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Parents and Children Reading Together: Expanding Shared Book-Reading Across Genres

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ABSTRACT

In this conceptual article we explore parents' shared book reading (SBR) interactions with their preschoolers across different book genres in their natural home settings. We consider the unique and shared contributions of narrative, informational, wordless, and alphabet picturebooks, and how reading across genres can increase children's involvement in the interaction, deepen their content knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and strengthen their visual literacy. Beyond the benefits for children, we discuss the advantages for parents of reading from different genres and highlight directions for future research.

1. Introduction

For young children, shared reading of picturebooks¹ is an important part of the day. Research on shared book-reading (SBR), where an adult reads and engages in discussion surrounding a book with a child (or group of children), reveals various factors that may influence these interactions, such as parental education and reading style (e.g., Cline & Edwards, 2017,^[16] Mol et al., 2009),^[44] or child characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, or developmental stage (e.g., Boyle et al., 2019;^[10] Shahaecian 2018).^[59] However, aspects of the book itself and how they impact SBR have been explored less frequently (Hoffman et al., 2015,^[33] Lennox, 2013).^[39] Moreover,

despite a large array of children's book genres, adults generally default to the narrative picturebook for SBR (e.g., Bingham et al., 2018;^[7] Yopp & Yopp, 2006).^[66]

In this conceptual article, we explore parent-child SBR of books from four popular genres in children's literature – narrative, informational, wordless, and alphabet. Drawing upon SBR vignettes² with young children and their mothers, we consider how the unique and shared aspects of each genre contribute to these joint interactions and provide opportunities to promote four important aspects of children's literacy development: active involvement in literacy interactions, broadening content knowledge, expanding vocabulary, and fostering visual literacy. These four elements of early literacy embody a range of factors

1 We use the term *picturebook* to describe illustrated children's books. For detailed explanations of the types of illustrated children's books, see Nikolajeva and Scott's (2006) *How Picturebooks Work*.

2 The vignettes included in this article were gathered as part of a series of studies relating to SBR and different genres.

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that can be set in motion during SBR and are particularly relevant to the interactions captured in the vignettes examined in this article.

Research indicates that although the adult is the person reading the book in SBR, children's active involvement in these interactions benefits their cognitive development as well as their language and literacy skills (e.g., Bojczyk et al., 2016;^[9] Grolig et al., 2020;^[30] Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2014;^[31] Hutton et al., 2017;^[36] Saracho, 2017;^[55] Towson et al., 2017).^[63] These benefits arise from situations where the child is an active partner in exploring the text rather than being a passive listener.

Studies have also revealed that content knowledge is an important component of reading comprehension and language learning, and SBR is one way of promoting this knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2010;^[29] Hirsch, 2006;^[32] Neuman & Kaefer, 2018).^[45] Through SBR and its discussions surrounding books, children examine and use decontextualized language, build background knowledge about a topic, and learn content-related vocabulary (Neuman & Kaefer, 2018).^[45] Building "world knowledge" from a young age helps children process material and promotes their later learning (Hirsch, 2006).^[32]

Alongside the construction of content knowledge, SBR helps children learn new words (Evans et al., 2011;^[25] Rowe et al., 2013;^[53] Senechal, 2017).^[57] Extratextual talk during SBR, particularly relating to words in the form of questions, definitions, and the like, has been found to promote word learning (Blewitt & Langan, 2016).^[8]

In a world that is more and more reliant on visual and multimedia communication, there is a correspondingly increasing need for children to "learn the skills of looking, appreciating, and interpreting visual material, including its design" (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 77).^[54] Conversations between parents and children during SBR include comparisons of the meanings conveyed by words and pictures, promoting visual literacy, and helping them understand the "third text" (Galda & Short, 1993;^[26] Edwards & Willis, 2000, p. 261),^[21] that is, the meaning created by the interaction between the text and the images.

While there are numerous other benefits to SBR (e.g., socio-emotional development), the four that we have selected here span the spectrum of children's literacy development, and they can all be activated during SBR (e.g., Ece Demir-Lira et al., 2019;^[20] Logan et al. 2019).^[42]

2. SBR & Genre

In this section we explore parent-child shared reading of books from four genres (narrative, informational, wordless, alphabet) in greater depth, and utilize vignettes

to illustrate the contributions of each genre to SBR interactions, focusing on the four abovementioned important elements of emerging literacy - involvement, content knowledge, vocabulary, and visual literacy. The discussion of each genre includes examples of award-winning books (Caldecott Honors and ALA List of Notable Children's Books) that illustrate key features.

