrated into the development of children’s practical intellect, eventually leading to the development of cognitive processes. Actually, children use their language to communicate, to guide their activities, to precede their actions, and to plan future tasks. Vygotsky (1978) asserted, “… children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands” (p. 26). For instance, children often count on their fingers to add sums, and they also talk aloud to themselves in attempting to achieve a certain goal. As a result of the dialectic unity of mind, speech and action, internalisation of the visual field is gradually created.

For Vygotsky, social interaction is significant for the development not only of language and thought, but also of other related psychological functions. He especially emphasised the social nature of knowledge acquisition. Vygotsky (1978) provided the concept of “the zone of proximal development” that refers to “… the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable
peers” (p. 86). In other words, what a child can do in cooperation with a more capable partner today, he/she will be able to do by him/herself in the near future. During collaborating with the child, the more capable partner conveys to him/her knowledge of the objects, of the tools and methods of that society. Initially, the child uses this knowledge in interaction to solve a problem and, subsequently, he/she can implement it alone, independently. Consistent with his point of view on the direction of child psychological development discussed before, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of an individual child also may be represented as a spiral. In the case of reading activity, if the child is provided with the ‘right’ guidance, his/her actual developmental level, the potential developmental level, as well as the ZPD of reading skills will be constantly widened, from simple to complex, from lower to higher, from imperfect to perfect (see Figure 2.2.2).

![Figure 2.2.2- The zone of proximal development (ZPD) happens in a spiral](image-url)
In short, through the processes of cooperative activity and social interaction, higher psychological functions unique to humans in general, individual language and thought in particular are formed, developed and revealed. More specifically, through sociocultural activities and communication, social and cultural experiences of humankind are acquired albeit transformed and reconstructed by children purposefully. With their active and creative participation in the social interactions, they internalise the common experiences of human society, so the human experiences become their own knowledge. However, the process of internalisation may be changed to be maximally suitable and effective for each individual. Therefore, the process of internalisation is understood as a process of inheritable transformation (Rogoff, 1995). Then, the children can use their own knowledge and skills for their social and cultural life. In addition, they also can create new experiences or ongoing contributions. In other words, “people contribute to creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). On this basis, not only the social and cultural experiences of humankind are eternally preserved and improved, but also individual psychological functions, including language are continuously developed.

Although Vygotsky’s notions were not empirically tested, he provided a significant theoretical foundation for the social interactional origins of language, and also support for this study. Bruner (1977, 1983) and other Neo-Vygotskyans (McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 1995, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) examined some of the detail as well as elaborated the theory. They have been specifically examining the social interactional origins of both spoken and written language. The ideas have been elaborated in a variety of ways, which are explored further in the following section.
Like Vygotsky, Bruner (1983) believed that social interaction has an important position in children’s language development. He introduced LASS – an abbreviation for Language Acquisition Support System. To function as a language support, LASS was required to complement the basic Language Acquisition Device or LAD that was proposed by Chomsky (1968). LASS frames the input of language and interacts with LAD in a manner to “make the system function” (Bruner, 1983, p. 19) that was regarded as a social interactional format which enables children to learn the language. Specifically, through social interaction, a partner guides and provides a structure suitable to a child, allowing for entry into the linguistic community in which the child is growing up. Bruner provided a model for this appropriate social interactional framework, called scaffolding (Bruner, 1977). Indeed, scaffolding provided a metaphorical view of guidance as the essential process to help the child move from his/her actual developmental level to his/her potential developmental level. For instance, to facilitate the child’s language learning, his/her mother often provides a framework by using contexts that are very familiar and routinized such as peek-a-boo, shared books, bath time and so on. In these highly predictable routines, the mother can constantly raise her expectations of her child’s performance. As pointed out by Vygotsky (1962), “… the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions” (p. 104). Hence, it is suggested that the mother is always one step ahead of her child so that her support leads the child to progress at a reasonable speed.

With these frameworks, the development of language performance is derived from appropriate social interactions through different stages in the zone of proximal development. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) developed a four-stage model describing progress through the zone of proximal development, which focuses
mainly on the relationship between self-control (or self-regulation) and social control (or other-regulation).

More specifically, Stage I is described as “… where performance is assisted by more capable others” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 33). During the earliest part of Stage I, the child’s understanding of goal, task or situation may be very limited. The child needs to be offered explicit directions or modelling, and he/she responds in a compliant or imitative way. For instance, during reading the child may meet an incomprehensible word in a sentence, and he/she does not know how to help him/herself to understand. In this context, his/her mother needs to guide the child with her comprehensive speech and modelling. Later in Stage I, the child gradually comes to know the way and sees that the parts of the activity relate to one another, and becomes aware of the meaning of the performance. Now, other means such as questions, feedback and further cognitive structuring may be used to assist the child. These means should be age-graded, manipulative, and involve selecting manageable tasks, and choosing appropriate tools.

Stage II of the zone of proximal development occurs “… where performance is assisted by the self” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 38), and further help just occurs when really necessary. The child is aware of the actual structuring of the task. He/She consciously invokes the problem-solving strategies learned by using self-speech. For example, as guided by his mother before, now Quang, a Vietnamese Year-1 student, could use his inner voice to direct his actions in utilizing the following reading strategies to understand any incomprehensible words:

*Look at the illustrations*

*Re-read the sentence and/or the paragraph*

*Look up from dictionary.*

(Tran, 2003)

Stage III is “… where performance is developed, automatized and ‘fossilized’, … all evidence of self-regulation has vanished, … [and] Assistance from the adult or
the self is no longer needed” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 38). Now, the reading task is carried out automatically, without any conscious effort. The reading strategies provided by the mother have become internalised, and the child is able to use them as ‘skilled behaviours’. “Learning is no longer developing – it has happened” (Smith & Elley, 1997, p. 80).

Stage IV represents “… where de-automatisation of performance leads to recursion…” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 38) back through the zone of proximal development. In this stage, a reversion to using the inner voice in an effort to understand is essential. If this is not achieved, then external assistance should be provided. In fact, de-automatisation of performance often occurs when the learned reading strategies are not regularly practised, or when the child is trying to learn new reading skills. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) describe the capability at this stage, “For every individual, at any point in time, there will be a mix of other-regulation, self-regulation, and automatized processes” (p. 39).

Therefore, it is essential to understand specifically every step through the zone of proximal development of each child. This understanding is a basis on which to create appropriate social interactional frameworks or scaffoldings leading to the child’s language development. Furthermore, according to Bruner, the use of social interactional formats to support children’s language learning is varied among cultures. Actually, language is a cultural phenomenon. He indicated,

Culture is constituted of symbolic procedures, concepts and distinctions that can only be made in language. It is constituted for the child in the very act of mastering language. Language, in consequence, cannot be understood save in its cultural setting. (Bruner, 1983, p. 134)

Also, similar to Vygotsky and Bruner, Rogoff (1990) stresses the essential and inseparable roles of societal heritage, social engagement, and individual efforts in development of reading. She states,
... to understand the development of skill in reading, it is important to attend to the limitations and resources in the individual’s genetic makeup and pattern of interests, in the examples and instruction provided by caregivers and teachers, and in technology structured over social history to involve specific alphabets, syllabaries, and conventions of written representation. Reading would not be possible without human efforts and human genes, without models provided by other people who read and assist in learning to read, or without a literate society in which there is material and reason to read and a system to organize written communication. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 25-26)

Rogoff continues this analysis of Vygotsky’s theory and confirms that “the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50). She argued that developmental processes correspond with three planes of sociocultural activity: apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation. According to Rogoff, the metaphor of apprenticeship provides a model in the plane of community activity, involving active individuals participating with others in culturally organized activity. Guided participation refers to the processes and systems of involvement between people when they communicate and coordinate

![Figure 2.2.3- The three planes of sociocultural activity in nested contexts](image-url)
efforts while participating in culturally valued activity. In other words, the term “guided participation” is applied to the interpersonal plane. Participatory appropriation refers to how individuals change (or how personal development occurs) through their involvement in one or another activity. These three layers are inseparable and mutually constituting planes (Rogoff, 1995). Cazden (2007) illustrated the three planes of sociocultural activity in a model of nested contexts (see Figure 2.2.3).

Consistent with this understanding of Vygotsky’s theory, McNaughton (1995) developed a socialisation model of emergent literacy based on co-constructionist theory (Valsiner, 1988). This model describes development as “co-construction”, in which a child acts to make sense out of his/her world by participating in everyday activities where guidance is provided by his/her family and cultural group. In other words, the child’s development is constructed and transformed as a joint outcome of personal and social activity (Smith & Elley, 1997). In the family literacy context, three sorts of activities are distinguished: joint, personal, and ambient. McNaughton (1995) explains, firstly, literacy activities as jointly constructed activities in which the child is engaged directly. Next, there are the times of personal or independent engagement with literacy activities. Finally, the ambient activities surround the child and provide a context for jointly constructed activities and personal activities (see Figure 2.2.4).

According to McNaughton (1995), “Activities have specific goals and recognisable structures seen in the patterns of behaviour and the means of carrying out the activity” (p. 5). Specifically, for a reading activity system, there are four dimensions. The first dimension is the goals that the participants have for the activity. The second dimension is interaction patterns in tutorials. Interactions provide predictable frameworks for learners and experts to influence each other, and become familiar ways of behaving within the tutorial. The third dimension of a reading activity system is tutorial types or configurations. There are three major configurations described as collaborative participation, directed performance, and item
conveyancing. Tutorials provide adjustable, temporary, and dynamic support, in order to transfer the performance from experts to learners gradually. Through tutorials, the participants come to share goals of the activity, and the learners’ performance becomes increasingly self-regulated. The final dimension is spelled out as materials that are used in the activity. Materials can be texts, such as storybooks, picture books, and message books; signs, such as labels, menus, and traffic signals; and visual display items such as letters on a chart and flash cards. With this elaboration, McNaughton “helps explain how Vygotsky’s concepts apply to children’s learning of the functions and strategies of early literacy” (Smith & Elley, 1997, p. 82).

Figure 2.2.4 - Family literacy activities: Ambient activities surround the child and provide a context for joint and personal activities

(Adapted from McNaughton, 1995, p. 20)
In short, the research works of Vygotsky and Neo-Vygotskyans provide an important theoretical foundation of the social interactional origins of language development, and also support for the present research. Social interactions or sociocultural activities are regarded as the vital way for children’s language learning. Especially, family reading activity with the four dimensions has been described in detail by McNaughton (1995). Nevertheless, a full structural account of a family shared storybook reading activity still has not yet been completed. To fill this gap, the present research has applied Leont’ev’s activity theory (Leont’ev, 1974, 1978 & 1981) to an examination of the structure and features of shared storybook reading activity in the home setting. In the next chapter, Leont’ev’s activity theory and its application to family shared storybook reading will be analyzed.
Aleksei Nikolaevich Leont’ev (1903 – 1979) was one of Vygotsky’s first students, and also his colleague. “He is the figure who, over the past four decades, has been most responsible for consolidating and integrating the ideas of Vygotsky and others into what is now known as the theory of activity” (Wertsch, 1981, p. 15). Leont’ev’s activity theory or Leont’ev’s psychological school of activity was formed in the mid-1930s when a group of Vygotsky’s students and colleagues led by Leont’ev worked together at a research centre in the Ukrainian city of Kharkov, the former Soviet Union. Following Vygotsky, Leont’ev and the Kharkov group started their works of the unique character of human development based on appropriation of human culture and cultural tools, both material and symbolic. However, Vygotsky emphasised word meaning as a fundamental unit of analysis, whereas Leont’ev and his group considered the role of practical, material activity as the key mediator between the child and reality in the formation of human mind (Kozulin, 1995, 1996). He believed that the “… psychological secret is revealed only in the investigations of the genesis of human activity and its internal structure” (Leont’ev, 1978, p. 51). The concept of activity, therefore, has become “… a vehicle to a general understanding of the nature of psychological processes” (Cole, 1974, p. 3). Although this theory of activity was developed from general psychology, it has had a considerable influence on various areas of psychology, such as developmental psychology,
educational psychology and engineering psychology, in the USSR since the 1950s until nowadays.

In this chapter, the concept of activity, the relationship between external and internal activity and the general structure of activity are analyzed. In addition, some different perspectives on Leont’ev’s activity theory are discussed. The application of this activity theory to family shared storybook reading is also examined.

**The Concept of Activity**

Unlike behaviorism that treats humans as if they were passive receivers of stimulation in the well-known formula S → R, or idealism that treats humans as if they created their knowledge of the world by conscious reflection and self-reflection, Leont’ev had a different point of view of the nature of human psyche.

According to him, neither the external world nor the human organism solely determined consciousness. He had an interest in “… a three-part scheme that includes a middle link (a “middle term”) to mediate to the connections between the other two” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 46). This middle link, according to Leont’ev, “… is the subject’s activity and its corresponding conditions, goals and means” (1981, p. 46).

Thus, this three-part scheme can be illustrated as follows:

![Diagram of the three-part scheme](image)

In other words, from his point of view, our knowledge of the world is created by our interactions with it, which are the actual process of living. He defined this model this way,

The process of living is the aggregate or, more precisely, the system of activities that succeed one another. In activity the object is transformed into its subjective
form or image. At the same time, activity is converted into objective results and products. Viewed from this perspective, activity emerges as a process of reciprocal transformations between subject and object poles. According to Marx, in production the individual is objectivized, and in the individual the object is subjectivized. (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 46)

This means that through the reciprocal interaction between the subject and the object in an activity, the subject uses his/her knowledge, experience, interest, skills, feeling and so on, to convert the object into his/her working products. Through this process, the subject’s psyche is revealed or objectivised. Therefore, this process is called *objectification or externalization*. However, it is also the case that the subject discovers new knowledge of the object, of his/her real ability as well as of his/her working products through the interaction. This enhances his/her experience, skills and interest, which is called *subjectification or internalisation* (see Figure 2.3.1).

**Figure 2.3.1 - A process of reciprocal transformations between subject and object poles through objectification and subjectification**

As a result of this process of mutual transformations, the activity of an individual leads to changes not only in the object, but also in the subject him/herself. This understanding of the concept of activity provides a basis for educators and
researchers not only for developing children’s psychological life, but also for studying their psychological development. As Wertsch comments, “this is why the notion of activity has come to play such as a central explanatory role in Soviet psychology” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 38). Another significant contribution of Leont’ev’s activity theory to psychological science is the identification of different forms of activity, such as external and internal activity, and the reciprocal relationship between them. This discovery helps to explain the origin of mental activities, and also provides a theoretical foundation for coaching parents, aiming at developing their children’s receptive and expressive language.

The Relationship between External and Internal Activity

In Soviet psychology, Vygotsky investigated the genesis of internal mental activity from external activity with the introduction of the concept of internalisation that is interpreted by Leont’ev in the following way:

Internalization is the term applied to the transition that results in the conversion of external processes with external material objects into processes carried out on the mental plane, on the plane of consciousness. In the transition these processes often undergo specific transformations – they are generalized, verbalized, abbreviate; most importantly, they can be developed further. This last factor allows them to exceed the limitations of external activity. If we use Piaget’s succinct formulation, this conversion ‘leads from sensorimotor plane to thought’. (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 55)

Leont’ev also identified two central, interconnected parts of activity from Vygotsky’s analysis of human productive labour activity. They are tool and social interaction. As Vygotsky (1978) indicated, human productive labour activity is mediated by tools, and is developed only under conditions of cooperation and social interaction among people. According to him, these features define the nature
of human psychological process. As a mediator of activity, the tool links a human individual with the world of objects, and also with other people. For this reason, activity draws into itself the experience of humankind. In other words, the individual’s mental processes, especially his/her higher psychological functions, require a structure necessarily attached to the sociohistorically created means and methods. In the process of cooperation and communication, these means and methods are conveyed to him/her by other people through the external form of an action or speech. Then, the means and methods are turned inward, and carried out independently by the individual.

Extending this idea of Vygotsky, Leont’ev (1981) argued that internal mental activities stem from practical activity developed in human society on the basis of labour, and are formed in the course of each person’s ontogenesis in each new generation. The very form of the mental reflection of reality, hence, also changes. Consciousness which is understood as co-knowledge, or the subject’s reflection of reality, of their own activity, emerges. The process of internalisation, hence, is not the conversion of an external activity to a pre-existing, internal plane of consciousness; rather, it is the process in which this internal plane is created. Leont’ev asserted, “Individual consciousness can exist only in the presence of social consciousness and language, which is its real substratum” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 56). In fact, in the process of labour, humans produce language which is not only a means of communication, but also is a carrier of the socially made meanings that are embedded therein. However, thinking and individual consciousness in general are broader than the logical operations and the meanings in which they are embedded. Vygotsky noted that, “By themselves, meanings do not produce thought: they mediate it, just as tools mediate, rather than produce, actions” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 57). Vygotsky also saw the motivation and affective-volitional sphere as the final, ‘hidden’ plan of verbal thinking.

In order to identify the unveiled and active function of meaning and thought, Leont’ev investigated the category of objective activity and extended it to internal
processes or process of consciousness. Leont’ev indicated the two types of activity: external and internal activity, that mediate human’s connections with the world in which they live. The two forms of external and internal activity share a common structure, and there are interrelationships or mutual transitions between them. He wrote: “Internal activity, which has arisen out of external, practical activity, is not separate from it and does not rise above it; rather, it retains its fundamental and two-way connection with it” (1981, p. 58). In the following section, the common structure of external and internal activity is described.

The General Structure of Activity

Leont’ev understood activity at the psychological level as a component of life of the human subject. Activity is described as a system with its own structure, and with its own internal transformations. More exactly, in his words,

Activity is a molar, not an additive unit of the life of the physical, material subject. In a narrower sense, that is, at the psychological level, it is a unit of life, mediated by psychic reflection, the real function of which is that it orients the subject in the objective world. In other words, activity is not a reaction, and not a totality of reactions but a system that has structure, its own internal transitions and transformations, its own development. (Leont’ev, 1978, p. 50)

From this structure system perspective, activity is needed to recognize with its basic components, interrelationships among these components, and environments in which activity exists (see Figure 2.3.2).
(1) Basic components of activity. Any concrete activity of humans is carried out by a SUBJECT who can be an individual person or a group of people, consciously participating in the activity. They have NEED. Leont’ev (1978) made a very important distinction between a need as an internal condition, as one of the necessary precursors of activity, and a need as that which directs and regulates concrete activity of the subject in an objective world. In the first place, a need is
only as a state of the desire of the organism but, only in its directing function, is a need an object of psychological cognition. A noteworthy point is that only when the need meets a corresponding OBJECT does it become capable of directing and regulating activity. In other words, the object of an activity gives it a determined direction and also is the main thing to distinguish one activity from another. This meeting of the need and the object is seen as “… an extraordinary event…” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 50), an act of objectifying need. Now, the need becomes the subject’s MOTIVE which creates a system of inducement, stimulating the activity of the individual and considered as energetic component of activity (Bedny, Seglin & Meister, 2000). Although motives are not separated from emotion and consciousness, they are not always recognized by the subject. Thus, “There can be no activity without a motive” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 59). However, under certain situations, position of a motive in the relationships of the hierarchy of motives can be changed and redetermined by the subject.

In order to translate various human activities into reality, one must carry out ACTIONS which are considered as fundamental elements of them. However, a human concrete activity can exist under the form of an action or a chain of actions. A process is seen as an action when it is subordinated to the idea of achieving a GOAL. Thus, as an activity is directed by a motive or a system of motives, an action is directed by a goal which is often recognized precisely, clearly and consciously by the subject. Leont’ev explained this, “… when a concrete process – external or internal – unfolds before us, from the point of view of its motive, it is human activity, but in terms of subordination to a goal, it is an action or a chain of actions” (1981, p. 61). Although an action that constitutes an activity is directed by a goal which may coincide or not coincide with motive of the activity, it is still energized by the motive. For example, a child wants to widen his/her knowledge by reading storybooks. In order to satisfy this, he/she must carry out actions that are not immediately directed toward his/her former motive. Some of his/her actions may be saving money to buy books, and going to bookshops. Thus, if a motive of a concrete
activity is considered as a common goal, then a goal which an action directs toward is seen as a constituent goal of this activity. Importantly, some of component goals are often rigidly ordered.

As discussed above, the process of goal formation depends on the motive of the activity. In fact, the subjective selection of the goal is a special process which relates not only to making the goal concrete and determining its position in a strict sequence, but also to selecting the CONDITIONS of its achievement. Thus, besides “… its intentional aspect (what must be done), the action has its operational aspect (how it can be done), which is defined not by the goal itself, but by the objective circumstances under which it is carried out” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 63). In other words, under certain conditions given, the methods by which an action is carried out, are called OPERATIONS. This means that actions are directed to goals, and operations depend on conditions. For this reason, with the same goal, but with changes in the conditions to fulfil it, then only the operational composition of the action changes. In this case, for example, the child carries out the same goal, that is to choose a story, but under altered conditions, from his/her family bookshelf or from his/her mother’s computer, then the child’s operations are not the same when using these different means. As a result of the combination between conditions/tools under which actions are implemented and the subject’s mastering of operations corresponding to these conditions/tools, subjective and objective OUTCOMES, or RESULTS of the activity are created.

In brief, as Figure 2.3.2 shows, an activity has ten basic components. The subject carries out the activity when his/her need meets an object which can satisfy the need. This means that he/she identifies the relationship between his/her need and the object. At the moment the motive of activity appears, and the subject starts engaging in his/her activity. However, sometimes the subject cannot spell out clearly why he/she wants to take part in an activity. To convert the activity into reality, the subject must carry out an action or a chain of actions directed toward explicit goals which are concretized from the former motive. In order to achieve the goal under
certain objective conditions given, the subject must perform operations corresponding with the conditions. Through these interactions between the subject and the object, products or results of the process of activity are produced.

These components of activity do not exist independently. The relationship between them is that which constructs an activity as a structure system. If one pays no attention to the internal relationships when examining the structure of an activity, the components will become as intangible, isolated blocks. Thus, in the next part, the association and transitions among the constituent elements of activity are presented. These relationships are important to define in order to design the intervention.

(2) Internal interrelationships amongst basic components of activity. The analysis of basic components of activity which is represented in Figure 2.3.2 with double-sided arrows, points out internal interconnections among them in a circular movement of activity. According to Leont’ev, this movement is not in a closed circle; rather, this circle opens, and precisely, it opens in sensory-practical activity itself (Leont’ev, 1978; Pham Minh Hac, 2003). In fact, the subject engages in an activity to satisfy his/her need when he/she finds an object suitable to this need. After being satisfied, the former need is extinguished, and another need is produced, but probably in other changed conditions and requiring another activity to address it. The transition of the need can be seen in the following brief representation:

\[ \text{NEED 1 - ACTIVITY 1 - NEED 2 - ACTIVITY 2 ...- NEED n - ACTIVITY n} \]

Moreover, in the general structure of activity, as illustrated by Figure 2.3.2, there is a twofold transition occurring here, on the one hand, the transition from the object to the process of activity; on the other hand, the transition from the activity to the subjective outcome of this activity. According to Leont’ev (1981), the transition of the process into a product happens not only from the subject’s point of view, but also from the point of view of the object that is transformed by human activity. In
In this case the subject’s activity that is regulated by the mental image passes into the fixed property of its objective result.

In addition, reciprocal relationships between components of an activity are also indicated by double-sided arrows in a three level structure of activity (see Figure 2.3.2). Specifically, an activity consists of actions, and the activity’s effectiveness depends on performance of each constituent action. Similarly, an action consists of operations, and the action’s effectiveness depends on the mastery of every single operation. As analysed above, an activity is directed and urged by a motive or motives. The level of satisfaction of the motive relies on the activity’s effectiveness. If the former motive is viewed as a general goal, then the goal which an action directs to is a component goal. To achieve the general goal or the motive, the subject needs to fulfil well every component goal. The level of success of the component goal is determined by both conditions and the master level of operations that the subject performs under the conditions given.

Apart from the twofold transition between the object and the subject’s activity, and interdependent relationships amongst the basic components, within each component of activity also occurs its own internal transition, that forms its macrostructure. Leont’ev (1981) pointed out that,

> Actions and operations have different origins, different dynamics, and different fates. The origin of an action is to be found in relationships among activities, whereas every operation is the result of the transformation of an action. This transformation occurs as a result of the inclusion of one action in another and its ensuring ‘technicalization’. (p. 64)

For example, labelling a letter might, first, be called an action of a child’s alphabet learning activity. Then, when this letter labelling action becomes competent, it may be converted into an operation of his/her word learning action. However, distinguishing these units of activity does not rely on separating living activity into elements but must be understood through inner relations that characterize activity.
Leont’ev emphasised that when taking out any element of a certain activity, it no longer serves in its original capacity. For instance, pictures used as tools to understand the meaning of a new word in shared storybook reading activity, will become an abstraction if they are viewed apart from the reading goal.

Furthermore, according to Leont’ev, an activity is a process characterized by constant transformations, from an activity to an action and, conversely, from an action to an activity. When an activity loses the motive that stimulated it, it can be converted into an action that may have a different relation to the world. For example, at the beginning a child takes part in an activity of learning to read words through a game with his/her older sibling. Then, he/she loses the learning motive, and reading words becomes an action in his/her language playing activity. Conversely, when an action acquires an independent, stimulating force, it can become an activity. For example, a pre-school child observes other primary children when they read aloud books and copies their behaviours into his/her game, pretending to read aloud stories, even though the child is not able to recognise any word. Gradually, the pretend reading action generates its own energizing motive that inspires the child to engage in a real reading activity, especially given altered conditions with support of an adult in the activity.

In short, to apply the category of activity as the entire conceptual framework of psychology, Leont’ev (1981) suggested that, “... we must accept this category in its complete form, with all its applications with respect to (1) its structure, (2) its specific dynamics, and (3) its various forms” (p. 46-47). An application of this position involves the need to precisely analyse the inner, systematic connections of activity. If we ignore this requirement, we cannot resolve the simplest problems, such as determining in a specified context where we have an action or an operation. Additional to the essential understanding of the components of activity and their inner relationships as analysed above, the final aspect of this structure, that needs to be known, is the environment in which an activity exists.
(3) Environment in which activity exists. Importantly, the unit of activity must be understood as a system embedded in the system of social relations (see Figure 2.3.2). Leont’ev asserted,

Human psychology is concerned with the activity of concrete individuals, which takes place either in a collective – i.e., jointly with other people – or in a situation in which the subject deals directly with the surrounding world of objects – e.g., at the potter’s wheel or the writer’s desk. However, if we removed human activity from the system of social relationships and social life, it would not exist and would have no structure. With all its varied forms, the human individual’s activity is a system in the system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations. (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 47)

According to him, in a society, humans do not simply find external conditions to adapt their activity, but these social conditions bear with them the motives and goals of their activity, its means and modes. In other words, “... society produces the activity of the individuals it forms” (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 48).

In summary, from Vygotsky’s and Leont’ev’s perspective, human activities contribute to perfect their bodily organism which is considered as a pre-condition of their psychic reflections. Besides this, through activities, humans create their material and non-material culture which is the origin and content of their psyche. More decisively, through activities, humans establish their interactions with the objective reality. Due to these interactions, their psychic images are produced. Activities of a subject help him or her not only in surviving as a nature being, but also in developing and confirming him/herself as a social being, a real member of society in which he/she lives. In fact, the human mind is formed, developed and becomes manifest in the process of activity.

The awareness of this relationship between the human consciousness and activity provides guidance for investigation of the human mind through his/her activities. In other words, activity is a vital way or special form of mediation which
functions as a basis for the development of a human individual’s psyche as well as maintenance and improvement of human society. Thus, it is important to understand features of various human activities and know how to manage them effectively. This also requires an open-minded critique of various perspectives on Leont’ev’s activity theory.

**Different Perspectives on Leont’ev’s Activity Theory**

Although with the general structure of activity, Leont’ev made a great contribution to Soviet Psychology, its applications in specific areas of human activity (e.g., learning, working activity) and different activity forms (e.g., pair, group activity) have not yet fulfilled the promise. He also saw the need of further studies in relation to these gaps (Leont’ev, 1979). Moreover, there are some controversies around his activity theory. In this section, the discussion focuses on the relationship between social interactions or communication and human activity, and the internal and external planes of human activity. Because of the dynamic relationship of storybook reading, understanding these issues of the theory are important to the application.

*The relationship between social interactions and the human activity.*

Leont’ev (1974, 1978, 1981, & 1989) confirmed that an individual’s activity always exists in the system of social relations, and is unseparated from other individuals’ activities. This relationship can be illustrated by the metaphor of the fish-water bond. He defined social interactions between individuals or communication as a component of human activity (e.g., in teaching and learning activity). Communication is also viewed as a special form of activity, called communication activity (e.g., in formal and informal conversations). This means that social interactions play not only the role of the social environment in which the human activity occurs, but also a constituent factor and a special form of human activity.
One controversy concerns the independence of communication. Lomov, another Soviet psychologist, also examined interpersonal communication and characterized this in this analysis as primarily a subject-subject relation: $S1 \leftrightarrow S2$. He claimed communication could be analysed independently of the activity (Lomov, 1982). However, when discussing joint activity, Lomov emphasised that communication among people is an essential component of joint activity. Like Leont’ev, he argued, “Communication, as it were, pervades joint activity, playing an organizing role” (Lomov, 1982, p. 82). But, his model of interpersonal communication is unusual, because of its lack of an object which is a vital condition for a subject’s existence. D.A. Leont’ev (1992), another Soviet scholar, stated, “A subject does not exist without an object, and an object does not exist without a subject” (p. 46). Continuing the application to storybook reading, it is assumed that communication and, more generally, social relationships are integral components and need to be studied and comprehended within the activity (e.g., discussing and explaining during shared storybook reading to help a child learn the meaning of a new word).

Another controversy concerns the relationship between human activity and its social environment. Engestrom, a Professor in Education in Finland, elaborated Leont’ev’s original theory of activity by a model of the socially distributed activity system (see Figure 2.3.3).

![Figure 2.3.3 - A model of the socially distributed activity system](image)

*(Adapted from Engestrom, 1999)*
This pyramid shaped model provides a new perspective on the human activity system which is composed of “the individual practitioner, the colleagues and co-workers of the workplace community, the conceptual and practical tools and the shared objects as a unified dynamic whole” (Engestrom, 1991, p. 267). This model might be helpful for organizing work when analysing social relations in a workplace community. Expanding his model to a learning community, Engestrom (1996) describes a transformation of school learning into a collective instrument for teams of students, teachers and people living in a community. Nevertheless, Engestrom’s model of the basic components of the human activity also has limitations, because the motive which determines the direction of a particular activity, and actions and operations which are involved in technical aspects of the activity, are not identified. As result of these limitations, its application as a theoretical model for the present research is not convincing.

Therefore, in this project, consistent with Leont’ev’s point of view, social interactions are seen not only as components of the joint reading activity, but also as the environment in which it takes place. In fact, the family shared storybook reading activity often occurs in a specific home setting or a “microsystem” as termed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), a developmentalist using an ecological framework. According to Bronfenbrenner, the evolving interaction between the home environment with its particular socio-cultural, physical and material characteristics and an active, growing child, on the one hand, influences directly the child’s development. On the other hand, the child also may make changes to this environment through his/her activities. However, this immediate setting within which the child lives is affected by relations between it and other immediate settings, and also by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. In Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) nested ecological system (see Figure 2.3.4), besides the home setting in which the family storybook sharing activity exists, social interactions between it and other settings, such as preschool, school, neighbourhood and community, also occur and are influential on development.
The external and internal planes of activity. Apart from the controversy about the independence of communication discussed before, another controversial issue is the existence of external and internal forms of activity. Leont’ev (1974, 1978 & 1981) proposed two forms of activity, external and internal activity. These two forms of activity have the same general structure, and have mutual transitions. However, Lomov (1982) argued that, “The structure of activity, any activity, is the same: it has both external and internal aspects. But the external and internal of activity are combined in different ways, which are specific to different types of activity” (p. 78). According to Lomov, the external is the objectively observable, while the internal is what appears in self-observation.
This argument of Lomov about the internal and external activity was examined further by Gal’perin (1902-1988), another Soviet psychologist. He continued Leont’ev’s approach to studying how the internal activity or mental activity is shaped, developed and what its function is. Gal’perin (1969, 1992) indicated that mental activity itself is, in terms of general and basic life function, nothing other than orienting activity. Its structure is revealed to neither internal nor external observation, because it is not a ‘phenomenon’, but an ‘essence’. He developed “stage-by-stage formation of mental action and concepts” which is often used as a method of educational psychology, and also elaborates the process of internalisation or the transformation of an external action into an internal action (Gal’perin, 1969, 1992). His model is presented through five stages (see Figure 2.3.5).

At the first stage “Task orientation”, the individual learns the specific introduction or orientation to perform a certain action, which should be presented under the directly physical or material forms (e.g., means of the manipulation of physical objects or their representations, such as models and diagrams). This stage includes forming a picture of circumstances (e.g., understanding of what needs to be done,
in the whole meaning), mapping out a plan of action (e.g., how to do in specific conditions), checking and correcting its execution. The quality of the action’s performance depends on this guiding element.

Next, the second stage “Material performance” is where the individual performs the action learnt with material or actual objects. This phase also can include some generalization in instruction. Then, when the action has been adequately understood using real objects or their material representation, it is essential to transfer the action to overt speech or “communicated thinking” (Haenen, 2001).

At the third stage “Audible speech”, the individual verbalizes the action without material supports. In other words, speech contains both the actions and its objects. The transition from the material form of the action to its overt speech is important, because it helps to generalize the action, and also enable the learner to communicate his/her action to other people.

Next, in the fourth stage “External, soundless speech”, the individual converts his/her external, loud speech into the form of external, soundless speech or, as Gal’perin (1969) called it, “the audible image of the word” (p. 263).

Finally, at the last stage “Inner speech, mental action”, the individual abbreviates the external, soundless speech and transforms it into inner speech which functions as the internal, mental action or the orienting action. That is why Gal’perin (1989) confirmed that, “In any case, the mental plane forms only on the basis of verbal form of an action” (p. 29). Now, the individual is able to master his/her external action, even in new circumstances and with new materials (Gal’perin, 1989, 1992).

