

Parental Involvement and the Influence of Parents' Prior Literacy Experiences

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## **Abstract**

This study examines parents' prior literacy experiences and how those experiences influence their involvement with literacy activities at home. The data for this study were collected through interviewing parents who had children in my kindergarten classroom. After analyzing the data, multiple themes were identified, which includes positive literacy experiences may be provided by adults other than parents, parental involvement takes on many forms, and the importance of teachers and parents to establish relationships to support student literacy learning. The conclusion of this study is that parents' prior literacy experiences have a direct influence on their involvement with their children. This is because parents carry their prior experiences with them as adults. Parents will try to replicate their prior experiences with their children. The literacy activities that parents engaged in as a child are what they will try to engage in with their own children at home

**Keywords: Parental Involvement, Relationships, Literacy, Experiences, Funds of Knowledge, Prior Experiences**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

When Shawn (all names are pseudonyms) was asked to come to the carpet for shared reading he refused, by saying “I don’t want to!” After I made several attempts to get him to join the rest of the class on the carpet, he started to throw chairs, pencils, crayons, and anything that was in front of him. At this point, I had to stop instruction because the other kindergarten students’ safety was in jeopardy. I called an administrator to help me with this situation because I didn’t know what to do. While I was waiting for an administrator, I had to restrain him because he started swinging his arms and kicking his feet at me and the other students. This was turning into a dangerous situation very quickly for everyone in the classroom. Finally, an administrator came to escort him out of the classroom. These acts of violence and defiance that Shawn exhibited happened often and very regularly. I decided that I needed to find the cause of this problem because he wasn’t going to learn and neither were the other students.

With the help of some colleagues we conducted a variety of assessments to find out if Shawn’s behavior was due to a learning disability, lack of prior school experience because it was kindergarten, or an internal dissonance. Since this was my first year as a teacher, another teacher came into observe my behavioral management, my interactions with the students, and how I conducted myself in the classroom to find out if it had to do with my lack of experience. After a discussion with the other teacher, we concluded that it was not due to my lack of experience. So, we conducted a variety of observations in and out of the classroom, as well as assessments that would help determine what he knows and what he can control. He meets with a counselor once a week. We set up an individual behavior plan, and Shawn met with

the school psychologist once a week. After the data were compiled, we determined that he had some learning difficulties, some health impairments that were affecting his ability to comprehend, and that he had psychological problems that would need to be formally diagnosed by a district psychologist. After reviewing all the data, we all realized that we needed to get the parents involved. This is because many of the strategies that we wanted to use required the parents' permission.

First, I had a meeting with the parents regarding Shawn's academic progress. I provided them with the assessments that I conducted to determine what Shawn had control of and what he didn't yet control. I explained that the assessments show that he is unable to recognize letters, produce the sound for each letter, and segment or blend sounds from a word. I told the parents that it is still early in the year and he can learn these skills. The parents asked what they could do at home to help him build these skills and support what I'm doing in the classroom. I provided them with a variety of strategies for use at home that would help support his growth in these areas.

Then we had a meeting with the parents and discussed our findings from the school counselor, psychologist, observations, results from his individual behavior plan, and health concerns. The parents were very surprised by the information that we presented and asked, "What can we do to help?" We informed the parents that it would be beneficial to use the same behavior plan at home that we use in school (we adapted for home use). Shawn needed to visit a psychologist to get a formal diagnosis and possible treatments. The school set this up with no cost to the parents. Shawn also would need to see a doctor to assess the severity of the health impairments and to discuss treatment options that would be available. We informed the parents that we all needed to be involved in order to help him maximize his potential. The parents said,

“We will do whatever is necessary to help him.” After the meeting, we set up all necessary appointments as well as documents for the parents.