2.1 Narrative Storybooks

Narrative storybooks are the most widely used books for preschool-aged children. They generally tell a story, often with human or animal characters, and rely on a traditional plot structure with a clear beginning-middle-ending. In children's narrative storybooks, the illustrations and the text may be considered different "sign" systems that interact in complicated ways (e.g., Sipe, 2012).^[60] Reading these books often involves not only understanding the main idea of the story as related by the text, but also being able to follow the progression of the illustrations that may help reinforce and elaborate on the story (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006).^[47] For example, in *Last Stop on Market Street* (De La Pena, 2016),^[18] CJ's bus ride with his grandmother begins with his questioning the differences he observes in the people around him, and ends with his sense of satisfaction with the people and activities in his life. This theme of understanding and appreciating differences is addressed in a different manner in *All the World* (Scanlon, 2008),^[56] in which each two-page spread presents a poetic word sequence and illustration related to a specific living environment, from the "shell to keep" and "moat to dig" of the beach to the "hive, bee, wings, hum" of the farm. The vignettes in Table 1 highlight how mothers make use of both the text and the illustrations in narrative picturebooks to promote children's emerging literacy.

Throughout these vignettes with narrative texts, mothers are drawing upon words and illustrations, as well as the connections between them, to encourage the child's *involvement* with the story. By explaining specific elements in the illustration, one mother expanded her child's *knowledge* of the work done harvesting apples, and the people responsible for doing it; another fostered her child's attention to *visual clues* by asking questions about ice cream flavors. The sequencing of words and pictures in narrative picturebooks supports inference and prediction - "what is going on here", "what will happen/what will we see next?" In SBR with narrative picturebooks, as parents and children explore the connections between text and illustrations, they draw upon text-to-self connections that foster literacy engagement and deepen comprehension.

Table 1 Vignettes of SBR with Narrative Picturebooks Demonstrating Elements of Literacy

	Involvement	Content knowledge	Vocabulary	Visual literacy
Book Title (Author)	<i>The Mitten Tree</i> (Christiansen, 2009: 7) ^[15]	^[56] <i>Groundhog Stays Up Late</i> (Cuyler, 2005: 1) ^[17]	<i>Apple Picking Time</i> (Slawson, 1998: 4, 8) ^[61]	<i>Curious George Goes to an Ice Cream Shop</i> (Rey, 1989: 7) ^[52]
Context	<p>“All that day Sarah couldn’t stop worrying about the little boy with no mittens. Late in the afternoon, as the sky grew dark, Sarah dug through the basket of yarn scraps she had saved for many years. She found her needles and four shades of blue wool. Then, Sarah began to knit.”</p>	<p>“Groundhog was not the kind of groundhog who liked to hibernate.”</p>	<p>“We meet outside the town in cars and pickups. Papa finds a place behind Grandma and Grandpa’s truck. Then our families follow the narrow dirt road to the orchards”.... “Dave is our foreman”</p>	<p>“Mr. Herb dipped out a scoop of strawberry. George was curious. Could he scoop ice cream, too?”</p>
Vignette	<p>Child: What’s she knitting? Mom: We’re going to see. What do you think she’s going to knit? Child: Don’t know Mom: Maybe something for the little boy? Child: Gloves Mom: Gloves, right. Mittens.</p>	<p>Mom: You know what hibernate means? Child: What? Mom: We read it about a bear, one of our books, it’s about a bear that hibernates. Do you remember? Child: No. Mom: It means to sleep for a very, very, very long time, usually in the winter. So some animals hibernate in the winter, they sleep for a long time</p>	<p>Mom: Orchards - That’s where the apples grow. Mom: The foreman - he’s the man in charge.</p>	<p>Child: What’s this one (pointing)? Mom: It’s purple. Child: No, what’s this flavor? Mom: What flavor do you think it is? Child: I think it’s. . . Mom: Grape? Child: Yeah, grape. Mom: And what’s this one (pointing)? Child: Um Mom: Well, the man with the yellow hat said he wanted strawberry, is that the strawberry (pointing)? Child: yeah Mom: What’s this one (pointing)? Child: An orange one Mom: And what’s this one (pointing)? Child: A banana one Mom: And this one (pointing)? Child: A cola one</p>

