

# Yale College Education Studies Program

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Senior Capstone Projects

Student Research

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## *How to Not Lose Your Mind When Reading Goodnight Moon for the Thirtieth Time: An Investigation into Shared Storybook Reading and Caregiver Emotional Intelligence*

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### Abstract:

Shared reading is a vital foundation of caregiver-child bonding and early literacy. Previous research has been conducted on the importance of adult emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and shared reading techniques that yield positive outcomes. However, there is little to no current research on the unique development of emotional intelligence through the process of caregiving. The purpose of this paper is to investigate a potential relationship between shared reading practices and caregiver emotional intelligence growth. Using sample populations from a daycare center in a mid-size New England city, qualitative data was collected from caregivers of young children on their self-reported experiences with shared reading. Findings revealed extensive use of emotional intelligence and moderate engagement in self-reflection amongst caregivers during shared reading. Limitations and recommendations for future research and programmatic interventions based on these findings are proposed.

Dedicated to Sandy Malmquist and Marjorie Stone.

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## Introduction

For the past 3 years I have worked as a part-time early childhood educator. I have gained valuable experience providing developmentally enriching curriculum and facilitating social-emotional growth, and have received many sticky-fingered hugs in return. One of my favorite parts of the day is story time – which coincidentally occurs in some form almost all day long. Whether reading to a full class at snack time or with single child during free play, I love seeing my students' eyes light up at a surprising plot twist or hidden illustration in the corner of the page. Storybooks extend their influence outside of colorfully drawn pages, serving as the premise for exciting outdoor games or the muse for artistic renderings. Even books from home make their way into class through spontaneous connections to other literary characters or real-life emotions. Stories that my students plead to hear on a daily basis still provide continuous excitement through new discoveries and conceptualizations.

Shared reading, or active reading to or with a young child or children, is an intense cognitive task. In order to fully engage children in this process, caregivers are simultaneously mindful of myriad factors, including; (1) the narrative structure of the story, (2) techniques for making a story engaging (e.g. silly voices, singing, dramatic pauses); (3) engagement of the child; (4) attentiveness to the child's thoughts and feelings about the story; (5) assessing the child's understanding of the story's narrative progression; (6) pinpointing the child's understanding of characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations; (7) identifying the child's understanding of vocabulary and word choice; (8) acknowledging the child's own relationship to a character's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and/or actions; (9) contextualizing unknown subjects to the child and/or finding opportunities to link story elements to a child's lived experiences or emerging knowledge; (10) recognizing voiced or unvoiced questions that the

child may be harboring; and (11) pinpointing opportunities to impart new knowledge to the child. This requires caregivers to be carefully attuned to the child's mental and emotional state, a demanding emotional intelligence task in and of itself. I have personally experienced a major shift in my capacity for empathy and interpretation of the mental states of others since I began interactively reading to young children. Yet, there is little to no research on the impact of shared reading practices on caregivers. The exploration of caregiver emotional intelligence outcomes will not only fill an existing gap in the research literature, but also codify positive caregiver practices as mutually beneficial for the adult-child dyad. This capstone therefore seeks to investigate whether a relationship exists between shared storybook reading and caregiver emotional intelligence.

## **Background**

### *Storybooks*

Storybooks are a key driver of early literacy in children. In addition to providing a child with great joy, storybooks impart complex vocabulary, phonological awareness, and communication skills upon their young readers.<sup>1</sup> Children with enhanced access to physical storybooks also exhibit heightened knowledge of language conventions, including conceptions of writing, print, and narrative structures).<sup>2</sup> Engagement with storybooks fosters early literacy and creates a foundation for future growth.

Young children's literature can take many forms: durable board books are designed for a baby's rough handling, vivid picture books for toddlers gradually morph into easy readers or more narratively complex texts, and elementary school students often embark on their first rudimentary chapter books. For the purposes of this paper, I define storybooks as books designed

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<sup>1</sup> Strasser, Janis, and Holly Seplocha. "Using Picture Books to Support Young Children's Literacy."

<sup>2</sup> Neuman, Susan B. "Books make a difference: A study of access to literacy."

for approximately 3- to 5-year-old children (although not exclusively) that contain both written text and illustrations. As the name suggests, storybooks must have a continuous narrative plotline and at least one character. Non-examples include an animal encyclopedia or an illustrated English-to-ASL guide. While there are high-quality storybooks produced in every country in nearly every language, I will be focusing my research on publications that are available in English and sold in the United States. This reflects the books that are available to my sample population.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a vital component of an individual's lifelong development. EI has been defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions."<sup>3</sup> The core domains of EI are interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional appraisal, regulation, and expression.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the terms "EI growth" and "EI development" will be used interchangeably to describe the process of exercising and growing one's EI. In young children, EI involves the understanding of a child's own emotions as well as their ability to perceive and regulate emotions in social situations. The latter requires management of not only intrinsic emotions but also the feelings of others.<sup>5</sup> EI is a positive predictor of a young child's academic and social school readiness, social behaviors and genuine friendships, adjustment to new

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<sup>3</sup> Mayer, John D., and Peter Salovey. "The intelligence of emotional intelligence."

<sup>4</sup> Salovey, Peter, and John D. Mayer. "Emotional intelligence."

<sup>5</sup> Willis, Clarissa A., and Pam Schiller. "Preschoolers' social skills steer life success."

environments, and future mental health.<sup>6</sup> In adults, EI has been linked to resiliency, life satisfaction, decreased risk for depression, and positive self-esteem.<sup>7</sup>

### *Theory of Mind*

Children's capacity to demonstrate theory of mind is one of the most crucial stages of early social-emotional development, affecting both present and future relationships.<sup>8</sup> Within the field of social cognition, theory of mind is described as the ability to understand people as distinct mental beings that have their own unique thoughts, emotions, and motivations.<sup>9</sup> Theory of mind typically develops in children between the ages of birth to five along incremental stages of increased understanding.<sup>10</sup> Studies have found significant links between theory of mind capabilities and future outcomes. Children whose mothers talk openly about thoughts and feelings of others demonstrate earlier mental state awareness.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, parents who displayed higher levels of prosocial orientation rooted in theory of mind reared young children

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<sup>6</sup> Denham, Susanne A. "Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness: What is it and how do we assess it?"; Mavroveli, Stella, and María José Sánchez-Ruiz. "Trait emotional intelligence influences on academic achievement and school behaviour." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 81, no. 1 (2011): 112-134; Petrides, K. V., Yolanda Sangareau, Adrian Furnham, and Norah Frederickson. "Trait emotional intelligence and children's peer relations at school"; Mavroveli, Stella, Kostantinos V. Petrides, Yolanda Sangareau, and Adrian Furnham. "Exploring the relationships between trait emotional intelligence and objective socio-emotional outcomes in childhood"; Piqueras, Jose A., Ornela Mateu-Martínez, Javier Cejudo, and Juan-Carlos Pérez-González. "Pathways into psychosocial adjustment in children: modeling the effects of trait emotional intelligence, social-emotional problems, and gender"; Scott-Little, Catherine, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Victoria Stebbins Frelow. "Creating the Conditions for Success with Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Study of State-Level Standards for Children's Learning Prior to Kindergarten."

<sup>7</sup> Delhom, Iraida, Encarnación Satorres, and Juan C. Meléndez. "Can we improve emotional skills in older adults? Emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, and resilience"; Lloyd, Sandra J., Michael Malek-Ahmadi, Kathleen Barclay, Miguel R. Fernandez, and Max Stanley Chartrand. "Emotional intelligence (EI) as a predictor of depression status in older adults"; Doinita, Nanu Elena. "Adult attachment, self-esteem and emotional intelligence."

<sup>8</sup> Flavell JH, Miller PH. Social cognition. In: Kuhn D, Siegler R, eds. *Cognition, perception and language*.

<sup>9</sup> Astington Janet Wilde, Dack LA. "Theory of mind." In: Haith MM, Benson JB, eds. *Encyclopedia of infant and early childhood development*.

<sup>10</sup> Astington, Janet Wilde, Hughes C. "Theory of mind: Self-reflection and social understanding." In: Zelazo PD, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*.

<sup>11</sup> Ruffman T, Slade L, Crowe E. "The relation between children's and mothers' mental state language and theory-of-mind understanding."

with higher levels of theory of mind and emotional understanding.<sup>12</sup> Understanding underlying internal states that affect outward actions is critical for the development of platonic and intimate relationships.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, children both ground their own representation of theory of mind within their caregiver's capacity, and strengthen theory of mind through the secure attachments and responsive growth environment created by caregivers who employ frequent theory of mind practices.<sup>14</sup>

Theory of mind development is a key factor in short- and long-term life outcomes in school, work, relationships, and personal wellbeing. Children who display highly developed theory of mind have more sincere friendships amongst their peers, are rated as more socially competent by their teachers, and resolve conflicts more easily and effectively.<sup>15</sup> Further studies have shown positive relationships between young children's theory of mind and school readiness.<sup>16</sup> In slightly older children, achievement on advanced theory of mind tasks is associated with emotional intelligence.<sup>17</sup> In adulthood, theory of mind correlates with complex emotional intelligence abilities of understanding, perceiving and managing emotions.<sup>18</sup> High

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<sup>12</sup> Eggum, Natalie D., Nancy Eisenberg, Karen Kao, Tracy L. Spinrad, Rebecca Bolnick, Claire Hofer, Anne S. Kupfer, and William V. Fabricius. "Emotion understanding, theory of mind, and prosocial orientation: Relations over time in early childhood."

<sup>13</sup> Fonagy, Peter, Guörgy Gergely, Elliot L. Jurist, and Mary Target. *Affect regulation, mentalization, and the development of the self*.

<sup>14</sup> Fonagy, Peter, Miriam Steele, Howard Steele, Tom Leigh, Roger Kennedy, Gretta Mattoon, and Mary Target. "Attachment, the reflective self, and borderline states: The predictive specificity of the Adult Attachment Interview and pathological emotional development"; Fonagy, Peter, and Mary Target. "Mentalization and the changing aims of child psychoanalysis."

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, J. "Children's relationships: Bridging the divide between cognitive and social development"; Astington, Janet Wilde. "Sometimes necessary, never sufficient: False belief understanding and social competence."