After a few weeks, we realized that the parents weren't going to be as involved as we hoped. They missed the appointment for the psychologist and never called to say that they needed to reschedule. Shawn never made it to the doctor for a formal diagnosis of the health impairments. The behavior plan that we made for home use was in his book bag. I was getting frustrated because Shawn's disruptive behavior continued and I didn't know what to do. Also, I completed a weekly assessment on letter recognition, letter sounds, word segmenting and blending. Several months passed and Shawn showed no improvement in letter recognition, letter sounds, word segmenting and blending. I had other students in the class who were also showing no signs of improvement. This made me wonder if the parents were engaging in literacy activities at home with their children. In addition, I began to question whether parents' lack of involvement with literacy activities at home might be attributed to their prior literacy experiences.

### **Significance of the problem**

I believe that parental involvement in education is an essential element for students to be successful in school. Clark suggests, “experiences in the home significantly shape children's interpersonal competence in classroom settings” (1983, p. 5). One of the most critical components of learning in early elementary education is reading. This is because reading is an essential part of our everyday lives and without being literate we would not be able to function in today's society. We read to learn new information, to understand the past, travel, get/order food, understand bills, communicate, and it's a way for us to interact with the world around us. As a teacher

in the classroom, I can only provide so much of this instruction/exposure because of all the other subject areas that need to be taught. That is why I think parents need to be involved at home, participating in literacy activities to ensure that their children will be successful readers.

Parent involvement can take on many forms, but Joyce Epstein (1991) identifies four types of parental involvement; “basic obligations of families, involvement at school, involvement in learning activities at home, and involvement in decision making” (p. 290-291). Based on these four types of involvement, all of the parents that we encounter will be involved in some way. The type of involvement that needs more attention is the involvement in learning (literacy) activities at home. This can’t be placed solely on the parents. If the parents are not being informed by the teacher and/or school as to what their child needs additional practice with, how can they engage in literacy activities at home? Some other factors that I think that contribute to parents not being involved are: prior experiences with literacy, culture, and the belief that “the primary function of the school is to make their children literate and successful” (Clark 1983, p. 4). The parents’ previous experiences with literacy, especially in school, might have been negative or very different from what you were telling them to do.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find out how parents’ prior literacy experiences influence their involvement with literacy activities at home. The types of literacy activities that parents are engaging in with their children can contribute to student achievement. Research suggests, “the contribution of home literacy activities to acquiring literacy skills may center on the specific activities that parents use”

(Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000, p. 474). Through this study, I answered the following research question:

How is parental involvement in their child's literacy at home influenced by the parents' prior literacy experiences?

Also, through this study I developed my skills as a teacher-researcher. This process helped me uncover a new world of teaching strategies that I never knew existed. This is because some research stays just that: research. In addition, as a teacher-researcher of this study I contributed knowledge to other teachers or future teachers who may be asking the same question about working with parents. This study helped me contribute to the ever expanding knowledge of education.

### **Study Approach**

The participants of this study were parents of the students in my kindergarten classroom. I collected the data through a qualitative study. Through interviewing parents, I focused on how parents' prior literacy experiences influence their engagement in literacy activities at home with their children.

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how parents' involvement in or lack of engaging in literacy activities with their child at home can have an impact on children's literacy achievement. By looking at parents' prior experiences through interviews I uncovered how those experiences influence their engagement in literacy activities at home.

To conduct this study, I used an interview with open-ended questions to uncover how parent's prior experiences contribute to their overall involvement with literacy activities. Interviewing parents about their prior experiences and their involvement with literacy activities at home allowed me to understand the relationship between parents' prior experiences and parental involvement with literacy activities.

### **Summary**

Before beginning this research study, I had always assumed that parents are either involved or they're not. There are many factors to consider when thinking about how parents are involved. First, there can be many ways for parents to be involved. When thinking parents are not involved, teachers need to define in what ways they are and/or not involved. Next, the background of the parents needs to be considered. The background that people bring can influence how they interact with the world around them. Through interviews, I uncovered a relationship between parents' prior experiences and their involvement with literacy activities at home.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Before a teacher can begin to question the involvement of a parent, there are many factors that need to be considered. The amount and way that parents are involved will be linked to their prior experiences and funds of knowledge that they bring to school. The ways that parents are involved at home with literacy activities can be beneficial to students' academic achievement. In addition, parent-teacher relationships can have an impact on parent involvement with literacy activities.