In short, Gal’perin introduced the five stages for an external action to pass through before fully turning into an internal or mental action. His model provides significant guidance on how to outline the learning-teaching process and the teachers’ (or parents) and learners’ participation in it. However, the five stages may not always happen in the same sequence. Relying on the action to be learnt,
the specific learning task and the learner’s prior knowledge, the stages may be shortened, combined together or skipped (Haenen, 2001). This is not a fixed stage model with an invariant sequence. Hence, Gal’perin’s model is seen an idealised model for instructional purposes for human learning and mental development (Arievitch, 2003).

Gal’perin’s theoretical model of the teaching-learning process is illustrated by the following experiment. In the early 1950s, Gal’perin and his colleagues carried out an experimental study of the formation of the motor skill of handwriting. They used three different teaching strategies to form the motor skill of handwriting for young learners in elementary schools in the former Soviet Union, specifically: (1) the teacher offered a model of grapheme, the learners copied it independently; (2) the teacher offered a model of grapheme, showed the inventory of indices, and explained how to copy the model following the indices. Following his/her orientation, the teacher made the model, and the pupils copied it; and (3) the teacher offered a model of grapheme, explained the purpose of indices, and how to identify them. Then, the pupils identified all indices by themselves, and the teacher helped them to correct their mistakes. As their research findings indicated, with the third strategy, the pupils established for themselves the content of the orienting basis, including a general principle which is applicable to any specific grapheme. When being required to correctly copy unfamiliar and unknown graphemes from the Cyrillic, Georgian and Roman alphabets, they analysed and copied them quite easily (Gal’perin, 1992; Haenen, 2001).

In the present research, Gal’perin’s theory of formation of mental action and concepts was employed to develop shared reading skills for Vietnamese less well educated parents by providing them with complete and general guidance. After that, the parents implemented shared reading techniques by themselves under the researcher’s coaching. Subsequently, they used the techniques independently for various stories without coaching (see Part Three - Methodology).
As analysed in the previous chapter, from the co-constructionist perspective, family reading activity is elaborated by McNaugton (1995) with the following dimensions: the goal, interaction, tutorials and materials. His theory provides important guidance for literacy teaching strategies. To expand a whole view of this activity, in the next section, family shared storybook reading activity is examined using an adapted model of Leont’ev’s activity psychology (Leont’ev, 1974, 1978, 1981), incorporating Gal’perin’s stage model of information of mental action and concepts (Gal’perin, 1989, 1992), and other developmental concepts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1977; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

Application of Leont’ev’s Activity Theory to Family Shared Storybook Reading

Following the general structure of activity described by Leont’ev (1974, 1978, 1981), first of all, family shared storybook reading needs to be identified in a social context or within a system of social relations in which it exists. In this case, the immediate setting is a specific home environment in which the joint reading activity is embedded. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) as analyzed before, the home setting is affected by relations between it and other immediate settings such as preschool, school and neighbourhood. In addition, the immediate settings are also influenced by relations between them and the larger contexts by which they are surrounded. Accordingly, in this thesis, the shared reading activity was examined in relation to the following contexts, specifically a national community of Vietnam (see Part Two - Chapter Five "Family Storybook Reading in Vietnam"), local community, neighbourhood, preschool, primary school and family (see Part Four - Chapter One “The Context’). In these contexts, the home is foregrounded.
Secondly, Leont’ev’s model means that when investigating the family shared storybook reading activity, its components and the interrelations among the components need to be understood. In the present study, the family storybook reading is seen as a collaborative activity between a preschool child and his or her parent. This joint activity is constructed by sixteen components and reciprocal relationships amongst them as illustrated with double-sided arrows in Figure 2.3.6.

![Figure 2.3.6- Family storybook reading as a collaborative activity](image)

In the book reading case, the parent is called Subject 1, and the child is named Subject 2. Their engagement in this joint reading activity may come from their own different needs. Through communication or social interactions between the two subjects, their individual needs are shared, and the common object is determined. For example, the child likes to learn new things and/or to be close to his or her
parent, while the parent wants to educate and/or nurture the child. Their needs can be expressed through communication by verbal language and gestures. When they recognize that reading storybooks, including the content, illustrations of the books and ways to interact with one another can meet their needs, they discuss together and a common object of the joint activity is determined.

However, this shared object often focuses on development of the child him/herself. This means that both the child and his/her parent aim at widening the child’s knowledge and/or entertaining him/herself. The relation between Subject 1 or the parent, Subject 2 or the child, and their common object is briefly presented as follows (see Figure 2.3.7):

![Figure 2.3.7- Shared object aiming at language development for the child](image-url)

Therefore, ideally, the parent must be a more knowledgeable person than the child so that the parent can provide the child with effective scaffolding which enables the child to achieve the object (Bruner, 1977; Gal’perin, 1989, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). For that reason, this project was designed as an intervention which enabled the less well educated parents to become more competent than their child so that they could reach the common object that aims at developing their child’s vocabulary and narrative comprehension.
When both Subject 1 and Subject 2 find that the common object can satisfy their own needs, their shared reading motive emerges. They start engaging in the joint activity which consists of the individuals’ activities, such as the parent’s reading activity and the child’s listening activity. In fact, in the shared reading activity, often given a particular motive (e.g., reading for constructing narrative meanings or entertaining), the child should not be a passive listener. Rather, he/she should be an active and creative learner or an active and creative subject of his/her own activity. He/She can be asked to answer the questions set by the parent, and also can pose questions by his/herself to ask the parent or make his/her own comments about the story read. As Leont’ev (1981) and Gal’perin (1969, 1989 & 1992) suggested, the participative role of the child as an active subject of his/her learning activity is the most decisive factor for his/her development. Thus, this project provided the parents with dialogue reading techniques which aimed at enhancing the quality of parent-child social interactions, and also aimed to raise the actively participative role of the child in this activity.

Consistent with Leont’ev’s general structure of activity, each individual’s activity is formed by an action or a chain of actions. In this joint reading activity, the parent’s reading activity can comprise many different actions, such as warming up, reading aloud, explaining, elaborating, praising and so on. These actions aim at the achievement of specific goals which are concretized from the shared motive. In the present research, the specific goals are to help the children learn new words and to develop narrative comprehension from picture storybooks in Vietnamese. Corresponding to the parent’s actions, the child performs a chain of actions which create his/her listening or learning activity and are directed to the shared goals. The actions of the child can be listening, asking, labeling, inferring, recalling and so forth. For example, to be well-matched to one another in their collaborative activity, when the parent reads aloud, the child should listen to his/her parent. Conversely, when the child asks the parent about the meaning of a new word, the parent can provide him/her with a suggestion or explanation suitable to the
child’s ability and interest. This also shows that social interactions or communication act as components of activity.

As described above, in the three level structure of an activity, each action is performed by specific operations appropriate to the actual conditions given. For instance, when the parent uses a picture to explain the meaning of a new word to the child, the parent’s operations can be holding, pointing, asking or discussing. Matching to the parent’s operations, the child’s operations can be looking at the picture, touching, listening and answering the parent’s questions. In another case, the parent uses a real object to teach the child a new word. Apart from the operations performed such as using a picture, depending on the safety and cleanliness of the real object, the parent and the child can smell, hear or even taste it in order to discover the richer meaning of the word which is a representative sign of this actual object. As a result of their collaboration under the shared conditions given, the new word’s meaning is learnt by the child. This result is a shared outcome of their joint reading activity. In other words, the learning outcome of the child is co-constructed by activities of both the child him/herself and the parent in an environment with cultural artifacts (McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

To ensure that the outcome is met, the goal in particular and the object in general, regulation (e.g., checking and correcting) is always required in their joint activity. That is why, in Figure 2.3.6, the double-sided arrows are used to show two-way relationships, including determination and reflection between the components of the activity. Another meaning of the double-sided arrows is to illustrate transformations amongst the components of each individual activity as described by Leont’ev (1974, 1978 & 1981). In fact, at the beginning, a new word is a learning goal of the child. After the word is learnt, it becomes the result, and also can become a condition to learn another new word or to understand a sentence. This means that the word can become a condition to complete another learning goal. Another transformation is between an action and an operation. For example, first,
explaining the meaning of a new word to the child is an action of the parent to help him/her to learn the word. Then, when the parent helps the child to comprehend and summarise the story, this action can become an operation.

Apart from the child’s language development as the joint outcome of the child-parent shared reading, Figure 2.3.6 with double-sided arrows also shows transformations of the parent’s activity. In fact, the parent manages not only his/her own activity, but also the child’s activity so that they are well-matched to one another. To regulate the joint activity effectively, it is necessary for the parent to learn from his/her own activity, from the child and the child’s activity. The constant reflection during the joint activity helps to achieve the joint object as well as to improve the parent’s shared reading skills, knowledge and interest. This process is called internalisation or subjectification (Leont’ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978).

In summary, in this project, the family shared reading activity is seen as a joint activity of the two subjects, a parent and a child. Although each subject has his/her own needs, both of them are related to the child’s development. When they find a shared object can satisfy their different needs, a common motive appears and they start engaging in this joint activity. Each subject carries out his/her individual activity with different actions and operations, while they share the same object, motive, goal and condition. To achieve a joint outcome which meets their shared object, their individual activities must be well-matched at all levels, including actions and operations. Therefore, the process of their execution requires being not only self-regulated, but also joint-regulated. Moreover, as in the general structure of activity, the components of each individual activity exist as interdependent relationships that determine and reflect each other, and even transform. In fact, the joint reading activity’s outcome is presented by both the child’s language development and the parent’s shared reading skills, knowledge and interest. Another aspect is the environment in which the family joint reading exists. This activity often occurs in a specific home setting, with its own social relations, and with its own physical and
material conditions. However, the home setting is not isolated, but it is affected by its relations with other contexts, such as school and community.

The understanding of the structure of the joint reading activity helps to form a theoretical basis to design and analyse the effectiveness of a family shared storybook reading intervention. In the following chapter, previous research on family literacy environment and components of family shared reading, which influence on children’s language development, are reviewed.
Chapter Four - Family Storybook Reading and Language Development

Introduction

The proposal in the previous chapter is that family shared storybook reading activity is composed of individual activities of the parent and the child. This joint activity exists in a specific family environment in which the child is growing. Socio-cultural, physical and material characteristics of this home setting influence directly the child’s activities and his/her holistic development, including language (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This chapter focuses on reviewing the research evidence, most of which has been carried out in Western countries, of how family literacy environment and family storybook reading affect children’s language development.

Family Literacy Environment and Language Development

Family literacy can be regarded narrowly as particular school-like forms of literacy practice that occur in the home setting (Edwards, 1990). It also may be viewed more broadly including various activities and practices around print that occur within daily family life (Purcell-Gates, L’Allier & Dorothy Smith, 1995; Taylor, 1995). Auerbach (1989) places more emphasis on the second force, which encompasses parent-children interactions around literacy activities, as well as parental opportunities to develop their own literacy and language abilities. Morrow, Paratore and Tracy (1994) developed a definition of family literacy which has both a wide and specific view:
Family literacy encompasses the way parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children ‘get things done’. These events might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following direction; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading, and writing. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives. Family literacy activities may also reflect ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved. (Cited in Morrow, 1995, p. 7-8)

This very broad perspective on family literacy is consistent with a new view of literacy that was given by Spielberger and Halpern (2002), “Literacy is not simply about the ability to read and write; it is also the interest in and practice of using reading and writing for a variety of personally meaningful and socially valued purposes” (p. 4). Indeed, diverse literacy practices in the home setting can form and develop not only the skills of reading and writing, and a habit of reading and writing, but dispositions, motivations and purposes for engaging in literacy. Children can learn what it means to read and write before they know how to read and write from an early age by watching and participating in daily literacy events within their families and communities (Heath, 1983; McLane & McNamee, 1990; McNaughton, 1995; Spielberger & Halpern, 2002; Taylor, 1995). The family literacy environment, therefore, has the potential to be seen as a rich source for literacy development.

Consistent with the broader definition, Britto (2001) investigated the association between family literacy environment and the emerging literacy skills of low-income, African American preschool and school-aged children. The researcher focused on examining the relative and differential association between three dimensions of the family literacy environment: (1) language and verbal interactions, (2) the learning climate, and (3) the social and emotional climate, and emerging
literacy skills of preschool- and elementary-school-aged children such as receptive and expressive vocabulary, school readiness, letter-word identification, and comprehension skills. Britto’s findings show that the learning dimension of the family literacy environment was associated with the language and verbal interactions dimension and the social and emotional climate dimension. Children’s preschool-aged literacy skills were more significantly related to the family literacy environment than were their school-aged literacy skills. Specifically, preschoolers’ expressive vocabulary was associated with the language and verbal interactions and learning climate dimensions. In addition, their school readiness skills were connected with both the learning and the social and emotional climate dimensions. Maternal education that was regarded as an independent variable in all models also emerged as a significant correlate of children’s literacy skills both at preschool and school age. More importantly, the quality of literacy interaction appeared to matter for children’s emerging literacy skills. Preschoolers whose mothers’ reading and teaching styles reflected all three dimensions in their interactions during book reading and problem solving achieved better on the readiness test and demonstrated a greater expressive vocabulary.

Although family literacy environments can reflect a general cultural style, there are also differences from one family to another family, from one community to another community. Mostly, the differences reflect interactions between cultural identity, socio-economic status, and place of residence (Heath, 1983; McLane & McNamee, 1990; McNaughton, 1987, 1995, 1996; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Taylor, 1995). Leseman and de Jong (1998) state,

Home literacy, seen as a social microsystem for young children to acquire language and literacy skills, cannot be separated from the immediately surrounding social and cultural contexts constituted by parents’ education, work, social networks, and wider cultural and ethnic communities. (p. 297)

An early study by Clark (1976) indicated the significance of cultural and social lives. Precocious readers in her study generally were from professional homes
with an environment providing an extensive and varied range of books. Some had older brothers or sisters who already were experiencing success in school. However, according to Clark, extended and positive interaction with an adult was a feature of the preschool background of all these young fluent readers, although such interaction did not involve books in all cases, and seldom involved any direct formal instruction in reading.

Western family environments are, of course, not the only social and cultural circumstances conducive to literacy. Taylor (1995) investigated the literacy activities of 12 Icelandic families. He found that, at an early age, the Icelandic families exposed their children to a high-literacy tradition, and used their own culture and literacy heritage as basic knowledge to understand experience and shape behaviour. For example, to develop their identity, the Icelandic families often read the Icelandic sagas, Icelandic history, biographies and recollections of important Icelanders, the Icelandic folktales and Icelandic poetry for learning about the Icelandic sagas, history and culture, and for knowing more about other Icelanders. The Icelandic children also had frequent contact with multiple languages, parental and social modelling of linguistic behaviour, and multiple language exposure through media. Moreover, reading for enjoyment, pleasure, and relaxation was the key purpose of family members in most of the Icelandic homes. Family values appeared as a potential factor that may be significantly related to Icelandic accomplishments in literacy. A noteworthy finding of Taylor (1995) is the role of siblings in families of lower educated mothers. “Siblings often served as surrogate parents for reading activities, performing the responsible role for modeling, shared reading, and assisting younger children with literacy-related tasks or taking them to outside resources” (p. 216). This was why “… families of lower educated mothers had children who were good readers in numbers comparable to those of families of higher educated mothers” (p. 216).

More directly relevant to the present study, Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) describe children’s literacy experiences in Sino-Vietnamese refugee families in
Philadelphia. V.’s family and his friends’ families were recent arrivals from Saigon, Vietnam. Their parents could speak Cantonese, Mandarin, and Vietnamese, but V.’s father was able to speak little English, and his mother even less. Thus, they could not help their children with school literacy tasks that were instructed entirely in English. In addition, V.’s parents neither bought books for their children nor read books to them in any languages. In their home setting, there were few books and other reading materials, and most of these were in Chinese that V, a nine-year-old boy, found it difficult to learn while he was working on his English. Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith (1984) state, “The notion of a ‘literacy environment’ does not apply to the home environment of these Sino-Vietnamese families. Yet, once children enter elementary school, they make remarkable progress in acquiring school literacy” (p. 21).

In fact, these children lived in a very literate culture. “Even if their environment does not have a variety of books and reading material for them to explore and is not literate in some sense, their ideology is” (p. 21). Instead of being assisted by adults in their families and community, they were asked to help the adults. “The children must act as translators and mediators in dealing with a range of forms (such as school-related, job-related, medical, and tax forms)” (p. 15) that require “… a certain level of sophistication in literacy skills” (p. 17). Furthermore, V.’s father often read to his family letters from their family members in Vietnam and other places; letters were exchanged frequently. Although V. and his younger siblings were not able to write them, they had been in contact with the traditional model of literacy since they were very young. Indeed, the children and the adults in these families learnt “… a number of different kinds of literacy in different ways and for different purposes” (p. 21).

In brief, the family literacy environment creates a variety of social and cultural contexts for the development of both spoken and written language of children as well as of adults. Reading storybooks to, with, and by children in the home setting has come to be regarded as an especially significant family literacy activity.
Family Storybook Reading and Language Development

It is claimed that shared storybook reading activity benefits children and their family in many ways. In general, researchers argue that this activity not only affects parent/child relationships, but also lays the foundations for literacy (Smith & Elley, 1997; Strickland & Taylor, 1989). Through shared storybook reading in an enjoyable and natural way, the literacy interest and motivation of children are nurtured (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002; Mulholland, 1998; Ortiz, Stowe & Arnold, 2001; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Wan, 2000). In addition, “When parents read to and with a child, from a suitable book of appropriate interest and conceptual level, they have an ideal opportunity to capitalise on the child’s zone of proximal development” (Smith & Elley, 1997, p. 7). Teale (1984) claims, “Book-reading episodes are one type of social interactional activity from which the child can internalize features necessary for reading and writing” (p. 118). Storybook reading, therefore, is considered an effective means to enhance and develop oral-language (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; LeFevre & Senechal, 1999; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1988; 1994), alphabet knowledge, print awareness (Box & Aldridge, 1993; Ezell, Justice & Parsons, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2000), and early-literacy skills (Bus et al., 1995). The studies of Feitelson and her colleagues (Feitelson, Rosenhouse, Charadon, & Givon-Oz, 1991, cited in Meyer, Stahl, Wardrop & Linn, 1999) give further evidence of the effects of storybook reading on language skills such as the literacy register, the vocabulary, syntax, and tone used in school. The language of storybooks differs from that of schoolbooks which may be difficult for many children. Parents’ reading of storybooks can provide help in the transition between the two. The experimental storybook reading programme of
Feitelson et al. (1991, cited in Meyer et al., 1999) which is based on this premise appears to have long-term effects in terms of children’s school achievement.

According to Teale (1984), reading stories not only promotes literacy development, but also serves “… to familiarize the child with the literacy heritage of the culture” (p. 118). Through reading stories of a culture, the child is socialized into a particular pattern of attitudes and values. Wan (2000) found that Yuan (a U.S.-born Chinese girl) received many moral lessons and rich cultural knowledge through storybooks read in both English and Chinese at home. That developed the roots of bilingual literacy as well as bicultural identity when Yuan prepared for school.

Holdaway (1979) concluded that through shared storybook reading a “literacy set” that includes motivational, linguistic, operational, and orthographic factors is learned. “Children who are regularly read to will find such factors a great asset when they first start reading at school” (Smith & Elley, 1997, p. 10). Family storybook reading, indeed, brings benefits to children, families, schools, and the whole community. Storybook reading at home nurtures children’s love of reading and learning, and is a ‘firm and essential bridge’ to help children move into formal education more easily. Many parents who lack basic literacy skills cannot know the joy of reading a storybook to their children, and these children cannot reap the documented educational benefits of being read to (Darling, 1998, cited in Edwards, 1995). The parents feel “… embarrassed, scared, angry, and … helpless” (Angela, cited in Edwards, 1995, p. 58) because they cannot read.

Despite not directly applying Leont’ev’s activity theory to investigations of family shared storybook reading, many prior works have found relationships between particular components of this activity and children’s language development, including vocabulary and comprehension which are regarded under certain conditions to be among the joint activity’s products. Specifically, referring to the model of family shared storybook reading illustrated in Figure 2.3.6, the components examined by previous scholars are the reader or the subject, reading
motive, reading conditions (e.g., storybooks and frequency of reading), actions, operations (e.g., reading techniques or reading styles) performing in the course of storybook sharing, and result of this joint activity.

The Readers Themselves and the Motives of Their Reading

Family storybook reading occurs in different ways, such as reading to children, with children, and by children. Thus, the role of reader is varied. Readers can be parents, grandparents or children themselves. In many families, older siblings play an important role in reading to and with their younger siblings (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1966; Heath, 1982; McNaughton, 1995; Mulholland, 1998). Generally, at home mothers are still considered to bear the main responsibility for reading to their children (Aram & Levin, 2002; Bus et al., 1995; Harte, 1997; Heath, 1982; Ortiz et al., 2001; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990).

Different readers often have different reading motives. Through storybook reading, Wan (2000) describes how Yuan’s parents wanted to improve her language, while her grandparents emphasised educating virtues and good behaviours for Yuan. Katie’s father (Mulholland, 1998) highlighted feelings of enjoyment and relaxation during shared storybook reading with her. Katie and her brother (Mulholland, 1998) liked to make funny games from onomatopoeic words when they read together. Carol’s mother (White, 1984) focused on developing her daughter’s knowledge about the world and vocabulary, whilst she paid less attention to concepts about print. Teale and Sulzby (1989) suggest that “… storybook reading takes on great significance to the children” (p. 7), so adults should read aloud daily to children, and provide opportunities for children to “read” books independently by themselves (and to one another).
The Types of Storybooks Selected for Reading

Storybooks or reading materials are regarded as an essential condition to carry out the family joint reading activity. Selection of storybooks is partly dependent on different family cultural backgrounds and children’s ages. Heath (1982, 1983) describes “Roadville” wives and mothers as often buying simple books, usually featuring a single object on each page to read to their under-six-month-old babies. When their children grow up more, they choose books that tell simplified Bible stories or contain “real-life” stories about boys and girls, usually taking care of their pets or exploring a particular feature of their environment. Heath found that, “Books based on Sesame Street characters were favorite gifts for three- and four-year-olds” (Heath, 1982, p. 58).

In addition, Wan (2000) showed that the storybook themes chosen for reading to Yuan, a preschooler in the Chinese family living in America, included: respecting the elderly, being polite, having a sense of shame, working hard at school, helping the family, being modest, being self-disciplined, behaving like a girl, and not wasting food. Through family storybook reading, traditional Chinese values were conveyed to Yuan. Unlike Yuan, the favourite storybook themes of Carol (White, 1984) and Katie (Mulholland, 1998) were animals and food, especially food for Katie. Furthermore, Yuan’s storybooks were read in both Chinese and English, whilst storybooks read to Carol and Katie were in English only.

Overall, previous studies showed that the reading condition, including storybooks, is an important and dynamic component of the child-adult joint reading activity. The reading material should be suitable to each child’s ability and interest. Moreover, type of text influences not only child-adult shared reading styles or reading operations, but also development of the child’s language and literacy skills. Storybooks selected for reading to young children at home, therefore, are mostly picture storybooks with coloured illustrations and simple narrative texts. Picture storybooks are more attractive to and appropriate for
young children than narrative books without pictures (Aram & Levin, 2002; Cornell, Senechal & Broda, 1988; Mulholland, 1998; Ortiz et al., 2001; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Wan, 2000; White, 1984).

Besides storybooks, another condition of the family joint reading activity, which has also been examined by prior scholars, is its frequency.

**The Frequency of Storybook Reading**

In a study of children who were able to read when they entered school, Durkin (1966) found that one common factor among early readers was parents who had read regularly to their children. LeFevre and Senechal (1999) used checklists and questionnaires to study the frequency of storybook reading at home of two cohorts of children (Grade 1 and Preschool). On average, the children’s parents reported having started reading storybooks when their child was nine months of age, and that storybook reading occurred frequently in their home. These authors found that storybook reading frequency predicted oral-language skills, and this indirectly related to reading acquisition in Grade 1.

In some families, storybook reading occurs at a relatively early age. Rachel (Strickland & Taylor, 1989), Katie (Mulholland 1998) and Yuan (Wan, 2000) listened to stories since they were born. Both their mothers and fathers read to them daily. Rachel’s mother reflected that, “...[reading] storybook is almost an extension of breast-feeding her little girl” (Strickland & Taylor, 1989, p. 31).

Bedtime storybook reading as a routinized activity has been found in many families (Heath, 1982; Mulholland, 1998; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990). One estimate of frequency in a white, middle-class family in New Zealand was that an average of 6.5 books was read to Katie per day (Mulholland, 1998). In another study in New Zealand, a total of 86.8 books, on average, was read to a group of 10 middle-class Pakeha (Anglo-European) preschool children over a 28-day period (Phillips &
McNaughton, 1990). However, in some Tongan families living in New Zealand, their diary records over a week showed that an average of seven different books were read to their children over five days of the week (McNaughton, 1995). When investigating 17 children who had progressed well at school in New Zealand, McNaughton (1995) found that, in these Maori, Pakeha and Samoan families, “Book reading was a daily occurrence and storybook reading, in particular, was frequent” (p. 112).

Another important characteristic of this shared activity, which determines significantly language development of young children, is the quality of child-adult cooperation or social interaction contained in their actions and operations through joint reading.

**Parental Reading Styles and their Children’s Vocabulary and Comprehension Development**

According to Morrow and Gambrell (2000), previous researchers have identified a number of interactive behaviours during storybook reading. They include questioning, scaffolding dialogue and responses, praise or positive feedback, offering or extending information, classifying information, restating information, directing discussion, sharing personal reactions, and relating concepts to life experiences. Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1997) classified parent-child interactions through storybook reading into the following three groups: (1) active roles for parents and children in which the event is a negotiation, with the parents asking, illustrating, and explaining, the child reacting and responding, and vice versa (Cochran-Smith, 1986; Heath, 1982); (2) parents supporting the child, directing and guiding him/her in the use of linguistic cues (Cochran-Smith, 1986; Heath, 1982); and (3) parents’ mediating between the text and the child (Cochran-Smith, 1984, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1987).
In fact, interactive styles during shared reading are varied between and within cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, places of residence, as well as developmental levels of children. Flood (1977), Heath (1982) and (Teale, 1986) argue that qualitative differences in how parents read storybooks to their children are likely to be reflected in their children’s development of different literacy skills.

Some studies have examined the association between children’s performances on emergent literacy tasks and parental interactive style of storybook reading. Hayden and Fagan (1987) discovered that parents of children who achieved higher scores on print awareness tasks often elaborated on the book text and related the stories to real life experiences when they shared books with their children. Moreover, parents of children with high print awareness also often emphasised the text and asked their children to make inferences and predictions about the story.

Haden, Reese, and Fivush (1996) investigated the relationship between middle-class mothers’ extra-textual comments during storybook reading and their children’s literacy acquisition over two and a half years, specifically when their children were aged from 40 to 70 months. In their longitudinal study, the researchers explored the individual differences of maternal storybook reading styles in families from the same culture and social groups, which is consistent over time. “Describer” mothers focused on describing and labelling pictures. “Comprehender” mothers focused more on story meaning and making inferences and predictions about story events. “Collaborator” mothers appeared to employ Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development in supporting their children to make responses to their questions which were a little bit challenging compared to the children’s actual development level. “Collaborator” mothers’ comments were related to the reinforcement of their children’s responses, the identification of letters and words, as well as the process of reading.

Importantly, Haden et al. (1996) found that these maternal styles of reading were linked to children’s subsequent literacy. Children of “Comprehender” mothers and
“Collaborator” mothers had higher vocabulary and story comprehension levels after two and half years, compared to children of “Describer” mothers. Accordingly, diverse storybook reading interactive styles can be related to different skills in the development of children’s literacy.

Other studies have focused on different stypes of storybook reading interaction both between and within cultures. Ninio (1980) studied picture book-reading in mother-infant (17 to 22 months old) dyads from two socio-economic classes in Israel. She found that middle-class Israeli mothers of European descent used labelling routines with “what’s that?” questions much more frequently than lower-income Israeli mothers of Asian and North African descent during shared book reading. As a result of this, the expressive vocabulary of the middle-class children was greater.

Heath (1982, 1983) compared three different communities: “Maintown” (white and black middle-class), “Roadville” (white working-class), and “Trackton” (black working-class) and found that each community had a distinctive way of taking meaning from storybooks. In the first community – “Maintown”, storybook reading events usually began with labelling, followed by what-explanations, why-explanations, and affective commentaries. Heath indicated that children in “Maintown” developed not only decontextualised responses (i.e., explaining a technical term if it is not apparent from the content), but also other skills associated with book reading such as turn taking. She argued that most children from “Maintown” families succeeded in school, because this prepared children for school. In the second community – “Roadville”, Heath found that storybook reading focused on contextualised information such as labels and features with what-questions, rather than decontextualised information. Therefore, the “Roadville” children’s readiness for school was limited. Furthermore, they were not prepared for the types of tasks necessary for higher-level school work. In the third community – “Trackton”, Heath (1982) found, in general, that there was no evidence of storybook reading. Consequently, when “Trackton” children went to school, they
faced unfamiliar types of questions which asked for what-explanations. They did not know how to take meaning from reading. They found it especially difficult to complete tasks that require decontextualised ability.

According to Heath (1983), such distinct styles of storybook reading interaction for each of the three communities were partially influenced by their geographical environment and lifestyle characteristics. Similarly, McNaughton (1995) discovered cultural differences in storybook reading interactive style in the New Zealand context. In particular, within Maori, Samoan and Tongan families, children were often encouraged to reproduce the texts. By contrast, Pakeha (European descent) New Zealanders primarily focus on narrative meaning.

**Literacy Intervention Programmes**

These descriptive and correlational analyses suggest a causal link between book reading activity and language outcome, especially when social interaction is based on a child-centred approach that aims at enhancing the active role of the child. However, establishing cause requires evidence using experimental and quasi experimental formats. Whitehurst and his colleagues developed an intervention program, called “dialogic reading” in order to involve children actively during shared reading and provide them with a rich avenue for language development (Whitehurst et al., 1988). The program is based on three general principles: (a) encourage the child to participate, (b) provide feedback to the child, and (c) adapt the adult’s scaffold to the child’s growing linguistic ability. Whitehurst et al. (1988) trained a group of middle-class parents to read to their children (who were aged from 21 to 35 months) in a dialogic manner, whereas control-group mothers were instructed to read to their children in a customary fashion. After the four-week study, children whose parents used “what” and other types of open-ended questions and praised during reading made more expressive vocabulary gains than children whose parents used the regular reading style. A six-month advantage on
expressive vocabulary was still maintained for the experimental group at a nine-month follow-up assessment.

This work of Whitehurst and his colleagues has been subsequently replicated and extended (Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999; Zevenbergen, Whitehurst & Zevenbergen, 2003). The experimental research findings provide evidence that this particular shared reading intervention conducted with preschool-aged children from low-income families can have positive effects upon their language and emergent literacy skills. Especially, they have suggested that adults’ use of questions during shared book reading may be a powerful medium for promoting young children’s vocabulary development.

Further evidence of the effects on both receptive and expressive language comes from a study by Justice (2002). She examined the influence of child-adult storybook reading interactions on children’s receptive and expressive learning of new words through an one-week experiment with 23 children (aged from 37 months to 59 months, whose parents mostly held a high school diploma). In contrast to the findings by Whitehurst et al. (1988, 1994 & 1999) and Zevenbergen et al. (2003), Justice found that adults’ labeling of new words, in contrast to questioning, resulted in significantly greater gains in preschool children’s receptive word learning. However, this differential effect was not observed for children’s expressive word learning: labeling and questioning resulted in similar new word learning gains. Justice explained the inconsistency in terms of methodological differences across the studies. The differences among these studies shows that the differential effects of various types of child-adult interactional styles, within the context of shared storybook reading on children’s vocabulary development, have not yet been properly determined.

Another intervention programme, Early Access to Success in Education (Project EASE), was designed by Jordan, Snow and Porche (2000) to provide European American low-income parents both with a theoretical understanding of how to help
their preschool children and with scaffolded interactive practices to facilitate their children’s early literacy development through book-centered activities. Specifically, parents received information about ways to strengthen vocabulary, extend narrative understanding, develop letter recognition and sound awareness, produce narrative retellings and understand exposition. Their findings have shown that children whose families engaged in the at-school and at-home activities made significantly greater gains in language scores as measured on subtests of vocabulary, story comprehension, and sequencing in story-telling than comparison children. The greatest gains were found in those low-achieving students who started out with low language skills at pretest and strong home literacy support. Their study demonstrates the potential for schools to engage parents in meaningful ways in supporting their preschool children’s literacy development.

Hannon and his colleagues (Hannon, Morgan & Nutbrown, 2006) have extended the evidence base further. Their intervention programme was conducted in socio-economically disadvantaged communities in a northern English city. The purpose of their research was to promote preschool children’s literacy through a parental involvement programme. Based on their ORIM framework, families (N=85) were supported by providing Opportunities for learning, showing Recognition of the child’s activities, Interaction with the child on literacy activities and providing a Model of a literacy user. Four strands of literacy were addressed: environment print, books, early writing and aspects of oral language. Parents reported that the programme impacted on family literacy practices and also benefited children. Specifically, their child had a favourite book and increased his/her achievements in writing and oral language (i.e., ‘talk about literacy’, ‘phonological awareness’ and ‘storytelling’). An important note was that the programme enhanced parents’ awareness of early literacy development and provided them with additional options for promoting their children’s development without devaluing what they were already doing.
In short, according to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and Leont’ev activity theory, social interactions or, more specifically, activity and communication are vital ways where the higher psychological functions unique to humans in general, individual language and thought in particular are formed, developed and revealed. As the first language learning setting in one’s life, family interactions play a significant role in the development of both spoken and written language (Britto, 2001; Clark, 1976; Heath, 1983; McNaughton, 1987; 1995; Snow, 1993; Vo Thi Cuc, 1997). According to Snow (1993), parent-child interaction during storybook reading creates “… a context in which the social interaction quite explicitly supports literacy acquisition” (p. 23). In Western countries, a number of studies have provided evidence of positive effects of family shared storybook reading activity on children’s vocabulary and comprehension development, though the effects of various sorts of adult input on preschool children’s receptive and expressive novel word learning still need to examined (Justice, 2002). Previous intervention programmes also provided evidence of the feasibility of training parents from socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Jordan et al., 2000; Hannon et al., 2006; Zevenbergen et al., 2003). For Vietnam, this research area is very new. Therefore, one of the purposes of the present research was to aim at filling in the gap. The last chapter in this section introduces the context of Vietnam where this project was investigated.
Chapter Five- The Context of Family Storybook Reading in Vietnam

A structure of family shared storybook reading activity as analysed always exists in a context and represents that context. Also, given the review of guidance here the pedagogy of introducing an intervention should be based on the existing repertoires of guidance. For these reasons, gaining a thorough understanding of the context of Vietnam with its social and cultural characteristics was necessary. In this chapter, the context of Vietnamese language, Vietnamese family culture and literacy, as well as family storybook reading in Vietnam, are introduced.