<sup>16</sup> Cavadel, Elizabeth Woodburn, and Douglas A. Frye. "Not just numeracy and literacy: Theory of mind development and school readiness among low-income children"; Astington, Janet Wilde, and Janette Pelletier. "Theory of mind, language, and learning in the early years: Developmental origins of school readiness."

<sup>17</sup> Qualter, Pamela, Alexandra Barlow, and Maria S. Stylianou. "Investigating the relationship between trait and ability emotional intelligence and theory of mind."

<sup>18</sup> Megías-Robles, Alberto, María José Gutiérrez-Cobo, Rosario Cabello, Raquel Gómez-Leal, Simon Baron-Cohen, and Pablo Fernández-Berrocal. "The 'Reading the mind in the Eyes' test and emotional intelligence"; Ferguson, Fiona J., and Elizabeth J. Austin. "Associations of trait and ability emotional intelligence with performance on Theory of Mind tasks in an adult sample."

emotional intelligence in adults has resultingly been associated with better physical and mental health.<sup>19</sup> Theory of Mind is therefore a core competency associated with positive growth and future outcomes.

### *Reflective Practice*

Reflective practice is an oft-mentioned term in such varied fields as social work, healthcare, education, and sports.<sup>20</sup> Nebulous in nature,<sup>21</sup> some practitioners define it as a distinct set of steps or periods, while other definitions qualify any act of reflection as engagement in reflective practice.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I define reflective practice between caregivers or early childhood educators and young children as the continuous cycle of identifying and evaluating a child's thoughts and feelings, understanding how these influence the child's actions, and determining and implementing the appropriate steps to address the child's needs. This definition is loosely based on several existing early childhood reflective practices, such as the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework's Practice Principles, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Five Step Reflective Cycle, the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, and the Program for Infant/Toddler Care's Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt framework.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Schutte, Nicola S., John M. Malouff, Einar B. Thorsteinsson, Navjot Bhullar, and Sally E. Rooke. "A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and health."

<sup>20</sup> Knott, Christine, and Terry Scragg, eds. *Reflective practice in social work*; Ferguson, Harry. "How social workers reflect in action and when and why they don't: Reflective practice in social work"; Wikinson, John. "Implementing reflective practice"; Taylor, Beverley. *Reflective practice for healthcare professionals: a practical guide*; Rushton, Ian, and Martin Suter. *Reflective Practice For Teaching In Lifelong Learning*; Van Manen, Max. "On the epistemology of reflective practice"; Cropley, Brendan, Sheldon Hanton, Andy Miles, and Ailsa Niven. "Exploring the relationship between effective and reflective practice in applied sport psychology."

<sup>21</sup> Zeichner, Kenneth M. "Research on teacher thinking and different views of reflective practice in teaching and teacher education."

<sup>22</sup> Loughran, J. John. *Developing reflective practice: Learning about teaching and learning through modelling*; University of Cambridge Libraries, "Reflective Practice Toolkit."

<sup>23</sup> Garvis, Susanne, Donna Pendergast, Danielle Twigg, Bev Flückiger, Harry Kanasa, Carmel Phillips, Maggie Bishop, Kerry Lockett, and Darlene Leach. "The Victorian early years learning and development framework: Managing change in a complex environment"; Vallotton, Claire D., Jennifer A. Mortensen, Melissa M. Burnham,

Reflection is necessary in any pursuit, profession, or personal relationship as a mechanism for identification, evaluation, and improvement. Questioning and analyzing one's own actions is a helpful tool for understanding strengths and weaknesses in thoughts and execution. Likewise, reflecting on the decisions and actions of others is helpful for self-learning and addressing the needs and concerns of the person reflected upon. Reflection often yields the additional benefit of a temporal and spatial delay that enables a person to gain heightened perspective on events that occurred. Social reflection, specifically, allows individuals to make meaning out of the perspectives of others and alters their own perspectives.<sup>24</sup> This facilitates complex and nuanced problem-solving.<sup>25</sup> These skills are highly valuable tools when attempting to interact with and understand others, especially populations that aren't able to voice their inner thoughts and feelings.

A prime example of reflective practice in action is the Five Step Reflective Cycle. The NAEYC's formulated approach utilizes developmental and contextual lenses to structure a caregiver's reflections on the thoughts and actions of their child.<sup>26</sup> The Five Step Reflective Cycle requires caregivers to first gauge their child's immediate behaviors and feeling through observation. They are then to apply an introspective lens by examining the internal and external stimuli to which the child is responding. In the next two steps caregivers identify and address the child's underlying emotional and relational needs. Finally, caregivers reflect on their child's actions in relation to their own to assess the efficacy of their chosen solution. Thus, a practitioner of the Five Step Reflective Cycle is able to reflect on their own perceptions and feelings of a

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Kalli B. Decker, and Marjorie Beeghly. "Becoming a Better Behavior Detective"; Gibbs, G. "Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods"; Virmani, Elita Amini, and Peter L. Mangione. "Culturally Sensitive Care."

<sup>24</sup> Mezirow, Jack. "Learning to think like an adult."

<sup>25</sup> Hutton, N., & Smith, D. "Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation."

<sup>26</sup> Vallotton et al., "Becoming a Better Behavior Detective."

child's thoughts and actions in order to best care for them. While other explicit models of reflective practice in teaching vary slightly in steps and term definition, the core tenets remain the identification, understanding, and response to the thoughts and feelings of others.

## **Literature Review**

### *Emotional Intelligence and Children's Literature*

Extensive research has been conducted on the EI benefits of children's literature. Storybooks create frameworks for friendship, empathy, and tolerance that children internalize and emulate.<sup>27</sup> Reading young children's literature with social-emotional themes increases a young child's emotional vocabulary,<sup>28</sup> which gives them the words to describe their own thoughts and feelings. Storybooks also engender emotional literacy through promotion of empathy and theory of mind.<sup>29</sup> This most frequently occurs through heightened awareness of the thoughts and feelings of themselves and others.<sup>30</sup> Plotlines and characters that mirror a child's own experiences validate their emotions while providing suggestive pathways for emotion regulation.<sup>31</sup> Further studies demonstrate that books focused on early sources of trauma can help a young child mediate the impact of these stressors.<sup>32</sup> Storybooks provide exemplary models for children to recognize, process, and react to intrapersonal and interpersonal scenarios in their daily lives.

### *Adult Emotional Intelligence*

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<sup>27</sup> Kemple, Kristen Mary. *Let's be friends: Peer competence and social inclusion in early childhood programs.*

<sup>28</sup> Garner, Pamela W, and Tameka S Parker. "Young Children's Picture-Books as a Forum for the Socialization of Emotion."

<sup>29</sup> Nikolajeva, Maria. "Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy."

<sup>30</sup> Harper, Laurie J., and Susan Trostle Brand. "More alike than different: Promoting respect through multicultural books."

<sup>31</sup> Harper, Laurie J. "Using picture books to promote social-emotional literacy."

<sup>32</sup> Roberts, Sherron Killingsworth, and Patricia A. Crawford. "Literature to help children cope with family stressors."

An abundance of research has been conducted on adult EI. There have been investigations into the relationship between adult EI and widely disparate factors including sex offender-status, communicative foreign language anxiety, happiness, and learning styles.<sup>33</sup> Most commonly, models of social-emotional learning geared towards adults are applied in workplace settings to increase the EI of workers for more productive labor and group cohesion. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as EI was becoming more broadly accepted as a legitimate form of intelligence by researchers and the general public alike, the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations released a report on the importance of workplace applications.<sup>34</sup> The consortium heads claimed the effective implementation of set guidelines for adult EI practices would re-capture billions in lost profit for companies. A few years later, study authors Cary Cherniss and Daniel Gorman published a book on the subject, *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace*, which has been cited over 1,300 times in published research.<sup>35</sup> The foreword and preface of this instructive manual belabor the myriad financial benefits that companies can reap from having emotionally intelligent workers, ranging from high level executives to HR departments. The future success of the EI workplace industry was propagated on ideals of increased corporate efficiency and resulting financial gains for companies. Investment into this field also results in fiscal benefits for psychologists and EI-focused centers that create content for for-profit corporate programs as supplements to their published research.

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<sup>33</sup> Puglia, Michelle L., Con Stough, James D. Carter, and Megan Joseph. "The emotional intelligence of adult sex offenders: ability based EI assessment;" Dewaele, Jean-Marc, Konstantinos V. Petrides, and Adrian Furnham. "Effects of trait emotional intelligence and sociobiographical variables on communicative anxiety and foreign language anxiety among adult multilinguals: A review and empirical investigation"; Sillick, Tamra J., and Nicola S. Schutte. "Emotional intelligence and self-esteem mediate between perceived early parental love and adult happiness"; Johnson, Gia Daneka Kimbrough. *Learning styles and emotional intelligence of the adult learner*.

<sup>34</sup> Cherniss, Cary, Daniel Goleman, Robert Emmerling, Kim Cowan, and Mitchel Adler. "Bringing emotional intelligence to the workplace: A technical report issued by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations."

<sup>35</sup> Cherniss, Cary, and Daniel Goleman. *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select for, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations*.

### *Caregiver Emotional Intelligence Research Gap*

Workplace EI has paved the way for broader research into the correlates between adult EI and economic, social, educational, and health-based outcomes. Caregiver EI, however, has been widely disregarded by the research community. Hardly any published work exists on the impacts that the work of caregiving for young children has on an adults EI. Likewise, there is little to no research on the benefits of EI growth for caregivers themselves. Instead, the collective body of research focuses either on how increased caregiver EI affects their children,<sup>36</sup> or the ways in which parents can facilitate their children's EI development.<sup>37</sup> This gaping hole in the literature neglects the importance of caregiver growth and wellbeing as well as delegitimizes the social-emotional labor and advancement that occurs through the process of attentive caregiving.

### *Relationship between Shared Reading and Emotional Intelligence*

Shared reading between children and their caregivers plays a key role in facilitating early bonding. The process of storybook shared reading has been shown to support young children's EI development, pro-social play with peers and future social-emotional competencies.<sup>38</sup> High quality shared reading has also been shown to promote vocabulary expansion and retention in

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<sup>36</sup> Kim, Jung-Min, and Yu-Ri Lee. "The effects of parent-adolescent communication, emotional intelligence and parentification on the psychological well-being of adolescents"; Dabke, Deepika. "Role of parental emotional intelligence and perceived parental leadership behaviour on satisfaction with parent."