### **Funds of Knowledge**

Funds of knowledge refers to “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Gonzales, Moll, Amanti, 2005, p. 25). In relation to education, this means that all families have knowledge that teachers do not know about. This knowledge that families have can't be assessed like academic skills. It is knowledge that they need to function in their culture and/or society in which they live. This knowledge is not transferred through formal education, rather it is “passed on through social networks of exchange” (Gonzales et al., 2005, p. 73). The exchanges of information/knowledge that children get at home are not represented in the classroom. So, there is a mismatch between the ways that children are used to learning at home and way they are required to learn in school. This is because families who are immersed in non-dominant cultures experience the mismatch with the dominant culture of most schools. The same can be said when parents come to school with their child. Educators place assumptions on parents because of where they live and their background.

Parents are not blank slates; just like their children they come to school with prior experience. The prior experiences that will impact the way that parents are involved with literacy, may be dependent on how their parents were involved with literacy activities and their experience with literacy in school. Once we begin to understand that parents' prior experiences impact their involvement, "we can no longer easily blame them for their children's difficulties in school" (Compton-Lily, 2009, p. 457). These prior experiences that they encountered growing up will shape the way they are involved with literacy activities. In addition, once "we begin to recognize the complexities of their lives and realize that all families" are not the same due to the varying prior experience (Compton-Lily, 2009, p. 457). As educators we need to remember that the parents that we encounter through the educational setting will have a range of prior experiences that were positive and/or negative.

Many educators would say that one of the main factors that influences a child's achievement in literacy is linked to parents being involved. The amount of parental involvement may be linked to the cultures of the community in which a teacher is teaching. It is challenging to define the word culture, but one perspective suggests that

a culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members and it is an organization of people, things, behavior and emotions. (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p.33)

There are "several trends that view the culture of poor or minoritized students as the cause of educational failure" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 34). Is it really the culture of the poor or minoritized students or the mismatch between the teachers and surrounding community culture that causes educational failure?

It is this mismatch that needs to be addressed in order to make sure poor and minority students succeed in literacy. We need to implement “instruction that puts their knowledge and experiences at the heart of their learning” (McIntyre, Rosebery, Gonzalez, 2001, p. 2). Since a majority of teachers are white middle-class, their funds of knowledge are expressed in the classroom environment. The funds of the knowledge that are expressed in the classroom often don’t match the funds of the knowledge of the students whom they teach. This is because “different homes, community, and economic backgrounds learn different funds of knowledge” (McIntyre et al., 2001, p. 2). This causes an educational disconnect between poor and minority students. The ways in which students are learning at home does not match how they learn at school. Since many teachers are middle class, those funds of knowledge are aligned with school values and this causes the minority “funds of knowledge to go unrecognized or may actually conflict with those that are valued in school” (McIntyre et al. 2001, p. 4). As educators we need to be teaching in ways that allow the students to use what they know and apply it to what they need to know.

### **Impact of Home Literacy Practices on School-Based Achievement**

Before children become school age and attend public schools, they have already been immersed in literacy in their home environment. According to Sénéchal, children are exposed to “two types of literacy activities formal and informal” (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002, p. 445). Informal literacy activities are focused on the message of the print and formal literacy activities are focused on the actual print. The literacy experiences and practices that are utilized at home can help prepare the child to be successful in school-based literacy achievement. Evan suggests that “parents and the literacy environments they create in their homes are widely believed

to play an important role in the development of children's reading and language skills" (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000, p. 65). There are a variety of literacy practices that can be implemented at home that support literacy development in a young child.