Context of Vietnamese Language

Vietnam is a multiethnic and multilingual nation with 54 ethnic groups and approximately 100 languages spoken by the population of more than 83 million people. The national language is Vietnamese. It is used as the first language (or one of the first languages of multilingual people) by about 90 percent of the population (Kosonen, 2004) and three million Vietnamese people living overseas.

Some archaeological evidence shows that signs of written language of the Vietnamese people appeared in caves from the primitive epoch of the nation. However, in the course of over one thousand years of Chinese domination, from 111 B.C to A.D. 939, the Vietnamese people adopted and used the Chinese writing system which was called Chữ Hán (Chinese script) or Chữ Nho (scholars’ script) (Nguyen Khac Kham, 1967; Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997), also known as Sino-Vietnamese. According to DeFrancis (1977), “In any case the term Sino-Vietnamese is usually applied to
anything written in classical Chinese by a Vietnamese and pronounced, when read aloud, in the Vietnamese manner” (p. 15). Therefore, even though “… the literati and the mass were separated by a Chinese wall of foreign writing they were united by a common spoken language” (p. 20) which had become a means of sharing understanding of things written in Chinese. Moreover, the people had developed their own rich literature which consisted of legends, stories, fables, satires, maxims and folksongs being transmitted from generation to generation in oral form. Ironically, “… the illiterate masses were the chief repository of this rich oral literature in Vietnamese” (p. 21). As a result of this, the Vietnamese people recognized the necessity to develop a script to express themselves in their own language. The demotic characters called Chữ Nôm (southern script) which consists of Chinese graphs (or their components and combinations) and which are often undecipherable to the Chinese themselves, were invented. The time of its creation was thought to be around the ninth or tenth century (Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997). The first works in Nôm appeared in the 14th century. Then, many great works of Nôm literature continued to extend into all levels of Vietnam society, though classical Chinese remained in use until the early 20th century (DeFrancis, 1977; Nguyen Khac Vien, 1987).

In 1624, the French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) was sent to Vietnam together with five other European priests and a Japanese priest who knew Chinese well (DeFrancis, 1977). They needed some sort of transcription easier than Chữ Hán and Chữ Nôm to help them learn the local language well enough to preach the Gospel without interpreters. Furthermore, they wanted to give their new converts easy access to Christian teaching in Vietnamese translation (Hoang Ngoc Thanh, 1973; Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997). For these reasons, they invented the Roman script called Quốc Ngữ (national language/script). Among these missionaries, the French priest Alexandre de Rhodes, had made the greatest contribution to the formation of Quốc Ngữ with his production of the first prayer book in Latin and Quốc Ngữ and his publication of a Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary in 1651 (Hoang Ngoc Thanh, 1973). “For the first time the Vietnamese spoken language was
systematically reproduced in the Latin alphabet, with accent marks taken from the Portuguese to indicate the Vietnamese six tones” (Hoang Ngoc Thanh, 1973, p. 193).

On 31 August 1858, a French naval squadron attached to Danang, started the French rule over Vietnam (Nguyen Khac Vien, 1987). To govern Vietnam easily, the French colonialists had concerns about training a small number of Vietnamese people to become their lackeys, while most of the population of this nation were to be kept illiterate. The French colonialists considered the romanization or Quốc Ngữ “… as a potential tool for assimilation of their subjects, whom they hoped would be able to make a smooth transition from this sound-by-sound transcription of their mother tongue into Latin letters to the process of learning French as their ‘langue de culture’” (Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997, p. 8).

Quốc Ngữ proved a powerful system, indeed, “…an excellent system of writing that enabled Vietnamese speakers to learn how to read and write their own language within a few weeks” (Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997, p. 8). Quốc Ngữ not only assisted in the campaign against illiteracy, but rapidly became a practical and effective means for propagating ideas of independence and progress. After the Independence Day, 02nd September 1945, Quốc Ngữ or Vietnamese language really became the national language. Currently, Quốc Ngữ serves as the medium of instruction at all levels of education (Nguyen Dinh Hoa, 1997; Nguyen Khac Vien, 1987; Nguyen Khanh Toan, 1968; Nguyen Van Huyen, 1968). Article five of Vietnam’s Educational Law (Quoc hoi nuoc Cong hoa xa hoi chu nghia Viet Nam khoa X, 1998) indicates that, “Vietnamese is the official language used in schools…” Although the vocabulary of the Vietnamese language still continues to be developed by borrowing from many languages, especially Chinese, French and American English, every Vietnamese person is always taught to preserve the purity of it, which needs to be understood “… to preserve its richness and beauty” (Nguyen Van Huyen, 1968, p. 55).
In fact, people living in specific areas of Vietnam have developed their own dialects and accents. Those who are born and living in Thua Thien Hue province, where this project was conducted, often use Hue dialect and accent characterised by its sweetness and gentleness. However, Hue dialect and accent differ from Quốc Ngữ or school language. This causes difficulties for young children in Thua Thien Hue in adapting to the school environment and school activities when transitioning to formal education. They often make language errors that are influenced by the Hue dialect and accent, especially when speaking, reading aloud and writing (Hoang Thao Nguyen, 2000; Tran, 2003). The current early literacy intervention was concerned with the relation between the maintenance of Hue dialect as a vital part of Hue culture and the development of Vietnamese standard language (or Quốc Ngữ) for young children.

Throughout the long history of Vietnam, scholars have made a major assumption. It is that the family has an important function in preservation and transmission of national cultural values, including the Vietnamese language.

**Vietnamese Family Culture and Literacy**

“The Vietnamese family is a small world unto itself” (Jamieson, 1993, p. 22). In Vietnam, the family is regarded as a cell of society, as an intimate cradle which affects one’s entire life, and as an important environment to educate in ways of living, and to form personality (Vo Thi Cuc, 1997). Pham Van Bich (1999) introduces a definition of the Vietnamese family as follows,

... in Vietnam, the family is a group of people who are related by blood and marriage ties; who often live together; and who co-operate economically to satisfy the basic needs of their life: production, consumption as well as those of human reproduction – childbearing, childraising, caring for the elderly, etc. In its most common form, the family usually includes a man
and a women and their children, whether their own or adopted. It may or may not include other relatives. (p. 2)

According to Vo Thi Cuc (1997), the Vietnamese family’s functions include not only biological and social human reproduction, the economic function, and the psychological function, but also the function of preservation and transmission of national cultural values. For her, Vietnamese family culture might be classified into three models. The first model is the ‘conservative’ family culture⁰ in which family members try to preserve old family cultural values, including even unsuitable features, such as passive obedience. The second model is called the ‘upstart’ family cultureⁱ. Members who come from this family often want to cast off wholly traditional cultural values, and “run after” the new, blindly. Thirdly, there is the ‘rehabilitated-renovated’ family culture⁴. Members of this type of family try to restore and enhance good traditional values of family culture, remove backward customs, and incorporate chosen new values. Vo Thi Cuc (1997) notes that there are distinct family educational viewpoints among different kinds of Vietnamese family cultures. Their various ideas about family education have come as a result of differences of educational level, financial conditions and other related factors.

In the ‘conservative’ family culture, economic conditions may be low, but education of most of the parents is at a deeply traditional level. Family education is often organized in an ordered and strict way, according to the patriarchal style. In this family, adults are allowed to cane their children when necessary. The ‘upstart’ family culture may be well-off financially; however, the parents’ educational level is low. They do not value family education; children’s education is often entrusted completely to their teachers and schools. Unlike the above families, the educational level of parents from the ‘rehabilitated-renovated’ family culture is high, while their financial situation is at a middle level. They especially

Translated by the researcher from Vo Thi Cuc’s (1997) own words in Vietnamese:

² – văn hóa gia đình bảo thủ
³ – văn hóa gia đình hành tiến
⁴ – văn hóa gia đình phục hưng cách tân
emphasis education in the home setting. Adults in this model of family culture always try to set a good example for their children to follow. Moreover, they help their children develop their self-control and self-confidence from a young age.

Vo Thi Cuc (1997) also points out that children’s language reflects their family cultures. Alongside imitating adults’ language, children are taught language deliberately by their family members. In the ‘conservative’ family culture, Vo Thi Cuc claimed that children find it easy to understand the deeper meanings of words, while their syntax is limited. Their vocabulary has many Chinese-Vietnamese words. Children in the ‘upstart’ family culture often develop colloquial language. A high standard of Vietnamese language is not achieved. Moreover, their comprehension of word meaning tends to be at a superficial level (i.e., neither deep nor extensive). In contrast, language of children in the ‘rehabilitated-renovated’ family culture is well developed. Their vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, and spelling are accomplished at a high level.

The three models of Vietnamese family culture described by Vo Thi Cuc (1997) have informed this project. Specifically, each type of Vietnamese family culture with its own system of values and beliefs; with a variety of financial conditions; and with differences of educational levels of parents determines their own parenting styles. Also, these characteristics and the different parenting styles in each model of Vietnamese family culture influence their children’s education in general and language development in particular in distinctive ways.

Jamieson (1993) and Woods (2002) assert that in many Vietnamese families, parents have a high regard for their children’s education. As noted by Woods (2002), several reasons for this are:

First and foremost, education was the primary, if not only, means for an individual and family to rise above poverty and daily rigors of an agrarian life. Social prestige was another motivating factor for the Vietnamese to seek
advancement through scholarship. The most admired and respected individuals in a Confucian society were scholars. (p. 129)

This characteristic is identified clearly in Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam where values of traditional culture are still maintained. Le Nguyen Luu (2006) wrote,

At any classes in the Hue region, family education also aims at training people with characteristics called Hue traits such as fondness of learning attached with respect for teachers and admiration of virtues; love of neighbours, homeland and country; being subtle at communicating, behaving; being refined at gestures, language, and ways of eating, living … (p. 208 - 209)

Thus, nowadays, although many Hue parents have to work very hard for a living, they always value their children’s education, and are willing to support their children to go to school. In a recent study in Hue, the researcher found that daily the parents in all the six families studied helped their primary school children daily to complete their homework and prepare their new lessons for the following day, despite the fact that they were very busy (Tran, 2003).

Nevertheless, as a result of the traditional Vietnamese worldview, the social hierarchy and the system of Yin and Yang also exist in family education. In the past,

Upon reaching his sixth birthday (Vietnamese children are considered one year old at birth), a bright boy might go to the village school to acquire an education that was the first step in the preparation for the civil service examinations. A girl, however, stayed at home to help her mother in all the domestic chores and to begin her training as a future bride, for her destiny was to get married. (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001, p. 140-141)

Moreover, fathers were often expected to be the main breadwinners, while mothers and grandmothers played an important role in the socialisation of children (Tran Dinh Huou, 1991). A Vietnamese proverb says, “Con hư tại mẹ, cháu hư tại bà” [Children are naughty because of their mothers, and
grandchildren are naughty because of their grandmothers]. Traditionally, “… the father had to be severe; otherwise he might lose his authority. The mother taught her children differently, through playing on the sympathy of the children, through tenderness and gentleness” (Pham Van Bich, 1999, p. 39). Although the Vietnamese women’s educational levels are lower than that of Vietnamese men (Passingham, Nguyen & Shaw, 2001), and many of them have just become literate (Pham Minh Hac, 1998), the stores of folk songs, fairy tales, and fables are used by mothers and grandmothers as educational means from the time their children are born. In fact, oral literature has a rich tradition in Vietnam. McLeod and Nguyen (2001) wrote, “Throughout childhood, Vietnamese children were taught the moral lessons of filial piety, obedience, and proper social behavior through songs, sayings, and stories” (p. 140). This affirms that the Vietnamese family plays a very important role in preserving Vietnamese culture and language.

Although Vietnamese highlight both virtue and talent, virtue is still regarded as the essential foundation of one’s personality. For traditional education, to become a “quán tử” or a true gentleman who could “tề gia” (manage his household), “trị quốc” (govern a country) and “bình thiên hạ” (pacify the world), firstly, a man needed to “tu thân” (self-improve). Through formal and informal education, he had to perfect the dominant discourses of a good man drawn from Vietnamese’s Neo-Confucian legacy, that were “nhân” (benevolence), “nghĩa” (righteousness), “lễ” (propriety), “trí” (wisdom), and “tín” (sincerity) (see Malarney, 2002; Ozmon & Craver, 1999; Tran Ngoc Them, 2001). Central discourses of a good woman who could serve her family well were characterized by four virtues of “công” (work), “dung” (appearance), “ngôn” (language) and “hạnh” (conduct). Pham Quynh (1917) wrote, “In the past, traditional education was strict in the sphere of morality, and even though women received no formal education they remained virtuous through the influence of their families” (cited in Jamieson, 1993, p. 87). Until now, in the family as well as school setting, children are reminded daily by the following saying: “Tiên học lễ, hậu học văn” [First and foremost, learn to be virtuous, then learn to be literate].
Being viewed as the first teacher of their children and reliable pillars of family life, Vietnamese women have a strong influence not only on their families, but also on the whole of the society. As stated by Pham Quynh (1917), “When men lack virtue, it is harmful to society; but not so harmful as when women become unsound, because unsound women damage the very roots of society” (cited in Jamieson, 1993, p. 87). More significantly, according to Vo Thi Cuc (1997), Vietnamese mothers like mothers in other countries over the world, play the most important role in developing their children’s language and national languages. For that reason, the language of a nation as well as the language of a people is often called “mother tongue” not “father tongue”. In other words, in each family in Vietnam, the mother often takes the main responsibility not only in looking after and educating their children, but also developing their children’s language, as well as maintaining Vietnamese culture.

Although Vietnamese are very fond of learning and have a rich ‘capital’ of oral literature produced by the masses (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001), the mandarinal and colonial authorities applied a ‘keep the people stupid policy’ in order to make them easy to govern. Apart from training their lackeys, the French colonialist regime limited the opening of schools, because they did not want Vietnamese to be literate. Until the August Revolution in 1945, 95% of the population in Vietnam were still illiterate (Ho Chi Minh, 1945). President Ho Chi Minh appealed to the entire people to fight against the enemy of illiteracy. “Literacy, in Party thought, was a vital component in making people their own masters” (Malarney, 2002, p. 74), and in developing the nation (Ho Chi Minh, 1945). The Vietnamese government established a “Nha Bình dân Học vụ” or Department of Mass Education to administer Vietnamese language learning to the people. To be successful in the literacy campaign, families became ‘literacy classes’. President Ho Chi Minh wrote,

Literate people should teach illiterate ones ... Wife does not know, then husband teaches, younger brother does not know, then older brother teaches, parents do not know, then children teach, home helpers do not know, then
host teaches, rich people should open classes in their own families to teach illiterate people. (Ho Chi Minh, 1945, p. 15)

Ho Chi Minh (1945) also emphasised that it is more important that women learn to read and write in order to be able to catch up with men, because for a long time they were repressed. To encourage women’s literacy learning, many markets asked customers to read a sentence or a word before they were allowed to go into the market gates. The following poem used to be read at Vietnamese markets at that time:

If you can read, go to the gate marked ‘glorious’
If you cannot, go to the ‘gate of the blind’.
Young girl, strong, pretty, and fresh,
You can’t read a letter, you creep to the blind gate,
Dear girl, that gate, what shame.

Furthermore, in Vietnamese families, women were actively encouraging their children and husbands in learning to read and write. Another poem written by a young girl who lamented her illiterate husband:

You’ve left, but I couldn’t go
I lay on my back writing a line to a poem
For I’ve just learned ‘i, t’
Marrying a man who can read sends one forward,
Marrying a man who can’t leaves one in debt.

During that period, learning to become literate was regarded as a patriotic duty. Through teaching reading and writing, lessons to advance officially sanctioned ideas such as studying hard, thrift, respect for parents and good hygiene were passed onto learners. The literacy campaign’s success was recognized as one of the revolution’s great accomplishments (Malarney, 2002). From December 1946 to July 1954, over ten
million Vietnamese became literate (Pham Minh Hac, 1995). More significantly, “Mass Education” had succeeded in:

... propagandizing about the resistance, putting the guidelines and policies of the party deeply into the hearts of the people, teaching patriotism and fortitude to fight and win, strengthening the efforts to eliminate the enemy hunger, defeating foreign invaders, implementing all production policies, establishing revolutionary bases, instructing cadres in the countryside after the land reform ... at every level of important revolutionary change, the campaign helped to strengthen the revolutionary efforts in every manner and registered many impressive accomplishments. (Ngo Van Cat, 1980, p. 102, cited in Malarney, 2002, p. 76)

Although the Vietnamese people lived under wars followed by wars and suffered many deprivations, literacy campaigns were still continuously implemented with the active participation of families and communities. As a result of this great endeavour, Vietnam went from 95 % of the population being illiterate in 1945, to 50 years later, in 1995, 90 % of the population becoming literate (Pham Minh Hac, 1995). Furthermore, the Vietnamese government not only pays attention to the development of the national language or Vietnamese, but also has a high regard for the preservation and development of 53 other ethnic minorities’ languages and cultures (Quoc hoi nuoc Cong hoa xa hoi chu nghia Viet Nam khoa X, 1998). Duiker (1983) affirms, “In some respects, Vietnam under Communist rule has made impressive advances. Education had rapidly expanded, and the literacy rate is one of the highest in Asia” (p. 134).

This historical evidence has suggested that the Vietnamese family has a significant influence on becoming literate for both young children and adults. Without active participation and support of Vietnamese families, any literacy programmes in Vietnam may not be successful.

Nevertheless, recently in Vietnam, according to Le Trung Tran (2001), there were over 11 % of children living in poor families, 5 % of children from single parent
families (without father or mother), over 38% of children in large families, and 10% of children with parents whose educational level was at a primary level. He stated that this fact caused many difficulties for children’s education. As Nga Nguyet Nguyen (2002) asserts, “Although fees were no longer compulsory at the primary level, households have to pay many school-related costs, such as parent contribution (PTA), books, uniform, private fees, transportation, and lunch at school” (p. 11). Indeed, these costs are a significant financial burden on the poor. Vietnam Economic News indicated that funds needed for a child to go to school usually counted for 14% of a poor family’s income, while in a middle income family this proportion was only 7% (“Vietnam: Reading”, 1999, March 29).

In addition, Le Trung Tran (2001) found that there were 56% of families whose children were carefully looked after and closely supervised, 34% of families looked after their children, but they were not closely supervised, and 10% of families had no time to look after and/or supervise their children. Mostly, families were very concerned about their children’s learning, whilst they paid less attention to other aspects in their children’s spiritual life. In particular, 75% of parents directed their children to self-learning activities, 59% of parents sent their children to extra classes, and 42% of Vietnamese parents allowed their children time to watch television, listen to the radio or go out with their friends. Only 5% of rural families bought toys for their children, and 25% of Vietnamese children had not yet had contact with radio and television. Most parents kept in touch regularly with their children’s schools (80%). However, some of the families still entrusted their children’s education completely to teachers and schools. Le Trung Tran (2001) argued that economic difficulties as well as low educational levels were the main cause of some parents’ ignorance about their children’s learning.

In short, in Vietnam, the family is not only significant for one’s childhood, but also for one’s total life. From birth, every Vietnamese child is reared in the richness of Vietnamese oral literature that always emphasises moral values. His /Her personality in general, and his /her language in particular, are influenced by the
family’s educational environment. As stated by the Vietnamese proverbs, “Con nhà tổn không giống lông, cũng giống cảnh” (Your child is the same as you in at least one way), and “Giò nhà ai, quai nhà ấy” (If the basket belongs to your family, then its handle belongs to your family, too. In its metaphorical meaning, if one is from a family, then some of his/her characteristics are also from the family). Thus, in most Vietnamese families, especially Hue families, parents highlight the importance of their children’s education. This attitude towards education is a cultural tradition of the Vietnamese and it also is the key responsibility of every family towards society. It is stipulated by Vietnamese Laws such as Educational Law, Law on Protection, Care and Education to Children, and Law on Marriage and The Family.

Although Vietnamese children are nurtured in rich environment of oral literature and their parents often pay close attention to their education, not all of them have a chance to enjoy storybook reading with their parents at home (Tran, 2003). The next part describes the practice of family storybook reading in Vietnam.

**Family Storybook Reading in Vietnam**

Storybook reading may occur in many Vietnamese families. However, at the moment in Vietnam there are a few studies of this area. In an article by Nguyen Khac Vien (1995) under the title “Let young children play with books”, the benefits of storybook reading to preschool children in the home setting are discussed. He stated that storybooks read to young children by their parents at home are significant ways to help children move from the world of spoken language to the world of written language. When children listen to stories read by their parents, they understand the special meaning of the books that they are unable to discover by themselves. Consequently, young children become interested in books. For children, storybooks are “interesting toys”; hence, they wish to be able to read stories independently. This acquaintance with written language helps children find it easier when learning to read. Nguyen Khac Vien (1995) also suggested, “Let
under-six-year-old children play with books, and adults must play with them. Absolutely, do not turn this play into study, nor force children to cause their discouraged response at their first contact with print’’ (p. 14).

Tran (2003) conducted a case study research about family storybook reading practices of six Vietnamese first graders who came from varied home backgrounds and primary school settings, in Hue city. The following four issues were examined: (1) the readers themselves and the purpose of their reading, (2) the types of storybooks selected for reading, (3) the frequency of storybook reading, and (4) the styles of child-adult\textsuperscript{5} interactions through storybook reading. She found that storybook reading to, with, and by the children occurred in all six families, with a variety of readers, including parents, grandparents, older siblings and the children themselves. The different readers with their individual reading purposes showed a diversity in types of storybooks read and frequency of reading, as well as child-adult interactional styles. The parents’ income levels, the reading partners’ educational levels, and the children’s personal, gender and age-related developmental characteristics also influenced the children’s family storybook reading practice.

The children liked to be entertained and widen their knowledge with stories, while their parents highlighted storybook reading’s educational functions. The highly educated parents paid more attention to all features of the content, form and language style, choosing and providing higher-quality storybooks for their children than did the less well-educated parents. Picture storybooks with coloured illustrations and simple narrative text were favoured by all the Vietnamese first graders. There was a large gap between the highest number of storybooks (250) from Duong Anh’s high-income family and the lowest number of storybooks (five) from Thao’s low-income household. Overall, the six children had family storybook reading experiences before they began primary education, though the frequency of reading at home was different from one

\textsuperscript{5} - In the project, the term “adult” was used with a flexible meaning for both adults and older siblings.
child to another. Quang whose parents had gained the highest level of education (amongst the six children) was read books daily and had been since he was 11 months old. In contrast, Thao whose parents had the lowest level of education and income (amongst the six children) never listened to storybook reading before the age of five, although her parents loved to tell her stories and teach her to read and write letters. Since she was five, occasionally, Thao’s sister shared books with her.

Child-adult reading interactions in the Vietnamese families mainly focused on constructing meaning from narratives. Sometimes, they discussed concepts about print such as letters, syllables, words, and punctuation. The highly educated parents understood their children’s mood, interest, and capability. Their scaffolding was defined in terms of a well-matched aid to their children’s actual ability and interest, and also enabled the children to progress at a reasonable rate (Bruner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1962). However, there was still a lack of effective guidance in the families of less well-educated parents. For example, Duong Anh’s mother often posed questions which her daughter found it difficult to answer. Therefore, instead of giving responses to her mother, Duong Anh often kept silent, and then ignored the shared reading. In another case, Thao’s sister often interacted with her in simple ways, such as labeling. This made Thao feel bored easily. Also, this strategy was not helpful in terms of Thao’s ability to make inferences and connections between the text and her life. From the understanding of this practice in Vietnam gained through the study, the necessity of support less well educated parents in reading storybooks to their children before schooling became clear.

In summary, the Vietnamese family plays an important role in maintaining and improving Vietnamese culture and language, including literacy for children and adults. In each Vietnamese family, telling stories is still a very popular activity. It is often the main way in which adult family members entertain and educate young children. However, with current requirements of the knowledge
economy, besides development of spoken language, Vietnamese people need to be good at using written language as well. Therefore, Vietnamese young children should be introduced at an early stage to reading culture, starting in their home. In fact, Tran (2003) noted that not all Vietnamese children had a chance to enjoy shared storybook reading with their parents. Moreover, not all family members who read books to their children used effective ways of reading and interacting.

Much research internationally has investigated the relationship between family storybook reading practices and children’s language acquisition (Heath, 1983; McNaughton, 1995; Tran, 2003; Whitehurst et al, 1988, 1994, 1999). Nevertheless, in Vietnam at the moment, there have been no intervention studies aimed at supporting less well educated parents in reading storybooks to their preschoolers. Therefore, this study is timely. Next, Part Three “Methodology” will describe how the present research was carried out in the context of Vietnam. The full model of family storybook reading activity was examined through addressing the following research questions:

1. How familiar was the storybook reading activity to preschool children in less well-educated Vietnamese families?

2. What changes in the shared storybook reading activity in the less well-educated Vietnamese families occurred through the planned intervention?

3. Did the intervention regarding the family shared storybook reading activity positively influence Vietnamese children’s vocabulary and comprehension development?
PART THREE – METHODOLOGY

In this part of thesis, the methods are described alongside the theoretical basis for this project. Methodology consists of three main sections. Firstly, “Research Design” describes and justifies the use of a semi longitudinal set of case studies combined with single-subject experimental design format. Here, the provisions for trustworthiness are also stated. Secondly, “Procedure” describes the four component processes of “Participant and Setting Selection”, “Intervention”, “Measures and Data Collection” and “Data Analysis”. Techniques, instruments, time, place and people are presented in this section. Thirdly, “Ethical Considerations” outlines the ethical matters that relate to the rights of the participants as considered by the researcher.

Research Design

The research aims to describe and demonstrate short- and longer-term effects of an intervention of family storybook reading activity on individual children’s vocabulary and comprehension development, before school and over the transition to school. As suggested by Neuman and McCormick (1995), both case studies and single-subject experiments provide a means of studying the individual. However, single-subject experiments are designed to support functional and causal statements, while case studies are designed to achieve insight by describing phenomena. According to Bisesi and Raphael (1995), “Incorporating case-study methods within the context of a single-subject design could provide valuable
documentation and additional evidence of integrity” (p. 115). Therefore, this project is a semi longitudinal set of case studies combined with single-subject experimental design. Because of this design format, both the term “participant” and the term “subject” has been employed to refer to children and their parents who were involved in the present research.

A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994; Stake, 1998) that must be a specific, unique, and bounded system, an entity in itself (Burns, 1994; Stake, 1998). “A case study is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (Skate, 1998, p. 87). As noted by Merriam (1998),

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “… when researchers study two or more subjects, settings or depositories of data they are usually doing what we call multi-case studies” (p. 62). A population of cases is preferred to an individual case, because “… we cannot understand this case without knowing about other cases” (Stake, 1998, p. 87). Furthermore, “Multi-case designs can be considered advantageous in that the evidence can be more compelling” (Burns, 2000, p. 464). Accordingly, six case studies were conducted, and then compared and contrasted. It is believed that “… understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases”(Stake, 1998, p. 89).

Unlike case-study design, Sandra McCormick (1995) indicated that single-subject experimental research aims at clearly establishing the effects of an intervention (or
an independent variable) on a single individual. In the same study, several participants can be included, but every participant’s responses are analyzed individually. In the present study, this personalized analysis of data provided important understanding of each child and allowed the researcher to determine whether an instructional intervention could be effective for particular children. The term single-subject research, therefore, “… refers to a process rather than to the actual number of participants” (McCormick, 1995, p. 4). Moreover, single-subject experimental research uses the participant as his or her own control. Through collecting baseline data that comprises more than a single pretest, one child’s changes are compared with his or her own pre-intervention level of responding. As a result of this, “… single-subject experimental research is robust in regard to internal validity” (McCormick, 1995, p. 16).

To gain external validity, direct and systematic replication is used (McCormick, 1995; Neuman & McCormick, 2000). Direct replication can consist of the same experiment with the same subject and with other, different subjects who have similar characteristics in terms of age, parents’ educational level and setting. However, systematic replication can be carried out with another group of subjects who differ from the previous subjects in known ways.

It was assumed that the knowledge and skill which children have learned through family storybook reading activity are not reversible. Furthermore, a return of baseline conditions was not desirable. Thus, in this study, a type of single-subject research design which is called multiple-baseline design (Kucera & Axelrod, 1995) was used across conditions. The conditions in this study consisted of three different Vietnamese storybooks. The intervention was applied in a staggered fashion following the multiple-baseline format to reading with each book using three dependent variables (receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary and narrative comprehension). To avoid the risk of prolonged and potentially ‘reactive’ baselines as well as of confounding caused by maturation of prior
trained behaviours (Tawney & Gast, 1984), this project used a multiple baseline design with intermittent probes. Particularly for the narrative comprehension behavior which does not occur without direct listening to the stories, it is impractical and potentially confounding to document data using continuous baseline measures (Tawney & Gast, 1984). For this reason, one probe testing for the narrative comprehension behaviour was applied, before starting the intervention with each successive storybook.

Generally, to increase the trustworthiness of findings obtained from this project, the following criteria were applied throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994):

(a) Triangulation of methods of data collection, and of data resources

The single-subject design relies on repeated measures to confirm internal and external validity and replication, in this case across baselines. In addition to this, a triangulation of methods of data collection, and of data resources helped the researcher gain not only reliability of the research outcomes, but also a better understanding of the cases studied. Each method of data collection has its own functions, and different strengths and weaknesses (Brown & Dowling, 1998; Burns, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Moreover, “… no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective …” (Patton, 1990, p. 244). As affirmed by Lincoln and Guba (1985),

Triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies. As the study unfolds and particular pieces of information come to light, steps should be taken to validate each against at least one other source (for example, a second interview) and/or a second method (for example, an observation in addition to an interview). No single item of information (unless coming from
an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated. (p. 283)

Therefore, three main methods were used. Specifically, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with six preschoolers, their teachers and parents in order to understand their beliefs, interests, and experiences of family storybook reading activity. Participant observation was employed to collect verbal and non-verbal data of child-adult shared storybook reading activity in their home setting. This method was also used to obtain tacit knowledge by observing the children’s family and school environment in which they were living and studying. The repeated measures were employed to assess children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary and narrative comprehension development before, during and after the intervention. In addition, supporting methods were informal conversations, open-ended questionnaires, review of documents, review of journals, and statistics (see “Measures and Data Collection” for a detailed description of use of these methods).

The data were collected from three basic sources. These were six preschool children, their parents and teachers. The present study investigated vocabulary and narrative comprehension development of the children before school and over the transition to school through shared storybook reading in home setting. Hence, their preschool and primary school teachers were important sources in providing not only the children’s details of background and progress in school, but also information about relationships between school, family and community in developing family storybook reading practice.

(b) Building an audit trail

Detailed information of the study process, including time, method, content, and people involved was fully recorded in the researcher’s research journal. Recorded audio- and video-tapes, the original interview and observation transcripts from
these audio- and video-tapes, field notes, the unitised data, and the analysed data were carefully kept. All of these contributed to an audit trail that helped the researcher understand the path she took. This enabled the researcher to check and judge the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. Furthermore, these documents were used as evidence and a basis to write the final report in detail.

(c) Working with a research team

In order to ensure an accurate translation of six case records from Vietnamese into English, the researcher worked with assistance of two doctoral students at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand and her supervisors. The researcher also worked in collaboration with preschool teachers to choose storybooks for children and design language tests. Moreover, to gain inter-observer agreement in assessment for both the dependent and the independent variables, another research assistant who is a lecturer in child language development, at the College was trained to work with the researcher.

(d) Member checks

According to Merriam (1998), member checks should be carried out continuously throughout the study. Therefore, at the end of each interview conducted with every participant, as well as in the last interview with her or him, the researcher summarised key points provided by participants, and asked him or her whether the researcher’s understanding of their opinions was accurate. In addition, when the data collection process was primarily completed, the transcripts and field notes of original conversations, interviews and observations were sent to adult participants to verify the accuracy of the information, and in the case of interviews and conversations to enable them to add more if they wished. Finally, after completing
each child’s case record in Vietnamese, it was sent to his/her family to check. This prevented misinterpretation of the participants’ practices in the analysis of the data.

**Procedure**

**Participant and Setting Selection**

The purpose of this project is to achieve better understanding of the effects of an intervention of family storybook reading activity on vocabulary and comprehension development of Vietnamese young children whose parents are less well educated, from urban and rural locations in Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam. Thus, a purposeful sampling with maximum variation sampling strategy was employed to select participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 1990). As indicated by Patton (1990), “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). Also, Merriam (1998) suggested, “… one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (p. 48). According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), maximum variation sampling is the most prominent and useful strategy that helps the researcher “… to understand some phenomenon by seeking out persons or settings that represent the greatest differences in that phenomenon” (p. 56-57). Patton (1990) asserted,

When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (1) high quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness,
and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their
significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. (p. 172)

In addition, “… there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry”
(Patton, 1990, p. 184). For Patton (1990), a sample size depends on what the
researcher wants to know, what will have credibility, and what can be done
with available time and resources.

Letters were sent to the principals of two preschools Vinh Ninh and Phu Thuong⁶,
to seek their agreement to take part in this project and for their help to identify
and recruit two preschool teachers and six preschoolers (aged six⁷, male and
female) whose parents completed their education at between Year 4 and Year 12⁸
(see Appendix 1). Next, other letters (see Appendix 4 & 7), information sheets (see
Appendix 2, 5 & 8) and consent forms (see Appendix 3, 5 & 9) were forwarded to
the two preschool teachers and the six children’s families inviting them to
participate. All letters were responded to. However, at the beginning of the
process of recruitment, five of the six families were happy to participate in the
project, while one family declined. At the time, this family wondered if they had
enough time for the researcher’s visits. They also did not think reading storybooks
could benefit their child. After explanations from the researcher, the last family
participated voluntarily in the present research.

As a result of this, the participants of the present study were six preschoolers (four
boys and two girls), aged six, from Vinh Ninh, and Phu Thuong preschool, and
their parents and teachers (see Table 3.1, Part Three & Part Four - Chapter One).