2.2 Informational Picturebooks

Conversations between early childhood caregivers and young children are peppered with questions about the how and why of everyday experiences, suggesting the potential appeal of informational books. Despite this, parents and teachers tend to select narrative rather than informational books for SBR (Bingham et al., 2018;^[7] Yopp & Yopp, 2006).^[66] Informational books generally aim to convey information in an engaging style, incorporate visually attractive formats and include graphics and/

or photos and illustrations to enrich and reinforce their communicative impact. They are often written in an expository fashion, and generally have a large percentage of technical and content-specific words (Mar & Rain, 2015).^[43] The structure of informational books and the variety of language in them encourages adults’ use of decontextualized language and provides unique opportunities for children to gain *content knowledge* and domain-specific *vocabulary* (e.g., Baldwin & Morrow, 2019;^[4] Loewenberg Ball et al., 2008).^[41] Further, the expository nature

of the books and the frequent inclusion of access formats such as glossaries, graphs, etc. can facilitate parents' use of questioning and discourse strategies that can increase children's *involvement* in these interactions (Blewitt & Langan, 2016).^[8] For younger children, informational picturebooks often relate to topics in the natural and social worlds – e.g., animals, science, weather, cultural traditions and practices (Duke, 2009).^[19] They may also include elements from other genres, such as “how-tos”, biographical information, or a more narrative style of writing. Recent years have seen an increase in multi-genre picturebooks for young children, which embed information within narrative formats, sometimes using poetry rather than prose. This trend is apparent in *Mama Built a Little Nest* (Ward, 2014),^[65] which juxtaposes pages of poetic narrative about individual species with pages that provide information about each species' nesting habits. Another trend in informational books is highlighting connections to contemporary issues such as cultural diversity, climate change and social justice. In this vein, *We are Water Protectors* (Lind-

strom, 2020)^[40] draws upon the traditions and history of Indigenous people in North America to provide resources to support a call for action for environmental justice. The vignettes in Table 2 illustrate how parents' SBR with informational books utilize features of informational texts to foster involvement and comprehension, two cornerstones of emerging literacy.

In these vignettes, we see mothers using questions to engage and maintain the child's *involvement* with the reading experience and the information that is being communicated. Mothers use references to the illustrations to encourage the child's attention to details of the *content*, for example, the different steps that are involved in making ice cream. They also reference the *illustrations* to provide a visual referent for introducing new *vocabulary*, for example, “field”. Throughout the vignettes, the questions (e.g., “how does the bear spend his winter”) and prompts (e.g., “use a magnifying glass”) that are characteristic of informational texts serve as scaffolds for the conversation.

Table 2 Vignettes of SBR with Informational Picturebooks Demonstrating Elements of Literacy

	Involvement	Content knowledge	Vocabulary	Visual literacy
Book Title (Author)	<i>How and Why Animals Prepare for Winter</i> (Pascoe, 2000) ^[48]	<i>Snow is Falling</i> (Branley, 2000: 9) ^[13]	<i>From Cow to Ice Cream</i> (Knight, 1997: 9) ^[38]	<i>Apples</i> (Gibbons, 2000: 24) ^[27]
Context	Questions at the end of the book: <i>How does a black bear spend winter?</i>	“Sometimes snowflakes stick together and fall as a cluster of flakes. They also fall as single flakes. Look at the single snowflake on the mitten. Use a magnifying glass to make it look bigger. Each snowflake has six sides. The snowflake may look like this or this, or like this.”	“Twice each day, the cows come in from the pasture to be milked by machine. Some of their fresh milk is sent off to an ice cream factory.”	<u>Illustration</u> : <i>How to Plant and Care for an Apple Tree</i>
Vignette	Mom : What does he do all winter, do you remember? Child : He's in the cave Mom : And what does he do in the cave? Child : He sleeps Mom : That's right!	Mom : See? These are all the snowflakes under the magnifying glass. Child : Mm hm; nodding Mom : That's how they look, with their 6 sides. They look different than when you just see it like that (pointing to previous page), right? Child : Nods	Mom : You know what the pasture is? Child : What? Mom : Field, where they walk around and eat grass. Mom : That's where they make ice cream.	Mom : Look, this is really interesting. <i>It is best to plant a seedling in the fall.</i> Mom - pointing <i>Dig a hole that is big enough to give the seedling's roots room to grow.</i> Mom - pointing <i>After placing the seedling in the hole, add topsoil.</i> Mom - pointing: That's the dirt that goes on top of the little seedling. <i>Pack down the soil to give the seedling support.</i> Mom - pointing: So it doesn't fall over. <i>Water the seedling. It will need about ten gallons of water each week during the first few months after planting.</i> Mom : That's a lot of water.