While reading to your child has some benefits, recent studies have suggested that, "parent-child reading is a weaker predictor of reading achievement" (Evans et al., 2000, p. 66). One of the major benefits of parent-child reading is the development of vocabulary. Fritters suggests, that parent-child reading "has a direct influence on prereaders' oral vocabulary development but not on their acquisition of early written language knowledge" (Fritters, Barron, Brunello, 2000, p. 474). Instead of parents reading to their child, the child should read to the parent and the parents can offer help as needed. Research even backs this idea that "parents listening to their children read or explicitly coaching their children in reading subskills may be more important mechanisms by which parents influence their children's reading achievement" (Evans et al., 2000, p. 66). This allows the child to learn valuable reading skills while applying them directly to reading.

Another factor that can contribute to children's literacy achievement is the presence and availability of literacy materials in the home. The more literacy materials that are available the more benefits they create. The amount of literacy materials varies from one home to the next; there are fewer literacy materials in the home of poor or less educated families. The benefits of having literacy materials will also vary from one home to the next. Having the literacy materials at home does not necessary mean that they are being used to their fullest advantage. The reason for this is because "parents differ in whether they believe that they should teach reading skills" (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002, p. 446).

The literacy activities that parents engage their child in at home can vary. Some literacy activities will have a small impact on literacy development, while others will have a significant impact on literacy development. The literacy activities that are implemented in the home are at the parents' discretion and are going to be interconnected with the ones they experienced growing up. Whatever literacy activities that parents engage in, the "activities that parents initiate in the home and children's feelings toward literacy activities are related to children's level of achievement" (Friters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000, p. 473).

As teachers we expect literacy learning to look and be taught a certain way. The way that parents teach and interact with literacy at home is going to be based on the way that they were exposed to knowledge. This means that "the literacy practices that are going on in homes aren't immediately recognizable to teachers" (Compton-Lilly & Georgy, 2013, p. 466). In addition, the skills that children are learning at home are school-based, but they are learning them informally through the funds of knowledge of their parents.

### **Parent-teacher relationships that foster family literacy practices at home**

Most teachers would agree that there is a positive connection between student success in literacy and parental involvement with literacy activities at home. The same statement could be made that parents and teachers need to create a positive relationship that will in turn support parental involvement with literacy activities at home. Espstein & Dauber have indicated that there is an "importance of school and family connections for increasing student success in school" (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 289). When creating and maintaining a relationship, all those involved need to keep in mind that the one who should benefit is the child. The reason for this is

because the “two most influential contexts in which young children’s learning and development occur are home and school” (Galindo, 2011, p. 90). The best way to make sure a child learns and develops the best would be to bring the two contexts together. Bringing the home and school contexts together will create the best change for children’s literacy success. Also, when teachers make an effort to involve parents there are many benefits not only for the students, but also for the parents and the teacher. Espstein and Dauber suggest that when parents are involved regularly by the teacher, “parents feel more positive about their abilities to help their children, rate teachers as better teachers overall, and students improve their attitudes and achievement” (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 289). In addition, when parents are involved they “increase their involvement in educational practices at home” (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987, p. 418). If parent-teacher relationships are beneficial to students’ success, then where do the relationships start?

Parent-teacher relationships need to start from somewhere and someone needs to initiate the relationship building. Since many parents have other obligations on top of making sure their child gets to school, it is going to be on the schools and teachers to initiate this relationship. Research suggests that “parents are more likely to be involved in their child’s education when the school or teachers make a stronger effort to engage them in their children’s learning” (Galindo, 2011, p.91). It seems that if we want parents to be involved in literacy practices at home and school then teachers and schools need to start reaching out to parents to build a relationship.