<sup>37</sup> Thomson, Rebecca N. *A Self-Administered Parent Training Intervention for Building Social-Emotional Competence among Low-Income Preschoolers: A Non-Concurrent Multiple-Baseline Design across Three Cases*; Conner, Natalie W., and Mark W. Fraser. "Preschool social-emotional skills training: A controlled pilot test of the making choices and strong families programs"; Sheridan, Susan M., Lisa L. Knoche, Carolyn P. Edwards, James A. Bovaird, and Kevin A. Kupzyk. "Parent engagement and school readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready intervention on preschool children's social-emotional competencies."

<sup>38</sup> Wirth, Astrid, Simone C. Ehlig, Nadja Drescher, Sabrina Guffler, and Frank Niklas. "Facets of the early home literacy environment and children's linguistic and socioemotional competencies"; Kohm, Kristen E., Robyn M. Holmes, Lynn Romeo, and Louis Koolidge. "The connection between shared storybook readings, children's imagination, social interactions, affect, prosocial behavior, and social play"; Wirth, Astrid, Simone C. Ehlig, and Frank Niklas. "The role of the Home Literacy Environment for children's linguistic and socioemotional competencies development in the early years."

disadvantaged youth populations.<sup>39</sup> However, the definition of “high-quality” shared reading varies greatly among researchers, with a nebulous field-wide agreement on the essential component of interactive nature of caregiver-child conversation. This results in seemingly endless perspectives and instructive manuals on how caregivers can best read to their children. Educator guides often suggest involved activities like creating charts for different character’s perspectives or narrative retelling via theatrical imaginative play, but caregiver guides entail more conversational approaches.<sup>40</sup> Research has been conducted on certain effective techniques, such as increasing scaffolding difficulty when introducing children to new words or focusing on narrative elements before moving to socio-cognitive discussions.<sup>41</sup> Interventions for caregiver shared reading may encourage retelling of complex plots or activation of prior knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Other encourage taking into account children’s preferences for different types of books and reading styles, providing context for new subjects or geographies, and being attentive to the child’s engagement levels.<sup>43</sup> Dialogical shared storybook reading is a repetitive sequence of prompting child discussion, evaluating their input, rephrasing their responses with new information, and insuring through verbal communication that child has understood and encoded the added knowledge.<sup>44</sup> This methodology renders children as active participants in the reading process, despite their limited or nonexistent capacities to understand written text. Recent research

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<sup>39</sup> Hargrave, Anne C., and Monique Sénéchal. "A book reading intervention with preschool children who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading"; Karweit, Nancy, and Barbara A. Wasik. "The effects of story reading programs on literacy and language development of disadvantaged preschoolers"; Collins, Molly Fuller. "ESL preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition from storybook reading."

<sup>40</sup> Kozak, Stephanie, and Holly Recchia. "Reading and the development of social understanding: Implications for the literacy classroom."

<sup>41</sup> Blewitt, Pamela, Keiran M. Rump, Stephanie E. Shealy, and Samantha A. Cook. "Shared book reading: When and how questions affect young children's word learning"; Aram, Dorit, Yaara Fine, and Margalit Ziv. "Enhancing parent-child shared book reading interactions: Promoting references to the book's plot and socio-cognitive themes."

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, Kathryn L. "Comprehension strategy instruction during parent-child shared reading: An intervention study."

<sup>43</sup> Paul, Pamela, and Maria Russo. *How to Raise a Reader*.

<sup>44</sup> Whitehurst, Russ J. "Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read Aloud with Young Children."

has found correlations between dialogical storybook reading and increased receptive vocabulary and positive attitudes about reading.<sup>45</sup> These diverse shared reading techniques are tied by the implicit thread of reflective practice and EI. These strategies for high quality learning require caregivers to apply theory of mind principles to understand the questions, desires, and cognitive connections or disconnects that a child can not explicitly vocalize. This suggests that EI growth is actively occurring as parents engage in shared reading.

### *Relationship between Reflective Practice and Emotional Intelligence*

There is little to no research explicitly linking the action of reflective practice and its impact on educators' and caregivers' EI. Many educational institutions and social psychology research centers encourage teachers to engage in reflection about their promotion of EI-based social emotional learning endeavors in the classroom, or implement activities for students to reflect on their EI.<sup>46</sup> However, scarce scholarly research on EI exists in the overarching field of reflective practice (e.g., social work, healthcare, management leadership), and even less so in the explicit domain of education research. A single study in conducted in 2013 examined the relationship between reflective practice and EI in upper high school equivalent educators in the United Kingdom.<sup>47</sup> Researchers found a significant correlation between engagement in reflective practice and subsequent growth on measures of self-awareness, emotion regulation, motivation, and empathy. Despite these landmark findings, the sole subsequent research on the connection between educator's EI and engagement in reflective practice was conducted 5 years later with a

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<sup>45</sup> Kotaman, Huseyin. "Impacts of dialogical storybook reading on young children's reading attitudes and vocabulary development."

<sup>46</sup> CASEL. "Reflecting on Personal SEL Skills"; Kremenitzer, Janet Pickard. "The emotionally intelligent early childhood educator: Self-reflective journaling"; Elias, Maurice J. "How to Effectively Develop Social-Emotional and Reflection Skills"; Greater Good in Education. "Reflecting on SEL Skills."

<sup>47</sup> Gill, Gobinder Singh. "The Nature of Reflective Practice and Emotional Intelligence in Tutorial Settings."

sample of pre-service foreign language teachers in Ukraine.<sup>48</sup> There is very little published research on the relationship between caregiver EI growth and reflective practice. While there are numerous guides on the importance of caregiver reflective practice for the sake of their children, especially for caregivers of infants and toddlers, studies have not been conducted into the direct impacts on caregiver EI.

Minding the Baby is unique in explicitly tying reflective practice to caregiver EI development and other positive outcomes. The program's goals define "promoting emotional well-being in parents and children" as equally important key directives, centering the caregiver experience as worthy of investment. Started in 2002, Minding the Baby is an intensive home visiting program designed to serve low-income first-time young mothers. Since its founding cohort in New Haven, the program has since been studied and replicated in geographic regions across the United States and internationally. Foundational preventative measures are grounded in theories of reflective practice, secure attachment, and maternal and infant physical and mental health prioritization.<sup>49</sup> Caregiver engagement in reflective practice quite literally puts the titular "mindfulness" in the Minding the Baby. Longitudinal research has identified myriad positive outcomes for caregiver-child relationships, including increased caregiver reflection, higher rates of demonstrated secure attachment, lower rates of future externalizing disorders, and significantly less disrupted parent-child interactions resulting from Minding the Baby interventions.<sup>50</sup> These outcomes are significant contributors to both caregiver and child positive

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<sup>48</sup> Zadorozhna, Iryna, Olha Datskiv, and Natalia Levchyk. "Development of pre-service foreign languages teachers' emotional intelligence by means of reflection."

<sup>49</sup> Slade, Arietta, Margaret L. Holland, Monica Roosa Ordway, Elizabeth A. Carlson, Sangchoon Jeon, Nancy Close, Linda C. Mayes, and Lois S. Sadler. "Minding the Baby®: Enhancing parental reflective functioning and infant attachment in an attachment-based, interdisciplinary home visiting program."

<sup>50</sup> Sadler, L. S., A. Slade, N. Close, D. L. Webb, T. Simpson, K. Fennie, and L. C. Mayes. "Minding the Baby: Improving early health and relationship outcomes in vulnerable young families in an interdisciplinary reflective parenting home visiting program."

social-emotional development.<sup>51</sup> *Minding the Baby* is a prime example of one of the scant few child-caregiver programs that prioritizes both caregiver well-being and reflective practice.

### *Importance of Caregiver Wellbeing*

Caregiver wellbeing is highly under researched and undervalued. The lived experiences and EI growth of caregivers is a valuable topic of research, both because it signals to caregivers that they are valued as individuals in their own right and because more emotionally intelligent caregivers raise more emotionally intelligent children.<sup>52</sup> Based on analysis of previous research and published guides from early child literacy programs, EI growth is innately tied to the process of shared reading. However, data from caregivers on shared reading in practice is needed to validate these findings. Connecting these functions highlights and upholds the labor of early child caregivers.

### **Methodology**

This capstone represents inaugural research into the relationship between caregiver EI growth and the practice of caregiving to young children, with a specific focus on shared storybook reading. Data was collected through an instrumental case study of the caregiver-child relational discourse of children's storybooks.<sup>53</sup> Instrumental case studies are designed to construct theory and provide previously unexamined insight into a particular topic or subject group, rendering it an ideal format for this line of inquiry.<sup>54</sup> Case study will rely on qualitative, ethnographic data collection from subject interviews which are coded for explicit and implicit self-reported behaviors of EI growth, theory of mind, and reflective practice.

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<sup>51</sup> Ordway, Monica Roosa, Lois S. Sadler, Margaret L. Holland, Arietta Slade, Nancy Close, and Linda C. Mayes. "A home visiting parenting program and child obesity: A randomized trial."

<sup>52</sup> Turculeț, Alina, and Cristina Tulbure. "The relation between the emotional intelligence of parents and children."

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, Lorna, and Connie Corbett-Whittier. *Using case study in education research*.

<sup>54</sup> Mills, Albert J., Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe, eds. *Encyclopedia of case study research*.