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⁶ Vinh Ninh preschool is located in Hue city, while Phu Thuong preschool belongs to Phu Vang district, Hue outskirts.
⁷ Age of these children will be counted by birth-year, not birthday.
⁸ The comprehensive educational system in Vietnam consisted of 12 years with three levels as follows:
   - Primary (five years): Year 1 to 5 (aged six to 11)
   - Junior Secondary (four years): Year 6 to 9 (aged 12 to 15)
   - Senior Secondary (three years): Year 10 to 12 (aged 16 to 18)
Table 3.1 - A brief description of participants and settings\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN</th>
<th>PRESCHOOL</th>
<th>FAMILY BACKGROUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Le Huy (Male)</td>
<td>Vinh Ninh</td>
<td>Low-income(^{10})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Cong Khiem (Male)</td>
<td>Vinh Ninh</td>
<td>Low-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huynh Ngoc Anh (Female)</td>
<td>Vinh Ninh</td>
<td>Low-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Quoc Nhat (Male)</td>
<td>Phu Thuong</td>
<td>Low-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pham Hoa Tan (Male)</td>
<td>Phu Thuong</td>
<td>Low-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Lan Trinh (Female)</td>
<td>Phu Thuong</td>
<td>Low-income</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^9\) Participants valued their identity; therefore, their personal information is given with their consent.

\(^{10}\) In 2006, their average of real earning per person ranged from 240 USD to 672 USD (see Part Four - Chapter One) and was lower than the average GDP per capita of Vietnam at the same time, 715 USD (Cited from http://vnexpress.net/Vietnam/Kinh-doanh/2006/11/3B9F053D/).
When the six children went to school, they attended four different primary schools, Vinh Ninh, Phuong Duc, Phu Thuong and Thuy Van. Their schools are located in both urban and rural areas of Thua Thien Hue province. Thus, the researcher sent another letter (see Appendix 10 &13), information sheets (see Appendix 11 & 14) and consent forms (Appendix 12 & 15) to their primary school principals and teachers for their collaboration to continue studying the children’s progress in Vietnamese language learning as well as their primary school contexts which might influence the children’s family storybook reading activity. Quantitative and qualitative data obtained from this final phase provided the researcher with longer-term effects of the intervention on the children’s language development.

**Intervention Design**

As discussed before, an intensive descriptive study carried out by Tran (2003) showed that in the Vietnamese families of less well educated parents there was a lack of high-quality storybooks as well as of effective reading guidance. There was evidence for an educational case to be made for supporting less well educated parents in reading storybooks to their children before schooling. Some prior intervention projects with families focusing on children’s literacy learning, such as “Coaching strategies” (Numan & Gallagher, 1994), “Dialogic reading” (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), “Project EASE” (Jordan et al., 2000) showed considerable effects on children’s vocabulary and comprehension acquisition. These informed the design of this family storybook reading activity intervention, which aimed at providing Vietnamese less well educated parents with essential knowledge and skills in order to develop their children’s vocabulary and comprehension through shared book reading at their home settings.
An adapted model of Leont’ev’s activity theory, incorporating Gal’perin’s stage model of information of mental action and concepts (Gal’perin, 1992), and other developmental concepts (Bronfenbronner, 1979; Bruner, 1977; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) (see Figure 2.3.6) provided the present research with a framework to design, implement and evaluate the family shared storybook reading activity intervention. This intervention was located within the context of Vietnamese culture and language in general, Hue culture and language in particular. The intervention mainly focused on establishing shared reading objects and goals (e.g., target words and comprehension components), shared reading conditions (e.g., storybooks and a Vietnamese dictionary) and shared reading techniques (or actions and operations) for Vietnamese less well educated parents, working with their own preschoolers.

(1) Selection of storybooks, target words and comprehension components

In a study with preschoolers, and first and second graders in Michigan city, United States of America, Paris and Paris (2003) used wordless picture books with simple black-and-white illustrations for both assessment and instruction purposes of children’s narrative comprehension. By contrast, in New Zealand, Werner (2003) used narratives with standardised-structure texts and without pictures to assess six-year-old children’s listening comprehension. However, other scholars have shown that picture storybooks with coloured illustrations and simple narrative text are favoured by both Western and Vietnamese young children (Aram & Levin, 2002; Cornell et al., 1988; Mulholland, 1998; Ortiz et al., 2001; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Tran, 2003; Wan, 2000; White, 1984).

In Tran’s (2003) study, Vietnamese parents stated that, firstly, their children were often attracted by pictures in storybooks, then, the children wanted to understand narrative texts. Storybooks with a reasonable combination of illustrations and
simple narrative texts not only made children interested in family shared reading activity, but also fostered their motivation for learning to read. In addition, Vietnamese parents often placed more emphasis on the educational functions of storybooks. They preferred storybooks with Vietnamese moral and cultural values. Based on the criteria of content, form and language style, three commercially available contemporary picture storybooks in Vietnamese were chosen. As evaluated by the preschool teachers, the storybooks were appropriate to the children’s ability and interest, but were unfamiliar to them. Because the intervention of family shared storybook reading activity was to occur in practical and natural contexts, these three storybooks were used in their original form, without modification. As Table 3.2 shows, Book 1 with 231 words, named “Choi dai” [Silly game] that was easier for the children than the other books, was used for the first three weeks of the intervention. Book 2 “Cau be thong minh” [The clever boy] with 282 words, more difficult than Book 1, but still suitable to the children’s ability, was employed for the second three weeks of the intervention. For the last three weeks of the intervention when the parents and their children became more familiar with the joint reading activity, Book 3 “Nang tien Gao” [The Rice Fairy] with 419 words, the most difficult book compared with the other two books, was used. The content of each of the three books is summarized in Table 3.2.

From the picture storybooks, 18 target words were selected. Consistent with the methodology of previous studies examining children’s novel word learning (Elley, 1989; Justice, 2002; Justice, Meier & Walpole, 2005; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Senechal & Cornell, 1993), in this project, selection of target words was decided on the basis of anticipated unfamiliarity to preschool children. Six words (two nouns, two verbs and two adjectives or one adjective and one adverb) occurring in the text from each of the three storybooks were chosen through collaborative discussion with the preschool teachers. All 18 target words from these three storybooks were used for the designing of both receptive and expressive vocabulary measure instruments, the basis for the repeated measures (see Table 3.3).
Table 3.2 - Storybooks used for the intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORYBOOKS</th>
<th>BOOK 1</th>
<th>BOOK 2</th>
<th>BOOK 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Chơi dại [Silly game]</td>
<td>Cậu bé thông minh [The clever boy]</td>
<td>Nàng tiên Gạo [The Rice Fairy]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Kim Khánh</td>
<td>Nguyễn Ngọc Minh Thư</td>
<td>Tô Hoài &amp; Minh Trí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Thanh Hóa</td>
<td>Kim Đồng</td>
<td>Giáo dục</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>“Chơi dại” is a short story about Little Pig. He liked playing naughty and silly games to tease other people. One day, he made a fire from dried leaves and cried loudly for help. When his neighbours came, they realised that there was just his naughty game. Little Pig had a lot of fun by this trickery. Another day, he took an oil lamp to his bed for reading. Unluckily, the oil lamp fell down and burned his bed. He cried loudly for help, but nobody came. Thus, his house was destroyed. At the time, Little Pig understood that because of his previous naughty and silly games tricking other people, nobody believed him.</td>
<td>Based on a true story about a Vietnamese talented person named Luong The Vinh, “Cậu bé thông minh” writes about a clever and studious boy. When he and his friends were playing football that was made from a grape-fruit, a son of a rich family came. The rich boy, who was very haughty and arrogant, stole the grape-fruit from the kids and threw it into a bottomless hole. Then, he challenged the kids to pick the grape-fruit up without damaging it. If any kid succeeded, he would be the palanquin carrier for the kid. If not, the kids would have to carry him around the village. The kids tried their best to pick the ball up, but the grape-fruit was still on the bottom of the very deep hole. Then, the clever boy discussed his plan with his friends. He and his friends went to the river to fetch water, and filled the hole with water. The grape-fruit floated on the water, and the kids got the ball easily without damaging it. The clever boy won, so the kids asked the haughty and arrogant boy to keep his promise.</td>
<td>“Nàng tiên Gạo” is a fairy tale about an ethnic group Xo-dang living in Central Highlands of Vietnam. The story is about the Rice Fairy who often helped poor but kind people. After witnessing that Krong, a poor man, was happy to share his food with an old beggar, the Rice Fairy helped him become the richest man in the region. Regrettfully, when owning a lot of property, Krong changed his manner and became very greedy and cruel. One night, the Rice Fairy told a poor girl, who worked very hard for Krong, in her dream that the Rice Fairy gave her reward to the wrong person. Then, she withdrew the reward from Krong, and he became a poor man again. Another day, the Rice Fairy acted as an old beggar to ask the poor girl for food and drink. The girl was pleased to share her food with the beggar. While the girl went to the river to get some water for her, the old beggar disappeared, but a basket was left there. The girl took the basket, and put it in her kitchen. Amazingly, every day returning home from work, she saw the basket filled with rice. She shared the rice with her neighbours and silently thanked the Rice Fairy for her help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 - Target words used for the intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOKS</th>
<th>TARGET WORDS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Noun</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verb</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book 1</strong></td>
<td>Đèn dầu</td>
<td>Đổ xô</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Đụng cụ chữa cháy</td>
<td>Thiếu rụi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book 2</strong></td>
<td>Kiểu</td>
<td>Lò đò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bóng bưởi</td>
<td>Phá đám</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book 3</strong></td>
<td>Củ mài</td>
<td>Sế</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vựa thóc</td>
<td>Cuốn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>06</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, narrative comprehension components were determined based on the content of the storybooks. Previous research (McNaughton, 2002; Paris & Paris, 2003; Smolkin & Donovan, 2002) has determined that narrative comprehension can be assessed by children’s ability to identify main ideas; to recall information; to make inferences; and to form comments about stories read to them. In other words, narrative comprehension is understood as the ability to make meaning from stories through mental processes. Children not only obtain knowledge, but also improve their mental skills through reading comprehension. These outputs of narrative comprehension are consistent with purposes for shared storybook reading of the Vietnamese parents from findings by Tran (2003):

Through storybook reading to and with the children, their parents wanted not only to relax the children, but also to develop their spiritual life, intelligence, and language, especially reading skills and vocabulary.
According to the parents, shared storybook reading was to provide their children with an essential foundation for learning. (p. 91)

Identifying main ideas of a story is regarded as the most important function of comprehension (Johnston & Afflerbach, 1985). It requires each child not only to understand what he/she has heard, but also requires the child to make judgments about the importance of the information and to consolidate information (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). Main ideas of a story consist of a setting, characters, problems and resolutions, which construct a story grammar (Dymock & Nicholson, 1999; Stein & Trabasso, 1982).

Recalling information assesses each child’s ability to remember exactly important and explicit information stated from stories being read to him or her as well as to respond exactly to questions posed by the researcher. These questions related to the main character’s problems or solutions. This ability to recall is also an attribute of literacy learning for children at school.

Making inferences requires each child to form and state his/her own thoughts about the character’s feelings, dialogues, causal relations, predictions and themes from stories listened to. This kind of information is often presented implicitly in the narrative content, so it needs to be inferred.

Making comments requires each child to describe what he/she likes or does not like, and why he/she likes or does not like that. Comments are important clues that reveal how the children’s experiences, beliefs and feelings are related to the story.

Table 3.4 shows these four narrative comprehension components that have been operationalised in 12 comprehension tasks based on the three storybooks.

In brief, the four narrative comprehension components corresponded to the four levels (from simple to complex, or from easy to difficult) of children’s ability in making meaning from the three stories read to them. These components also covered both children’s metacognition skills and comprehension outcomes
(McNaughton, 2002; Werner, 2003), which are suitable to the capability of five to six-year-old children (Paris & Paris, 2003; Werner, 2003).

Table 3.4 - Comprehension tasks used for the intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOKS</th>
<th>COMPREHENSION TASKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Book 1 | 1. Who do you remember most in this story?  
2. How did Little Pig play his silly game?  
3. Why was Little Pig’s house burned down?  
4. Do you love Little Pig? Why? |
| Book 2 | 1. Who do you love most in this story? Why?  
2. How did the rich man’s son disturb the kids playing grape-fruit ball?  
3. What did the clever boy and his friends do to win the challenge?  
4. Who is the haughty and arrogant in this story? In your opinion, what does the haughty and arrogant often meet with? |
| Book 3 | 1. Why did the Rice Fairy think that she made a mistake when helping Krong become rich?  
2. What did the girl do to help her family and neighbours get away from poverty?  
3. Do you love this story? Why?  
4. Can you retell me the story “The Rice Fairy”? |

(2) Intervention procedure

As suggested by Axelrod (1983), in this multiple-baseline-different-storybooks design, target words and narrative comprehension components which children achieved from the three stories were measured over time to establish a baseline against which further changes could be assessed. Once the baseline was established, an intervention was applied to only one of the storybooks. Then, following repeated measures with the first storybook under the intervention, the
procedure was still continued with the first storybook, but also applied to the second book and, subsequently, to the third storybook. If children’s vocabulary and comprehension for those words in the target book, and the comprehension of that book improved during applying the procedure, an argument for believing that the intervention was responsible for such changes could be made. However, according to McCormick (1995), single-subject experimental research is “... incomplete until an appraisal of maintenance of the learned behaviors has been accomplished” (p. 14). Accordingly, in this study, changes in the children’s vocabulary and comprehension as well as in their family shared storybook reading practice were examined quantitatively and qualitatively through the four following phases: baseline, ten-week intervention, ten-week transfer and twelve-week maintenance. These phases are described in detail below.

**Baseline**

The Baseline phase lasted for three weeks, particularly for the first storybook. Each of the six families was visited four times by the researcher. Consistent with the focus of inquiry as indicated before (see “Research Purpose” in Part One), conversations, a questionnaire, an interview, one observation of home environment and one observation of a family shared storybook reading event were conducted with each family to gain an understanding of the nature of their shared storybook reading activity in the natural context of their own home. Three testing sessions were used to establish baseline level of vocabulary before the book was read to them. A probe test was applied to measure the child’s narrative comprehension ability after listening to each of the three stories read by their parent. However, to avoid reactive responses from repeated measures, the comprehension probe test was just applied before the intervention. Once the baseline was established, an intervention was applied to the first storybook. Meanwhile, the baseline condition with two intermittent probes testing for receptive and expressive vocabulary behaviours and one probe testing for
narrative comprehension, was still continued with the second and the third storybook until the intervention began with each of them. During the Baseline phase, the researcher also visited the target children’s preschools and classes, and observed the children and their teachers during reading storybooks together. Questionnaires, conversations and interviews were conducted with their teachers and principals to gain a better understanding of the role the preschools played in developing and supporting their family storybook reading activity.

**Intervention**

After three weeks of baseline data collection, the intervention of family storybook reading activity was implemented in a series of overlapping phases for each of the storybooks for the next ten weeks. Applying Gal’perin’s theory of formation of mental action and concepts (Gal’perin, 1989, 1992) to this intervention, parents were provided with extensive guidance by a training workshop, and followed up by individual coaching sections at their home.

Specifically, in this phase, a training workshop was organized for the parent participants at Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the workshop, the parents had discussions with some Vietnamese experts on child language development, educational psychologists, preschool principals and teachers about the benefits of family shared storybook reading. The purpose of discussions with these specialists and educators was to help parents develop their understanding of and motivation for family shared storybook reading activity in the context of Vietnamese language, culture and society.

In this workshop, the researcher also discussed with the parents about how to read stories to their children effectively. Basing on the model of family shared storybook reading activity (see Figure 2.3.6), the researcher helped the parents understand that the joint reading activity consists of a parent reading activity and his/her child’s active listening activity. This joint activity often occurs in their home setting. Their
family relationships as well as physical and material conditions in their home (e.g., reading corner and books) have certain influences on their shared reading activity. Moreover, it always requires a close collaboration or well-matched interactions between the parent and his/her child. Their joint reading outcomes depend on many factors such as their reading motive (e.g., love to read for knowledge or entertainment), reading condition (e.g., storybooks, quiet and comfortable reading corner, Hue dialect) and the way they read and talk together (e.g., read clearly and expressively, ask questions, give suggestions and explanations suitable to their child’s ability and interest). From this workshop, the parents developed not only shared reading motivation, but also knowledge and essential skills to manage the shared reading activity with their children effectively.

In addition, the parents were provided with a DVD of shared reading samples and a shared reading brochure (see Appendix 22). These documents enabled them to access information about the instruction of shared reading techniques easily whenever needed. Their children were also invited to attend the workshop, so the parents could practice shared reading techniques with their own child under coaching of the researcher and a research assistant who is an early childhood teacher educator in child language development. Next, nine individual coaching sessions for each family at their home setting were conducted by the researcher herself.

The reading techniques which were introduced to the parents were similar to those of “dialogic reading” (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), and also were similar to effective reading techniques of Vietnamese highly educated parents as found by Tran (2003). The purpose of this study was to examine effects of a family storybook reading activity intervention on children’s vocabulary and comprehension development. Therefore, the ten following picture storybook reading techniques (or actions and operations) which aim at benefiting children in many ways, were discussed with parents.
1. **Warming-up**: Activate the child’s prior knowledge, interest and attention by questions, gestures or statements relating to the story that will be read.

2. **Identifying and labeling**: Discuss with the child the way to hold, to read the books, and objects, settings, characters pictured, or some letters printed in the books.

3. **Explaining**: Provide the child with suggestions or explanations to help make meaning of a new word or of an incomprehensible sentence, when necessary.

4. **Recalling**: Ask the child to remember main information presented explicitly in the story.

5. **Inferring**: Discuss with the child how to make inference about information presented implicitly in the story by what, where and why questions or by suggestions, comments and models.

6. **Relating**: Require the child to relate the content of the story to the real world around him/her or his/her experiences.

7. **Commenting**: Ask or suggest the child to state his/her own thinking and feelings about the content and/or the form of the story, for example, solutions given by the main character, the illustrations and language styles presented in the book (e.g., Which character in this story do you like most? Why?)

8. **Elaborating**: Provide an appropriate, accurate response when the child’s statement is inadequate.

9. **Praising and encouraging**: Give the child praise and encouragement by both gestures and statements whenever he or she makes a good response.

10. **Having fun**: Create a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere for shared reading by choosing a suitable place, giving the child a smiling face and gentle gestures; using an expressive reading voice and, sometimes, taking a game-like approach to discussing the story with the child.
In the second week of intervention, the researcher visited every family and gave them feedback from their baseline data. The parents received the first of the three Vietnamese storybooks with the list of its six target words and four comprehension questions (see Table 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3). Referring to the full model of family shared storybook reading activity described before, these components were seen as their reading object (or reading goals) and reading condition (or reading material), and they were given by the researcher. Unlike previous interventions of “Dialogic reading” by Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst, et al., 1994; Zevenbergen et al., 2003; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003), the parents of the present study were not provided with a guide book in which reading techniques corresponding to each story are available. Given particular characteristics and conditions of each family and of each child, they might not find it easy to use certain techniques, while other particular techniques might be more suitable for them. Thus, through three individual coaching sessions for the first story, with one coaching session per week, each parent was encouraged to employ reading techniques learned from the workshop in a flexible way to the shared storybook reading with his/her own child, in his/her own home conditions and with at least three shared reading times per week. They were also encouraged to use Hue dialect as a means to link to Vietnamese standard written language. This aimed at preserving Hue culture and language as well as the identity of Hue people.

After completing each shared reading session where parents were coached by the researcher, the three language tests were used to assess the child’s development of receptive and expressive vocabulary and narrative comprehension. The processes of their shared storybook readings and child’s language assessment were videotaped. Then, they watched what and how their shared reading activity (not language assessment) occurred from the tape. The researcher gave them additional feedback based on their practice, and also gave them praise and encouragement for their efforts.
Next, similar to the first story, every three weeks, the parents received each of the other two storybooks with its six target words, four comprehension tasks and three coaching sessions. The three language tests were used to measure the children’s ability of vocabulary and narrative comprehension immediately at the end of the shared reading sessions coached by the researcher.

**Transfer**

Two weeks after the last coaching session of the intervention, the researcher returned to each family to introduce three new storybooks and ask the parents to define target words and narrative comprehension components of the new books by themselves. The purpose of this period was to determine whether the parents’ learned skills associated with shared storybook reading activity continued to be applied to a set of different materials with no additional coaching sessions. Also, the researcher wanted to know how their children achieved the new target words and narrative comprehension components from the new books, and if the children maintained the language behaviours they had learned from the three storybooks used for the intervention. Data about the new target words and narrative comprehension components from the new storybooks are not presented in this thesis. Every three weeks, the researcher visited each family, observed and assessed the effects of their shared reading activity by using language learning targets devised previously by the parents. In addition, at the fifth week of this period (and also seven weeks after the intervention), the original language tests were administered individually to each child in order to measure longer-term effects of the intervention. The child listened to each story again before completing the original narrative comprehension test.
Maintenance

At four weeks and then at twelve weeks after the end of the transfer phase, when the children were attending primary schools, the researcher returned to each family to have conversations with them, and to observe their shared storybook reading activity in their own home contexts. They were also provided with some money to buy storybooks for their children. This helped the researcher to confirm if the parents knew how to choose good storybooks for their children. In addition, the language test still continued to be used for assessment of longer-term effects of the intervention on the children’s language development (i.e., 22 weeks after the intervention). In this final phase, the researcher visited and observed the target children’s primary schools and classes. Questionnaires, conversations and interviews were conducted with their teachers and principals to understand how the primary school context affected their family storybook reading activity. In addition, the researcher reviewed the target students’ files and other school documents to gain knowledge of the children’s progress in Vietnamese language learning in the first term of Year 1.

In summary, a time line of the intervention procedure and data collection is shown as follows (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 - A time line of the intervention procedure and data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>0 – 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>4th – 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>15th – 24th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>28th – 39th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Measures and Data Collection**

The present study was conducted through four phases of data collection, including baseline, ten-week intervention, ten-week transfer and twelve-week maintenance. Throughout all these four phases, qualitative data were collected by the following methods: informal conversations, opened-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and review of documents and journals. Quantitative data were mainly collected through language tests, participant observations, and review of reading journals. Using these methods, this project gained not only rich descriptions of context and process of the family storybook reading activity intervention, but also its outcomes in terms of the children’s vocabulary gains and comprehension development, and parents’ enhancement of reading techniques.

(a) **Informal conversation**

Fontana and Frey (1994) asserted that, “Gaining trust is essential to an interviewer’s success”, and “close rapport with respondents opens doors to more informed research” (p. 367). Therefore, to establish good rapport with the participants, to foster a climate of trust, and also to gain tacit knowledge, many informal conversations were conducted with the six children, their parents and teachers at both their home and school settings (from 20 to 40 minutes for each conversation). These conversations also yielded information important to the triangulation process described above. Moreover, using this method became very helpful to “warm up” observations and semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

With the first conversations when the close relationship between the researcher and the participants had not yet been formed, the important information obtained from the conversations was recorded retrospectively as notes in the research.
journal after the researcher had left the setting of the conversations. Later, when
the researcher and the participants had come to know one another better and
parents had become more comfortable in sharing their ideas, she asked her
participants for permission to take notes or audio record during the conversations
with them, if necessary.

(b) Open-ended questionnaire

In this study, open-ended questionnaires were research instruments designed in
order to gain exploratory and descriptive, primarily qualitative data about the
preschool and primary teachers’ perspectives on the family storybook reading
practices of their students, which might affect the children’s language learning at
home and at school. Open-ended questionnaires were also employed to survey the
parents’ understandings of family storybook reading activity, as well as their
backgrounds. They were used to describe parents’ ideas and beliefs which are
socially and culturally located. After checking their feasibility with a trial study
group (who were the other two preschool teachers and the other two Year-1
teachers at Thua Thien Hue province schools, and the other four parents whose
children were preschoolers of these teachers), the open-ended questionnaires (see
Appendix 17& 18) were sent to the preschool and primary teachers and the parents
of the main sample, with a week given to complete them. This basic information
obtained from the questionnaires was essential to have prior to the interviews.

(c) Semi-structured, in-depth interview

Burns (1994) argues that, “An interview is a verbal interchange, often face to face,
thought [sic] the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit
information, beliefs or opinions from another person” (p. 278). There are three
different formats of interviews, namely, unstructured, semi-structured and
structured interview. Semi-structured, in-depth interview was understood as part
of a structured interview or an unstructured interview.
Rather than having a specific interview schedule or none at all, an interview guide may be developed for some parts of the study in which without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions, a direction is given to the interview so that the content focuses on the crucial issues of the study. This permits greater flexibility than the close-ended type and permits a more valid response from the informant’s perception of reality. (Burns, 1994, p. 278-279)

Firstly, the researcher completed a trial of interviews with the same trial study group (who took part in the trial study for the open-ended questionnaires: two preschool teachers, two Year-1 teachers, and four parents). Four children of the parents from the trial study group, another preschool principal and another primary school principal were also invited to conduct the trial of interviews. This helped to improve her interview skills, and to predict problems that might occur during interviews with the main sample, as well as to find the best way to proceed. Then, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the main sample (the six children, their parents, teachers and principals), to understand clearly the information gleaned from the open-ended questionnaires and other necessary information, especially about their beliefs, interests, and experiences in relation to this research topic. Each family was involved in eight interviews, of about 30 minutes for the child participant (see Appendix 19), and 40 to 60 minutes for adult participants in each interview. Two 60-minute interviews were conducted with each preschool teacher and a 40-minute interview with each principal (see Appendix 16). The interviews with the children and their parents, teachers and principals were conducted before, during and after the intervention to understand how and why an effect might have occurred.

Gollop (2000) states that it is best to interview participants, especially children, whenever and wherever they feel most comfortable. Thus, the researcher suggested the participants choose the time and place that was most convenient for them to carry out interviews. Moreover, to better follow ideas presented at the speed of oral language, and to keep information obtained from interviews
accurate, as well as to be a “good listener”, the interviewer asked the interviewees for permission to audiotape for the duration of the interviews, which was later transcribed for use in data analysis. Nevertheless, the appearance of non-verbal information such as gesture, and attitude during the interviews required the interviewer to combine both observation and note taking when required.

**(d) Participant observation**

Patton (1990) writes,

> In participant observation the researcher shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study. The purpose of such participation is to develop an insider’s view of what is happening. This means that the evaluator not only sees what is happening but feels what it is like to be a part of the setting. (p. 207)

Therefore, the researcher combined direct participation and observation to be able to enter the lives of others. Natural interactions between the children and their parents as well as other family members during their storybook reading in their home settings (e.g., enhancing attention to text, promoting interactive reading, supporting comprehension and using literacy strategies) were observed. To gain a picture of verbal- and non-verbal interactions, the researcher asked participants for permission to videotape 14 reading and testing sessions, record notes, and to take some pictures of their activities. The field notes and the videotapes transcribed were later used in the data analysis. Testing sessions recorded from the videotapes were used for gaining inter-observer agreement. The pictures provided explicit and specific evidence to understand the observed contexts (see Part Four - Chapter One: “The Context”). In addition, in order to obtain more tacit knowledge, the researcher observed the family literacy environments in which the children were living (book-shelf, learning corner and so on). Also, two observations were conducted in each of the school settings, focusing on the school
libraries and classrooms in which the children were studying. The data gained from these setting observations were noted in the research journal.

(e) Review of documents

The data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on. (Merriam, 1998, p. 126)

Merriam (1998) classified documents into three main kinds such as public records, personal documents, and physical material. In the present study, data were collected from public records such as school reports, student files, and other official records. As Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue, “The first and most important injunction to anyone looking for official records is to presume that if an event happened, some record of it exists” (p. 253). The researcher asked the teachers and the parents for permission to review the six target children’s files to obtain their personal information (e.g., birth day, family background, place of residence, learning progress). In addition, other official documents such as bulletins, handbooks and statistical tables that related to social and educational issues provided by the children’s preschools and primary schools, as well as by other educational organizations in Thua Thien Hue province were very helpful for the researcher to identify the wider context of the study. Taking notes and photocopying were used to keep the information from these documents.

(f) Review of journals

In contrast to public records, journals or diaries are personal documents or self-reports, as suggested by Brown and Dowling (1998),
In order to follow the activities of participants in their everyday lives you may ask them to keep a diary of events … to record what are they doing, in term of the categories you have provided … This kind of diary is a form of self-administered, structured observation … (p. 65)

This method was employed for the longest time of data collection from April 2006 to December 2006. The researcher gave the children and their parents six notebooks and pens, and guided them to write a ‘family storybook reading journal’ that described their practices of storybook reading to, with and by their children in their home settings, according to the main issues of the focus of inquiry (see Appendix 20). Their journals contained sufficient and systematic information of the themes the researcher wanted to know in relation to this project, especially the frequency of storybook reading that occurred over a long time. These journals were collected directly by the researcher every month.

(g) Language tests

From each of the three Vietnamese storybooks used for the intervention, three kinds of language test were designed to assess the children’s vocabulary and comprehension development before, during and after the intervention. The tests cover receptive and expressive vocabulary and narrative comprehension.

A receptive vocabulary test was used to examine the children’s receptive knowledge of the 18 target words (i.e., six target words from each of the three storybooks, see Table 3.3). The procedure and format of this test were similar to those of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Third Edition (PPVT-III) (Dunn & Dunn, 1997). Specifically, the children were presented with four colourful illustrations on a test plate (e.g., an oil lamp, a candle, an electric torch, and an electric lamp, see Appendix 23). Each child was asked to identify a target item named by the researcher (e.g., “Show me oil lamp, please!”). Each correct response received two points, whereas each incorrect response was scored as 0.
An expressive vocabulary test was employed to determine the children’s expressive knowledge of the 18 target words that appeared in the receptive vocabulary test. Its procedure and format was similar to those of the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test – Revised (EOWPVT-R) (Gardner, 1990). The children were presented a series of the 18 test plates corresponding to the 18 target words. Each plate depicted a single illustrated item (e.g., an oil lamp). The researcher asked the children to label the item depicted on the plate. Each correct response received two points. Each partially correct response (e.g., a synonym, Hue dialect) received one point, whereas each incorrect response was scored as 0.

The narrative comprehension test was designed to assess the children’s abilities to construct meaning from the three stories read to them. Similar to narrative comprehension tests designed by McNaughton (cited in Werner, 2003) and Paris and Paris (2003), this test consists of the 12 narrative comprehension tasks (see Table 3.4). For each of the three stories there were four comprehension tasks which asked the children to retell or identify main ideas, recall information, make inferences and comments about the story. Each correct response received two points. Each partially correct response gained one point, whereas each incorrect response was scored as 0.

After confirming the feasibility and reliability of the three language tests through carrying out a trial study with a sub-sample of the preschoolers, these tests were used as repeated measures for assessment of the vocabulary and comprehension development of the six children from the main sample through each phase.

To ensure reliability of the language assessment, a second-observer (who was a lecturer in Child Language Development, at Department of Early Childhood Education, at Thua Thien Hue College of Education) was trained to work with the researcher. Fifty percent of the videotaped measures (N=42) were randomly selected to gain an agreement for the language assessment. Each observer assessed each videotaped session independently using the measure. The two observers’
scores were checked using an exact agreement formula \( \text{i.e., } \frac{\text{Na} \times 100\%}{\text{Na} + \text{Nd}} \), which resulted in a 98% of agreement. The observers, then, discussed the few disagreements to reach consensus on the score assigned.

**(h) Parent reading techniques**

Table 3.6 - Examples of the rules for counting an occurrence of a reading technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TECHNIQUES</th>
<th>PARENT’S BEHAVIOURS ILLUSTRATING TECHNIQUES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warming-up</td>
<td>Now I read to you the story “Silly game” OR Do you like it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying and</td>
<td>Who is this? OR Who was Little Pig doing here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td>Someone is kind when he/she is willing to help other people. OR Sick people sometimes cannot speak loudly and clearly. They speak faintly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalling</td>
<td>What did Little Pig feel when his house was burnt? OR What did Krong do when he saw a beggar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td>What will happen if you often deceive someone? OR What does the haughty and arrogant often meet with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating</td>
<td>Have you ever seen a pig? OR When do we use an oil lamp?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenting</td>
<td>Do you love the Rice Fairy? Why? OR Who do you love most in this story? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborating</td>
<td>Child: When getting rich, Krong changed his manner. Parent: When getting rich, Krong became greedy and cruel. OR Child: The girl shared the rice with her neighbours. Parent: The girl shared the rice with her neighbours and silently thanked the Rice Fairy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising and</td>
<td>Well done. OR Right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouraging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having fun</td>
<td>Holding the child when reading. OR Read expressively “Hee hee” to make funny sounds as the Pig’s laugh.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All shared reading sessions were videotaped. Data about frequencies of parents reading techniques presented in this thesis were obtained from eighteen reading sessions at the Baseline phase (i.e., the six families read the three target books before the intervention) and 18 further reading sessions at the Intervention phase (i.e., in each family, one reading session for each target book was randomly selected to observe). To ensure reliability for assessment of the parent reading technique frequencies, fifty percent of the reading sessions (N=18) were randomly chosen to gain an agreement. The second-observer was trained to work with the researcher. Similar to the procedure of language assessment, each observer assessed each videotaped reading session independently using rules of counting. These rules were consistent with the content of each technique introduced before (see “Intervention” in Part Three). Repetitions of the technique were counted. In Table 3.6, each instance of a behaviour which illustrated the technique was counted. The two observers’ scores were checked using the exact agreement formula \( \frac{Na*100\%}{(Na+ Nd)} \), which resulted in a 90% of agreement. The observers, then, discussed the few disagreements to reach consensus on the score gained.

(i) Statistics

Each individual child’s scores gained from each of the three tests of receptive and expressive vocabulary and narrative comprehension, corresponding to each of the three stories, were summed for finding averages. Similarly, the total frequencies of home reading events and parental reading techniques were summed. These quantitative data, then, were graphed for analysis. Visual inspection of the repeated measures was used to interpret trends and levels in the data series.
Data Analysis

As a result of the combination between case studies and single-subject experimental designs, research findings obtained from this project were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Family practices in reading storybooks were described using frameworks for activity analysis available from previous studies (McNaughton, 1995; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Tran, 2003; Wan, 2000).