Parents are coming to school with a variety of backgrounds that contribute to the way that they are involved in school and at home. The backgrounds that are from the “non-dominant culture may exhibit less parent involvement” (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 198). Less parent involvement can be seen in “the parents in difficult or

disadvantaged inner-city parents that are less educated because they cannot or do not want to become involved in their child's education" (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 290). There are many factors that need to be considered or thought about before placing the fault on their cultural background. The reasons that some parents are less involved may be due to work obligations, educational background, prior experiences at school and home, and/or confidence. This is because those parents who are disadvantaged or less educated may feel "less confident about communicating with school staff owing to a lack of knowledge of the school system, a lack of familiarity with educational jargon, or their own negative educational experiences" (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 198). Parents who are disadvantaged or less educated should not be thought of as being less involved and/or that they do not place a high value on education. Those parents who are less educated and educated parents as well "need to know how to be productively involved in their child's education" (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 290). This can be done by schools and teachers proactively getting parents involved and communicating in ways parents can understand.

There may be many possible reasons for this that goes beyond the idea that parent's are just not involved. For starters, the lack of parental involvement in literacy practices may be due to the "lack of time, minimal opportunities for involvement, and indifferent or antagonistic attitudes on part of the school personal" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, p. 419). As well, "teachers can vary how much and how well they inform families" (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 290). If parents are unaware or unsure of what is going with their child, how can they be held accountable? Many parents would assume that it is the job of the teacher to communicate information regarding their child. According to Hoover-Dempsey, "parents want more contact with schools" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, p. 418). The same could be said that if teachers

wanted parents to work on literacy activities at home, they would communicate that as well. Teachers have the expertise to share with parents about how to engage their children in meaningful literacy activities at home teachers.

This idea about creating parent-teacher relationships that support parents' involvement with literacy activities at home is not all on the shoulders of the teachers. Some parents have made teachers "fear parents perhaps because of perceptions that parents question teachers' professional competence or blame them for children's problems" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, p. 419). In addition, teaching is one profession that requires lots of schooling and training in order to be certified to teach. This makes many "parents less involved in their child's education because they feel that teaching is better left to the experts" (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2012, p. 34).

Teachers believe the idea that parental involvement in literacy activities can support students' achievement. However, the research shows that "even though teachers express positive attitudes toward parent involvement, their classroom practices don't support their beliefs in the importance of school and family relationships" (Espstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 304). Teachers believe in the idea of relationships to increase student success, but they don't employ the practice in the classroom. This idea that parents are not involved can be linked to the idea that the teachers and/or schools are not supporting parent involvement. Teachers should utilize strategies that involve parents in as many ways as possible, if teachers want parents to support the literacy process at home.

The strategies that can be utilized to get parents involved can range from simple to complex ideas. Research suggests that the simple "low-intensity generic contacts, such as sending home brochures, fliers, or invitations to school events" can

get parents involved (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011, p. 91). These don't seem like they get parents involved, but it informs parents as to what's going on in the classroom and they have the option to get involved. More communication between teachers and parents will help keep them informed and can get involved where necessary.

There are programs that aim to get parents involved often and early. The Head Start intervention program is the "first and largest early intervention program for disadvantaged preschoolers that emphasize parent involvement" (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999, p. 380). Early intervention programs help to decrease parent involvement in schools by providing services for parents that promotes involvement. There is a link between parent involvement and student success through early intervention programs. There are "several early intervention program studies that examined academic achievement and found that parent involvement was positively associated with children's school success" (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999, p. 382). Making sure parents are aware of these programs and the benefits associated with them will help improve involvement and student success.

Most of the strategies are aimed towards the parents and not the teachers: why is this? McBride suggests that the "lack of adequate training for teachers on parent involvement might account for the few differences found in teacher implementation of family-school partnership initiatives" (McBride, Bae, Wright, 2002, p.123). In addition, most college preparation courses focus on teaching practices and less on parent-teacher relationships. This also means that "teacher preparation programs do not adequately address characteristics of rural life that influence teaching conditions in rural schools or family-school-community partnerships in rural communities" (McBride, Bae, Wright, 2002, p.123). There needs to be more research that focuses

on strategies that teachers can implement to build and foster parent-teacher relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Before teachers begin to think that parents are not involved, they need to consider the multiple factors that impact their involvement. Parents' involvement with literacy activities at home is going to be linked to prior experiences, funds of knowledge, and parent-teacher relationships. To understand the prior experiences and funds of knowledge that parents bring with them to school, teachers need to talk with parents. However, before teachers can have a conversation with parents about their past and current experiences they need to establish a relationship. In order to create parent-teacher relationship, teachers need to utilize strategies that bring parents in. However, there is little research available that suggest ways to build and maintain parent-teacher relationships.