*Participants*

Participants were caregivers sourced from a single high-quality daycare in the New Haven area, near Yale University. The term “caregiver” will be used to describe an individual who is an uncompensated primary caretaker of a child, which may include but not limited to: biological parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, and other close relatives and/or family friends. While some literature extends the use of the word “caregiver” to include babysitters or teachers, the former is excluded from the study and the latter will be referred to as “educator.” Caregivers of current 3 to 5-year-old students of this daycare were recruited via emails from current full-time educators and an informational note deposited in the students’ lunchboxes attached to the daily activity recap. Former caregivers of students who graduated from the daycare within the last 4 years were recruited via email from educators who taught their children, including myself. Caregivers who did not speak or read any English books at home were excluded from study eligibility, but all participants who scheduled interviews were from bilingual or strictly English-speaking households. Furthermore, caregivers of current or former students who were also early childhood or elementary educators were excluded from the sample population. The two full-time early childhood educators in the 3 to 5-year-old room were both informed about the project through caregiver recruitment efforts, and expressed their interest in being interviewed. Interview data from highly-skilled professions complemented the perspectives of vocationally untrained caregivers. This daycare’s pedagogy contains an explicit focus on the value of early childhood literacy and the role of storybooks, rendering it an ideal candidate for study inclusion. Furthermore, I am a part-time educator at this daycare, and have therefore have both in-depth institutional knowledge of the daycare’s daily operations and have fostered trust over time with community stakeholders.

## *Methods*

Interviews with participants were scheduled over text or email. All interviews were conducted over a password protected Zoom video chat, and lasted 25-30 minutes on average. Recording and transcripts from interviews were moved from a password-protected cloud account to a password-protecting personal computer that only the researcher has access to, and file names were de-individuated to provide additional identity protection for participants. Participants were briefed that the study was on “the relationship between parents and children during storybook reading,” but were not told that the purpose of the study was focused on caregiver EI. This enabled more organic and intuitive responses from participants without undue fixation or worry. Additionally, meta-cognitive reflections from caregivers on their own thoughts, feelings, and actions were all spontaneously expressed by caregivers through their recollections of personal storybook reading practices.

Below are three interview scripts, for caregivers of current students, caregivers of alumnae students, and early childhood educators, respectively. These questions were developed through extensive consultation with validated interview protocol practices, including the use of expansive, open-ended lines of questioning that beget story-telling over fragmented responses.<sup>55</sup> The order and wording of questions was not strictly adhered to, and additional follow up questions in-line with the script framework were occasionally asked, but the focus and topic-outline of the below scripts constituted the consistent framework for every interview conducted to ensure standardization.

### *Script 1: Caregivers of currently enrolled children*

1. How do you select books to read with your **child/ren?**

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<sup>55</sup> Jacob, Stacy A., and S. Paige Furgerson. "Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: tips for students new to the field of qualitative research."

- a. What is important to you when selecting a new book?
  - b. What kind of books does your child most enjoy?
2. What books inspire the best conversations between you and your child/ren?
  - a. Can you give me an example of such a conversation?
3. Does your **child/ren** ever play out the content of what you've read together in other situations?
  - a. Can you tell me about a time when you've used themes from books in other scenarios?
4. How do you read books to your child/ren?
  - a. When you're reading to your child/ren how do you understand what the book means to them?
  - b. Has the way you read to your child/ren changed over time? If so, why?
  - c. Why do you think your child/ren wants to read the same book(s) over and over?
5. Why did you choose to enroll your child/ren in [School Name]?
6. Has the way that reading is incorporated into the pedagogy at [School Name] impacted the way that you read to your child/ren outside of school?
7. Is there anything else that you'd like me to know that we haven't discussed?

*Script 2: Caregivers of previously enrolled children*

1. How did you select books to read with your child/ren when they were 3 to 5 years old?
  - a. What was important to you when selecting a new book?
  - b. What kind of books did your child/ren most enjoy?
2. How did you read books to your child/ren when they were 3 to 5 years old?
  - a. When you were reading to your child/ren how did you understand what book meant to them?
  - b. Did the way you read to your child/ren changed over time? If so, why?
  - c. Why do you think your child/ren wanted to read the same book(s) over and over?
3. What books inspired the best conversations between you and your child/ren when they were 3 to 5 years old?
  - a. Can you give me an example of such a conversation?

4. Did your child/ren ever play out the content of what you've read together in other situations when they were 3 to 5 years old?
  - a. Can you tell me about a time when you've used themes from books in other scenarios?
5. Why did you choose to enroll your child/ren in this school?
6. Has the way that reading is incorporated into the pedagogy at [School Name] impacted the way that you read to your child/ren outside of school?
7. Do you still read to your child/ren?
  - a. Do you think that the foundation of reading that occurred when they were 3 to 5 years old contributed to their reading or literacy today?
  - b. Do you think that the reading that you did with your child/ren when they were 3 to 5 years old contributed to your relationship with them today?
8. Is there anything else that you'd like me to know that we haven't discussed?

*Script 3: Current early childhood educators*

1. How did you select books to read with your students?
  - a. What is important to you when selecting a new book?
  - b. What kind of books do your students most enjoy?
2. What books inspire the best conversations between you and your students?
  - a. Can you give me an example of such a conversation?
3. Do your students ever play out the content of what you've read together in other situations?
  - a. Can you tell me about a time when you've used themes from books in other areas of your teaching?
4. Do you use principles of reflective practice in your teaching?
  - a. What does reflective practice mean to you?
5. Why did you choose to work at this school?
6. What kinds of communication is there with parents about how to read to a child?
  - a. What kinds of communication is there with parents about kinds of books to read to their child?
7. Is there anything else that you'd like me to know that we haven't discussed?

### *Emotional Intelligence in Theory*

Emotional intelligence is defined by the American Psychological Association as “a type of intelligence that involves the ability to process emotional information and use it in reasoning and other cognitive activities.”<sup>56</sup> The framework of EI was first proposed by psychologists Peter Salovey and David Caruso, who believed that the ability to appraise, express and regulate emotions within the self and others constituted a unique form of intelligence along a separate domain from previously construed measures of intellect.<sup>57</sup> After the scientific field’s recognition of EI as a valid form of intelligence, emerging theories subdivided the subdivided into trait and ability models. The former was developed in 2001 with a central focus on the subjectivity of the emotional experience. Defined as “a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies,” the trait EI model is designed to measure an individual’s self-perceptions of their own emotional abilities and self-efficacy.<sup>58</sup> The trait EI model is contingent upon the recognition of EI as a personality trait. Ability-based EI models are instead concentrated on the processing of emotional information and subsequent manifestation of adaptive behaviors.<sup>59</sup> These adaptive behaviors are said to manifest into four interrelated abilities: perception, use, understanding, and management of emotions.<sup>60</sup> A third mixed model was introduced by science journalist Daniel Goleman, famous for bringing emotional intelligence to the forefront of the collective social consciousness through business-centric

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<sup>56</sup> VandenBos, Gary R. *APA Dictionary of Psychology*.

<sup>57</sup> Salovey, Peter, and John D. Mayer. "Emotional intelligence."

<sup>58</sup> Petrides, Kostantinos V. "Trait emotional intelligence theory"; Petrides, K. V., Adrian Furnham, and Stella Mavroveli. "Trait emotional intelligence: Moving forward in the field of EI."

<sup>59</sup> Mayer, John D., Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso. "Target Articles: Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications."

<sup>60</sup> Salovey, Peter, and Daisy Grewal. "The science of emotional intelligence."

publications.<sup>61</sup> Though initially derived as a measure for performance-predictive leadership skills, the resulting model of five core competencies of EI combines elements from both trait and ability models.<sup>62</sup> Each core competency construct (self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy, and motivation) is comprised of multiple learning-receptive emotional competencies. Myriad psychometric measures with varying degrees of validity, reliability, and practical applicability have been developed for the ability,<sup>63</sup> trait,<sup>64</sup> and mixed models.<sup>65</sup> These assessments are used to capture diverse aspects of emotional intelligence in varied populations, often alongside targeted interventions or cross-methodological measures of possible co-occurrent variables. In modern research, emotional intelligence has commonly been bisected into interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, which are each further bisected into domains of awareness and regulation. Similar to academic intelligence, every individual has a natural threshold for EI, but implicit and explicit learning can contribute to significant EI development.

### *Emotional Intelligence in Practice*

Although unstudied in parents, the education practice of social-emotional learning (SEL) for students and teachers provides a helpful framework for EI growth. SEL is incorporated into preexisting classroom and community settings amongst students, educators, caregivers, and

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<sup>61</sup> Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*.

<sup>62</sup> Mayer, John D., Richard D. Roberts, and Sigal G. Barsade. "Human abilities: Emotional intelligence."

<sup>63</sup> Mayer, John D., Peter Salovey, David R. Caruso, and Gill Sitarenios. "Measuring emotional intelligence with the MSCEIT V2.0"; Nowicki, Stephen, and Marshall P. Duke. "Individual differences in the nonverbal communication of affect: The Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy Scale"; MacCann, Carolyn, and Richard D. Roberts. "New paradigms for assessing emotional intelligence: theory and data"; Matsumoto, David, Jeff LeRoux, Carinda Wilson-Cohn, Jake Raroque, Kristie Kookan, Paul Ekman, Nathan Yrizarry et al. "A new test to measure emotion recognition ability: Matsumoto and Ekman's Japanese and Caucasian Brief Affect Recognition Test (JACBART)."

<sup>64</sup> Bar-On, Reuven. "Emotional and social intelligence: Insights from the Emotional Quotient Inventory"; Petrides, Konstantinos V. "Psychometric properties of the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire (TEIQue)"; Palmer, B., and C. Stough. "Workplace SUEIT, Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test."

<sup>65</sup> Boyatzis, Richard E., Daniel Goleman, and Kenneth Rhee. "Clustering competence in emotional intelligence: Insights from the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI)"; Bradberry, Travis R., and Lac D. Su. "Ability-versus skill-based assessment of emotional intelligence."

community stakeholders.<sup>66</sup> The core competencies of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.<sup>67</sup> Although not exact mirrors for the core tenets of EI, SEL is inherently focused on promoting the awareness and regulation of emotions for the positive benefits of social and academic outcomes. RULER is an evidence-based approach to SEL that facilitates the eponymous process of EI growth through recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions.<sup>68</sup> Engaging in processes like RULER requires individuals to actively engage their perceptions of emotions within themselves and in others, and carefully modulate their resulting actions accordingly. Most SEL frameworks are rooted in the field-dominant EI ability models, which are measured on objective outcomes instead of subjective self-report measures on personality traits.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, SEL is inherently dependent on the growth mindset theory that EI can be nurtured and advanced over time.<sup>70</sup>

In practice, active EI usage involves the perception, understanding, and regulation of the emotions of those around you. For parents of young children, discerning the needs and feelings of children is a near constant process. Preverbal infants are unable to express their concrete needs through language, toddlers cannot report on inner complex emotions, and young children need guidance in regulating adverse emotional responses. Caregivers need to utilize Theory of Mind to conceptualize the innate feelings of the children in their care. Spontaneous behavioral analysis

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<sup>66</sup> Zins, Joseph E., and Maurice J. Elias. "Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students."