Each individual child’s vocabulary and comprehension scores were graphed and analysed as required in a single-subject experiment research employing a multiple-baseline-different-behaviours design by Neuman and Gallagher (1994). The basic quantitative approach to the analysis of repeated measures is to examine properties of the time series in terms of level and trend through visual inspection. The nature of the data and the design format did not require more complex statistical procedures. The in-built replication across books and across subjects provided a firm basis for the confidence in the visual inspection.

Quantitative analysis was also used to examine changes in the total frequencies of parent reading techniques across books over the time. The total frequency of each technique were counted and compared among those of the ten techniques. Again, given the small sample size and the quasi experimental design format, more complex statistical procedures were not needed.

Unlike quantitative approach, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Patton also stated that,

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it
means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s
going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that
particular setting – and in the analysis to be able to communicate that
faithfully to others who are interested in that setting … The analysis strives

According to Merriam (1998), quantitative research takes apart a phenomenon to
examine component parts as variables of the study, while qualitative research can
discover how all the parts work together to form a whole. Thus, first of all, as an
integral part of data analysis, the settings in which this study was carried out as well
as in which their family shared reading activities occurred, were understood and
described clearly (see Part Four – Chapter One “The Context”).

Next, the following issues of the focus of inquiry, specifically (1) the readers
themselves, and the motives and goals of their reading, (2) the types of storybooks
selected for reading to children, (3) the frequency of storybook reading, and (4) the
styles of child-adult interactions through storybook reading (including the parental
reading techniques used); (5) children’s vocabulary development before, during
and after intervention; (6) children’s narrative comprehension development before,
during and after intervention; and (7) home-school connections, were viewed as the
emerging themes that not only guided the collection of the data, but also formed the
basis of data analysis. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), “In most forms of
cases, the emerging themes guide data collection, but formal analysis and theory
development do not occur until after the data collection is near completion” (p. 66).

In order to analyse and present data in a clear and explicit manner, the constant
comparative method was used. The constant comparative method of analysing
qualitative data combined inductive category coding with a simultaneous
comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Normally, in multiple or comparative case studies, there are two stages of analysis.
The units of meaning are first analysed within each case, and then compared across
cases (Yin, 1994; Merriam, 1998). “For the within-case analysis, each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself ... Once the data analysis of each case is completed, cross-case analysis begins” (Merriam, 1998, p. 194-195). However, this study employed an innovative way to do a cross-case comparison of qualitative case studies. As introduced by West and Oldfather (1995), “pooled case comparison” that begins with raw data allows the comparison of “… separate but similar studies ex post facto; like the overlaying of one transparency on another, this method highlights both the uniqueness and the commonality [sic] of participants’ experiences and allows us to understand each study more fully” (p. 454). West and Oldfather (1995) note that, “… a unique and essential quality of pooled case comparison is that raw data from separate studies are not simply compared but are pooled for new analysis” (p. 457). Therefore, firstly, in ‘a case record’, the data of one case collected from various resources and by various methods were classified into themes which were basically consistent with the main issues in this focus of inquiry, and based on the review of literature. After returning to New Zealand, in May 2007, the six case records were completed. According to Patton (1990),

The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package. The case record includes all the major information that will be used in doing the final case analysis and case study. Information is edited, redundancies are sorted out, parts are fitted together, and the case record is organized for already access either chronologically and/or topically. The case report must be complete but manageable. (p. 386-387)

Then, these case records were pooled, and classified into themes. Similarities and differences among the six cases were discovered and analysed in depth within each theme, and presented in this final case studies’ report.

In brief, a combination of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the new method of “pooled case comparison” (West & Oldfather, 1995) was used, through the four steps of data analysis as follows:
Step 1 – Complete the six case records
Step 2 – Pool the case records, and classify the pooled data into themes
Step 3 – Discover similarities and differences among the six cases within each theme
Step 4 – Analyse the data and discuss the findings

As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert, this procedure was complex and required an ability to think analytically, but it was an important way of controlling the scope of data collection and making multi-site studies theoretically relevant. Although the constant comparative method may rely on descriptive data to present theory, it transcends the purposes of descriptive case studies.

Ethical Considerations

When discussing ethical features of qualitative research, Punch (1994) writes, “In essence, most concern revolves around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data” (p. 89). The participants “… have the right to be informed that they are being researched and also about the nature of the research” (Punch, 1994, p. 90). Accordingly, as stated before, recruiting letters, information sheets and consent forms were sent to the participants for their permission to become involved in this project. All their questions related to the research were answered and explained fully. The researcher undertook the responsibility to implement every principle discussed in the information sheet about the rights of the participants (e.g., the right to withdraw themselves from this study, and the right to withdraw the information they provide to the researcher).

In addition, to protect the privacy and identity of the participants, Bulmer (1982) suggests, “Identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form, and all data kept securely confidential” (p. 225). Therefore, the second observer was asked for confidentiality
agreement before working with the research data (see Appendix 21). All the names of the particular people and places should be changed in the final research report. However, in the present research, the participants valued their own identity. It would amount to a lack of respect to them, if their identity were changed. When the participants had understood that this project would benefit them and their children, they asked the researcher to preserve their own identity in terms of their real names, occupations, and addresses with their written statement on the consent forms. They also allowed the researcher to use their pictures for the research purposes. Besides that, no information obtained during this research process was discussed with anyone outside of the research team, the research supervisors and the relevant participants without the written permission of the participants. After receiving the approval of the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee, this research was commenced.
PART FOUR – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Part Four includes three chapters. Chapter One introduces the participants’ school and home contexts, as well as related demographic information about the six cases. Chapter Two reports and analyses the research findings in relation to the research questions and the focus of inquiry. The findings of the present study were discussed in Chapter Three.
Chapter One: The Context

According to Vygotsky (1962, 1978, & 1981) and Neo-Vygotskyans (Bruner, 1983; Garton & Pratt, 1998; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Steward, 1995), individual psychological functions, including language are constructed by interactions between the individual and his/her social milieu, both institutional and interpersonal, in which the individual is embedded. Leont’ev (1981) also confirmed that the human individual’s activity does not exist without social relations. “Personal meaning is tied to context” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 45). The emerging view of dynamic and dialectical relations among culture, context, and cognition have broadened and deepened our understanding of children’s learning (Jacop, 1992). Therefore, to establish the properties and effects of the family storybook reading activity of the six children and their language development, it was important to understand these participants within their particular social contexts. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated, “It is the function of the case study, with its ‘thick description’, to provide the essential judgmental information about the studied context” (p. 217). In this chapter, an indepth description of the participants’ school and home contexts, as well as related personal information about the six cases11, are presented.

Participants’ School Contexts

As indicated in Part Three, Vinh Ninh preschool and Phu Thuong preschool were invited to participate in this study.

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11 - The personal information about the six cases, and the information about their school and home contexts gained from all the methods and recourse as described in “Data Collection” (see Part Three).
Vinh Ninh Preschool

Vinh Ninh preschool (see Photograph 4.1.1) is one of the best early childhood education and care centres in Hue city. For many years, the preschool has gained significant educational achievements and had been offered a “Certificate of Merit” from the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. At the time of the study, there were 331 under six-year-old children, with 17 teachers and 10 general staff. The principal had held her position at this preschool for 28 years. All the teachers possessed a Diploma and/or Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education and Care. They often worked five to six days a week, from 6:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. each day. Only 35 percent of the teachers and staff there were paid by Vietnamese Government, the rest of them were paid by the preschool, from family contributions.

Photograph 4.1.1 - Vinh Ninh preschool
(Observation, March 24th, 2006)
In Vinh Ninh ward, 100 percent of five-year-old children attended the preschool, while just about 30 percent of under three-year-old children from the ward accessed their early childhood education at this child care centre. Many children from outside Vinh Ninh ward also wanted to attend the child care centre because of its educational quality. Therefore, in some classes, it was over crowded with about 45 to 47 five-year-old children, including some mildly disabled children. Usually, each big class needed two teachers. Huynh Ngoc Anh, Le Huy and Cong Khiem were members of such a big class. Their main teacher was Mrs. Yen Loan who had a reputation as an excellent teacher. After completing her Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care, she had worked there for 17 years, and was attending an in-service education programme to complete her Bachelors degree. Their co-teacher also had more than ten years of experience in the preschool.

Although the principal and the main teacher understood thoroughly the benefits of reading storybooks to children at home, Vinh Ninh preschool did not have a library. In Mrs. Yen Loan’s class, there were about 50 storybooks, including books made by the teachers. Most of these books were donated by parents. The preschool had tried to encourage parents to tell stories to their children at home, but had not mentioned reading storybooks to them to date. Mrs. Yen Loan reported, “Generally, this issue [reading storybooks to children at home] has not been disseminated broadly and not given in detail to parents yet. We have just promoted telling stories” (Interview on May 11th, 2006 at Vinh Ninh preschool). Based on the Vietnamese Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum, the teacher told stories to five-year-old children during teaching periods dealing with “Contact to Literature”. Reading storybooks to children in her class was an optional activity occurring at least three times a week. However, not all the children in her class could participate in the reading event effectively as it was often organized with a very big group of 45 children.
Phu Thuong preschool

Phu Thuong preschool is located in Phu Thuong commune, Phu Vang district, Thua Thien Hue province (see Photograph 4.1.2). Phu Thuong is a suburban area of Hue city. Unlike Vinh Ninh which is a state early childhood education and care centre, Phu Thuong preschool is a private one. It has three small units in three different villages. Ngoc Anh unit (or Ngoc Anh preschool), which is located in Ngoc Anh village, was chosen as a site to carry out this project.

Photograph 4.1.2 - Phu Thuong preschool - Ngoc Anh unit
(Observation, March 28th, 2006)

In Ngoc Anh unit, there were three teachers and one general staff. Several times a week, the principal and the vice-principal visited this unit. The principal had held this position in Phu Thuong preschool for eleven years. The principal and all the teachers had gained a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care. The vice-principal had completed her Bachelors degree. There were two classes, one for
three or under three-year-old children and the other for three to five-year-old children. Each class had 31 to 35 children. There were two teachers in the three and under three-year-old children’s class, while there was just one teacher in three to five-year-old children’s class. Lan Trinh, Nhat and Tan attended the same three to five-year-old class. The teachers and staff at Ngoc Anh preschool worked five days a week, from 6:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. each day. They were wholly paid by family contributions.

In Ngoc Anh village, 98 percent of five-year-old children and 30 percent of three and under three-year-old children went to the preschool. Most of their parents are farmers and small traders. They work very hard, but their incomes are quite low. However, they have high regard with respect to their children’s education.

Ngoc Anh preschool had neither a well-equipped playground nor a library for children. At the beginning of each academic year, the teachers often suggested that parents donate some children’s storybooks to the preschool. As a result of this act, in each class, there were about 20 storybooks, including books made by the teachers. Like Vinh Ninh preschool, reading storybooks to children at Ngoc Anh preschool was an optional activity for teachers, while telling stories was carried out based on the Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. The Principal and Mrs. Nga who was the teacher of Lan Trinh, Nhat and Tan understood well the benefits of shared reading of storybooks to children at home. However, they had not given any support to parents to develop this activity in their family yet, especially to less well educated parents. Mrs. Nga said that,

_I myself as well as the preschool did not talk about ‘Reading storybooks to your children’ before… Parents did not know about reading storybooks to their children like this. Now, only my class knows this project, while the rest of classes do not know… but just parents who take part in the project know’._ (Interview on April 4th, 2006 at Ngoc Anh preschool)
Moreover, Mrs. Nga explained, most parents while mainly focused on their children’s learning, did not read storybooks to their children. They thought that it was good enough for their children to know how to read, how to write and how to calculate. For them, reading storybooks was an entertainment and did not constitute ‘learning’, so they were not concerned about it. Nevertheless, at home they still often told stories they knew or that they made up to their children.

In short, though the two preschools were located in different areas and had significant differences in teaching and learning conditions, both Vinh Ninh and Ngoc Anh child care centres had not given explicit and planned support to less well educated parents in order to develop storybook reading activity with their children at home.

Participants’ Home Contexts

Case 1- Nguyen Le Huy

Nguyen Le Huy was born on January 19th, 2000 in Hue city (see Photograph 4.1.3). Huy was a healthy boy, attending Vinh Ninh preschool. He was the first child of a two-child family. His father was 39 years old and had completed Year 12 of Comprehensive Education. He was an electrician and working for a hotel in Hue. His mother was 34 years old and also had finished Year 12. She was a worker at Thua Thien Hue printing factory. Huy had a younger sister. She was four years old and did love learning and playing at preschools like other young children who were the same age, but her parents could not afford to send her to any early childhood education and care centre.

Huy’s family was sharing a small house with his maternal grandmother in the centre of Hue city. Next to his house, there were some small rooms hired by university students and his aunt’s room where she lived with her eight-year-old
daughter. Huy’s parents had a low income with less than 300,000 VND\textsuperscript{12} for each person a month, and also for the financial reasons, their youngest child could not go to preschool. They always tried to look for extra jobs and worked hard to get more income. They hope to send their daughter to the preschool when she reaches the age of five.

Photograph 4.1.3 - Huy’s mother reading a picture storybook to him

(Observation at Huy’s living room, November 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2006)

At home, Huy’s father liked to read newspapers and magazines about science and technology. This home reading event occurred about three times a week. Since Huy was three years old, he often told Huy stories he knew and created. He had never read any storybook to his children. He thought that,

\textsuperscript{12} In April 2006 when this project started the data collection, 11,000 VND was equivalent to $NZ 01.
Because my son is still young, he cannot spell or read now. Therefore, it is not necessary to read storybooks to him. I intend when he goes to primary school and starts learning how to read, I will read storybooks to him. It will not be late then.

(Conversation on March 31st, 2006 at Huy’s house)

Accordingly, at the beginning of the data collection, there were no storybooks for children in Huy’s family. Huy’s father also considered declining the opportunity to participate in this project, though he had never ever received any support to develop storybook reading activity at their home setting.

**Case 2- Ho Cong Khiem**

![Photograph 4.1.4 - Khiem sharing a Vietnamese cartoon with his mother](image)

(Observation at Khiem’s living room, December 7th, 2006)

Ho Cong Khiem was born on September 2nd, 2000 in Hue city (see Photograph 4). Like Huy, Khiem was attending Vinh Ninh preschool, but he was thin and often easily got sick when the weather changed. Khiem was the only child in his family.
His mother was 41 years old and had completed Year 12. She was a butcher and often had to work at Ben Ngu market all day long. His father was 42 years old and had finished Year 7. He was a tailor and worked at home. Their income was at the middle level, with around 900,000 VND for each person a month. Khiem’s father liked to read the newspaper “Cong an” [Police] and often bought it every week. His mother just sometimes read books and newspapers at home. She read some books about Vietnamese traditional medicine to know how to look after her son well. She also liked to read funny stories. Khiem’s family was living close to his relatives and next to a house hired by university students. Khiem often played with his cousins who were nine to ten-year-old and loved reading children. Therefore, since Khiem was three, he wanted to have storybooks like his cousins. At bedtime, he did not like his mother to sing songs to him as she still did when Khiem was a little child. He asked his mother to tell stories and read storybooks to him, so he could fall asleep easily.

Though Khiem liked to be read to, his mother who primarily looked after him was often so busy and tired, she never took him to go to a library or a bookshop. She bought eight second-hand books sold on pavement stalls that she often passed by and sometimes borrowed some storybooks from Khiem’s cousins to read to him.

Case 3- Huynh Ngoc Anh

Huynh Ngoc Anh, a healthy and active girl, was born on January 14th, 2000 in Hue city (see Photograph 4.1.5). She was attending the same class as Huy and Khiem at Vinh Ninh preschool. She was the youngest child in a two-child family. Her older sister was a Year 9 student at Nguyen Chi Dieu junior secondary school in Hue. Anh’s father, a community service officer, was 37 years old and had completed Year 12. He had been trained in a military school to become a military officer and often came home at weekends. Her mother, a tailoring worker, was 39 years old and also had finished Year 12. She worked six days a week, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.
each day at an import-export company in Hue city. When the company was busy, she had to work more at night and the weekend to earn an extra income. Their monthly average income was about 400,000 VND for each person. Anh’s family was living in her parental grandmother’s garden with two other families of her uncle and aunt. There were also some hired rooms of university students in this garden. Anh’s maternal grandparents’ house was not far from her place, so she often visited them every week. Her maternal grandfather was a retired teacher who used to read stories to her mother when she was a little girl. Anh’s aunt was an Early Childhood educator. She often looked after Anh whenever her mother went out to work nightshift or at the weekend.

Photograph 4.1.5 - Anh listening attentively to her mother’s reading
(Observation at Anh’s living room, December 2nd, 2006)
At home, Anh’s parents read books, newspapers and magazines about once a week. Her mother liked to read books regarding kindness. Since Anh was 18 months old, her mother and aunt sometimes read stories to her. However, Anh’s parents never took her to any library or any bookshop to get storybooks. Anh’s mother often borrowed them from her sister and her friends. Before the data collection, there were six storybooks available in Anh’s house.

Case 4- Nguyen Quoc Nhat

Photograph 4.1.6 - Nhat enjoying a Vietnamese legend with his mother
(Observation at Nhat’s living room, November 19th, 2006)

Nguyen Quoc Nhat, a healthy and quiet boy, was born on January 3rd, 2000 in Phu Thuong commune, Phu Vang district, Thua Thien Hue province (see Photograph 4.1.6). He was attending Ngoc Anh preschool. Nhat was the first child of a two-child family. His younger brother was three years old and still stayed at
home. His father was 37 years old and had completed Year 5. He was working as a carpenter in Hue. His mother was 28 years old and had finished Year 7. She was a laundrywoman at a hotel. They often left home from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monthly, they earned an income of about 650,000 VND for each person. Nhat’s family and his uncle’s family were sharing a house with his paternal grandparents. Therefore, day by day his grandfather often took him to preschool and picked him up after class.

At home, his mother sometimes read the newspaper “Phu nu” [Women] and his father read “Cong an” [Police]. They rarely read or told stories to Nhat and his brother. According to them, Nhat did not like reading and could not understand stories well. Moreover, he had not gone to primary school yet, so they did not read many stories to him. His mother remembered that she had just read to him twice since he was five. The two books read to Nhat were borrowed from his relatives. Therefore, it was difficult to find a storybook for children in Nhat’s family at the beginning of the present research.

His mother wanted her son to be confident when going to primary school in the year 2007, thus she taught him the Vietnamese alphabet regularly. However, she did not believe in Nhat’s learning ability. She thought his ability to acquire knowledge was very slow and he often quickly forgot what he learnt.

Case 5- Pham Hoa Tan

Pham Hoa Tan was born on January 8th, 2000 in Thuy Van commune, Huong Thuy district, Thua Thien Hue province. Tan was a healthy and active boy (see Photograph 4.1.7). Like Nhat, Tan was attending Ngoc Anh preschool. He was the youngest child of a three-child family. His sisters were Year 4- and Year 6 students. His father was 38 years old and had completed Year 10. His mother was 33 years old and had finished Year 6. They were staying under the same roof with Tan’s paternal grandfather who was nearly 80 years old and very sick. Tan’s parents were
farmers with small rice fields and some pigs which could not meet their basic living demands. Therefore, they always tried to do extra jobs when the rice crops had been harvested. His father often worked as a carpenter around the province and his mother sold steamed rice with mussels on pavements in Hue city. They earned monthly an income of more than 300,000 VND for each person.

Photograph 4.1.7 - Sitting on the floor, Tan and his father sharing a picture storybook together
(Observation at Tan’s house, November 25th, 2006)

Tan’s mother often had to leave home very early in every morning, about 3 a.m. She was so busy all day long that she could not help Tan to learn daily. Tan’s father just sometimes checked his alphabet writing homework for him. Mostly, Tan did it by himself. At home, Tan’s parents read the newspapers “Phu nu” and
“The thao” [Sports] occasionally, but they had not read stories to him yet. Several times Tan’s older sisters took home some storybooks and the newspaper “Nhi dong” [Children] that they borrowed from their school library and friends. When they read aloud for themselves, Tan also listened to them. As shared by Tan’s father, their life was hard enough trying to afford food, clothes, textbooks, notebooks and pay tuition fee for all the three children. They never thought of buying or borrowing storybooks for their kids. The children’s learning was mostly entrusted to their teachers and schools.

Case 6- Ho Lan Trinh

Photograph 4.1.8 - Trinh’s mother relaxing her through shared storybook reading

(Observation at Trinh’s living room, November 25th, 2006)
Ho Lan Trinh, a little and shy girl, was born on October 3rd, 2000 in Phu Thuong commune, Phu Vang district, Thua Thien Hue province (see Photograph 4.1.8). Trinh was attending the same class as Nhat and Tan at Ngoc Anh preschool. She was the youngest child in a four-child family. Her oldest brother was a senior secondary school student. Trinh had two older sisters, one of them was a Year 8 student and the other was Year 3 student. Her father, a builder, was 41 years old and had completed Year 10. Her mother, a small trader, was 39 years old and had completed Year 7. Trinh’s family was living with her paternal grand mother who was also a small trader. They earned monthly over 300,000 VND for each person.

At home, Trinh’s brother and sisters often read Japanese cartoons. They had about 30 items of this kind of book. Her parents sometimes read newspapers such as “Phu nu” and “The thao”. As told by her mother, Trinh was read to since she was in her mother’s womb. At that time, Trinh’s mother liked to read Japanese cartoons for entertainment and she believed that her baby could feel these stories from her emotion and thoughts. However, when Trinh was born, her mother was so busy that she did not often read to Trinh any more. Reading stories to Trinh restarted with picture storybooks since Trinh was one year old and just occurred once a week. Sometimes, her siblings also read Japanese cartoons to her. As a result of this, Trinh loved to listen to storybook reading very much.

In conclusion, all the six children had normal physical development and came from the families of less well educated parents in Thua Thien Hue province. Though their parents valued education, only three of these children occasionally enjoyed family shared storybook reading with their parents. Moreover, each family had never received any direct support or guidance in initiating and carrying out storybook reading with their children.
Chapter Two: The Results

Introduction

This chapter describes changes in the storybook reading practices of the six children in their home settings and their language development through Baseline, Intervention, Transfer and Maintenance. This description aims to answer the following research questions (see “Part One”):

1. How familiar was the storybook reading activity to preschool children in less well-educated Vietnamese families?

2. What changes in the shared storybook reading activity in the less well-educated Vietnamese families occurred through the planned Intervention?

3. Did the Intervention regarding the family shared storybook reading activity positively influence Vietnamese children’s vocabulary and comprehension development?

Consistent with the seven issues of the focus of inquiry posed before (see “Part One”), this chapter consists of seven sections. The first section discusses who took part in the shared reading, and what their particular motives for family storybook reading were. The second section discusses both the quality (e.g., the content and form) and the quantity of stories used for their shared reading as well as independent reading by the children. The third section reports the amount of time that the children spent in family storybook reading (e.g., the number of years, the number of days per week and the number of minutes per day). The fourth section
provides evidence of child-adult family storybook reading interactional styles in the six families. The fifth section shows the children’s development of the receptive and expressive vocabulary from the three Vietnamese picture storybooks for children. The sixth section describes the children’s narrative comprehension development through listening to the three storybooks read by their parents. The last section examines the relationships between the children’s preschools, schools and their families in improving their family storybook reading practice. Within all the seven sections, the commonality and the uniqueness of the six cases are described. Findings from before the Intervention are compared with findings during and after the Intervention.

The Reading Participants and the Motives for Their Shared Reading Activity

Before the Intervention

Reading stories to young children occurred occasionally in three of the six families, specifically the families of Khiem, Anh and Trinh. Readers were varied and their reading beliefs and motives were also different (see Table 4.2.1). However, the readers and their child reading participants had shared motives. The readers were mothers, fathers, an aunt and older siblings. The mothers played the main role, not only in looking after their children and guiding them to learn how to read and write the Vietnamese alphabet and how to calculate with simple numbers, but also in reading stories to their children.

Khiem’s mother thought that these were her duties, while his father would look after him sometimes, but he never read books to him. Khiem’s mother liked to read stories to him in order to help him go to sleep easily, to educate him and to
widen his knowledge. For Khiem, he loved the shared storybook reading with his mother at bedtime because it helped him have a good sleep.

Similar to Khiem, Trinh’s mother was the closest person to her. Though she was very busy running her business, she still took care of her four children and supervised their learning. At home, Trinh’s mother and her older siblings sometimes shared storybooks with Trinh. Through their shared reading, Trinh’s mother wanted to entertain her, and to develop her knowledge of the world around her. Sometimes, Trinh’s siblings just read aloud their stories to comfort her when their mother was busy. In Trinh’s opinion, she engaged in shared reading because it brought her a lot of enjoyment.

In the case of Anh, both of her parents sometimes read stories to her. They said that, “Ngoc Anh is a very active girl, so we read books to her to keep her quiet and still sometimes” (Interview on 07th April 2006 at Anh’s house). Besides Anh’s parents, her aunt, an early childhood teacher, often focused on educating good behaviours and developing language for her whenever they read together. Anh stated that shared storybook reading helped her understand about characters and provided opportunities to enjoy beautiful illustrations.

Unlike the three children above, it was very rare for Huy, Nhat and Tan to listen to storybook reading at home. Therefore, they had no ideas about their motives for the family shared storybook reading. Although each of their parents wanted the children to know how to read and write soon, and they were also very patient in teaching their children the Vietnamese alphabet, they almost never read stories to their offspring. Huy’s father thought that it was not necessary to read stories to his young children before they went to school. He often relaxed with his children and addressed their desire for learning by telling stories he invented. Nhat’s and Tan’s parents also had the same point of view, so they did not consider sharing storybooks with their children. Up until the Baseline phase, Nhat’s parents did not
think that it was useful for their children to listen to storybook reading. For Tan, he sometimes listened to his older sisters when they read aloud their books at home. Tan never shared storybooks with his parents, because it was considered a low priority. Tan’s father said that,

_We are very busy earning our living. To have enough money for buying food, clothes, notebooks, text books and pens for my children, and paying their school fees, we have to work very hard from every early morning to evening. Therefore, we have no time to read stories to them. Indeed, we also have no money to buy storybooks, while many other things are more important for them._ (Interview on March 27th, 2006 at Tan’s house)

In summary, findings from the Baseline showed that the three mothers of Khiem, Anh and Trinh had some experiences of reading storybooks to their children at home. They understood that shared reading benefits the children in developing their knowledge and behaviours. Khiem, Anh and Trinh also identified some value in the activity. On the other hand, the parents of Huy, Nhat and Tan had not yet learnt about the significance of family storybook reading activity for their young children’s life (see Table 4.2.1). Furthermore, they identified financial difficulties as considerable barriers when thinking about buying storybooks for their children. They mostly had seldom shared storybooks with their children at home.

**During and after the Intervention**

Compared to the findings before the Intervention, the reading participants had a more developed understanding of the benefits of the family shared storybook reading afterwards. The parents now reported that their children could develop their language, including decoding skill, memory, thought, imagination and their cultural well-being through the activity. Reading books to their children provided the parents with chances to be close to their children and share with them
thoughts and feelings. Two parents reported changing from being worried and blaming their sons for being slow, to being pleased that their sons could understand and remember the stories very well, and could give correct and thoughtful answers.

In one case, Huy’s parents who never read storybooks to him before and also were initially reluctant to participate in the project said that,

“At the beginning, we did not want to take part in this project because of concerns of our small house without separated rooms. In addition, at that time we did not know clearly about the benefits of the project… Now, we recognize that the project helped both my children understand about stories. They understood the plot of stories and traits of each character. We were very happy when knowing how much our children understood stories. If we did not share stories with them, we would not know how their intelligence is … They really love storybook reading, especially new stories. They also learn to read by themselves and use many good words from stories.

(Conversation on June 10, 2006 at Huy’s house)

Although the Intervention did not provide direct supports to other family members, in some families older siblings played an active role in shared reading with their younger siblings. Before the Intervention, Trinh’s brother and sisters often read their Japanese cartoons to comfort her when their mother was busy. However, during and after the Intervention their motives changed. They focused on not only entertaining her, but also on developing Trinh’s knowledge and language. Similarly, in other families, Anh’s sister and Tan’s sisters, who did not read storybooks to Anh and Tan before, wanted to help Anh and Tan relax and improve their knowledge and language through shared storybook reading (see Table 4.2.1).

As a result of their active engagement in shared picture storybook reading with their parents and other family members, the six children’s motivation to read developed. They liked the family shared storybook reading because this activity
Table 4.2.1 - The reading participants and the main motives for their shared reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILIES</th>
<th>THE READING PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>THE MAIN MOTIVES FOR SHARED READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ho Cong Khiem (male, urban)</td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong> Help Khiem have good sleep, educate him and widen his knowledge</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Entertain him, develop his language, knowledge and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Entertain him, develop his language, knowledge and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Khiem</strong> Go to sleep easier</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Develop knowledge and relax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong> Keep her quiet and still</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Relax her, develop her knowledge, language and educate her moral values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huynh Ngoc Anh (female, urban)</td>
<td><strong>Father</strong> Comfort her</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Comfort her and widen her knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Aunt</strong> Educate her good behaviour, develop her language and memory</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Entertain her, develop her language and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Older sister</strong> Understand stories and enjoy beautiful illustrations.</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Comfort her, develop her language and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ngoc Anh</strong> Understand stories and enjoy beautiful illustrations.</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Develop knowledge and have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Father</strong> Comfort her</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Practice decoding and reading performance Understand stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Le Huy (male, urban)</td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong> Entertain Huy and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Entertain Huy and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Huy</strong> Understand stories and entertain</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Entertain Huy and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Older siblings</strong> Comfort her</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Entertain Huy, develop his knowledge, behaviours, language, specially decoding skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lan Trinh</strong> Have fun</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Understand stories and entertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Lan Trinh (female, rural)</td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong> Entertain Trinh and develop her knowledge</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Entertain Trinh, develop her knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Older siblings</strong> Comfort her</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Entertain Trinh, develop her knowledge, behaviours, language, including decoding skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lan Trinh</strong> Have fun</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Entertain Trinh and develop her knowledge and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**Nguyen Quoc Nhat (male, rural)</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Entertain Trinh and develop her knowledge and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mother</strong> Entertain Nhat and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Entertain Trinh and develop her knowledge, language, including decoding skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nhat</strong> Widen knowledge and relax</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Entertain Nhat and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Father</strong> Relax him and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Entertain Nhat and develop his knowledge, behaviours, language, including decoding skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Older sisters</strong> Entertain him and help him understand stories</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Relax Tan, develop his knowledge, behaviours and language, including decoding skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tan</strong> Understand stories and have fun</td>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong> Entertain him and help him understand stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**Pham Hoa Tan (male, rural)</td>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong> Understand stories and have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Father</strong> Relax him and develop his knowledge, language and behaviours</td>
<td><strong>After Intervention</strong> Understand stories and have fun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
helped to widen their knowledge, have fun and entertain themselves. Especially, Anh and Trinh learnt to read stories by looking at pictures, spelling and decoding Vietnamese written language from narrative texts. These little girls also wanted to practise their decoding skill and reading performance (see Table 4.2.1).

In conclusion, a change in the reading participants’ motives occurred, associated with the Intervention. As the Baseline data show, three of the six families (one from an urban area and two from a rural area) did not take part in the family shared storybook reading before, because they did not know about the benefits of the activity. As a result of the Intervention, all the six families actively engaged in the shared storybook reading activity and they articulated benefits from the activity which could address their educational and entertainment needs.

In the next section, some evidence of the participants’ storybook selection and the relationship between this and their reading motives and are described.

The Types of Children’s Storybooks Selected for Reading

Before the Intervention

Before the Intervention, few storybooks for young children were present in the homes. The numbers ranged from six (Anh’s family) to zero (Huy’s, Nhat’s and Tan’s family). Khiem had the second highest number with two items. Trinh’s mother and Khiem’s mother said that previously they bought about five to seven storybooks for their children. In Trinh’s home, there were also over 30 Japanese cartoons belonging to her siblings. However, Huy’s, Nhat’s and Tan’s parents never bought or borrowed storybooks for them and also never read storybooks to them at home.
The three children who did have storybooks liked to listen to humorous stories and stories about good people (see Table 4.2.2). The mothers thought that it was easier for their children to understand the content of stories by looking at the pictures. According to Khiem’s mother, pictures attracted her son. When he was curious about the content of the pictures, he asked his mother to read the picture storybooks to him. Trinh’s mother also often shared simple picture storybooks with Trinh, whilst her older siblings, who loved Japanese cartoons about sport and spy stories, often read these kinds of books to her.

Overall, the findings at the Baseline indicated that the number of storybooks in the children’s homes was very small. The parents who did shared reading with their children preferred picture storybooks to non-picture ones. In the other three families where the parents had no motive for shared reading, there were also no storybooks available for young children.

Changes in storybook selection for shared reading during and after the Intervention are described in the following section.

**During and after the Intervention**

Each family was provided with 22 commercially available picture storybooks, including three target books in Vietnamese, chosen because of their high standard of content, form and language style. Furthermore, they were suitable to the children’s ability and interest, but unfamiliar to them. The storybooks also contained Vietnamese moral and cultural values that Hue parents often emphasised when educating their children (Le Nguyen Luu, 2006; Tran, 2003, 2005). In addition, it was suggested that parents borrow more storybooks from other sources, such as their neighbours, extended family members, and school libraries if possible.
Through observation, conversation with the participants and review of their journals, the present research found that the parents and their children chose to read picture storybooks with simple narrative text, attractive illustrations, clear print and large font size. Consistent with their reading motives, they loved stories with moral lessons which helped form the children’s positive attitude towards learning and behaving, including legends, fables and other genres (e.g., true stories, daily life stories) (see Table 4.2.2).