2.3 Wordless Picturebooks

Wordless picturebooks offer young children the opportunity to use a curated collection of pictures to create a story. Jalongo et al. (2002: 167)^[37] describe wordless books as “pure” picturebooks, where “the pictures tell it all”. Many picturebooks have a text accompanying the pictures that helps convey information or the story, and the child’s task involves “filling in the gaps between the words and pictures to construct meaning” (Salisbury & Styles, 2012: 97).^[54] In contrast, wordless picturebooks rely solely on the illustrations to tell the story, and often require the reader to be more involved in focused literacy conversations to construct and convey meaning from the book (Arizpe, 2013;^[2] Gibson, 2016;^[28] Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006;^[47] Serafini, 2014).^[58] Sharing wordless books offers the child an opportunity to engage in an open-ended literacy experience in which there are no right or wrong answers (Reading Rockets, 2013),^[51] which can help build literacy motivation and engagement (e.g., Trelease &

Giorgis, 2019).^[64]

Spurred by research documenting the educational benefits of engaging with wordless texts, there has been a recent upsurge in the publication of wordless books dealing with a broad range of topics including social-emotional issues of childhood (e.g., family relationships and transitions), phenomena and inhabitants of the natural world (e.g., animals, seasons), and social issues (e.g., immigration, diversity). For instance, in *Fly!* (Teague, 2019),^[62] a baby robin counters his father’s encouragement to fly with humorous alternatives in interactions that strongly resemble human parent-child exchanges. *A Ball for Daisy* (Raschka, 2011),^[50] addresses the joys and sorrows associated with a special toy. Both of these wordless books use animal protagonists to explore a range of emotions and circumstances that occur frequently in the lives of young children and their parents. The vignettes in Table 3 illustrate how parents’ SBR with wordless books models story creation and storytelling in ways that support their children’s emerging literacy.

Table 3 Vignettes of SBR with Wordless Picturebook Demonstrating Elements of Literacy

	Involvement	Content knowledge	Vocabulary	Visual literacy
Book Title (Author)	<i>A Day at the Seaside</i> (Elzbieta, 1972: 7-9) ^[23]	<i>Summer Riddles</i> (Elzbieta, 1972: 12) ^[24]	<i>Summer Riddles</i> (Elzbieta, 1972: 6) ^[24]	<i>Summer Riddles</i> (Elzbieta, 1972: 17-18) ^[24]
Context	Bear finds an egg on the shore and prepares to make an omelette, not realizing that his friend the bird is preparing for a chick to hatch from the egg.	The bear in the story is “chasing” the moon and paddles out to an island where he sees the moon shining above a mountain.	The dog looks at the barrel of water and the bear wants the dog to get in so he can bathe him.	Bear returns to the shore and sees the puppy there. Together they play and then fall into the barrel of water.
Vignette	<p>Mom: Bear sees the egg in the bird’s nest and thinks, maybe he can make an omelette from the egg.</p> <p>Mom: The bird comes back, sees her egg gone and sees Bear getting a fire ready to cook the egg. She cries and cries. Bear asks her, “why are you crying?”</p> <p>Child: Because her egg is lost</p> <p>Mom: “Because that’s my egg,” she says to him.</p> <p>Mom: Bear says, “that’s why you’re crying? I’ll give you back your egg.”</p> <p>Child: You don’t have to cry</p> <p>Mom: That’s right. Bear gives her back the egg.</p>	<p>Mom: He paddles and paddles out to the island. Then, he takes his bag and he climbs and climbs on the small mountain.</p> <p>Child: Which is the small one?</p> <p>Mom: Here. Then, he climbs and climbs some more until he gets to the peak. Do you know what a peak is?</p> <p>Child: No</p> <p>Mom: A peak is the very top of the mountain. Like right here (points).</p> <p>Then he jumps and he jumps and he jumps.</p> <p>What happens if you jump and jump at the top of something tall?</p> <p>Child: You fall</p> <p>Mom: Right! And that’s what happens. He fell.</p>	<p>Mom: Look, here’s the barrel of water, and the brush.</p> <p>Child: Here’s the brush.</p> <p>Mom: Right. But the dog hesitates. Do you know what it means to hesitate?</p> <p>Child: No</p> <p>Mom: It means he’s not sure what he wants to do so he’s thinking about it before he decides.</p>	<p>Mom: Bear decided to go back to the shore, that’s over here (pointing). So he gets back in his boat, and paddles back to shore, and look, who does he see waiting for him (pointing)?</p> <p>Child: The puppy!</p> <p>Mom: Right, the puppy. Do they look happy to see each other?</p> <p>Child: Ya, they’re smiling.</p> <p>Mom: Good!</p> <p>Mom: The puppy says, “I’m so happy to come back, I was waiting for you.” And then Bear says, “I’m so happy you’re waiting for me.” Let’s play tag.</p> <p>Mom: They play tag and run around, and then what happens (pointing to the page)?</p> <p>Child: They fell into the barrel!</p>