<sup>67</sup> Jagers, Robert J., Deborah Rivas-Drake, and Brittney Williams. "Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence."

<sup>68</sup> Brackett, Marc A., Craig S. Bailey, Jessica D. Hoffmann, and Dena N. Simmons. "RULER: A theory-driven, systemic approach to social, emotional, and academic learning."

<sup>69</sup> Brackett, Marc A., and Nicole A. Katulak. "Emotional intelligence in the classroom: Skill-based training for teachers and students."

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, Leigh, and Donald R. Glover. *Building Character, Community, and a Growth Mindset in Physical Education*.

of a temper tantrum must consist not only of the child's but also environmental factors, temporal triggers, and nuanced emotional stimuli. A child who exhibits anger with a parent during school drop off may be harboring secret feelings of sadness, abandonment, apprehension, stress, and fatigue that are difficult to immediately ascertain. Likewise, it is often difficult to modulate natural negative affective responses to positive prosocial behaviors in the face of a crying or screaming young child. The process of engaging one's EI to identify interpersonal social awareness or intrapersonal self-regulation is not necessarily intuitive nor easy, and indeed may be counter to familial tendencies, thus demonstrating the need for holistic facilitation of EI development.

### *Reflective Practice in Practice*

The continuous rehearsal of these abilities, especially when paired with reflective practice, nurtures informal learning that leads to heightened comparative EI growth. Reflective practice does not necessarily require a concrete conceptualization of the aforementioned 5-step process, but rather can occur naturally as a caregiver recounts their actions during a particularly gratuitous or challenging moment. Recollecting on actions of strength or areas of weakness can prompt personal inquiry into how a future situation could be handled in a similar or divergent fashion in order to produce more optimal collective results. Such recollections may happen naturally immediately after a given event, when speaking with friends or family, or during quiet moments of personal contemplation. Programs that scaffold reflective practice in parents, such as *Minding the Baby*, yield similar positive outcome trajectories to reflective practice interventions in teaching and nursing.<sup>71</sup> Reflection is therefore a powerful mechanism for expediting EI growth.

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<sup>71</sup> Slade, Arietta, Margaret L. Holland, Monica Roosa Ordway, Elizabeth A. Carlson, Sangchoon Jeon, Nancy Close, Linda C. Mayes, and Lois S. Sadler. "Minding the Baby®: Enhancing parental reflective functioning and infant

### *Self-Reported EI & Reflective Practice*

This study considers the role of EI and reflective practice with specific regard to shared storybook reading. Due to the constraints of the study operationalization, specifically the self-report nature of interviewing, findings were coded for both explicit and implicit accounts of EI growth practices and reflection. As an example, an explicit demonstration of EI may be a caregiver specifically recounting a time where they ascertained that a particular type of book generated negative feelings in a child and actively assuaged their worries without prompting. An implicit demonstration of reflective practice may be an occurrence within the interview itself, where a caregiver shifts the way in which they are speaking about a child's thoughts, feelings, or actions and/or desires for personal future actions as they recount past events or phenomena. Coding for implicit and explicit expressions of EI and reflective practice diminished the effects of non-subject-expert self-reports. Purposeful obscurity of the caregiver-centered nature of the study prevented experiences of hyper self-consciousness on the part of interviewees. Questions were formulated to inquire about the thoughts, feelings, and actions of caregivers through a seemingly child-centric lens. Interview items used "you" focused language to recenter the conversation on how the child's emotions and behaviors are perceived by their caregivers. Likewise, the open-ended nature of questions and relative flexibility of optional follow-up structuring elicited lengthy and complex responses from interviewees. Caregivers with children above the age of five were encouraged to recollect both about when their children were aged three to five and about present-day. Collectively, these interview practices engendered the acquisition of a wealth of rich data.

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attachment in an attachment-based, interdisciplinary home visiting program"; Ghaye, Tony. *Teaching and learning through reflective practice: A practical guide for positive action*; Grobbel, Claudia C. "The importance of reflective practice in nursing."

## Findings

Interviews with caregivers revealed significant data that supports a relationship between EI growth and shared storytelling. Caregivers, in this instance all biological parents, self-reported significant amounts of continuous engagement in the four core tenets of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and social regulation. Reflective practice appeared less frequently in the data than anticipated, warranting exciting avenues for future research and programming. Findings have been organized below into the following domains of shared storybook reading: book selection, literary engagement, external application, and developmental change. Additionally, the impact of structural supports from the shared daycare setting, which served as an independent variable that was controlled across the sample, is reported. Variations across caregiver experiences and between the three subject groups are presented to contextualize overarching findings. As all interviewees were parents, the terms “caregiver” and “parent” will be used interchangeably.

### *Book Selection*

Selecting storybooks to read is the essential precursor to shared reading, but often viewed by society as a thoughtless task or a prescriptive ritual. In truth, choosing books for a child is a thoughtful, continuous process that reveals deeply personal revelations about the way that caregivers perceive the literary needs and wants of their children. The book selection domain in this study encompasses both the initial selection of books for home library inclusion and daily choices for shared reading.

Home library quality and quantity has been shown to improve early literacy and long-term linguistic and academic outcomes in children.<sup>72</sup> Interviewees reported a wide range of

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<sup>72</sup> Payne, Adam C., Grover J. Whitehurst, and Andrea L. Angell. "The role of home literacy environment in the development of language ability in preschool children from low-income families"; Kreider, Holly, Georganne

informational inputs prioritized during the initial book selection process. Many caregivers reported an explicit mindfulness of their child's interests when picking out new books. One mom said that she "didn't push [her children] in a particular direction" with their literary interests, and instead shaped her book acquisitions around the topics that her children naturally gravitated to. For this parent, that meant lots of stereotypically boy-centric interests that did not align with her own. Another mother commented that one of her children expressed a fascination with body parts, bathroom functions, and worms, subjects that she personally perceived as unpleasant but nonetheless sought to support through educational storybooks. Book format was an additional consideration that parents took into account during the book acquisition process. One parent noticed their child gravitating towards narrative texts more than informational resources, and prioritized the former when rearranging storybook collections. Other caregivers identified dinosaurs as a primary obsession of their children, and each individually reported that they tried to find a mix of narrative and non-fiction dinosaur storybooks to fully attend to their children's fixations. Each of these parents exhibited intrapersonal awareness of their child's interests, and took it upon themselves to self-regulate their own book selection tendencies in order to better serve these preferences in the future. In the case of some of the aforementioned, this process involved additional self-awareness of the disconnect between their child's interests and their own. These parents actively diminished the importance of their own literary proclivities in favor of their children's preferences.

Multiple caregivers expressed a desire to incorporate social and global diversity into their home libraries. One black parent emphasized the importance of filling his home library with

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Morin, Gabrielle E. Miller, and Angie Bush. "Promoting language and literacy outcomes through shared reading at home"; Coleman, James, Ernest Campbell, Carol Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander Mood, Frederic Weinfeld, and Robert York. Equality of Educational Opportunity.

stories of women's empowerment and racial diversity, especially of black children and families, to enable his daughters to feel represented through reading. He remarked that his children's favorite storybooks (e.g. *Ladybug Girl*, *Ada Twist Scientist*) frequently featured strong female protagonists. Another white parent prioritized selecting books that represented cultural diversity that her daughter wouldn't otherwise naturally gravitate towards in order to expose her children to a broader range of experiences and cultures. One mother summed up the general rationality of the caregivers who mentioned diverse representation as a driver of book selection: "Books are the only way that people can develop world sensibilities...reading is a pretty profoundly moral act and encounters with characters and ideas and landscapes and worlds that are different from your own is really how to have empathy." These caregivers understood the role of storybooks in facilitating real world representations and attitudes, and selected books in order to scaffold implicit appreciation for and explicit conversations about diversity in the world.

Social regulation is further exemplified by caregivers who sought books that mirrored or provided context for complex experiences their children were facing. One caregiver used books to explain the scientific processes of seasons changing through a young child's eyes to facilitate her daughter's acclimation to new climates after moving countries. She also selected books about kindergarten and daycare settings to prepare her child to enter a new classroom. Another parent "relied heavily on books to sort of talk about heaven and the concept of not coming back" to her young son after the death of his grandfather. A third parent purposefully chose books that would mirror common experiences that his children may face in the future, such as losing their first tooth. These caregivers used children's books as a method of addressing and regulating the thoughts and feelings of their children, demonstrating (sometimes proactive) appraisal and regulative EI.

Some caregivers mentioned selecting books that used engaging rhyme schemes or shorter sentence structures to support textual accessibility. However, a subset of interviewees oriented their personal beliefs of the value of storybooks to lie primarily in facilitation of literacy and linguistic familiarity. Literacy is an incredibly important part of early childhood development, but in terms of the purpose of this investigation does not fall within the purview of activities that facilitate caregiver EI growth. Interestingly, caregivers who did not define the principal value of storybooks to linguistic proficiency detailed more instances of their children engaging in literacy-oriented actions like identifying letters or words. Uniquely, these accounts were paired with Theory of Mind suppositions regarding their children's mental states, such as one parent who said their child enjoys finding sight reading words or another who remarks that their daughter loves picking out the letters of in her name amongst the story's text. While not causal, these findings suggest a correlation between self-reports of EI abilities and children's spontaneous positive engagement in literacy-centric behaviors.

Every caregiver maintained that they let their children choose which books they wanted for story time. Some expressed a preference for certain books, such as those with topics that aligned with their own interests or were nostalgic texts from their own childhood, but all let their children make the final decision about which book to read. These findings demonstrate the inherent selflessness inherent in the experience of shared storybook reading for this sample population. This phenomenon implies that self-regulation for the purpose of supporting others' happiness is a key display of EI capabilities central to caregiving for young children.