When selecting storybooks to buy and borrow for their children, parents reported that they paid attention to a range of factors, including content, illustrations and language used in the books, seen as suitable to their own child’s ability and interest. They also valued the educational functions of stories. The stories were seen as a useful medium not only for developing the children’s moral values and behaviours, including language behaviours, but also for helping them to learn to read. Their rationales for how to choose good storybooks for their children changed. Tan’s father, who never thought about buying or reading storybooks for his children before, shared his experiences when choosing storybooks for his son as follows:

*Apart from educational meaning, the content should not be too long, but should be short and simple. If my child listens to a very long story, he is easily discouraged because he cannot understand it properly…Pictures are also necessary. Tan often looked at pictures and read along. He used pictures to predict happenings of each story, though he could not read the texts yet. In storybooks, he is more fascinated by pictures… I often took a long time to choose books for him. Sometimes, my wife lost her patience waiting for me at the bookshops, because I had to read through many books before I bought some of them. I need to know if the narrative texts are clear and understandable for my son. If the texts are printed in a small font size, it will be difficult to teach him to read.* (Interview on December 3rd, 2006 at Tan’s house)
Table 4.2.2 - The types of children’s storybooks selected for shared reading at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILIES</th>
<th>THE READING PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>THE TYPES OF STORYBOOKS SELECTED FOR SHARED READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Cong Khiem</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Humorous stories and good people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khiem</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Humorous stories and good people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huynh Ngoc Anh</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older sister</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ngoc Anh</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Le Huy</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huy</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Lan Trinh</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old siblings</td>
<td>- Japanese cartoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lan Trinh</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguyen Quoc Nhat</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nhat</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pham Hoa Tan</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older sisters</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tan</td>
<td>- Picture storybooks, legends and fables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Preferences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The parents did not often take their children to bookshops to buy books. They thought that their children could not read yet, thus they would not have preferences in storybooks. However, the children had their own favourite books. After listening to their parents’ reading the books they had, the children often chose some of them they liked to read again and again. The children loved legends and fables with engaging illustrations. Huy preferred fables, daily life stories and other stories which described fights. He said, “I like fighting stories because there are many strong people. I most like stick weapons” (Conversation on November 21st, 2006 at Huy’s house). In contrast, Trinh loved stories about exploration for treasure. Tan’s favourite books were about family relationships. For Anh Khiem and Nhat, these three children liked stories which praise kindness, cleverness and diligence of characters.

As a result of changes in the parents’ and the children’s knowledge and motivation in relation to the family shared storybook reading, they paid more attention to improving their own reading materials at home. They not only looked after the stories provided by the researcher carefully, but also bought and borrowed other stories to share together. Anh and Khiem began to borrow books from other sources (i.e., their extended families, Phuong Duc’s library). Compared with the number of their own books in the six families at the Baseline, there were many more owned by the end of the study (see Figure 4.2.1).

For example, Huy, who, initially, had no stories at home, had the most with 35 storybooks. The other two children Tan and Nhat, who had none of their own storybooks at the Baseline, had 30 books and 28 books, respectively. Similarly, Trinh went from only one storybook at the Baseline to 32 storybooks at the Maintenance.

With the availability of reading materials, the frequency of storybook sharing in the six families changed. The following section reports this change.
The number of storybooks available in the six families: Baseline and Maintenance

**The Frequency of Storybook Sharing**

**Before the Intervention**

Although all the six children were often told stories by their parents, only three of them were read storybooks at home.

The activity started very early for two children, Trinh and Anh. Trinh’s mother even read storybooks for children to her before her birth, because she believed that the thoughts and feelings created during her reading would have a positive influence on her unborn child. For Anh, her mother and aunt began reading to her when she was one and half years old. Khiem asked his mother to read to him at the age of three when he went to preschool, and also when he saw some neighbouring children reading picture storybooks. Nobody in Tan’s family deliberately initiated to read storybooks to him, except sometimes he listened to
his older sisters reading aloud their own books. Like Tan, when Nhat and Huy were six, before this research project commenced, storybook reading to them never occurred at their homes. In other words, Trinh and Anh experienced four and half years of family shared reading, and Khiem with two and half years, whereas Tan, Huy and Nhat were unfamiliar with this activity.

Although reading storybooks to children started quite early in the families of Trinh and Anh, it did not often occur, just once a week or less than that, and lasted about 15 to 20 minutes per occasion. The frequency was reported to be similar to that for Khiem who began shared reading at the age of three (see Figure 4.2.2).

![Figure 4.2.2- Mean number of days per week the children shared storybooks with their family members: Baseline and Intervention](image)

**Figure 4.2.2- Mean number of days per week the children shared storybooks with their family members: Baseline and Intervention**

*During and after Intervention*

Based on the understanding of the process of internalisation over the time (Gal’perin, 1992; Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Tran, 2003;
Vygotsky, 1978), this project encouraged the parents and their family members to read storybooks to their preschoolers at least three days a week. Consistent with storybooks becoming more available at home, during the Intervention their joint reading activity occurred more frequently as reported in their home reading journals, interviews and conversations (Figure 4.2.2).

The parents reported that following the Intervention, all of the six children were read to at least three times a week (see Figure 4.2.2). Children often initiated the activity by asking their parents, siblings, other family members (e.g., aunt, cousin) and neighbours to read books to them.

Specifically, during the Intervention, Anh’s parents and her sister read picture storybooks to her every day (see Figure 4.2.2), for about 30 minutes. When Anh was able to read by herself, they still shared books with her daily. They read to her or listened to her reading and also answered her questions, even when she was reading alone. In fact, after the Intervention, Anh often liked to practise decoding and reading aloud texts in picture storybooks by herself. Sometimes, she also took several stories to her summer classes to read them during tea-breaks. As a result of the frequency of her storybook reading, before going to primary school, Ngoc Anh could read independently and quite fluently some picture storybooks which contained from 300 to 400 words. As reported further below, she understood their narrative meaning and could retell them when required (see Photograph 4.2.1).

Similarly, Trinh also had formed a routinized storybook sharing with her family members, over an average of six days a week (see Figure 4.2.2), and estimated each occasion to be 20 minutes. Trinh’s mother and her older siblings loved to read to her and teach her how to read. Like Anh, at the end of the first semester of Year 1 when most her friends were learning to decode word by word, Trinh could read narrative texts accurately and fluently. This progress of Anh and Trinh was comparable to that of children from highly educated families (Tran, 2003).
Khiem’s mother read to him, on average, four days a week (see Figure 4.2.2), about 15 to 20 minutes a day. Khiem’s mother who was the main reader to him was often very busy, while his father never shared books with him. After finishing her trading work at Ben Ngu market, Khiem’s mother cooked dinner for the whole family, helped Khiem to complete his homework, then she read stories to Khiem at bedtime. Khiem also often got sick when the weather changed. Thus, his mother always had to look after him very carefully, and their shared reading most often occurred when he was well.

A large change in the frequency of storybook reading occurred for Huy who was never read stories before. He and his younger sister often asked their parents, their first cousin (who was a Year 2 student, living next door), and neighbours to share stories with them. His mother said, “Both parents read to them, and our neighbouring university students and my niece read to them, too” (Conversation on June 10th, 2006 at Huy’s house). Accordingly, following the
Intervention, Huy had an average of four days per week sharing storybooks with his family members (see Figure 4.2.2), with around 20 minutes per day. Huy always preferred reading new stories to repeating old stories. Therefore, the small number of storybooks at his home did not satisfy him. His mother stated, “Huy did love reading new stories. After repeated reading a story for three times to him, he felt bored and kept saying, ‘I know it already. I don’t want to read it anymore’” (Conversation on June 10th, 2006 at Huy’s house). However, Huy’s parents could not afford to buy or borrow many more books from other sources to read every day to him.

Similar to Huy, Nhat and Tan, who had no experience of family storybook reading before the Intervention, also experienced significant changes in their storybook sharing routine. Both of them had an average of three days per week sharing storybooks with their family members (see Figure 4.2.2), for about 20 minutes a day. Nhat’s mother and his aunt-in-law often read books to him and his younger brother, mostly every day during the Intervention. Unfortunately, after the Intervention his grandparents had an accident. Nhat’s mother and his aunt-in-law had to provide special care to his grandparents, so they had not as much time to share books with him as they had previously. Then, his mother got sick and needed to have treatment at hospital for more than one month. His aunt-in-law had a newborn baby. These family events influenced the frequency of reading at Nhat’s home.

Also, Tan’s father and his older sisters often read stories to him about five days a week during the Intervention. Then, when his grandfather got very sick and died, they were sad, tired and busy. Therefore, the time for sharing books with Tan decreased. Nevertheless, at the end of this project, for both Nhat and Tan the frequency of family storybook sharing recovered to the level they had achieved during the Intervention phase.
The Parent Reading Styles

Before the Intervention

Before the Intervention, the parents of the six children who read storybooks did so clearly and slowly so that their children could grasp, as much as possible, the information available from each story. They also discussed the content and, on occasions, some new words during or after their reading. However, they focused more on educating the children in moral values and good behaviours. They said that they found it difficult to ask their children questions in order to develop their children’s knowledge.

Observations of the 18 reading sessions occurring in the six families at Baseline (i.e., one reading session for each target book) showed that the parents were more familiar with using certain reading techniques such as labeling, identifying, explaining and recalling (see Table 4.2.3). They rarely used elaborating and commenting. For Book 1, the parents never used the elaborating technique and seldom praised or encouraged their own child when he/she made a good response. However, this differed from Book 2 and Book 3. The Baseline data collected for these books were after the Intervention of Book 1. It appeared that the parents applied early generalised reading techniques learnt from the Intervention of Book 1 to unfamiliar storybooks. Therefore, at the Baseline the total frequency of the elaborating technique increased from zero for Book 1, to three for Book 2 and Book 3. Use of praising and encouraging techniques went from two at the Baseline for Book 1 to 11 for Book 2, and increased to 19 for Book 3.

It is interesting to note that within the interactions during the reading of Book 1, the children appeared to be passive. Few utterances were made by the children (see Shared reading example 1 & 2).
Shared reading example 1 (Baseline)

Tan’s father: [Introducing the story] The title is ‘Silly game’.
Tan: [Sitting on the chair near his father and looking at the book]
Tan’s father: [Reading the book slowly] ‘...Hee hee.’ [Pausing and explaining] ‘Hee hee’ is the Little Pig’s laughter. [Looking at Tan and smiling]
Tan: [Keeping silent and listening to his father]
Tan’s father: [Continuing his reading until the end of the story]
Tan: [Listening to his father and looking at pictures illustrated in the book]
Tan’s father: Do you understand the story I read?
Tan: [Nodding his head and smiling]
Tan’s father: Can you retell the story?
Tan The Little Pig played a silly game…

(Observation on April 8th, 2006 at Tan’s house)

Shared reading example 2 (Baseline)

Anh’s mother: [Sitting beside her daughter and reading the stories slowly until the end of the story] ‘The Little Pig was mischievous, and often made trouble to annoy other people…so nobody believed me.’ Ended already! [Looking at Anh and smiling]
Anh: [Holding the book and asking her mother] What is this story’s name, Mum?
Anh’s mother: [Showing her daughter the title on the front cover] The story’s name is ‘Silly game’.
Anh: ‘Silly game’
Anh’s Mother: [Confirming] Right!

(Observation on April 7th, 2006 at Anh’s house)
In addition, at the Baseline most parents made pronunciation errors when reading aloud those words that are often affected by the Hue accent (e.g., words with the ending letters “n”, “nh”, “t”, “s”; words with the syllables “uôi”, “iêu”, “oi”; and words with diacritic marks “~”, “’”).

Overall, before the Intervention when parents read stories, they did so slowly and clearly, with little interaction with their child during and after reading. Correspondingly, their children did not actively attempt to identify or discuss the information from their reading. The parents did not attempt to read with an expressive reading voice and with accurate pronunciation of the Vietnamese standard language. However, their shared reading techniques changed in a positive direction after the Intervention beginning with Book 1. The Baseline data of Book 2 and Book 3 showed the improvement (see Table 4.2.3).

The next section describes the parents’ progress in use of shared reading techniques during and after the Intervention.

*During and after the Intervention*

During and after the Intervention, substantial changes occurred in the parents’ shared reading styles, including reading performance, reading guidance and reading goal design.

The parents changed their reading performance, consistent with the goals of the programme. Vietnamese standard language was used, especially with the ending letters “n”, “nh”, “t”, “s”, the syllables “uôi”, “iêu”, “oi”; and the diacritic marks “~”, “’”. They paid close attention to practise reading these words correctly. This helped them to develop their reading aloud to be more exact, fluent and expressive and, in this way, to support their children when they learnt to read and write.
Table 4.2.3 - Total frequencies of reading techniques used by the parents with three target books:

Baseline and Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING TECHNIQUES</th>
<th>BOOK 1 Baseline</th>
<th>BOOK 1 Intervention</th>
<th>BOOK 2 Baseline</th>
<th>BOOK 2 Intervention</th>
<th>BOOK 3 Baseline</th>
<th>BOOK 3 Intervention</th>
<th>TOTAL N</th>
<th>Mean percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warming up</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeling and identifying</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalling</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising and encouraging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having fun</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
<td><strong>704</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moreover, before the Intervention most parents did not provide any specific form of guidance to their children to scaffold their understanding of the stories. After the Intervention, their reading guidance was more detailed and structured. The parents could reflect on their changes:

**Nhat’s mother:** Before taking part in the project I did not know how I should read to my children, and how to start my reading to them. Now, I know how to guide my children when listening to my reading, and how to make questions to develop their mind and emotion. (Conversation on June 10th, 2006 at Nhat’s house)

**Anh’s mother:** I also read stories to my daughter before participating in this project, but I just wanted her to keep quiet from her mischievous games. I often read straight through until finishing each book, without asking her any questions. Now I know how to ask her questions to help her understand stories better and to educate her. (Conversation on June 11th, 2006 at Anh’s house)

Before, Anh’s mother neither held her daughter nor introduced the name of the story to the child in order to attract her attention to the story (see Shared reading example 2). Also, she did not ask her child any questions about meanings of new words or the narrative. However, at the first reading session of the Intervention, she applied several of the different reading techniques to their storybook sharing (see Shared reading example 3).

**Shared reading example 3 (Intervention)**

**Anh’s mother:** [Holding her child in her arms and introducing the story]

> Now I read to you the story ‘Silly game’.

**Anh:** Yes.
Anh’s mother: *Do you like it? [Activating Anh’s interest]*
Anh: *Yes, I do.*

Anh’s mother: [Showing her child the font cover and discussing the illustration] *Who is this?*
Anh: [Looking at the picture and labelling] *Little Pig*

Anh’s mother: [Pointing at the character and asking Anh to label] *And who is this?*
Anh: [Looking at the picture] *I don’t know.*

Anh’s mother: [Pointing at another character and asking Anh to label] *Who is this?*
Anh: [Looking at the picture and labelling] *A cat.*

Anh’s mother: [Introducing the title of story and its author] ‘*Silly game, illustration and words of Kim Khanh.*’ [Reading the story slowly, clearly and expressively until the end of the book]. *The story ends now* [Looking at Anh and smile]

Anh: *No...* [Looking at the book and reaching for it]

Anh’s mother: [Smiling] *Now, I ask you some questions.*
Anh: *Yes.*

Anh’s mother: [Asking Anh to recall] *How many animals in this story?*
Anh: *Three animals.*

Anh’s mother: *Who?*
Anh: *Let me see. [Looking at the picture]*

Anh’s mother: [Asking Anh to identify] *Can you count them for me?*
Anh: [Touching the illustration and counting] *One, two, three.*

Anh’s mother: [Turning page, pointing at the picture and asking Anh to identify] *What was Little Pig doing here?*
Anh: [Looking at the picture] *Burning leaves.*

Anh’s mother: [Turning page, pointing at another picture and asking Anh to recall] *And what was Little Pig doing here?*
Anh: Looking at the picture *Burning.*

Anh’s mother: [Suggesting Anh to check] *Do you think Little Pig was burning?*
Anh: [Looking at the picture again] Little Pig was shouting ‘house fire’.

Anh’s mother: [Smiling and confirming] Little Pig was shouting ‘house fire’.

[Turning page and asking Anh to identify] What was happening to this house?

Anh: [Looking at the picture] Burning.

Anh’s mother: [Confirming] Burning. [Asking Anh to recall] Why was it burning?

Anh: [Looking at the picture] Because Little Pig played naughtily.

Anh’s mother: Uh-huh. [Turning page and asking Anh to recall] What were these uncles and aunts doing here?

Anh: They were leaving.

Anh’s mother: Why were they leaving?

Anh: Because Little Pig played naughtily.

Anh’s mother: [Turning page, pointing at the picture and linking to Anh’s real life+] Do our house have this kind of lamp?

Anh: [Looking at the picture] Yes, we have.

Anh’s mother: Where is it? Why can’t I see it?

Anh: In the kitchen.

Anh’s mother: Is that so? [Turning page]

Anh: [Looking at the picture and wondering] Why didn’t Little Pig hold the lamp when it was falling down?

Anh’s mother: [Asking Anh to recall] What did Little Pig feel?

Anh: Felt regret.

Anh’s mother: [Smiling and confirming] Felt regret.

Anh: About making naughty games, so nobody came and helped.

Anh’s mother: Uh-huh. [Smiling, turning page and asking Anh to recall] What was Little Pig doing here?

Anh: Careless and made the oil lamp fall down.

Anh’s mother: Uh-huh.

Anh: [Pointing the picture and asking]. Mum, why did Little Pig have only two teeth?
Anh’s mother: Right! [Explaining] Little Pig had only two teeth.

Anh: Why did Little Pig have four eyes?

Anh’s mother: Where?

Anh: [Touching the picture and counting] One, two, three, four.

Anh’s mother: [Pointing at the picture] What are these?

Anh: Eyes.

Anh’s mother: [Elaborating] Nostrils. [Linking to Anh’s experience] Have you ever seen a pig?

Anh: Not yet.

Anh’s mother: You have not seen a pig yet. [Turning page and asking Anh to identify] What happened to Little Pig’s house?

Anh: [Looking at the picture] Being burnt down.

Anh’s mother: [Asking Anh to make an inference] Why was the house burnt down?

Anh: Because Little Pig was careless.

Anh’s mother: [Confirming] Careless. Was Little Pig good?

Anh: No

Anh’s mother: Was Little Pig careful?

Anh: No

Anh’s mother: [Turning page, pointing at the picture and asking Anh to label] Who is this?

Anh: I don’t know.

Anh’s mother: You don’t know.

Anh: You let me know who is here, please! [Pointing the picture]

Anh’s mother: Ok. [Elaborating] Uncle Bear.

Anh: [Turning page back] And here is Uncle Cat.

Anh’s mother: [Confirming] Right. [Asking Anh to make her comment] Do you like Little Pig?

Anh: No.

Anh’s mother: Why?

Anh: Because Little Pig played naughtily.

Anh’s mother: Really? Was Little Pig naughty?
Anh: Yes.

Anh’s mother: [Relating to Anh’s real life] Are you naughty?

Anh: Yes, I am. On the other day I burnt firewood at my maternal grandparents’ house.

Anh’s mother: [Educating her daughter]. Don’t do it again! Don’t make fire as Little Pig! I will not love you any more if you make fire again.

(Observation on April 17th, 2006 at Anh’s house)

This transcript shows how Anh’s mother started now with a ‘warm-up’ by introducing the name of the story and discussing with Anh the characters pictured on the front cover. Anh’s mother activated Anh’s interest before Anh listened to the story. During reading, Anh’s mother also referred to the author of the book. She read the story slowly, clearly and expressively throughout. Her interactions with Anh occurred mainly after she finished her reading. She used the illustrations in the book to help Anh identify and label objects, characters and contexts. She also used the pictures as prompts to help Anh recall the information presented in the story. Anh’s mother asked Anh to make inferences, to comment and to make connections to her life and experience. Moreover, she provided her daughter with elaborations when Anh’s response was wrong or Anh could not find an answer. Anh’s mother encouraged the child by her confirmation and smiles when Anh provided an appropriate response. She emphasised the moral lessons for Anh to avoid making fire as Little Pig did. She also created a warm atmosphere by holding her daughter on her lap throughout their book sharing.

This combination of verbal and non-verbal action encouraged Anh now to ask her mother questions and was associated with having fun. Generally, Anh’s mother regulated the joint reading activity with her daughter in a way that ensured they maintained a well-matched collaboration (e.g., developing a long and interesting conversation about the book). However, Anh’s mother still sometimes found it difficult to give an accurate and appropriate explanation. For example, when Anh asked, “Mum, why did Little Pig have only two teeth?” her explanation was:
“Little Pig had only two teeth” (see Shared reading example 3). Similar to the other parents in the present research, Anh’s mother learnt to use the shared reading techniques step by step, and became more skilled after the Intervention.

The parents used illustrations from books, their home contexts, their own child’s life experience and previous knowledge as supportive conditions for making meanings of new words and narrative texts. In addition, they often combined verbal language, including their own dialect and accent with gestures or non-verbal language to provide clear and understandable explanations to their own child. For example, when explaining the meaning of the word “hoảng hồn” [panic-stricken] from the storybook “Chơi dại” [Silly game] (Kim Khanh, 2005) to her son, Khiem’s mother made a link to how this word is often used in Hue dialect. Next, she described a specific situation in which this word was used correctly. Then, her son applied the word again to another novel situation:

Khiem’s mother: ‘Panic-stricken’ is understood in our dialect as ‘unnerved’.

Khiem: ‘Panic-stricken’

Khiem’s mother: For example, when I visited my friend’s house, suddenly a big dog jumped out and barked at me loudly woof... woof... woof... The dog made me panic-stricken.

[Looking at her child]

Khiem: [Smiling] When I was going out at night, my cousin stepped out quietly from a dark corner. He held my shoulders and said boo...h... At the time I was panic-stricken.

Khiem’s mother: Right! [Looking at her son and smile]

(Observation on 20th April 2006 at Khiem’s house)

Changes in terms of the parents’ use of the reading techniques from the Baseline to the Intervention (i.e., over 12 weeks), through the three target books are detailed in Table 4.2.3 and summarised in Figure 4.2.3 across phases.

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Her own words in Vietnamese are “‘Hoảng hồn’ trong tiếng mình là ‘thất kinh’ [thất kinh]”
The data in Table 4.2.3 and Figure 4.2.3 were obtained by observing 18 reading sessions at Baseline (i.e., the six families read the three target books before the Intervention) and 18 further reading sessions at the Intervention (i.e., in each family, one reading session for each target book was randomly selected to observe). The frequency of the reading techniques’ usage increased from 82 at Baseline to 125 at Intervention for Book 1; from 93 at Baseline to 138 at Intervention for Book 2; and from 126 at Baseline to 140 at Intervention for Book 3. Two features of the overall change are noted, specifically, the training effects across the target books and almost identical total frequencies of reading techniques across the books produced by the Intervention.

Although in Book-1 Baseline some techniques were not used (i.e., ‘Elaborating’) or rarely used (i.e., ‘Commenting’ used twice; ‘Praising and encouraging’ used
twice), over 12 weeks the parents practiced with all the ten reading techniques (see Table 4.2.3). The reading techniques were employed before, during and after shared reading. However, the frequency of usage of each reading technique varied (see Table 4.2.3 & Figure 4.2.4).

Figure 4.2.4- Mean percentages of parents’ reading techniques (from 704 technical interactions): Baseline and Intervention

Of the 704 reading interactions analysed, 68 percent were comprised of four techniques: ‘Recalling’, ‘Explaining’, ‘Praising and encouraging’, and ‘Labelling and identifying’, while the other six techniques summed to only 32 percent.

It appeared that the parents varied their use of the techniques according to their own child’s ability and characteristics (e.g., attention and memory). For example, when their child was distracted and looking around, parents would attract the child’s attention and interest by asking him/her to label or recall the information from the storybooks during reading. When their child indicated that he/she was
grasping the content of the story with high concentration, parents would focus more on suggesting the child make inferences or providing him/her with explanations when necessary. For each storybook, the more they read together (or the more the child was familiar with the book), the less his/her parent used these reading techniques. This was different from the Baseline when the parents provided even less guidance when their own child was not familiar with the stories.

Besides their progress in reading performance and reading guidance, after Intervention the parents now designed shared reading goals for new storybooks (not target books). The reading goals set were apparently based on the parents’ experiences and their own child’s ability and interest. With the same storybook, the parents designed different reading goals for each individual child (see Nhat’s reading journal example and Trinh’s reading journal example). The reading journal examples showed that with the same story “Hai anh em” [Two brothers] (To Hoai & Huy Tuan, 2005), Nhat’s mother designed target words and comprehension tasks which were different from those of Trinh’s mother. Although the number of target words for Nhat (6) was less than that for Trinh (7), Nhat’s mother did not have a meaning explanation for every word like Trinh’s mother did. The comprehension tasks designed for Nhat focussed on development of his language, memory and moral attitudes. In contrast, the comprehension tasks designed for Trinh focused on development not only of her language, memory and moral attitudes, but also her thinking (e.g., making inferences and connections among events).

It appeared that, through shared reading, the proposed goals were adjusted to be most suitable to their own child’s developmental level. When necessary, the parents made sub-goals by probe questions in order to support their children to achieve the main goals. The reading goals also determined their selection and use of the reading techniques and reading conditions. For example, to teach their children nouns as labels for objects and animals, the parents often used pictures, real objects and their own child’s previous experience through the labelling and
Nhat’s reading journal example

The story: Two brothers

Nouns:  
- Plough (equipment)
- Reed (the same group with bamboo)

Verbs:  
- Purchase (buy)
- Pity (sorrowful, compassionate)

Adjectives:  
- Honest
- Bewildered (look dazed, as a soulless person)

Listening comprehension questions:

1) Which story I have read to you?
2) Who are characters included in the story?
3) Who do you like in the story “Two brothers”? Why?
4) Who do you dislike?
5) What happened to the greedy older brother at the end?

(Cited and translated from the original of Nhat’s reading journal on July 16th, 2006)

Trinh’s reading journal example

Two brothers

Nouns:  
1) Reed (like bamboo, used to make house)
2) Fish-pot (used to catch fish)

Verbs:  
1) Defy (challenge someone to do something)
2) Trample down (step on and crushed up)

Adjectives:  
1) Mature (full-grown)
2) Orphan (no parents)
3) Fearful (reveal very scared)

Questions

1) In this story, who was honest? Who was greedy?
2) How did the younger brother have a plough buffalo?
3) What did the older brother do to harm the younger brother?
4) Why did the younger brother build a new house and have cultivated land?
5) Consequences of greediness?

(Cited and translated from the original of Trinh’s reading journal on June 18th, 2006)
identifying technique or the relating technique. In another case, to teach their children verbs, descriptive adjectives and adverbs, the parents often used language, gestures, pictures, the children’s real life experience and the reading context as part of the explaining technique.

The parents also focused on teaching their own child how to decode. Therefore, their shared storybook reading interactions also altered, depending on their child’s decoding ability; initiated from labelling letters to decoding words and thence to reading aloud some sentences to some pages, and then to reading aloud the whole story. Specifically, Anh was very keen and quick at learning to read, so her mother and older sister often encouraged Anh to practise decoding and read aloud independently. Anh’s reading partners supported her by listening to her and helping her to correct the pronunciation errors she made. They also asked her to construct meaning of some new words and of the narratives she read. This helped Anh to be a fluent reader on these simple texts before formal schooling.

Huy’s mother shared that providing Huy with opportunities to read aloud stories independently under her supervision was an effective way to improve his reading performance. At the maintenance phase when Huy had gone to school, she said,

Some days ago, Huy’s teacher told me that Huy’s reading performance just gained five points out of ten. Coming home, I felt angry with Huy. I gave him some stories and asked him to read them by himself, so he read the stories independently. He could read and read them quite smoothly, but he still asked me to read to him. I suggested to Huy, ‘With difficult words, you can spell them. With simple words, you should read them straight away’. At the beginning, he read slowly, step by step he read quicker. For example, before Huy spelled like this ‘à-ng ãng tr-ãng trăng’ [the moon]. Now, he read immediately ‘trăng roi xuống giếng’ [the moon fell into the well]. Now, Huy read speedily. Huy made quick progress. And today when you came, he read to you as you saw. Before I only read to him, but I did not show him how to read. Therefore, he kept decoding words by spelling letter by letter. (Interview on November 11th, 2006 at Huy’s house)
In summary, the parents’ ways of interacting changed markedly. They selected the storybooks, designed the reading goals, selected and used reading techniques and reading conditions which were most suitable and effective for their own child. Moreover, they managed their shared reading activity so that parent-child interactions were well matched with one another. Their sensitive guidance made the children excited to enjoy happy moments of being in their arms, and to listen to their reading with close concentration or to read stories independently to the parents. Nhat’s mother who completed her education at Year Seven shared that, “I left school a long time ago. Since then I did not have contact with books, but now I really want to learn more so that I will be able to help my children study better” (Conversation on June 10th, 2006 at Nhat’s house).

The Children’s Vocabulary Development

Before Intervention

The findings at the Baseline indicated a consistent gap between the six children’s mean scores gained from the receptive vocabulary test and expressive vocabulary test (see Figure 4.2.6).

Based on a maximum mean with 12 points for each test measured through three testing sessions for Book 1, five testing sessions for Book 2, and six testing sessions for Book 3, the Baseline analysis showed that the children’s receptive vocabulary scores were much higher than their expressive vocabulary ones. Nhat had the biggest score gap between the two vocabulary tests (6.24), while Anh had the smallest gap (3.14). The score gap of Tan, Khiem, Trinh and Huy ranged from 4.64 points to 5.15 points.
Overall, at the Baseline, Anh gained the highest scores for both receptive and expressive vocabulary tests (9.67 points and 6.48 points, respectively), and Trinh had the lowest scores for the two vocabulary tests (7.73 points for the receptive vocabulary test, and 2.62 points for the expressive vocabulary test).

The children’s mean receptive scores varied across each target book (see Figure 4.2.7). For Book 1, their mean scores ranged from 6.67 points (Khiem) to 10 points (Trinh, Huy and Anh). For Book 2, the children’s mean scores ranged from 5.6 points (Huy) to 10 points (Tan). The outcomes from the receptive vocabulary test of Book 3 showed that Anh attained the highest mean score (11). Trinh had the lowest result (7).

On average, the six children gained the highest mean receptive vocabulary score for Book 3 and the lowest mean score for Book 2.

The rural group of children (Trinh, Nhat and Tan) had higher receptive score than the urban group of children (Khiem, Anh and Huy) for Book 1 and Book 2, but lower on Book 3 (see Figure 4.2.10).
Similarly, the six children achieved varying results from the expressive vocabulary test across these books (see Figure 4.2.8). For Book 1, Anh reached the highest mean expressive score (5.3), whereas Trinh gained the lowest expressive mean score (0.33).

Looking at Book 2, Anh attained the highest expressive vocabulary mean score (6.6). In contrast, Khiem had the lowest score (2.4). The children’s expressive vocabulary scores gained from Book 3 ranged from 7.5 points (Anh) to 2.5 points (Nhat).

Generally, for expressive vocabulary mean scores at the Baseline, the six children achieved the highest level from Book 3 and the lowest level from Book 1. Of the six children, Anh gained the highest mean score across all the three target books, whilst Nhat attained the lowest mean score.
There is also a difference between the mean scores of the urban group and that of the rural group gained from the expressive vocabulary test of the different target books at the Baseline. For all the three books, the results of the urban group were higher than those of the rural group (see Figure 4.2.11).

In summary, the present research found that, at the Baseline, the score of the six children for receptive vocabulary was much higher than that of their expressive vocabulary. There were also some differences among the vocabulary mean scores of the six individuals for the three books in general and each target book in particular.
**During and after the Intervention**

**Design based changes**

Figure 4.2.9 shows the overall trends for all the six children in receptive and expressive scores across each target book following the multiple baseline design logic. The Intervention occurred first with Book 1 from relatively stable baseline scores (i.e., around 9.0 points for receptive vocabulary and 3.0 points for expressive vocabulary). A marked change in level of expressive vocabulary occurred with the Intervention and with a clear upward trend. Receptive vocabulary did not change markedly. Interestingly, there was a steady upward trend in the baseline score for both receptive and expressive vocabulary scores in Book 2 and Book 3, with a change in level of both language measures for Book 2 after the Intervention. Scores remained at high levels and stable into the Maintenance phase after 22 weeks.

Overall, the design features provide some evidence for the Intervention systematically affecting vocabulary changes, although the potential generalised changes across books make the systematic replication less clear.

**Receptive and expressive vocabularies.** The data gained from 14 testing sessions showed that in the Baseline there was a large gap between the children’s mean scores for receptive vocabulary and their mean scores for expressive vocabulary across the three target books. The gap narrowed considerably during the Intervention. Their expressive vocabulary increased rapidly and came closer to their receptive vocabulary and the ceiling level (i.e., 12 points for six fully correct answers or two points for each fully correct answer).

Specifically, for Book 1, the children’s receptive vocabulary went from the starting point (7.7) at the Baseline to the ceiling level (12) at Intervention. Their expressive
vocabulary mean score climbed dramatically from the lowest level (1.5) of the first testing session at the Baseline up to the highest level (11.8) at Intervention.

Similar to Book 1, the children made a noticeable change for Book 2. Their average result for the receptive vocabulary went from the beginning point (6.0) at the Baseline to the maximum level (12) at Intervention. Especially, their mean score of expressive vocabulary rose significantly from the initial position (2.7) at the Baseline to the highest position (11.8) at Intervention.

As noted earlier, there was an increasing trend in the children’s vocabulary also shown for Book 3. The children’s mean receptive vocabulary score enhanced from 6.0 points at the first testing session up to the ceiling level (12) at Intervention.

The change for mean expressive vocabulary score was greater, from 1.0 point at the Baseline to 11.5 points at the Intervention phase.

Generally, the children’s vocabulary achievement was maintained over 22 weeks after the Intervention (see Figure 4.2.9). A slight decrease of their vocabulary score was seen at the Maintenance, ranging from 0.1 of a point to 0.3 of a point. For Book 2, their receptive vocabulary score was sustained at the highest level (12), and their expressive vocabulary score continued to increase up to the ceiling level (12) after the Intervention ceased.

**Urban and rural children.** The present research found that the progress of the urban children in vocabulary learning had a slightly different pattern from that of the rural children.

The urban children had lower scores of receptive vocabulary at the Baseline compared to that of the rural children for Book 1 and Book 2, but higher for Book 3 (see Figure 4.2.10). However, over time, the urban children’s receptive vocabulary mean score approximated that of the rural children across the three books.
The urban children had initially higher scores on the expressive vocabulary test at the Baseline but, over time, the score for both groups became similar (see Figure 4.2.11). The individual pattern shows that while all the children obtained generally consistent gains across phases, there were individual differences in the trends and levels over time.

Figure 4.2.9 - Vocabulary mean scores of the six children gained from the three target books
Figure 4.2.10 - Mean receptive vocabulary scores for rural and urban children across the target books.
Figure 4.2.11 - Mean expressive vocabulary scores for rural and urban children across the target books

Individual differences. The data of the six individual children’s mean receptive and expressive vocabulary scores gained from three phases of Baseline, Intervention and Maintenance are shown in Figure 4.2.12 and Figure 4.2.13. Mostly, the six children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary improved at the
Intervention and their outcomes were maintained over five months. However, each child had his/her own progress in language learning for each target book.