Throughout these vignettes of SBR with wordless picturebooks, we can see the child actively *involved* with the mother in constructing the story from the illustrations. This demonstrates Arizpe’s (2013: 170)^[2] idea that wordless picturebooks involve “a heightened co-authoring role that requires taking risks with the imagination, activating intertextual and cultural knowledge and trusting in the readers’ ability to make sense of the story”. Further, these vignettes illustrate that even without a written text, picturebooks can be used to promote both *content knowledge* (e.g., identifying the tops of mountains as peaks), and *vocabulary* (e.g., “hesitate”). Moreover, the vignettes show how, by attending to details in the pictures, children practice and strengthen *visual literacy* through “noticing deeply” (Holzer, 2007).^[35]

2.4 Alphabet Books

Alphabet books are a common genre in children’s books, and studies show that many parents regularly read alphabet books to their children (e.g., Bergman Deitcher et al., 2021;^[3] Chiong & DeLoache, 2013).^[14] Many alphabet books present a variety of words for each letter related to a specific theme - e.g., “artichoke”, “avocado”, “apple” on the “A” pages of *Eating the Alphabet* (Ehlert, 1989).^[22] Some authors take a more conceptual approach,

as in *The Graphic Alphabet* (Pelletier, 1996),^[49] in which the author determined that “the illustration of the letter-form had to retain the natural shape of the letter as well as represent the meaning of the word” (dust jacket). The visual salience of the letters in alphabet books can help draw children’s attention to the print, which they may not normally consider (e.g., Neumann et al., 2015).^[46] In this way, unlike the other genres discussed in this article, alphabet books focus on specific knowledge about elements of literacy, building children’s awareness of letter-shapes, letter-names and letter-sounds (Bradley & Jones, 2007).^[12] Indeed, research indicates that reading alphabet books is associated with children’s letter knowledge and has the potential to promote their phonological awareness (Brabham et al., 2006;^[11] Evans et al., 2011).^[25] The vignettes in Table 4 show how parents talk about alphabetic features with their child in SBR with alphabet books.

As illustrated in the vignettes in Table 4, alphabet books elicit conversations about the *sounds and meanings of words*. These conversations about how variations in the structure of individual letters and words communicate differences in meaning encourage the child to look more closely at written language. Gaining this knowledge about the structure of the language gives children a greater understanding of how letters and sounds work.

Table 4 Vignettes of SBR with Alphabet Picturebooks Demonstrating Elements of Literacy

	Involvement	Content knowledge	Vocabulary	Visual literacy
Book Title (Author)	<i>Laughing Letters</i> (Ben Dor, 2006) ^[6]	<i>Laughing Letters</i> (Ben Dor, 2006) ^[6]	<i>Letters in Silly Juice</i> (Hoffer, 2005: 5) ^[34]	<i>Letters in Silly Juice</i> (Hoffer, 2005: 5) ^[34]
Context	Alphabet book - page for the letter “R”	Page for the letter “H”		Letter “D”
Vignette	<p>Mom: This is “Laughing Letters” written by Datya Ben-Dor. Do you know other things written by Datya Ben-Dor?</p> <p>Child: “Riddles”!</p> <p>Mom: That’s right!</p> <p>“R” <i>Oh no, cried the rabbit! I’m late for the train again!</i></p> <p>Mom: Train is with an “R”</p> <p>Child: OK</p> <p>Mom: What “R” is this (pointing to the train)?</p> <p>Child: Oh...train...T!</p> <p>Mom: You’re right. I was making you crazy. Why did they put a train here if it’s the letter “R”? The <u>rrrr</u>rabbit (points to the picture). Maybe it’s a train for <u>rrrr</u>riding?</p>	<p>Mom: Hey (letter) - this is a difficult letter. You know how when we play the game in the car, when we say a letter and we have to list animals or other things with that letter? If we get to hey or vav we always skip it because it’s hard.</p> <p>“H” <i>Hachoo Hachoo! What happened?</i></p> <p>Mom: So look. In most of these words, this letter shows up at the end of the word and you don’t hear it. So in this word, it’s at the end and you don’t hear it. But in this word, it’s at the beginning and you do hear it.</p> <p>Child: OK.</p>	<p>Mom: Do you know what this is?</p> <p>Child: A porcupine!</p> <p>Mom: Well, close, but this is an animal called a hedgehog. Do you want to know the difference between a porcupine and a hedgehog?</p> <p>Child: Ya</p> <p>Mom: They both have spiky things called spines, but the porcupine is much bigger. I’ll show you a picture a little later.</p>	<p>Mom: Do you want to tell me what you see in the picture instead of me telling you what to look for?</p> <p>Child: I see a “doll” here.</p> <p>Mom: OK. And other than a doll, what else do you see with the letter D?</p> <p>Child: Hmmm...duck!</p> <p>Mom: Good, what else?</p> <p>Child: Pointing to each picture in the illustration: dog, donut, dinosaur. I’m great at letters!</p> <p>Mom: You did a great job finding the pictures for the letter D.</p>