### *Literary Engagement*

Literary engagement encompasses the ways in which parents incorporate their child into the process of shared reading, whether through their own actions or incentivizing the actions of

their child. While literary engagement seems to eponymously reference the active participation of the child, it equally refers to the attentiveness of caregivers to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of their dependents.

Several caregivers expressed the importance of inhabiting engaging reading styles to facilitate storybook engagement. These ranged from character-specific vocalizations, like silly vocalizations and unique accents, to general theatrics like comedic timing and singing. Multiple interviewees said that the purpose of their actions was to create a picture in their children's minds, potentially even one more salient than the visual imagery on the page. The usage of Theory of Mind to interpret their child's responses to differing reading styles demonstrates social EI growth. Similarly, one caregiver said that he derived personal enjoyment from eliciting laughter from his children through particularly silly voices or songs. This embodies a symbiotic, circuitous relationship between social awareness of a child's feelings, self-regulation of one's own feelings to produce optimal actions, positive social regulation of the child's happiness, and self-awareness of one's own resulting happiness.

A major theme across interviews was the correlation of shared reading timing and social regulation. Caregivers reported a variety of temporal reading habits, including strictly bedtimes rituals, mealtime additions, designated tech-free weekend time blocks, and continuous optionality similar to the accessibility of imaginative play. Some caregivers framed bedtime reading through an EI lens, describing shared storytelling as an ideal activity for regulating children into a calmer emotional state. Others described nighttime reading more as a prescriptive tradition that incentivizes a child to go to sleep. While these cases may look similar to an outside observer, the former cohort of parents is engaging more deeply in EI through mindfulness of their child's affective states and ways that they could modulate their own behaviors in order to

achieve optimal emotional regulation for sleep. One parent reported engaging in EI during mealtime, by spontaneously discovering that storybook reading during mealtimes settled her rambunctious children. She stumbled upon this discovery one day by happenstance and remembered that her children are read to during lunch and snack times at their school. By engaging in reflective practice about the stimuli that caused her children to change their emotional states, the underlying context of this stimuli, and its potential future veracity, she gained a valuable tool to assist in social regulation for more pleasant mealtimes for all. The caregiver that reported establishing designated tech free shared reading times and the other who made shared reading a known option during every play time may seem conceptually at odds with each other. However, both conveyed the message that reading is a pleasurable activity to value, whether through explicit prioritization or implicit equivalency with other diversions like playing with toy trucks. Thoughtfully endeavoring to change a child's appreciation of reading is a prime example of EI at work.

Among caregivers with multiple children, the act of attending to a multiplicity of reading penchants was a theme that consistently emerged in interviews. To illustrate, one caregiver described in length her three children's varied literary needs across the board. Not only did her children read at different grade levels, each had distinct topics and stories that they enjoyed. Furthermore, among the three children were assorted capacities for reading, preferred learning mechanisms, and a learning disorder, which only exacerbated her challenges. Rather than express frustration, the parent described her situation with attitude of an exciting puzzle to be undertaken. After what can only be assumed to be a good deal of trial and error, she found a solution where all three could be in the same room during storytelling, yet experience differing formats of reading: one following along with the text on the page, one listening to the book being

read aloud and seeing the pictures, and the oldest independently reading in the corner (with the tacit knowledge of available help). It should be noted that while her children were in elementary school at the time of interviewing, she reported on her ability to maintain a collective yet individualized shared reading experience for many years. This caregiver's remarkable ability to modulate her own emotions and engage in Theory of Mind to best attend to the needs of each of her children and grant them an ideal shared reading experience lent to their enthusiastic affect towards reading and positive literary growth.

Some used storybooks as a mechanism for fostering interpersonal relationships in a variety of ways. One interviewee encouraging multiple adult members of his family to engage in shared reading with his children. By expanding his children's exposure to these intimate experiences with myriad caregivers besides their parents, he facilitated positive collective familial bonds across age groups. Furthermore, this parent harnessed storybooks to teach his children about family members' lives, such as linking a book on emergency personnel to their uncle's job as a police officer. He explained that this action enabled his children to feel more comfortable around these adults, and often leads to them asking breathless questions and making endless connections to storybooks that result in a closer relationship for all. This parent's extensive knowledge of his children's comfort levels and utilization of books to regulate future interactions is an exemplary combination of EI and literacy in daily life.

Several caregivers used storybooks as a teacher for contextualizing complex historical events that children were interested in. When asked questions about the Civil War, an interviewee turned to a book on the subject to scaffold nuanced conversation with her child via historical narratives. Another parent recounted needing to spontaneously edit a book her children had requested about September 11<sup>th</sup> to ensure that the content was age appropriate. She described

that assessing if books on topics her children were curious about were “too scary” or mature for them whilst reading, and on several occasions needed to pivot the subject matter in the moment. Despite the pitfalls of relying on outside texts to describe daunting topics, the caregiver maintained that supplementing these stories with personal stories and discussions of what it means to be “good” and “bad” renders optimal understanding from her children. In addition to requiring extensive use of interpersonal awareness and regulation, these storybook-prompted conversations induced self-reflection about her own methods of communication with her children:

They teach you things and when they ask you questions, it makes you think about how to answer them, which I find is good, because you know, sometimes you're just flippant with your answers. But when you're talking to a five-year-old or three-year-old you can't be too flip because one they're really literal so they don't understand...sarcasm and shades of meaning. They don't want to hear all of the silly stuff, sometimes they just want to know. It's a real learning experience every time you talk to them.

Several other parents echoed her musings about feeling imperfect in answering complex questions, surmising that the importance of the conversations themselves outweighs fear of potentially saying “the wrong thing.” Using self-awareness to identify their own fears, self-regulation to assuage their nerves, social awareness to assess their children’s feelings, and social regulation to talk about complicated topics without causing adverse affective responses, caregivers navigate the treacherous waters of such conversations. Those who reported engagement in reflective practice were more likely to express confidence in the ways that they handled difficult conversations with their children about historical events.

*External Application*

External application refers to the ways in which caregivers enable or support children's connections between storybooks and the broader world. A core theme that emerged in the interviews is a connection between shared reading and exploration of the physical world, whether in response to storybook content or as a precursor to explanatory storybook reading. One caregiver explained he selected books about characters exploring facets of governmental structures and functions in order to prepare his children for a camp on Capitol Hill. He similarly used a storybook on the neighborhoods of NYC in advance of an upcoming family trip. He recounted that his children felt much less anxious and more present for these events, and were able to make spontaneous connections to the storybooks that he discussed with them. After these adventures, the caregiver encouraged his children to read books on DC landscapes and subway trains to build upon each of these experiences. In doing so, he caregiver both proactively anticipated the information that could provide his children comfort and excitement in new situations and attended to their curiosities from these new experiences via shared reading.

On the whole, interviewees named numerous venues that were used to support external application of storybook content. These locations included museums, beaches, aquariums, memorials, and new cities or towns. Some ventures were proactive, such as trips to a museum to look at a child's favorite dinosaur's skeleton or see relics from moon landings to talk about aerospace travel. Others were pre-planned trips that garnered spontaneous connections to storybooks, like comparisons between shells found at the beach and imagery from a treasured underwater tale. Most involved application of history, science, or geographic content themes. A parent framed her conception of external application as a continuous process of establishing universal interconnectedness "I am always trying to make them tie things together, so that they recognize that you know you can learn it here, but then you can apply it there, and then they

they've sort of figured out how to do that on their own." Through scaffolding connections in advance or in the moment, caregivers utilize skills of interpersonal appraisal and Theory of Mind to foster relationships between literature and the broader world.

Another form of external application reported by caregivers was the recognition and regulation of children's existing external interests to engage them in new storybooks. For example, one parent noticed that her children really enjoyed sports, so she introduced them to numerous narrative and non-fiction storybooks on the subject. She reflected that not only did this promote her children's engagement in literacy, it also taught her about sports and thereby increased her enjoyment of shared game spectatorship with her family. This anecdote demonstrates that in self-regulating one's own interests to support the desires children, the shared experience can be powerful enough to change one's own affective response to a previously neutral or negative stimulus.

### *Developmental Change*

Renowned psychologist Jean Piaget believed that there were 4 levels of cognitive development that progressed from a child's first breath through adolescence.<sup>73</sup> These stages refer to a spectrum of concrete and abstract thinking, the ability to manipulate language, and engage in symbolic and strategic thinking. Numerous other theories that attempt to pinpoint exact phases cognitive, intellectual, and social development in children.<sup>74</sup> Erik Erikson's theory on the core psychosocial crises that impact personality development stands unique from these other developmental timelines because it spans from birth to death.<sup>75</sup> Despite an overwhelming amount

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<sup>73</sup> Piaget, Jean. "The stages of the intellectual development of the child."

<sup>74</sup> Tudge, Jonathan, and Barbara Rogoff. "Peer influences on cognitive development: Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives"; Bronfenbrenner, Urie, and Pamela A. Morris. "The bioecological model of human development"; Freud, Anna. "Observations on child development"; Bretherton, Inge. "The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth"; Kohlberg, Lawrence, and Richard H. Hersch. "Moral development: A review of the theory."

<sup>75</sup> Erikson, Erik H. *Identity and the life cycle*.

of research on myriad theories of child development, little has been written about the possible stages of development of a core phase of adulthood: parenting. Kyle Pruett's research on fatherhood has come the closest, delineating a clear shift in the role and mindset of fathers as their children age.<sup>76</sup> In popular culture, however, much has been written in blogs, self-help books, and parenting manuals about the changes that occur in parents as their children grow up. Common sayings about the delicacy with which parents handle their first child in comparison to their third or fourth inherently support the conception of some sort of socio-cognitive progression in caregivers, at least with regards to their perceptions of caregiving. The interviews findings below (sorted roughly by age) present an abundance of self-reported accounts of caregiver EI growth alongside their children.