Figure 4.2.12 - Mean receptive vocabulary scores for the six children across the three target books before, during and after the Intervention
Figure 4.2.13- Mean expressive vocabulary scores for the six children across the three target books before, during and after the Intervention

Specifically, Anh’s vocabulary scores across each target book were high at the Baseline, and reached the ceiling (12) at the Intervention and the Maintenance. Although Huy had a downward trend in mean receptive vocabulary score after Book 1 Baseline, he made consistent changes in both vocabulary measures across the three books over time. Khiem made most significant changes in both receptive and
expressive vocabulary scores compared to his friends. From low scores at the Baseline, Khiem reached the ceiling level for all the three books at the Maintenance. Similar to Khiem, Nhat showed a clearly upward trend in vocabulary scores for all three books. He achieved the top (12) at the Intervention and mainly sustained this progress over time. However, for Book 3, Nhat’s mean expressive vocabulary score dropped slightly (0.3) at Maintenance. Unlike the other children, Tan made inconsistent changes in vocabulary scores across the books. His vocabulary scores were high over time for Book 2, but lower for Book 1 and Book 3. Especially, for Book 1, Tan’s scores of both vocabulary measures dropped gradually after the Intervention was finished. Trinh also showed a consistently upward trend in vocabulary scores across the target books over time, especially for expressive vocabulary, though for Book 3 her expressive vocabulary score was lower than that of the other children.

In summary, all six children made large changes in their receptive and expressive vocabulary associated with the Intervention and sustained their achievement after the Intervention was completed. The replication across children is important to the judgement about the effectiveness of the Intervention. Nevertheless, there were differences in their progress for each target book.

The Children’s Narrative Comprehension Development

Before the Intervention

The baseline data of the six children’s narrative comprehension were obtained from single testing session conducted just before the Intervention in order to avoid reactive responses to this test. Four narrative comprehension questions for each target book created a ceiling level at 8.00 points, corresponding to four correct responses. The six children’s comprehension outcomes at the Baseline (see Figure 4.2.14) ranged from 2.33 points (Tan) to 5 points (Anh).
Figure 4.2.14 - Mean narrative comprehension scores for six children on three target books at the Baseline

Figure 4.2.15 - Mean narrative comprehension scores for the children across three target books at the Baseline
There were differences among the individuals across the target books, but no consistent pattern emerged (see Figure 4.2.15). For Book 1, their mean scores fluctuated from 3 points (Tan) to 5 points (Trinh). Similar to Book 1, Tan gained the lowest mean score (2) for Book 2, while his friends Anh, Huy and Nhat achieved the highest outcome (5). There was a wider range of the six children’s mean scores for Book 3, from 1 point (Khiem) to 6 points (Anh).

The urban group (Khiem, Anh and Huy) had higher mean comprehension scores than those of the rural group (Trinh, Nhat and Tan) (see Figure 4.2.17). For Book 1, both the groups reached the same level of narrative comprehension mean score (4), but for Book 2 and Book 3, the urban children gained the better results (4.7 points and 3.3 points, respectively) compared to the rural children’s outcomes (3.3 points and 3 points, correspondingly).

In conclusion, similar to the children’s vocabulary development at Baseline, their narrative comprehension development was uneven when comparing across the six individuals and across the different target books. In addition, the urban children achieved a higher outcome from the comprehension test compared to that of the rural children.

**During and after Intervention**

**Across target books.** The children’s mean narrative comprehension scores from the three target books increased noticeably following the Intervention. The multiple baseline design shows that the increase occurred at the point of each successive Intervention and there was a variable upward trend for successive measures. The scores continued to go up even when the Intervention was withdrawn (see Figure 2.4.16). Despite variation in initial scores, all children were close to the ceiling level by the end of the experimental period.
Urban and rural children. There were minor differences between the two groups of children, although the urban group had consistently higher mean narrative comprehension scores than those of the rural group through each phase (see Figure 4.2.17).

![Figure 4.2.16 - Mean narrative comprehension scores for the six children across three target books](image)
Figure 4.2.17 - Mean narrative comprehension scores for urban and rural children across the target books
**Figure 4.2.18 - Mean narrative comprehension scores for six children across three target books**

**Individual differences.** All six children made significant progress in narrative comprehension, but there were differences in individual learners and with each target book (see Figure 4.2.18). The most noticeable was Tan who started from the lowest point at the Baseline compared to his peers, specifically for Book 1 and Book 2, and had slightly lower scores over the Intervention and at the Maintenance across the target books.
In summary, the children showed consistent progress in narrative comprehension across the target books, though there were differences in language acquisition between urban and rural children, and among various individual learners through family shared storybook reading.

The individual patterns within families, including language learning and parent reading techniques were examined. There were no systematic relationships between sheer frequency of the use of the total reading techniques and rates of changes in children’s language acquisition. A specific case was Anh who gained the highest achievements in both vocabulary and narrative comprehension across books over the time, from Baseline to Maintenance. Across phases, Anh’s mother’s total frequency of the use of the reading techniques was not higher than that of Nhat’s mother or Trinh’s mother.

**Home-School Connections**

*Before the Intervention*

The principals and teachers at both Vinh Ninh and Ngoc Anh preschools realised many benefits from families engaging in shared storybook reading with young children. They commented that this activity would help to develop children’s knowledge, language, sentiment, behaviours and intelligence, especially to enhance family relationships. Before the project, they often focused on encouraging parents to tell stories to their children, but had not provided parents with guidance to read storybooks to their offspring.

According to Mrs. Loan, the teacher at Vinh Ninh preschool, reading storybooks to children was more difficult than telling stories, especially for less well educated parents who did not often have contact with books. She stated that reading stories required skills of parents at a higher level to ensure accuracy of pronunciation and
the content as printed, whilst telling stories was flexible. Parents could tell stories they knew or that they made up, and sometimes the stories could be incomplete. Many parents were too busy to share storybooks with their children. Some of them could not afford to buy books.

Similarly, Mrs. Nga, the teacher at Ngoc Anh preschool shared that she had not given any support to parents to develop their family storybook reading practice yet. She said, “If sharing storybooks to their children at home existed, then it was totally spontaneous” (Interview on April 4th, 2006 at Phu Thuong preschool).

For the parents who participated in this project, they also confirmed that they had never received any assistance to know how to read storybooks to their children before. Sometimes they just asked their children’s teachers about how to read some alphabet letters such as Q, P, so they could be confident to teach their children at home. However, when being invited to take part in this study, most of the parents still hesitated because of their lack of time, their home environment and their reading ability.

During and after the Intervention

There were changes in relationships between preschool teachers and the families in terms of improving family shared storybook reading practices following the Intervention.

The preschool teachers took part in this project as participants and also as co-operators together with the researcher in distributing the information of the research, recruiting the parent and child participants, and sharing their ideas with the parents at the workshop. Their classes were provided with about 20 picture storybooks (which differed from the target books) as a bonus. As a result of their engagement in these roles, the preschool teachers began to share their ideas about benefits of reading storybooks to children at home with the parents. The teachers
also encouraged the parents and guided them in how to share books effectively. The teachers were available to support the parents whenever needed. Additional to this, in their classrooms, storybook reading reportedly occurred more often than before. Although storybook reading was an optional activity and not included in the Early Childhood Education Curriculum, the teachers read books to their preschoolers every day. According to the teachers, this event affected the children’s attitude toward reading and their reading habits.

In response to the teachers’ initiatives, the parents felt more comfortable and confident to talk with the teachers, especially when they wanted to ask for help or to share their children’s progress with the teachers.

However, these connections were not maintained once the children went to four different primary schools, and the Intervention was not designed to continue in their primary schools. Observations and interviews were undertaken at the primary schools to check continued storybook reading of the children at school and at home.

Huy and Khiem attended the same class at Vinh Ninh primary school where storybooks were available in the school library and in each classroom. Every day their teacher read storybooks to the whole class before they took a nap. This enabled Huy and Khiem to retain their shared reading habits and interest. Although there was no support given by the primary school to their families in relation to improving family shared reading practices, Huy’s and Khiem’s parents still kept shared reading with them at home at least three times per week.

Unlike her classmates, Anh went to a separate unit of Phuong Duc primary school. There was a library with a reading room at Phuong Duc primary school, where students could borrow books to read within the library. In contrast, there was no book resource at the separate unit where Anh attended. Anh’s teacher never read storybooks to her, though she looked after Anh all day long (every weekday), including before school and after school care. Anh’s teacher identified
her as a gifted child, so she often taught Anh extra lessons in Mathematics and Vietnamese for a gifted student competition. In spite of being busy doing extra homework, Anh kept reading storybooks daily. Her parents borrowed and bought more books for her.

Nhat and Trinh together attended a Year-1 class at Phu Thuong primary school. The principal understood thoroughly the values of storybook sharing, but there was neither a library nor a reading room in this school. Although some storybooks were stored in a staff room, no storybooks were available for children in their classrooms, and none was accessible to them. Their first teacher was so sick that she had to stop teaching after two months of the school year. A replacement teacher arrived to teach in this classroom. Similar to the principal, the new teacher stated benefits of storybook sharing, but she did not read storybooks for her students in the classroom, except some stories from “Tiếng Việt Lớp 1 - Tập 1” [Vietnamese Language Textbook for Year 1- Part 1] (Dang Thi Lanh, 2006). She also did not provide any support for families in promoting shared storybook reading with their children at home.

Tan went to Thuy Van primary school where there was a school library and a reading room for children. However, storybooks were not allowed to be borrowed for home reading. No storybook was available in Tan’s classroom and no guidance about storybook sharing was provided for families. Additional to this, Tan’s parents were busier when his grandfather got very sick and died. Therefore, Tan had fewer chances to share storybooks with his family members.

In summary, before the Intervention, the preschool principals and teachers had knowledge of family shared storybook reading, but they did not provide any guidance for families about how to share storybooks effectively with their children at home. During the Intervention, the preschool teachers took initiatives to work with families in relation to improving their family shared storybook reading practices. Moreover, the parents also found it comfortable to share their ideas with
the preschool teachers and ask them for help when necessary. However, the families did not receive any more guidance or support about family shared storybook reading from their children’s primary schools and teachers. As reported by their primary school teachers, the final outcomes the six children gained in Vietnamese language learning for the first semester ranged from good to excellent.
Chapter Three: Discussion

This study showed that the parents made changes in their understanding of: family shared reading benefits, how to select high-quality storybooks and how to set reading goals suitable to their own child’s ability and interest. They also increased their use of specific shared reading techniques. Through the family shared storybook reading activity, the children made consistent progress in vocabulary learning and narrative comprehension. This progress was sustained over a period of 22 weeks after the intervention. The current research also found changes in the home-school partnership associated with the intervention.

The research outcomes of this project exemplify and extend the theoretical framework of activity analysis. Several particularly significant relationships were identified: Relationships between the readers’ motives and their engagement in reading activity; high quality storybooks as an important condition of shared reading; reading frequency as an indicator of language acquisition; parent reading styles as subtle and insightful guidance; storybook sharing as an advantageous way for children’s language learning, and home-school connections in promoting family shared storybook reading practices.

Relationships between the Readers’ Motives and Their Engagement in Reading Activity

The baseline outcomes showed that three parents who considered that family shared storybook reading could meet their needs (e.g., develop their child’s knowledge and behaviours) engaged in this activity. In contrast, the other three
parents, who did not perceive any significant relationships between their needs and the benefits of the shared reading activity, did not engage in the activity. In other words, the parents would get involved in the activity when they had their own motives (Leont’ev, 1978, 1891).

The role of motives in this initial description underlines the necessity of constructing the parents’ ideas about the significance of the family shared storybook reading activity. Through the family shared storybook reading workshop, the less well educated parents constructed new understanding and beliefs about the benefits of the family shared storybook reading activity. Furthermore, the parents’ motives were enhanced once their needs were satisfied through this activity (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981). Changes in the participants’ motives were found both during and after Intervention.

This study described the development of the readers’ motives in terms of the model of reading activity. The motives directed actions towards satisfying their own needs and their children’s needs (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981). This description is consistent with previous research regarding the participants’ literacy beliefs and ideas. The parents and their family members engaged in the literacy activity more actively when they believed that reading storybooks to their children would help the children develop their language, knowledge, behaviours, reading habits and also entertain them (Feiler, 2005; McNaughton, 1995, 2001; Tran, 2003; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

In addition, the findings of the present research showed that the motives of the participants were enhanced and strengthened through discussions or communication (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; McNaughton, 2001). In fact, the more the participants (i.e., the parents and their children) engaged in the shared reading activity and gained literacy successes, the greater their motives were developed (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002, Mulholland, 1998; Ortiz et al., 2001; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Wan, 2000). Leont’ev (1978, 1981) called changes in subjects made by engaging in an activity, subjectification or, as termed by Vygostky (1978),
internalisation. The current research found that after Intervention, the parents’ literacy reading motives or purposes were comparable with those of the highly educated parents who participated in a previous study, in the same city Hue, Vietnam (Tran, 2003).

**High Quality Storybooks as an Important Reading Condition**

The findings of this project are similar to the previous work of Tran (2003). In the low-income families, picture storybooks were rarely found. On the one hand, the parents were facing financial difficulties, so they could not afford to buy storybooks for their children. Local libraries were not easy for them to access because they were just open during office hours which were also their working time. On the other hand, they did not consider or appreciate the benefits of shared storybooks with their preschoolers.

In this project, picture storybooks were seen as the primary reading condition of the family shared reading activity (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981, McNaughton, 1995). This activity would not occur if the condition was not present. Furthermore, reading materials or reading condition is an important factor which determines the participants’ operations or parent-child shared reading styles. Subsequently, the reading condition influences the participants’ shared reading outcomes (Leont’ev, 1978, 1981). Therefore, the families were provided with 22 picture storybooks in Vietnamese during the Intervention and the Transfer. During the Maintenance, they were funded a small amount of money and given guidance about how to buy appropriate books for their children. These actions aimed to support the participants to ensure a basic condition for continued engagement in shared reading activity at home. This assistance was also designed to develop parents’ knowledge and skills of how to select suitable storybooks for their children.
The present research found that in the Vietnamese families, storybook selection to share with young children depended on the children’s age, gender, capability, and interest, and these were closely bonded up in participants’ reading motives. Similarly, Heath (1982, 1983) and Tran (2003, 2005) also found that books with simple narrative texts and engaging pictures were often chosen to read to children when they were younger and less capable. Then, when the children’s language, memory, thought and imagination developed further over six weeks, stories with longer texts were chosen. The preschoolers in this study did not go to bookshops to choose and buy stories with their parents, but choice was central to the activity at home. They often selected specific storybooks they liked for shared reading (Tran, 2003, 2005).

Favourite books of the children were varied. Their more deliberate choices were consistent with previous research (Aram & Levin, 2002; Cornell et al., 1988; Mulholland, 1998; Ortiz et al., 2001; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Tran 2003, 2005; Wan, 2000; White, 1984). All of the six children preferred picture storybooks with coloured illustrations and simple narrative text to long narrative books without pictures. Most of them loved legends and fables.

As a result of cultural influence, the Vietnamese parents often paid considerable attention to the educational functions of stories. Similar to the case of the Chinese girl Yuan (Wan, 2000) and the other cases of the Vietnamese first graders (Tran 2003, 2005), in the present research the parents wanted to read to their children storybooks which would help them to develop Vietnamese moral and cultural values in general and those of Hue in particular. Specifically, stories selected for their shared reading were often suitable to their educational needs and also aimed to imbue the children with Hue traits such as fondness of learning, respect for older people, being modest, richness of love and willingness to help each other, being subtle at communicating and behaving (Le Nguyen Luu, 2006). This means that selecting and using cultural tools for joint activities are part of socialisation processes in families (McNaughton, 1987, 1996; Rogoff, 1990, 2003).
The findings of the present research also indicated that the parents’ financial difficulties and their lack of understanding about the benefits of family shared storybook reading were the main reasons for the lack of storybooks for children at home (McNaughton, 2001; Le Trung Tran, 2001; Tran, 2003, 2005; Vo Thi Cuc, 1997). Another reason was lack of other storybook support sources such as school libraries and local libraries. Unlike the situation in many Western countries where local and school libraries are available to borrow storybooks for taking home (White, 1984), the six Vietnamese children were not allowed to borrow storybooks from their preschools and primary schools’ libraries for home reading. In contrast, their families were encouraged to donate storybooks or money for buying storybooks to these educational institutions. Therefore, at the Baseline the number of storybooks in the six Vietnamese families was very small, while in many families in America and New Zealand such as Yuan’s (Wan, 2000), Katie’s (Mulholland, 1984), and the 10 middle-class families in a New Zealand study (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990), hundreds of children’s storybooks were available. The current research suggests that providing families with storybooks is a necessary, but not sufficient resource. High-quality storybooks for children should be available and accessible in school libraries and local libraries, including for home reading.

Reading Frequency as an Indicator of Language Acquisition

Although in this study the frequency of the family shared storybook reading was not seen as a part of the structure of the activity, it had certain influences on development of the activity in general and the children’s language development in particular (Gal’perin, 1992; Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Tran, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky’s (1978), the process of internalisation is the result of a long series of developmental events occurring over time. Moreover, the transformation goes through different stages of the zone of
proximal development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Development of reading motivation, reading techniques and language of the participants, therefore, was examined in relation to the time spent across phases. In other word, apart from reading materials, the time is also seen as one condition of the activity.

Before the Intervention, three children (Anh, Trinh and Khiem) were read to occasionally, while the other three children (Huy, Nhat and Tan) did not have family shared reading experience.

During and after Intervention, a large change in reading frequency occurred for all children, especially Anh, Trinh and Huy. Their shared reading routines were established, with at least three reading days a week. Similar to Quang who was from a highly educated family (Tran, 2003), Anh read storybooks everyday and could read fluently before going to primary school. Many studies in Western countries also described that early readers came from families where book reading occurred frequently (Clark, 1984; Durkin, 1966; McNaughton, 1995; Morrow, 1983; Teale, 1978, 1981). Therefore, it is suggested that parents should read books regularly to their children, about 10 to 15 minutes for each occasion. This event should be started as early as possible, even when children are less than one year old.

Consistent with previous research (Phillips & McNaughton, 1990; Snow, 1983; Snow & Ninio, 1986, Teale & Sulzby, 1987, Tran, 2003, White, 1984), the present study found that the Vietnamese children loved to read their favourite storybooks again and again. However, they preferred new storybooks to old ones that had been read more than three times.

**Parent Reading Styles as Subtle and Insightful Guidance**

Changes in parent reading styles across phases, including the use of reading techniques and reading goal design occurred. Before the Intervention, the parents
used most of the techniques in some ways, for their shared storybook reading with the children. Following the Intervention, both the frequency and the quality of their shared reading techniques were increased. An important finding is that the increase in the total frequency of reading techniques in the baseline occurred to Book 2 and Book 3, compared to Book 1. The increase in the frequency of the technique of praising and encouraging across the target books was remarkable. This evidence suggested a generalization of the training effects across the target books. The baseline reading frequency of techniques for Book 3 was comparable to the Intervention frequencies of Book 1 and Book 2. Furthermore, the Intervention produced almost identical total frequencies of reading techniques across the books. Parents transferred their reading skills learnt from the one book to the other books. This evidence promises sustainability of the Intervention programme with new books. Further research will require examining this.

In the Baseline, the parents employed most of the techniques, but their children were involved passively in their book sharing. The parents posed questions which the children initially found difficult to answer. Instead of providing their children with suggestions or suggestive questions, the parents often provided their own explanations or passed over the questions. This was also observed in a previous case study (Tran, 2003) conducted with another less well educated Vietnamese family (i.e., Duong Anh and her mother). The parents did not understand what learning tasks their children could complete independently by themselves and what learning tasks their children needed to complete with assistance or in collaboration with a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978). Lack of effective guidance caused passiveness of their children, and also hindered the children’s development through shared reading. A need to support the parents in improving their shared reading techniques emerged.

In this project, the parents were guided to design shared reading goals that were suitable to their own child’s ability and interest, suitable to the content and form of each storybook, and also compatible with the educational values that the parents
Following the Intervention, the parents paid more attention to their children’s responses to regulate the individual activities to become well-matched to one another. They thought about teaching new words and narrative meanings and when their children could not contribute a full response, they provided sub-questions or sub-goals presumed to be easier for their child to respond to. For instance, after reading a story to her son, Nhat’s mother asked him to retell the story to her, but he could not say anything. Nhat’s mother scaffolded the task asking questions to support retelling of small sections of the story. After that, Nhat could retell the whole story to her. The parents also thought about teaching decoding or reading skills by providing their children with opportunities to read aloud words to sentences, and then read stories independently. Huy’s parents confirmed that Huy made quick progress in reading by reading aloud stories to his mother. This is consistent with Teale and Sulzby (1989). They suggest that adults should let children read books independently by themselves and to one another.

Changes in parent reading styles were also reflected through using various reading conditions. Parents used a combination of illustrations in storybooks, real objects and events in life, and information from television programmes to teach vocabulary and comprehension. They made connections flexibly and effortlessly between stories and the children’s life experience, including links between the Vietnamese standard language and their own dialect and accent. This helped to construct a bridge in learning the Vietnamese standard language, and also helped to maintain Hue dialect. The children’s vocabulary was enriched by adding the Vietnamese standard words to their own dialect.

In summary, parent reading styles were regarded as subtle and insightful guidance. This required the parents to use the reading techniques flexibly and effectively in a specifically cultural reading context and to address a specific reading purpose. The use of the reading techniques also needed to be matched with their child’s ability and interest as well as with the content and form of each story. The findings of the present research affirmed the feasibility of
training less well educated parents in order to promote their children’s language learning through book sharing (Jordan et al., 2000; Hannon et al., 2006; Whitehurst et al., 1994, 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003). However, in previous research, Whitehurst and his colleagues placed emphasis on the use of questioning techniques (Whitehurst et al., 1988, 1994, 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003). Justice (2002) tried to examine differences in the effects of labeling technique and the questioning technique for children’s receptive and expressive vocabulary acquisition. In the present research, one of the ten shared reading techniques was used with its own functions (e.g., using the praising and encouraging technique aims primarily at promoting confidence and interest for children, while using the labelling and identifying one helps mainly to increase vocabulary). The family shared storybook reading will not operate effectively when only one of the ten techniques is employed. Therefore, the parents were encouraged to use the ten techniques in an appropriate combination to accelerate their children’s vocabulary and narrative comprehension development.

**Storybook Sharing as an Advantageous Way for Children’s Language Learning**

Previously, experimental studies have confirmed that there are causal relationships between family storybook reading and child language development. The frequency and style of reading to preschoolers, as well as the features of storybooks themselves, influence children’s emergent literacy knowledge of narrative schema, book concepts, and elemental items of decoding (Feitelson et al., 1991, cited in Meyer et al., 1999; Jordan et al., 2000; Justice, 2002; Whitehurst et al., 1988, 1994 & 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003). Moreover, family storybook reading influences aspects of expressive and receptive language, including vocabulary and comprehension (Jordan et al., 2000; Justice, 2002; Whitehurst et al., 1988, 1994 & 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003). This quasi experimental research also showed that family
shared storybook reading was related to word learning and comprehension of young children. Although there were differences in language learning progress among individuals, all of the six children increased their vocabulary and narrative comprehension across the target books and sustained their achievement for five months followed the Intervention.

As a result of individual differences among the children, the differences in their vocabulary and narrative comprehension enhancement shown between the urban and rural groups are negligible.

In addition, the present Intervention was developed to add Vietnamese standard words to the Hue dialect. This suggested that learning a second language through storybook reading should use a first language as a supporting device. In a previous study, Roberts (2008) showed that this strategy was effective in learning aspects of a second language such as English by reading stories in a first language other than English. Unlike the study of Roberts (2008), in the current research, parents used spoken language of the Hue dialect as a bridge to help their children in learning Vietnamese spoken and written standard language. This approach was consistent with the inherent principle of literacy instruction, which suggests that teaching a new language should build on the knowledge and understandings of children’s diverse cultural and language backgrounds (McNaughton, 2002). The findings of this study provided evidence that this additional approach did not compromise the children’s language practices.

**Home-School Connections Promote Family Shared Storybook Reading Practices**

The present research investigated the transition to school. The role of home-school connections in supporting children to ensure a smooth transition from preschool to primary school was examined. Specifically, this study focused on discovering how
The research finding of this project showed that although the preschool principals and teachers had a basic understanding of the benefits of family shared storybook reading, before the Intervention they neither encouraged nor supported the parents to promote their family literacy practices. They assumed that it was difficult for less well educated parents to read stories to their children because of the high requirements of implementing reading techniques as well as the limited resource of books and time. Half of the parents (i.e., parents of Huy, Nhat and Tan) did not have experience of shared storybook reading with their children. They did not understand the importance of this activity. They were less confident and less comfortable in discussing aspects related to family storybook sharing with their children’s preschool teachers.

At the family shared reading workshop the preschool principals and teachers had a chance to share their ideas with the parents and to listen to the parents’ opinions. The teachers realised their role and potential in supporting the families. They provided parents with encouragement and support in relation to shared reading knowledge and skills. Once storybooks were available in their classroom, the teachers read them to the children more often. The teachers stated that by reading storybooks to the children at school, they sent a message to their families about how important and enjoyable it is to share storybooks with their young children. This also contributed to the establishment of the shared storybook reading routine in all the six families.

Once the parents were not only encouraged, but also assisted by the schools, to develop their family shared reading practices, they found they were more confident and comfortable becoming involved in a home-school partnership. Consistent with findings by Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins and Weiss (2006), increased family involvement in the schools helped to improve literacy
performance and reading attitude of the children from low-income families. This study provided evidence that the intervention programme contributed to enhancement of family engagement of the less well educated parents in a supportive and collaborative home-school partnership. As a result of this, their children’s Vietnamese language learning achievements for the first semester at primary school were at a high level.
PART FIVE - CONCLUSION
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This part summarises the research contributions, including theoretical knowledge, evidence in relation to cultural practices and other developmental issues. Some implications for promoting the family shared storybook reading practices in relation to children’s language learning are raised. Limitations of the present study as well as future research are also discussed.

Contributions

Theoretical Knowledge

The present research expanded Leont’ev’s activity theory, incorporating Gal’perin’s stage model of formation of mental action and concepts (Gal’perin, 1992), and other developmental concepts (Bronfenbronner, 1979; Bruner, 1977; McNaughton, 1995; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). A comprehensive model of joint activity to enhance early language development was developed from these components. The full model of joint activity structure was developed from the general structure of activity which has been applied in multiple areas of human psychology such as developmental psychology, educational psychology and engineering psychology (Wertsch, 1981). The completion of this model has provided positive evidence of the potential for completing and generating the theoretical framework of joint activities in educational contexts in general and in the context of family literacy education in particular. This model identifies components and principles of the shared reading activity. The functions of a model are to guide research, further concept building and applications by providing modes of representation and pictorial visualisation (Lachman, 1963).
The model developed here adequately fulfilled these functions. It provided clear guidance for design, implementation and evaluation of a family literacy intervention which aimed at optimising language development for children from less well educated Vietnamese families. Specifically, following the model, the researcher could identify and optimise components of the family shared storybook reading activity, including relationships amongst the components and environments in which the activity was embedded. Based on the comprehensive model, in programmatic research, the sequence can be better planned. This application of joint activity theory to early language intervention is the original contribution of the present research. This project has particular significance for Vietnam where, previously, no experimental studies were found in this area. The current quasi experimental study provides a good basis for scaling up.

Additional to the literature, through this project, the novel methodology of longitudinal case studies, combined with single-subject experimental designs, was imported into the context of educational research in Vietnam.

**Cultural Practices**

The present study added further descriptions of how the practices of the storybook reading activity with less well educated Vietnamese families operate (Tran, 2003). Lack of understanding or lack of motivation, together with lack of book resources, hindered half (or three) of the families from engaging in shared storybook reading activity. Moreover, this study also showed that suggestion and encouragement were not effective as ways to promote the shared storybook reading practices for the less well educated Vietnamese families. In contrast, providing them with direct and practical assistance such as discussions about the benefits of family shared storybook reading, books and technical coaching from school and community could bring about changes in their home literacy practices.
Specifically, this study also provided descriptive evidence about how patterns of storybook reading (e.g., reading motive, goal, material and style or technique) reflected and constructed beliefs and ideas as well as cultural values. For example, like other Vietnamese parents in a previous study by Tran (2003), the Vietnamese parents in the present research often set reading goals (i.e., comprehension questions) that placed emphasis on developing moral lessons and behaviours for their children. The intervention approach to family shared storybook reading practices not only promoted the development of Vietnamese standard language, but also aided in the preservation of the Hue dialect. The parents and their children were supported in using their own dialect as a language support device to learn new words and make narrative meaning from stories written in Vietnamese standard language. The cultural principle underlying this position was that teaching a new school-based language should be additive and based on learners’ existing language, knowledge and experiences to inherit and add to them, rather than ignore or replace what the learners already have (McNaughton, 2002). The experimental evidence was that this addition approach did not compromise language practices. The focus on cultural (or language) beliefs and values followed directly from the model.

The full model of joint activity structure functioned as necessary guidance to design and evaluate the family shared storybook reading intervention programme. Using this model, the intervention co-constructed changes in the parents’ beliefs, motives, shared reading performance and interactional styles. The parents developed their knowledge and skills about how to set reading goals for their children given the school values, how to manage or regulate their shared reading activity effectively, and how to select good storybooks. They became more responsible, confident and comfortable in sharing books with their children at home and in communicating with teachers at school. These changes indicate, like those made in other programmes, that the family literacy programme could be effective with less well educated families (Hannon et al., 2006). It enabled the parents to become effective partners with their children’s schools in improving their children’s learning achievement, attitude and behaviour.
As a result of the parents’ development, through their shared storybook reading, the children’s love of reading was fostered, and their reading habits were also established. In addition, consistent with findings from previous experimental programmes (Jordan et al., 2000; Justice, 2002; Whitehurst et al., 1988, 1994 & 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003), this quasi experimental study provides evidence that the family shared storybook reading could promote the children’s receptive and expressive language acquisition, including vocabulary and narrative comprehension. These significant effects on the children’s language learning were long lasting (Feitelson et al., 1991, cited in Myer et al., 1999).

The general findings are similar to those from an earlier family literacy programme that Hannon and his colleagues conducted with socio-economically disadvantaged communities in a northern English city (Hannon et al., 2006). The present intervention had impacts on the family literacy practices of the less well educated Vietnamese parents. Specifically, family members comprising mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins and neighbours participated in shared reading events at home, including those in the three families who never read storybooks to their children before. The parents reported that the programme benefited their younger children, because they knew how to read books to them at an earlier age. Their practices became multifaceted with capabilities to select and use storybooks which were not contained in the intervention itself.

**Generalisation and Developmental Issues**

In addition to these contributions, the present research provided evidence on changes in preschool teachers’ beliefs and relationships with the less well educated parents. As prescribed in the research procedure, the preschool teachers participated in this project as participants and also co-operators in identifying and inviting the children and their families. They attended the family shared storybook reading workshop and had a chance to share their ideas with the parents, with
other practitioners and professionals at the workshop. Their classes were also provided with a bonus of 20 storybooks (which differed from the target books using for the Intervention), for their taking part in this project. As a result of their involvement in the Intervention programme, they initiated contact in order to support the families. They shared deliberately and regularly with the parents and the children about what and how their family storybook reading practices occurred. The teachers affirmed that practical supports could enable the less well educated parents to make important contributions to the progress of their children’s language learning. The improvement in their home-school partnerships suggested future intervention programmes which should embed the practices of families and schools developmentally.

In summary, the present research expanded Leont’ev’s activity theory by completing the comprehensive model of joint activity structure. This model was tested through a family literacy programme, and also used as guidance on evaluating the intervention programme. Descriptive and experimental evidence about the family shared storybook reading practices and language development of the six children from the less well educated Vietnamese families, as well as about their home-school partnerships was obtained. Based on the research findings of the present project, some implications were raised.

**Implications**

The knowledge and evidence base gained from the present project is essential for the work of families, practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers in improving the family literacy practice, especially in the context of Vietnam.

**For Families**

(1) Parents, siblings and other extended family members such as aunts and cousins have the potential to become readers and reading partners who can
share storybooks with children through different means such as reading to, and reading with children, and listening to them when they read stories by themselves. The family shared storybook reading activity helps to improve the literacy skills of both children and adults (Braun, 1991), as well as enhance their family relationships (Smith & Elley, 1997; Strickland & Taylor, 1989).

(2) Adults should participate in selecting high-quality storybooks and guide children about how to choose suitable books for their reading. The quality of storybooks is viewed as “spiritual food” for children. All factors, including the content, the form, and the language style of stories, influence children’s development of intelligence, language, virtues and behaviours, as well as their interest in reading (Beach & Hynds, 1991; Elster, 1998).

(3) Apart from the use of high-quality storybooks as main reading material, parents and other family members should use other reading conditions such as objects and events in their house and around their neighbourhood, information from television programmes, and their child’s life experiences and knowledge to help the child make connections between the narrative text and his/her own life. The text-life connections help to enhance narrative comprehension, as well as to increase the reading interest of the child, and also help the child know about how to apply his/her knowledge in practice.

(4) For children whose home language or dialect is different from the language used in storybooks, parents and other family members should use their home language or dialect as a language learning support device to link and add new words and new grammar issues to the child’s existing language. This helps to make bridge in learning the new language and also to maintain their home language or dialect.

(5) An important note about the ten shared reading techniques is that each individual technique has its own functions (e.g., using the praising and encouraging technique aims primarily at promoting confidence and interest
for children, while using the labelling and identifying one helps mainly to increase vocabulary). Therefore, the family shared storybook reading will not operate effectively when only one of the ten techniques is employed.

(6) Shared storybook reading with children should begin as soon as possible, and be regularly implemented, with at least 10 to 15 minutes each day, to foster children’s love of reading from a young age. Adults also should guide children to use their time for reading in a profitable way.

(7) The family shared storybook reading activity includes two individual activities, one of a parent or other family member and the other one of a child. It requires the adult reader or reading partner to regulate his/her own activity and the child’s activity in order that they are well matched to one another. Therefore, the kinds of children’s storybooks selected, the amount of time used for reading, reading goals designed and child-adult reading interactional styles or reading techniques employed should be based on the individual characteristics and the age-related developmental changes of each child. If this understanding is applied to the family literacy practice, the shared storybook reading activity will bring to children relaxation and pleasure, and leads them to progress at an optimal practical level.