3. SBR Across Book Genres: Implications & Future Research

Authentic parent-child SBR interactions in the home offer insights about the advantages of using different genres for this important aspect of children's early literacy experience. Selecting books that children find relatable and meaningful requires adults to consider the children themselves -- developmental stage, attention span, interests, as well as their motivation. Children who show reluctance surrounding one genre may engage eagerly with another. For example, some children may satisfy their burgeoning curiosity about the natural world through informational books, while others may expand their imagination through narratives or wordless books. Future research can examine how different genres relate to children's motivation to engage in SBR.

Beyond thinking about the children, adults also need to consider their goal for the reading interaction -- quiet time before bed, learning about something new, focusing on a cultural event (e.g., holiday), working through a developmental milestone or difficulty (e.g., going to the dentist for the first time, parents divorcing), among others. Using different book genres enables adults to address this broad range of circumstances and goals related to engaging in SBR. For example, learning about an upcoming holiday can be accomplished by reading a narrative about a child and the holiday, but also through an informational book about the cultural history and significance of the holiday. Including both genres opens up different types of conversations and offers the child different perspectives on the holiday. Similarly, parents who want to teach their children the alphabet can consider both stories about the alphabet as well as more traditional alphabet books that examine each letter separately. Future research can help determine effective methods for increasing parents' awareness of the characteristics of various genres and the features that make them particularly suited for different reading interactions.

Characteristics of different genres may make SBR more accessible for parents who may feel unprepared or less comfortable engaging with their children in more traditional SBR. For example, parents with limited content knowledge about a topic may utilize the questions, glossaries, and graphs that are often featured in informational books to scaffold their conversations with their children. Parents whose cultures include strong oral traditions may find that genres such as wordless storybooks offer a natural link between oral storytelling and interactions that include a physical book. Additionally, parents with more limited language and literacy skills can use alphabet books

to focus directly on the building blocks (i.e., letters) of the language. Future research should focus on whether and how different genres can impact parents' attitudes towards and inclination to engage in SBR.

4. Conclusions

Due to its positive association with children's outcomes, doctors, educators, and various media encourage parents to start reading to their children from a very young age. While well-intentioned, this messaging for SBR may have unintended consequences by implicitly elevating narrative books over other types and portraying a narrow view of the SBR experience. Studies show that while parents naturally engage in a variety of behaviors and ways of talking during SBR, receiving guidance and support can improve the impact of SBR (e.g., Aram et al., 2013;^[1] Barone et al., 2019).^[5] In this light, encouraging parents to read across genres can broaden their choices and opportunities for engaging in SBR with their children.

SBR of informational, wordless, narrative, and alphabet books offers the chance for children to become involved, gain content knowledge and vocabulary, and hone visual literacy skills. Combining these benefits has the potential to yield significant positive outcomes for children in terms of language, literacy, and school learning. Furthermore, SBR with multiple genres benefits parents as well, enabling them to draw upon the features of different genres to generate a broader range of conversations about books and their meaning. Having an arsenal of genres from which to choose also provides parents with ways to consider their own and their children's unique characteristics. The interactive nature of SBR opens a space in which children and their parents collaborate to explore the content and messages within books, and the features and devices through which these are expressed and conveyed. Future research can expand our understanding of the unique potential of different genres to enhance an early childhood activity already recognized for its importance as a building block in language and literacy development.

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The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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