When reflecting on their children as infants, parents expressed a good deal of apprehension and uncertainty, especially when thinking about their first or only child. In terms of shared reading, many caregivers shared that although they knew they were supposed to be reading to their children they were unsure how much they got out of the experience. One mother said that she was surprised by how long board books were able to hold her first child's interest. She said that this experience made her conceptualize the role of storybooks differently, and viscerally saw their ability to impact a young child's cognitive capability and plasticity. Another caregiver shared that her first child sat quietly during board book reading, but her second frequently tried to grab at the pages or crawl away from the books. This led her to realize the role of the storyteller during shared reading, and resultingly tried to change the way she told stories to make them more engaging. This demonstration of unconscious reflective practice produced more

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<sup>76</sup> Pruett, Kyle D. "Role of the father"; Panter-Brick, Catherine, Adrienne Burgess, Mark Eggerman, Fiona McAllister, Kyle Pruett, and James F. Leckman. "Practitioner review: engaging fathers—recommendations for a game change in parenting interventions based on a systematic review of the global evidence."

positive shared reading experiences to this day. A third parent remarked that for much of her child's infancy she was unsure how much her child recognized or understood what she was reading. On one occasion, her pre-verbal child began making kissy faces to match a character in a book, and thereafter continued making these facial expressions only during the relevant section. The caregiver shared that this was her first sign that her child actually comprehended the content of the story, and came to rely on these subtle signs until the child began talking. Theory of mind and social appraisal were thus effective tools for her to engage in during shared reading.

Caregivers were also routinely surprised by literacy-centric changes in their children. Many reported being shocked the first time their young child finished a sentence or memorized a bit of dialogue, and continuing to experience that feeling as children were able to recite more and more lines from their favorite books. One caregiver said "It's amazing what they retain and because of their brains aren't really full of garbage like the rest of us, they remember stuff and they make connections that are surprising in such a way." Another parent said that they were so proud of their child's ability to remember sentences from favorite books, joking that she almost never needs to read the whole book anymore because her child fills in every other page. In engaging in self-reflection through these interviews, parents acknowledged their feelings of pride, joy, and amazement towards their children. Furthermore, they conceptualized their child's abilities differently, thus regulating their own social representations.

Caregivers of older children claimed these feelings were compounded when children autonomously decided to pursue the occasional independent reading. In addition to pride, there were some feelings of abandonment or rejection on the part of parents as their children actively decided to read alone. Nonetheless, caregivers commented on their ability to self-regulate these negative emotions and appreciate the literary initiative of their children. One parent laughingly

recalled that his daughter “said she likes reading but not when we tell her to read. She said ‘whenever you guys tell me to read I don't like being bossed around and that never makes me want to read.’” Another revealed that she uses her child’s independent reading tendency as a mechanism for applying Theory of Mind, admitting “I won’t even know that she liked the book that much but then she’ll pick it up by herself...reading it over and over again.” A third caregiver reflected that her child’s tendency to engage in independent reading made her value their shared reading times together even more. Parents’ abilities to regulate potential negative affective to promote positive growth in their children demonstrates high EI development.

The biggest challenge that caregivers detailed facing was complex lines of questioning from their children. As pre-verbal infants grow into chatty toddlers, they are naturally able to voice their opinions and questions about the world around them. Shared storybook reading then pivots from a process of dissemination to a full conversation. Shortly afterwards, children cognitively progress to complex lines of inquiry about the world around them, which multiple caregivers said they felt unprepared for. Even highly educated parents who were researchers or college professors themselves said their kids often asked questions beyond their expertise. As one caregiver phrased it, “parenting is like being a perpetual amateur at something because even if you’re a world-renowned scientist or skilled polyglot your children are always going to ask a set of questions that you don’t really know the answer to.” Parents had several different strategies for these situations, which can be best summed up by one father’s account, “sometimes I just wing it...other times I use it as an opportunity for both of us to learn...I’ll go through the deep dive with them and try to get the answer.” Interviewees relied on the internet, books, encyclopedias, former schooling resources, trusted experts, and museums to find the answers to these questions. Parents who found answers alongside their children put their own egos aside in

order to attend to the informational needs of their children, and in the process often gained new knowledge themselves. One parent described figuring out how to best answer their child's questions as "a process of constantly learning." Caregivers also reported having newfound respect for their children during shared learning. These individuals demonstrated significant EI growth through the self-appraisal and regulation of their feelings and application of social awareness, Theory of Mind, and social regulation to best attend to their child's thoughts, feelings, and desires when answering complicated questions.

### *Structural Support*

The domain of structural support encompasses any behaviors related to EI or shared storybook reading that were influenced by the daycare that each of the children formerly or currently attend. Parents voiced a range of factors that led to them choosing to enroll their children in this daycare, including locational proximity, small class sizes, positive community opinions, trust in the teachers and founder, and belief in the daycare's core pedagogy of literacy and multiple intelligences-based curriculum. The data revealed that there was very little transparency in regards to shared reading practices; caregivers knew that reading was occurring at multiple points throughout the day but every interviewee said their reading practices at home were unaffected by the shared reading their children experienced at school. In truth, the daycare did not impact the shared reading of the sample population.

### *Variance*

Several variances between caregiver EI in shared reading across participants emerged when synthesizing interview data. While most caregivers selected books for their children themselves, one parent sourced all of their child's books from friends and family before the child was born, leaving no room for them to incorporate their child's interests into book selection.

Many others described relying on recommendation from trusted community members, friends, educators, or family, demonstrating heightened trust in presumed experts' opinions over personal ability to select storybooks. A certain level of EI is required to determine trusted informational sources, but is counteracted by a lack of active appraisal of their child's desires and needs.

Furthermore, several parents attempted to control their child's reading preferences to align with their own interests. This most commonly emerged when children wanted to read the same book over and over again, which frustrated and bored their designated readers. One caregiver admitted that in these instances she tried to "steer [her child] in a different direction" to avoid re-reading texts. Another mother took more direct action, confessing that "There were books that I was not particularly interested in, and certainly not as up for hearing again, [that] I would quietly move to the side," so her child couldn't select them for story time. While these actions are certainly understandable, parents who self-regulated their own emotional affective states to serve their children's emotions thereby advanced their EI abilities; whereas the aforementioned caregivers did not. For example, one caregiver mused "I think it's the familiarity, the comfort of knowing what to expect...maybe its knowing that the book itself is going to have a happy ending." By engaging in Theory of Mind to attend to his children's inner mental states, this parent was able to more effectively justify self-regulation of his own negative feelings towards repetitive reading to support his children's desires.

Caregivers who were able to recount their children's varied interests with specificity and comprehensiveness (e.g. fantasy, dress up, science, and parent-child relationships; solar system, arctic foxes, rock formations, fossil hunting, Scandinavian countries, and narwhals) were more likely to display EI traits and abilities. These parents were also able to better enunciate the active work of EI through interpersonal and intrapersonal awareness and regulation, and were more

likely to engage in reflective practice over the course of the interview. Co-correlation of varied components of EI and reflective practice lends strength to the reliability and validity of these variables.

As part of the interview process, every caregiver was questioned about the storybooks that inspire the best conversations with their children. A wide range of answers emerged regarding actions and mindsets towards literary engagement. On one end of the spectrum, some caregivers talked about actively promoting conversation through reading. One parent said that although her child was naturally conversational, she preferred books with multi-layered content that could inspire varied discussions over time. She expressed that she was also partial to books that had rich illustrations that could inspire conversation in and of themselves. Contrastingly, some caregivers reported that they would rather their child sit back and “enjoy the story.” These parents detail their only engagement during reading outside of a book’s text as asking their child to select their favorite component of an illustration (i.e., choosing a certain flower, animal, or truck that they like best in a crowded picture). This extends to comprehension as well, as one parent phrased it, “I am not as worried about what a book means to him, unless he brings on a concept or unless I’m really trying to use the book to get across a concept or teach a lesson.”

Between these two groups lay accounts from parents who do not actively prompt their children during shared reading, but nonetheless see active engagement in the form of curious questioning, letter identification, or remarks about the story’s progression. From an outside perspective, it was difficult to delineate whether this third group of parents was displaying the EI abilities of the parents that actively promoted reading (and don’t actively facilitate conversation because they knew their child didn’t need it) or those that did not engage their children in conversation ( and therefore would not see similar engagement if caregiving for a different child).

There was also reported variance within an individual caregiver's behavior. For example, one parent noted that she was more engaged in shared reading when putting her younger child to bed, because her older child fell asleep an hour later and required more emotional labor when falling asleep. Likewise, the caregiver reflected that her own actions during shared reading were inconsistent depending on external factors of her day, "If I am not tired and in a good space I can spend more time reading... [sometimes with her older child] we're exhausted and I'm kind of anxious about if she is going to bed because she is a horrible sleeper...so I've been just trying to rush through the book." During the interview, this parent actively engaged in self-reflective behaviors, and by the end stated her commitment to self-regulating these emotions of fatigue and anxiety in order to better support the emotions of her children. In doing so, she extemporaneously engaged in proactive interpersonal EI.

## **Limitations**

### *Sample*

The sample population is not a representative sampling of early child caregivers across the United States. Female caregivers were overrepresented, as were individuals with an educational attainment level of a bachelor's degree or higher. Parents of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian children were interviewed, with white parents making up the majority of the sample. The study sample is further skewed towards a slightly higher socio-economic status than the general population. Several bilingual households were included in the study, but by design every participant was comfortable engaging with and reading to their children in English. Self-selective study design may have further biased the sample population to include parents that were more familiar with academic and/or scientific fields, or that generally had the privilege of more leisure time. The overrepresentation of highly educated, white, English-speaking, socio-economically

privileged caregivers that all reside in a single New England city excludes this study from being considered a perfectly representative investigation into caregiver EI growth. Furthermore, while all the caregivers in this study were the biological parents of their children, the use of the word “caregiver” was designed to encompass a broader spectrum of adults who take care of young children, such as adoptive parents, biological relatives, or family friends. Several child factors, such as birth order, racial diversity, age, and English-speaking abilities, were representative of the broader population, but were again not fully inclusive of the rich diversity of children in the United States. The aforementioned limitations promote the need for future studies on this topic with larger and more stratified sampling methods.

### *Study*

This study derived findings from caregiver self-reports. Self-reports are known to be less reliable than objective measures of data collection, such as validated personality inventories or bio-metric measures, due to the potential for participants to purposefully or implicitly misrepresent their own thoughts and behaviors.<sup>77</sup> Efforts to mitigate this impact were made, including the initial opacity of the study’s focus on caregivers, but these actions do not fully counterbalance the risk of compromised data via misremembered or inaccurate self-reports. Moreover, the self-reported data collected in this study was qualitative in nature. While qualitative data provides rich insight, it lacks the objectivity and comparability of quantitative data.<sup>78</sup> Findings from this study may therefore be difficult to generalize across greater populations or compare to other studies.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, two topics emerged in the interview

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<sup>77</sup> Razavi, Tiffani. "Self-report measures: An overview of concerns and limitations of questionnaire use in occupational stress research."