For Practitioners

(1) Through parent meetings and daily communications (including informal conversations, newsletters, brochures and bulletins) practitioners (i.e., teachers, librarians or social workers) should help parents understand the benefits of reading stories to and with children at home.

(2) High-quality storybooks for children should be available and accessible in classrooms and primary school libraries. Students’ families and the educational budgets of schools can contribute towards the buying of storybooks. Schools also can conduct fundraisings for children’s books in
their community. New or old books and money for buying books contributed by community will make an availability of reading material resources for children.

(3) Besides this, teachers and librarians need to encourage and guide students as well as their families to borrow storybooks from school and classroom libraries for taking and reading at home, and to simply borrowing procedures.

(4) Practitioners should discuss with parents how to choose high-quality storybooks for children and how to share stories with children effectively (e.g., through family shared storybook reading workshops, individual coaching if necessary, and family-school connection programmes). These experiences are significant for both parents and teachers. Pedagogical knowledge, skills and experiences of teachers about how to teach children to read are very helpful for parents to learn. Additional to this, parents also can provide teachers with their understanding and experiences of the child’s characteristics and family literacy practice so that teachers will be able to better plan for home-school partnerships in raising children’s learning achievement.

(5) Teachers also need to know about varied family storybook reading experiences that children bring to their classes in order to individualise reading instructions and reading materials and to ensure that their teaching strategies are most appropriate and effective for each child.

(6) In working with families, it is important for practitioners to be respectful, helpful, patient and subtle when listening to, sharing with and coaching parents. Good relationships established between practitioners and families are part of the outcomes of a family literacy programme. Families will be willing and happy to work with teachers or social workers once between them there is a trustful rapport existing.
For Researchers

(1) The full model of family shared storybook reading activity provided a theoretical framework for designing, implementing and evaluating optimal conditions for family literacy practices.

(2) The research findings of the present project also provided experimental evidence about the usefulness of this model applied in the specific socio-cultural context of Vietnam.

(3) Relationships between shared storybook reading at home and children’s vocabulary and narrative comprehension were established from experimental evidence.

(4) This quasi experimental study also showed the feasibility of training less well educated Vietnamese parents in order to promote their children’s language acquisition through family shared storybook reading.

(5) The present project introduced to Vietnam a new research topic of family literacy intervention programme and a new methodology of longitudinal case studies combined with single-subject experimental designs for educational research there.

For Policy-Makers

(1) Descriptive evidence about the home literacy practices of children from less well educated Vietnamese families was given. These findings from this project contributed to confirm that not all Vietnamese preschool children have opportunities to share storybooks with their parents at home. All the six families had not received any special support from schools and community for improving their family literacy practices before.
(2) The findings of this research also affirmed that education for all in Vietnam, especially educational equality for disadvantaged people, including women and girls who are the first and most important teachers of their children, plays an important role not only in developing economy and society, but also in maintaining language and cultural values of the nation.

(3) Alongside providing low-income families with high-quality storybooks, is the requirement to improve knowledge and skills for parents about how to select and read books to their children effectively. This project provides experimental evidence about the effects of a family literacy programme conducted with less well educated and low-come Vietnamese parents. The research findings showed that the programme made changes in the literacy practices of the participant families and in their home-school relationships. It also provides evidence about changes in the literacy practices of their extended families and their neighbourhood in relation to storybook reading.

(4) The parents and the teachers suggested that there are multiple ways to support disadvantaged families in enhancing their family literacy practices, for example through face-to-face communication, media programmes, posters, and home-school partnership programmes.

**Limitations**

Although the present research made significant contributions, some limitations of this study should be noted. Firstly, this quasi experimental research involved a limited and specific population of children from less well educated Vietnamese families, their preschools and primary schools. Scaling up will require conducting the study with a larger population of children, families, preschools and primary schools. Secondly, the relationship between storybook reading and language acquisition of the children was examined through only three specific picture
storybooks in Vietnamese. Verifying the research sequence will also require examining whether the current project is sustainable when using new storybooks. Thirdly, the researcher herself, from her own perspective and passion was the research instrument (Patton, 1990) over the whole research process. She also worked as a practitioner during the intervention programme. As a result of this, her understanding and experiences about how to work with less well educated families in Hue city, Vietnam could influence the research findings. Therefore, the findings of this project may not be widely generalisable. Replicability of the present project in new contexts with other participants, practitioners and researcher will require further investigations.

Future Research

The present study suggested several future research sequences. There is a need to know if the present programme is sustainable when using new storybooks and a wider population of children in preschools and primary schools. It is also important to know if the programme is replicable in new contexts with other participants, practitioners and researchers. In the near future, this intervention programme will be scaled up to more families and preschools once essential human and material resources are available. Dissemination of the current research findings will be undertaken through presenting at several conferences and publishing a book chapter and some articles in national and international research journals. User-friendly documents or non-technical information for families, practitioners, and policy-makers will be prepared in Vietnamese and English.

Furthermore, the need to examine the effects of using the full model to promote language acquisition of disabled children has emerged. There is also an interesting research topic about how the model works in relation to second language teaching and learning practices.
The current research suggested the potential for completing and generating the theoretical frameworks of various joint activities in multiple areas of human life in general and in further educational contexts in particular.
References


Education.


Pham, Minh Hac. (1995). Nen giao duc - con de cua Cach mang thang 8: Xoa mu


Tran, Thi Thanh Binh. (June, 2005). The storybook reading selection for first graders in some Vietnamese families in Hue city, Psychology, 6 (75), 52-57.


Appendices
INVITATION LETTER
(Used for Preschool Principals)

Dear Principal,

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

I am writing this letter to invite you to take part in a project called “Reading storybooks to your children”, from February 2005 to May 2005. The purpose of this project is to support parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing their child’s language through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like you to help me choose from your school one preschool teacher, three of his/her preschoolers (male and female) who were born in 2000, do not have a learning disability and come from families of less well-educated parents and these students’ families, who are interested in participating in this project. I would like to conduct a 40-minute interview with you and audiotape it. The interview will take place at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. Moreover, I would like to have a visit to your preschool library, the teacher’s class and a review of the children’s files. After completing each child’s case record, it will be sent to his/her parents to check and comment upon its accuracy.

I have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements outlined in Preschool Principal Participant Information Sheet (that is attached) about the rights of the participants.

If you agree with my invitation, please review the attached Participant Information Sheet and sign the attached Consent Form, and then return the signed Consent Form in the prepaid postage envelope.

Thank you very much for your consideration for this invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
**Title of the project:** Reading storybooks to your children

**Researcher:** Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

My research aims at supporting parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing language for their child through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like to invite you to participate in the project.

The project will focus on how parents read storybooks to their child at home in ways that will help the child develop language skills as well as help him or her learn to read. Some of the data collection will be carried out at your preschool from February 2006 to May 2006. I would like you to help me choose a preschool teacher and three of his/her preschoolers (male and female) who were born in 2000, do not have a learning disability and come from families of less well-educated parents and these students’ families, who are interested in participating in this project. Also, I would like to have a 40-minute interview with you and audiotape it. The interview will take place at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I would like to have a visit to your school library and the teacher’s class when she/he is reading storybooks to children, and have a review of the children’s files. I will transcribe the tape of the interview and then will send you its transcript. Thus, you will have opportunity to verify and comment upon the accuracy of information which you have provided me. Your audiotape will be coded and kept securely in my own home, and then on University premises. At the end of the research, your audiotape will be destroyed.

At any time before data collection is completed (May 2006), you may withdraw your participation or any information you have provided for this project. You are assured that if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. No information obtained during this research process will be discussed with anyone outside of the research supervisors, the research team, and the relevant participants without written permission from you.
Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any question or want to know more, please contact me at:

Tran Thi Thanh Binh  
Lecturer in Psychology and Education  
Thua Thien Hue College of Education  
123 Nguyen Hue – Hue City  

Office phone: (054). 822179 or 810115  
Email address: tranthanhbinh_72@yahoo.com.

You may also contact my supervisors:

Professor Stuart McNaughton  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87541  
Email address: s.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND  
Dr. Judy Parr  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 88998  
Email address: jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz

AND the Head of Department:

Associate Professor Michael. T. R. Townsend  
Head, School of Education  
The University of Auckland  
1 Short Street, Level 7  
Auckland, New Zealand  

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87851  
Facsimile: 0064. 9. 367 7191  
Email address: mar.townsend@auckland.ac.nz

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 0064.9.373 7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/ 462
PRESCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

(This consent form will be held for six years)

Title of the project: Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher: Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand that my preschoolers and staff’s participation is entirely voluntary. I understand that at any time before data collection is completed (May 2006), I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this project. I also understand that if the information I provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source. I agree to participate in this project. I also agree to collaborate with the researcher in recruitment and allow her to visit our school library, the teacher’s class and his/her preschoolers’ files after consultation of those involved is obtained.

I consent / do not consent to my interview being audiotaped.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
Tran Thi Thanh Binh
Thua Thien Hue College of Education
123 Nguyen Hue Street
Hue City

February 2006

INVITATION LETTER
(Used for Preschool Teachers)

Dear Teacher,

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

I am writing this letter to invite you to take part in a project called “Reading storybooks to your children”, from February 2006 to May 2006. The purpose of this project is to support parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing their preschool child’s language through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like you to help me choose three of your preschoolers (male and female) who were born in 2000, do not have a learning disability and come from families of less well-educated parents and these students’ families, who are interested in participating in this project. I would like you to complete a questionnaire (this will take about 30 minutes). I would also like to conduct a semi-structured in-depth interview with you (this will take about 60 minutes). I want to ask you about your knowledge of family storybook reading amongst your preschool class. In addition, I would like the opportunity to have some informal discussions around aspects of the interview. I would like to audiotape our discussions at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I also would like to have a visit to your class and a review of the children’s files with their parents’ permission. Once each child’s case record is completed, I will send it to his/her family to check.

I have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements outlined in Preschool Teacher Participant Information Sheet (that is attached) about the rights of the participants.

If you agree with my invitation, please review the attached Participant Information Sheet and sign the attached Consent Form, and then return the signed Consent Form in the prepaid postage envelope.

Thank you very much for your consideration for this invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
PRESCHOOL TEACHER PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the project: Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher: Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

My research aims at supporting parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing language for their child through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like to invite you to participate in the project.

The project will focus on how parents read storybooks to their child at home in ways that will help the child develop language skills as well as help him or her learn to read. Some of the data collection will be carried out at your preschool from February 2006 to May 2006. I would like you to help me choose three of your preschoolers (male and female) who were born in 2000, do not have a learning disability and come from families of less well-educated parents and these students’ families, who are interested in participating in this project. I would like you to complete a questionnaire (this will take about 30 minutes). I would also like to conduct a semi-structured in-depth interview with you (this will take about 60 minutes). I want to ask you about your knowledge of family storybook reading amongst your preschool class. In addition, I would like the opportunity to have some informal conversations around aspects of the interview. I would like to audiotape our discussions at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I also would like to visit and observe your class when you are reading storybooks to your preschoolers. At this time, I would like to review the target children’s files with parental permission. I will transcribe the audiotapes of your interview and conversations and then will send you their transcripts. Thus, you will have opportunity to verify and comment upon the accuracy of information which you have provided me. Your questionnaire and audiotapes will be coded and kept securely in my own home, and then on University premises. At the end of the research, your questionnaire and audiotapes will be destroyed.
At any time before data collection is completed (May 2006), you may withdraw your participation or any information you have provided for this project. You are assured that if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. No information obtained during this research process will be discussed with anyone outside of the research supervisors, the research team, and the relevant participants without written permission from you.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any question or want to know more, please contact me at:

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
Lecturer in Psychology and Education
Thua Thien Hue College of Education
123 Nguyen Hue – Hue City
Office phone: (054). 822179 or 810115
Email address: tranthanhbinh_72@yahoo.com.

You may also contact my supervisors:

Professor Stuart McNaughton
The Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599
Ext. 87541
Email address: s.mcnnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND

Dr. Judy Parr
The Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599
Ext. 88998
Email address: jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz

AND

AND

AND

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 0064.9.373 7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/ 462
PRESCHOOL TEACHER CONSENT FORM  
(This consent form will be held for six years)

Title of the project:  Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher:  Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand that at any time before data collection is completed (May 2006), I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this project. I also understand that if the information I provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source. I agree to take part in this research.

I consent / do not consent to my interview and conversations being audiotaped.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
Dear Parents,

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

I am writing this letter to invite your family to take part in a project called “Reading storybooks to your children”, from February 2006 to December 2006. The purpose of this project is to support you in developing your child’s language through reading storybooks to your child at home.

I would like you to complete a questionnaire. I would like to talk with you and record our conversations and interviews at a good time to you. I also would like to talk with your child and assess his/her language development, audiotaping and videotaping these. I will be giving you information about how to read storybooks to your children through a six-hour workshop at the Thua Thien Hue College of Education, and nine coaching sessions at your home. I will provide your family with six storybooks for your child. I would like to visit your family and observe you and your child sharing storybooks together. If you and your child agree, I would like to audio- and videotape this and take photographs. As well, I would like you to fill out a “Family storybook reading journal” over the 11 months (it will only take five minutes to fill in whenever you read a storybook to your child). After I have written your child’s information up, I will send it to you to check.

I have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements outlined in Parent-Child Participant Information Sheet (that is attached) about the rights of the participants.

If you agree with my invitation, please review the attached Participant Information Sheet and sign the attached Consent Form, and then return the signed Consent Form in the prepaid postage envelope.

Thank you very much for your consideration for this invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
Appendix 8

PARENT-CHILD PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the project: Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher: Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

My research aims at supporting you in developing language for your child through reading storybooks to your child at home. I would like to invite you and your child to participate in this project.

The project will focus on how you read storybooks to your child at home in ways that will help your child develop language skills as well as help him or her learn to read. This project will be carried out from February 2006 to December 2006 when your child is at preschool, and over the transition to primary school. I would like you to allow me to review you child’s files at his/her preschool and primary school. I also would like you to complete a questionnaire. I will visit your family weekly over four months. During the visit, we will talk and I would like to observe you and your child reading storybooks together. I will assess your child’s language development. If you and your child agree, I would like to audiotape this and take photographs at a good time for you and your child. To gain pictures of verbal- and non-verbal interactions during you are sharing storybooks to your child at home and also to gain inter-observer agreement about my assessment of your child’s language development, I would like you to allow me to videotape 14 reading and testing sessions at your home. At both a six-hour workshop at the Thua Thien Hue College of Education and nine coaching sessions at your home, we will work on how best to read storybooks to your child. I will provide your family with six storybooks for your child. As well, I would like you to fill out a “Family storybook reading journal” over the 11 months (it will only take five minutes to fill in whenever you read a storybook to your child). In total, this project will take about 25 hours of you and your child.

I will write down what happen on the audio- and videotapes and then will send you copies. You will be able to check information which you and your child have provided. The questionnaire, audiotapes and videotapes will be coded and kept securely in my own home, and then on University premises. Your questionnaire, your and your child audiotapes and videotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research.
At any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), you and your child may withdraw from participation or withdraw any information you and your child have provided for this project. You are assured that if the information you and your child provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you and your child as its source. No information obtained during this research process will be discussed with anyone outside of the research supervisors, the research team, and the relevant participants without written permission from you.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any question or want to know more, please contact me at:

Tran Thi Thanh Binh  
Lecturer in Psychology and Education  
Thua Thien Hue College of Education  
123 Nguyen Hue – Hue City  
Office phone: (054). 822179 or 810115  
Email address: tranthanhbinh_72@yahoo.com.

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Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
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Email address: s.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND

Dr. Judy Parr  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 88998  
Email address: jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz

AND the Head of Department:

Associate Professor Michael. T. R. Townsend  
Head, School of Education  
The University of Auckland  
1 Short Street, Level 7  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87851  
Facsimile: 0064. 9. 367 7191  
Email address: mar.townsend@auckland.ac.nz

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 0064.9.373 7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/ 462
Appendix 9

PARENT-CHILD CONSENT FORM
(This consent form will be held for six years)

Title of the project: Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher: Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I and my child have been told about this research project. We have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. We understand that at any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), we may withdraw ourselves or any information I and/or my child have provided for this project. We also understand that if the information we provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify us as its source. We agree to take part in this research.

We consent / do not consent to our interviews, conversations and shared reading sessions being audio- and videotaped and taken photographs.

Signature: 

Name: 

Date: 

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
INVITATION LETTER
(Used for Primary School Principals)

Dear Principal,

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

I am writing this letter to invite you to take part in a project called “Reading storybooks to your children”, from September 2006 to December 2006. The purpose of this project is to support parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing their child’s language through reading storybooks to their children at home. This project has been conducted with some of your students as preschoolers and will continue until they finish the first term of Year 1. I would like to conduct a 40-minute interview with you at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I would like to have your permission to invite the children’s teachers to be involved in this project, and to visit your primary school library, the students’ classes and review the target students’ files. After completing each child’s case record, I will send it to the child’s family to check.

I have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements outlined in Primary School Principal Participant Information Sheet (that is attached) about the rights of the participants.

If you agree with my invitation, please review the attached Participant Information Sheet and sign the attached Consent Form, and then return the signed Consent Form in the prepaid postage envelope.

Thank you very much for your consideration for this invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the project:  *Reading storybooks to your children*

Researcher:  *Tran Thi Thanh Binh*

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

My research aims at supporting parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing language for their child through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like to invite you to participate in the project.

The project will focus on how parents read storybooks to their child at home in ways that will help the child develop language skills as well as help him or her learn to read. Some of the data collection will be carried out at your primary school from September 2006 to December 2006. I would like to conduct a 40-minute interview with you and audiotape it. The interview will take place at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I would like to have your permission to invite your staff (who are teachers of my target children) to be involved in this project, and to visit your primary school library, the teachers’ classes and review the target students’ files. After completing each child’s case record, I will send it to the child’s family to check.

I will transcribe the tape of the interview and then will send you its transcript. Thus, you will have opportunity to verify and comment upon accuracy of information which you have provided me. Your audiotape will be coded and kept securely in my own home, and then on University premises. At the end of the research, your audiotape will be destroyed.

At any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), you may withdraw your participation or any information you have provided for this project. You are assured that if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. No information obtained during this research process will be discussed with anyone outside of the research supervisors, the research team, and the relevant participants without written permission from you.
Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any question or want to know more, please contact me at:

Tran Thi Thanh Binh  
Lecturer in Psychology and Education  
Thua Thien Hue College of Education  
123 Nguyen Hue – Hue City  
Office phone: (054). 822179 or 810115  
Email address: tranthanhbinh_72@yahoo.com.

You may also contact my supervisors:

Professor Stuart McNaughton  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87541  
Email address: s.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND the Head of Department:

Dr. Judy Parr  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 88998  
Email address: jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz

AND

Professor Stuart McNaughton  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87541  
Email address: s.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND the Head of Department:

Associate Professor Michael. T. R. Townsend  
Head, School of Education  
The University of Auckland  
1 Short Street, Level 7  
Auckland, New Zealand  
Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87851  
Facsimile: 0064. 9. 367 7191  
Email address: mar.townsend@auckland.ac.nz

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 0064.9.373 7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 FEBRUARY 2006 FOR A PERIOD OF 3 YEARS, FROM FEBRUARY 2006 TO FEBRUARY 2009. REFERENCE NUMBER 2005/462
PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

(This consent form will be held for six years)

Title of the project: Reading storybooks to your children

Researcher: Tran Thi Thanh Binh

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand that my staff’s participation is entirely voluntary. I also understand that at any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this project. I also understand that if the information I provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source. I agree to participate in this project. I also agree to collaborate with the researcher in recruitment and allow her to visit our school library, the teachers’ classes and review the target students’ files after consultation of those involved is obtained.

I consent / do not consent to my interview being audiotaped.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
Tran Thi Thanh Binh  
Thua Thien Hue College of Education  
123 Nguyen Hue Street  
Hue City  

September 2006  

INVITATION LETTER  
(Used for Year-1 Teachers)  

Dear Teacher,  

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.  

I am writing this letter to invite you to take part in a project called “Reading storybooks to your children”, from September 2006 to December 2006. The purpose of this project is to support parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing their child’s language through reading storybooks to their child at home. This project has been conducted with some of your students as preschoolers and will continue until they finish the first term of Year 1. I would like you to complete a questionnaire (this will take about 30 minutes). I would also like to conduct a semi-structured in-depth interview with you (this will take about 60 minutes). I want to ask you about your knowledge of family storybook reading amongst your Year-1 students. In addition, I would like the opportunity to have some informal discussions around aspects of the interview. I would like to audiotape our discussions at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I also would like to have a visit to your class during your teaching periods of Vietnamese language. In addition, I would like to review the target students’ files with parental permission. After completing each child’s case record, I will send it to his/her family to verify and comment upon its accuracy.  

I have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements outlined in Year-1 Teacher Participant Information Sheet (that is attached) about the rights of the participants.  

If you agree with my invitation, please review the attached Participant Information Sheet and sign the attached Consent Form, and then return the signed Consent Form in the prepaid postage envelope.  

Thank you very much for your consideration for this invitation.  

Yours sincerely,  

Tran Thi Thanh Binh
YEAR-1 TEACHER PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the project:  *Reading storybooks to your children*

Researcher:  *Tran Thi Thanh Binh*

I am Tran Thi Thanh Binh, a lecturer of Thua Thien Hue College of Education. At the moment, I am conducting research for my Doctoral Thesis in Education, under supervision of Professor Stuart McNaughton and Dr. Judy Parr, at the Faculty of Education, the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

My research aims at supporting parents (whose education is from four to 12 years) in developing language for their child through reading storybooks to their child at home. I would like to invite you to participate in the project.

The project will focus on how parents read storybooks to their child at home in ways that will help the child develop language skills as well as help him or her learn to read. Some of the data collection will be carried out at your primary school from September 2006 to December 2006. I would like you to complete a questionnaire (this will take about 30 minutes). I would also like to conduct a semi-structured in-depth interview with you (this will take about 60 minutes). I want to ask you about your knowledge of family storybook reading amongst your Year-1 students. In addition, I would like the opportunity to have some informal discussions around aspects of the interview. I would like to audiotape our discussions at whenever and wherever is convenient for you. I also would like to visit your class during your teaching periods of Vietnamese language. At this time, I would like to review the children’s files with parental permission.

I will transcribe the audiotapes of your interview and conversations and then will send you their transcripts. Thus, you will have opportunity to verify and comment upon the accuracy of information which you have provided me. Your questionnaire and audiotapes will be coded and kept securely in my own home, and then on University premises. Your questionnaire and audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research.

At any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), you may withdraw your participation or any information you have provided for this project. You are assured that if the information you provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. No information obtained during this research process will be discussed with anyone outside of the research supervisors, the research team, and the relevant participants without written permission from you.
Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any question or want to know more, please contact me at:

Tran Thi Thanh Binh  
Lecturer in Psychology and Education  
Thua Thien Hue College of Education  
123 Nguyen Hue – Hue City

Office phone: (054). 822179 or 810115  
Email address: tranthanhbinh_72@yahoo.com

You may also contact my supervisors:

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The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87541  
Email address: s.mcnaughton@auckland.ac.nz

AND

Dr. Judy Parr  
The Faculty of Education  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 88998  
Email address: jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz

AND the Head of Department:

Associate Professor Michael. T. R. Townsend  
Head, School of Education  
The University of Auckland  
1 Short Street, Level 7  
Auckland, New Zealand

Office phone: 0064. 9. 373 7599  
Ext. 87851  
Facsimile: 0064. 9. 367 7191  
Email address: mar.townsend@auckland.ac.nz

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 0064.9.373 7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/ 462
YEAR-1 TEACHER CONSENT FORM

(This consent form will be held for six years)

Title of the project:  *Reading storybooks to your children*

Researcher:  *Tran Thi Thanh Binh*

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I understand that at any time before data collection is completed (December 2006), I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this project. I also understand that if the information I provide is reported or published, this will be done in a way that does not identify me as its source. I agree to take part in this research.

I consent / do not consent to my interview and conversations being audiotaped.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 FEBRUARY 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
Appendix 16

SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FOR PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal,

I would like you to answer the following questions:

1) How long have you been the principal at this school?

2) What is your highest qualification you have achieved?

3) In your opinion, what are the benefits of parental reading storybooks to your students at home?

4) As far as you know, how does the practice of parental storybook reading to your students at home occur? (e.g., the reading context, the readers and their reading motivation and goals; the types of storybooks selected to read to children; the frequency of storybook reading at home; and adult-child interactions through storybook reading)

5) What have you and your school done in order to improve the practice of parental storybook reading to your students at home?

6) What aspects of this work do you find easy or difficult?

7) Do you provide any special help to less well educated parents in reading storybooks to their children at home? If so, what is the nature of this help?

8) What are your suggestions in order to develop parental practices in reading storybooks to their children at home in your location?

Thank you so much for your time and help!
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Teacher,

In order to complete the project “Reading storybook to your children”, I would like you to answer the following questions:

1) What is your name?
   Male/Female

2) How long have you been teaching at this school?

3) What is your highest qualification you have achieved?

4) In your opinion, what are the benefits of parental reading storybooks to your students at home?

5) As far as you know, how does the practice of parental storybook reading to your students at home occur? (e.g., the reading context, the readers and their reading motivation and goals; the types of storybooks selected to read to children; the frequency of storybook reading at home; and adult-child interactions through storybook reading)

6) What have you and your school done in order to improve the practice of parental storybook reading to your students at home?

7) What aspects of this work do you find easy or difficult?

8) Do you provide any special help to less well educated parents in reading storybooks to their children at home? If so, what is the nature of this help?

9) What are your suggestions in order to develop parental practices in reading storybooks to their children at home in your location?

Thank you so much for your time and help!
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

Dear Parents,

In order to complete the project “Reading storybooks to your children”, I would like you to answer the following questions:

1) What is your name?
   Male/Female?

2) What is your job?

3) What is the highest qualification/educational level you have achieved?

4) What is the highest qualification/educational level your partner has achieved?

5) Could you tell me how much does your family earn monthly? (Under or over 300.000 VND/ person)\(^{14}\)

6) How often do you personally read books at home? You can circle one capital letter below:

   a. Daily
   b. 2 to 3 times a week
   c. Once a week or less than one a week

7) What kinds of books do you like most to read?

8) When you were a child, did anyone read storybooks to you? If no, how did you get the idea to read storybooks to your child?

9) When did you start reading stories to and with your child?

10) For you, what are the benefits of reading storybooks to your child at home?

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\(^{14}\) Asking personal questions is common for Vietnamese. At the moment, monthly income with 300.000 VND/person is poverty line for Vietnamese people.
11) In your family, who most often reads storybooks to, and with their child?

12) What do you value most when you read storybooks to your child?

13) What are the types of storybook that you select to read to your child at home? (e.g., picture storybook, non-picture narrative book or both)

14) What are some of the favourite themes of storybooks your child wants to read or to be read?

15) How often do you read storybooks to and with your child at home? You can circle one capital letter below:

   a. Daily
   b. 2 to 3 times a week
   c. Once a week or less than one a week

16) How do you read storybooks to and with your child? (e.g., ask your child to identify letters or to retell the story after listening to you)

17) How often do you go to bookshops or libraries with your child to buy or borrow storybooks?

18) Who often chooses storybooks for your child when buying and/or borrowing?

19) Who often chooses storybooks for your child when reading to and/or reading with his/her at home?

20) What thing do you find easy or difficult to read storybooks to and with your child at home?

21) Have you ever received any support about how to read storybooks to your child? If so, what was that support?

22) What are your suggestions in order to develop your reading storybooks to your child at home?

Thank you so much for your time and help!
SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW FOR CHILDREN

After the researcher and the child have developed a rapport, I would like to ask him or her the following questions:

1) Do you like your family members reading storybooks to you? What do you like?
2) In your family, who most often read storybooks to and with you?
3) How often do you listen to storybooks read by them?
4) What kinds of storybook do you like? (e.g., picture or non-picture narrative book)
5) What do you like the storybooks to be about? (e.g., animal, food or conduct)
6) How often do you go to bookshops or libraries with adults to buy or borrow storybooks?
7) Who most often chooses storybooks for you when buying and when reading them at home? (e.g., you or your mother)
8) Do you often talk with your family members about the stories? What do you talk about?
9) Is there anything that you would like to change about storybook sharing at your home?

Thank you so much for your time and help!

15. These questions were flexibly used suitable to each child in our own language style.
FAMILY STORYBOOK READING JOURNAL

*Please fill in every time you read a book to your child!

1) Date

2) Author or editor and title of book

3) Author and title of story

4) Publisher, publishing date and location

5) Narrative theme (e.g., friendship, filial piety)

6) The kind of storybooks (e.g., picture storybook or non-picture storybook)

7) Reader

8) Reading partner(s)

9) The time spent reading

10) Talk together around reading (e.g., about the content of stories or/and letters, syllables, punctuation; make jokes)

11) Notes about your child’s sentiments and understanding of the story
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
(Used for inter-observer)

During my experience as an inter-observer of the project “Reading storybooks to your children”, I understand that I will have access to child participants’ pictures and information about their language ability. I also understand that I am required by law to keep such pictures and information confidential.

I agree to hold all information and pictures concerning any participant in strictest confidence in compliance with the law.

At the end of my work, I will not use, nor reproduce, nor disclose any such information and pictures to any third party unless required by law.

I acknowledge that any breach of confidentiality may result in consequences, including, but not limited to, dismissal from this project.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 8 February 2006 for a period of 3 years, from February 2006 to February 2009. Reference Number 2005/462
Appendix 22- Family Shared Reading Brochure (in Vietnamese and in English)
A - Lợi ích của việc đọc truyện cho bé là gì?

- Giúp bé thư giãn
- Phát triển đời sống tinh thần
- Phát triển trí thông minh, ngôn ngữ và các chuẩn mực hành vi
- Tạo tiền đề cần thiết để học tập tốt
- Duy trì những giá trị đạo đức và văn hóa Việt Nam
- Phát triển những quan hệ gia đình gắn bó

B - Hoạt động đọc truyện cho bé trong gia đình có những đặc điểm nào?

- Diện ra trong môi trường gia đình
- Họa quyền với các quan hệ gia đình
- Là hoạt động chung, cùng phối hợp giữa trẻ và người lớn (cô giáo, cha của bé)
- Hoạt động chung này có cấu trúc như sau:

Hình bên

- Hoạt động này đòi hỏi xác định rõ:
  1/ Đọc truyện cho bé nhằm mục đích gì?
  2/ Đọc như thế nào để đạt mục đích đó?
  3/ Cần phải có những điều kiện, phương tiện nào để thực hiện tốt mục đích đọc?

Bố mẹ là thầy cô giáo đầu tiên và suốt đời của bé.

C - Mở kí thuật (hoặc hành động, thao tác) cơ bản giúp đọc truyện cho bé thành công:

1. Khởi động: Chuẩn bị cho bé tâm thế lắng nghe truyện.
2. Gợi tình và nhận biết: Giúp bé gợi tình và nhận biết được những sự vật, hoàn cảnh, nhân vật... trong truyện.
3. Giải thích: Gợi ý hoặc giải thích những giúp bé hiểu nghe giá trị của một nút mở hoặc một câu khổ khi cần thiết.
5. Suy luận và phản đoán: Giúp bé phát biểu những ý kiến của truyện phản đoán những diễn biến tiếp theo có thể xảy ra.
7. Nhận xét/ Bình luận: Giúi ý cho bé phát biểu những suy nghĩ và cảm xúc về nội dung, hình thức của truyện.
10. Tạo sự vui thích: Tạo không khí thoải mái và thích thú cho việc đọc chung bằng cách:

- Chọn địa điểm phù hợp.
- Tiếp xúc với bé bằng khuyến mại tuội vui và các chi nhánh, sân khấu, thậm chí
- Sử dụng giọng đọc điện cảm và cùng đưa vui với bé khi có thể.

Bố mẹ là thầy cô giáo đầu tiên và suốt đời của bé.
7. **Commenting:** Ask or suggest the child to state his/her own thinking and feelings about the content or/and the form of the story.

8. **Elaborating:** Provide an appropriate, accurate response when the child’s statement is inadequate.

9. **Praising and encouraging:** Give the child praise and encouragement whenever he or she makes a good response.

10. **Having fun:** Create a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere for shared reading by:

    - choosing a suitable place
    - giving the child a smiling face and gentle gestures
    - using an expressive reading voice
    - taking a game-like approach to discussing the story with the child.

---

**Parents are first and lifelong teachers**

Hue, April 9th 2006  
*Designed by Doctoral Student*  
TRAN THI THANH BINH  
Email: binh.tran@auckland.ac.nz
- What are the main benefits of reading stories to your child?

- Entertaining the child
- Developing his/her spiritual life
- Developing his/her intelligence, language, moral values and behaviours
- Constructing essential foundations for his/her formal learning
- Preserving moral values and cultural identities
- Enhancing family relationships to be closer and more attached

What are the features of a family shared storybook reading activity?

- Occurring in a family environment
- Interweaving with family relationships
- Existing as a joint activity between a child and an adult (or his/her older sibling who is more knowledgeable than the child)
- Having a unique structure with many components and relationships among these components (see Model)
- To start reading a story to your child you need to answer the following questions:
  1. What is the purpose of reading this book to my child?
  2. How should I read it to get the purpose?
  3. What conditions and tools should I use to achieve the reading purpose?

Ten key techniques for shared storybook reading with your child

1. **Warming-up**: Activate the child’s prior knowledge, interest and attention to listen to the story.

2. **Identifying and labeling**: Discuss with the child the way to hold, to read the books, and objects, settings, characters pictured, or some letters printed in the books.

3. **Explaining**: Provide the children with suggestions or explanations to help the child make the meaning of a new word or of an incomprehensible sentence... when necessary.

4. **Recalling**: Ask the child to remember main information presented explicitly in the story.

5. **Inferring**: Suggest the child to make inference about information presented implicitly in the story and predict next happenings.

6. **Relating**: Encourage the child to relate the content of the story to the real world around him/her or his/her experiences.
Appendix 23 – Pictured Receptive Vocabulary Test
Ong có mệt lám không?

B...a... o...i
..tô. mét.. qu.. á..!

Làm gì thế. ..?

Loa loa loa...

La la la..