<sup>78</sup> Queirós, André, Daniel Faria, and Fernando Almeida. "Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods."

<sup>79</sup> Leung, Lawrence. "Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research."

process, imaginative play and the role of TV, that represented salient components of caregiver-child experiences but were determined to fall outside of the purview of this investigation and were therefore excluded from published findings.

## **Future Directions**

### *Programmatic*

During interviews with parents, the same few sentiments kept reoccurring: the recognition of implicit EI-driven actions, appraisal of their own viewpoints towards their children's shared reading proclivities, and thoughtful consideration of their own role as parents. As one caregiver stated, "Honestly reflecting and talking tonight I'm noticing my own [actions]," an opportunity which she rarely felt had the time or space to grant herself. In truth, every parent seemed to end the interviews with a renewed sense of purpose in their caregiving, whether through pride in their children, satisfaction in their past actions, determination to continue re-evaluating and refining their behaviors, or a combination thereof. While detailed cross-population comparisons between caregivers and educators were deemed ad hoc to be outside the bounds of this study, one finding was particularly salient for future initiatives. Regardless of if educators had formal academic training on shared reading or not, they reported the most vocational growth in their craft through parallel observation and mentorship by other master teachers. Contrastingly, caregivers reported little to know knowledge of the expert reading practices abundant within their daycare, nor of general shared reading best practices. This suggests a need for programmatic intervention that incorporates mechanisms of direct instruction and observational modeling. For example, many libraries host interactive storybook readings for young children. Since these are already events designed to host a trained reader, caregivers, and their young children, incorporating an instructional component for parents (e.g. signposting "this

is a hard word, let me explain what this means” or explicitly speaking to the parents to explain the choices they are making while reading) may yield significant benefits.

Another direct programmatic intervention could occur between caregivers and educators. Caregivers often have high regard for their children’s teachers, and thus trust their instincts and methods implicitly. The daycare actively implements trust-building measures to facilitate this social contract, include parent-teacher conferences, daily notes home about the activities of each age group, and informal check-ins during pickup. Numerous interviewees reported that they did not feel the need to witness their child’s instruction because they felt such faith in their respective teachers’ capabilities. However, this trust could be alternately leveraged to provide instruction to caregivers on shared reading best practices. Pickup and drop off are the clearest points of opportunity for educators to model reading best practices without putting undue burden on the time constraints of caregivers. If daycares implemented recommendations for parents to stay for the length of one story in the morning or afternoon (depending on their routines with the children), caregivers could witness expert shared reading techniques at work and feel inclined to implement them at home as well.

Parenting groups serve as a space for healing and support for caregivers. Many of these groups are designed to facilitate conversations about shared experiences and generate collective empathy and emotional validation. Some are run by professional facilitators, while others are more informal arrangements between community members. In the former group orientations, leaders could incorporate explicit dialogues about the role of EI and reflective practice into group meeting. This enables both introspective reflection and collective learning about the ways in which other group members use varied forms of emotional intelligence with their children. Even in informally organized groups, ensuring that there is time for members to reflect on their

experiences can support EI growth. Furthermore, either group has the capacity to make space for conversing about positive techniques for shared storybook reading. Although the members may not have the expertise of educators, the process of prioritizing, reflecting, and discussing shared reading can elevate caregiver consciousnesses about the importance of Theory of Mind and EI-based mindfulness of child emotional and cognitive states. If there are educators or trained professionals in these groups, informal methods can be interspersed with and compared to other known reliable methods of shared reading.

### *Empirical Research*

Three clear limitations of this study were the lack of quantitative data, small sample size, and relatively narrow scope that investigated caregiver EI growth in relation to shared reading. Further empirical research could address these issues in myriad forms. First, a similar study could be conducted in more diverse populations, including: racially, socio-economically, geographically, caregiver education levels, and across daycares of different qualities and pedagogies. Interview data could then be coded along similar domains or in an post-hoc fashion that may reveal alternate themes in interviewee responses. A larger-scale study may render such granular analysis too unwieldy, paving the way AI or computational text analysis instead of manual coding.

Alternately, quantitative approaches could be used to establish the presence of EI growth during the process of caregiving. Researchers could conduct a longitudinal study using a battery of validated EI assessments to measure caregivers over time. Alternately, if there was funding for a very sample but temporal restraints, a cross-sectional study design could also be implemented. Such research would have to take numerous factors into account, including potential EI growth that occurs with age independently of caregiving, the role of daycares, varied EI growth in

correlation with child development phases, and the differential impact of multiple children. These external factors may be addressed with control groups of same-aged populations without children, recruiting subjects across multiple daycares (or that rely on other caregivers or are the only caregivers of their children), stratified samples of caregivers with children of varied ages, and controlling for the number and ages of children, respectively.

Regardless of these control measures, the aforementioned study design would best correlational claims about general caregiver EI growth. In order to establish an empirical relationship between caregiver EI and shared reading, caregiver storybook reading would need to be quantitatively measured or actively manipulated through invention. The former might be facilitated through recorded sessions of caregiver shared reading, which are then coded and scored for quality. As an aside, observing and analyzing shared reading sessions would in and of itself be an effective way of empirically establishing caregiver engagement in EI, Theory of Mind, and potentially reflective practice. If future researchers sought a higher degree of control over their sample population, they could randomly divide participants into control and intervention groups, then provide the latter with high-quality training on shared reading best practices. Resulting analysis of the differences in EI growth between the two groups (controlling for the varied shared reading capabilities of caregivers in the control group) may provide insight into both the links between caregiver EI and shared reading as well as justification for the potential benefits of programmatic interventions. Such research could lead to further cross-comparative studies of different kinds of programmatic interventions developed for shared reading.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this capstone was to investigate whether a relationship exists between shared storybook reading and caregiver EI growth. Through detailed analysis of caregiver interviews, significant instances of EI growth were found across domains. In the book selection domain, caregivers regulated their own affective states to prioritize their children's preferences when choosing books to purchase and read, applied social regulation to expose children to diversity and complex experiences, and used social appraisal to determine ideal literary formats. In terms of literary engagement, parents displayed broad-scale abilities to understand and manage their children's engagement levels through interactive reading styles, facilitation of interpersonal relationships, regulation of multiple children, and using books as a mechanism for discussing complex history. In the domain of external application, interpersonal appraisal was the key to harnessing outside interests to serve literacy, while interpersonal regulation enabled scaffolded and spontaneous connections between storybook content and exploration of the physical and digital world. Finally, caregivers demonstrated EI throughout the developmental cycle of their young children, including: determining the literary comprehension levels of pre-verbal infants, adapting to children's improving literacy, managing their own emotions as their children express growing independence, and carefully using theory of mind and social regulation to answer complex questions.

While I hypothesized correctly that widespread instances caregiver EI would be found in the process of shared reading, numerous specific findings came as a surprise. I postulated that the structural supports of a high-quality, literacy-focused daycare would modulate caregiver's approaches to shared reading, but in practice this domain had little to no impact on caregiver experiences. This discrepancy occurred because of an unanticipated lack of transparency about shared reading best practices of educators. There is only so much communication that can be

reasonably conveyed in a day, and both caregivers and educators prefer to focus on child behavior and development, daily activities, and weekly themes. Furthermore, temporal constraints and daycare organization limit the supervision potential of parents. In fact, parents lingering around may make morning separations harder for children. Interviewees repeatedly expressed their faith in the daycare's pedagogy and instruction, and thus do not feel the need to supervise teaching for the purposes of their children's wellbeing. A dynamic reorientation to present daycare teachers as educators of both young children and their parents may incentivize side-by-side modelling of shared reading practices that can be translated to the home environment.

Wide-ranging variances in caregiver self-reports were also an unexpected finding. Variances across EI presence in shared reading did not necessarily correlate with expected factors, like educational attainment or socio-economic status. While these findings are obviously not able to generalize to a broader population, on a small-scale they suggest that caregivers have differing nascent EI capacities. Previous research has shown the EI can be improved with targeted interventions.<sup>80</sup> Interventions that advocate a growth-mindset approach to EI, which dictates that growth is able to be achieved through hard work and good strategies, may dually be more inclined to participate in EI shared reading interventions and may be more susceptible to their positive effects.<sup>81</sup>

The results of the study have great exigency for the fields of psychology and education. As evidenced by the scarcity of research on their well-being and affective states, caregivers have

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<sup>80</sup> Nelis, Delphine, Jordi Quoidbach, Moira Mikolajczak, and Michel Hansenne. "Increasing emotional intelligence:(How) is it possible?"; Pool, Lorraine Dacre, and Pamela Qualter. "Improving emotional intelligence and emotional self-efficacy through a teaching intervention for university students"; Hodzic, Sabina, et. al. "How efficient are emotional intelligence trainings: A meta-analysis."

<sup>81</sup> Dweck, Carol. "What having a "growth mindset" actually means."

been largely ignored by the scientific field. Workplace EI has the monetary backing of large corporations, and nonprofit funding sources are inclined towards child development, creating the modern gap in caregiver-based research. Furthermore, early childhood education has largely been devalued and disregarded by society writ large. In centering the experiences of caregiver shared reading and conveying the emotional and cognitive labor associated with this process, this study also asserts the expertise and importance of exemplary early childhood educators. It is my personal hope that future research can be buoyed by this rudimentary investigation into caregiver EI, and make the field as a whole recognize and appreciate the important work of those who care for and educate young children.

As an early childhood educator myself, this investigation has made me appreciate the complex emotional and cognitive labor that goes into the process of effective shared reading. In order to best serve the social-emotional development of children, we must prioritize their thoughts and feelings throughout formal and informal instruction, including during shared storybook reading. Simultaneously, we must value the parents and teachers that love and mold children into clever and compassionate people. I have emerged from this work with renewed appreciation for the incredible work that my fellow educators do, and for the heart and integrity of the caregivers that I interviewed.

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