## **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

The main purpose of this research study was to focus on the prior literacy experiences of parents and find out how those prior experiences influence their engagement with literacy activities with their children at home.

### **Research Question**

How is parental involvement in their child's literacy at home influenced by their parents' prior literacy experiences?

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were adults who had a child enrolled in my kindergarten classroom during the 2013-14 school year. The kindergarten classroom is located in urban elementary school, which is located in upstate New York. I interviewed 10 parents with the intention to uncover how their prior literacy experiences shape their involvement with literacy activities at home. Since all the students in my kindergarten class receive free breakfast and lunch, that means that their parents are in the low socioeconomic status. The parents of the children who make up my kindergarten class are African American and 90% are single mothers, and 10% are single fathers. I had the opportunity to interview a single father, married couple, grandmother, and six single mothers to determine if there were any noticeable differences between their prior experiences. I did not ask the parents their age, but most of the parents appeared to be between the ages of 20-30. From my interactions with most of the parents, they all appear to be able to read, write, and advocate for themselves and their children.

## **Context of the Study**

The interviews for this study took place at the parents' homes because it was the most convenient for them. The reason that these interviews took place in the parents' homes was because it was easier for me to go to them. This was because most of the parents didn't have a vehicle to meet me at school. Also, the parents had other children at home who they needed to care for which made it easier for me to go to them. I went to a variety of homes at a variety of times. The interviews were conducted either early in the morning before school, after school, weekends, or at night. This was done to ensure that all the parents had an opportunity to participate in this research study. This flexibility allowed me to fit the commitments of the parents.

## **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I am a 28-year-old graduate student attending the College at Brockport where I'm pursuing a Masters degree in childhood literacy. I also completed my undergraduate studies at the College at Brockport. I'm certified by the state of New York to teach general education students from birth to sixth grade and students with disabilities from first to sixth grade. Before accepting a position as a kindergarten teacher, I was a per diem teacher for two years for the urban elementary school district, which is located in upstate New York. As a per diem teacher, I have had the opportunity to teach in a variety of schools, grade levels, and to work with diverse students. Presently, I'm in my second year as a kindergarten teacher where I teach 21 students.

As a teacher, there are many beliefs that make up my philosophy of education, but none are as strong as how I feel about the importance of childhood literacy. I believe my job as a teacher is to make sure the students that I encounter every day

have the essential academic and interpersonal skills necessary to function in today's society. The skills that I think are the most essential and critical are being able to read, write, and interact with the world through text. Since most classrooms have only one teacher teaching these skills along with many others, teachers need support at home from parents and/or guardians. I think in order for children to be successful in obtaining these skills, parents and teachers need to create and maintain a relationship that has one goal in mind: the success of the child. I believe that the parent-teacher relationship can have a powerful impact on student learning, behavior, and reinforce the importance of school. These parent-teacher relationships can be "formal and informal ways to have positive and ongoing two-way flow of information and care to support higher school engagement and achievement" (Mo & Singh, 2008, p. 1). I believe that children learn best through direct experiences and application of ideas. As a teacher, I can provide some direct experience and application, but I think the best way to get these direct experiences and applications is for parents to engage their child in literacy activities at home or in the community in which they live. In addition, we need to "begin to conceptualize possibilities and solutions that recognize the strengths of families and the potential of children" (Compton-Lilly, 2009, p. 457). These literacy activities can support literacy learning in the classroom and/or help the child to function in society.

My research question about parents' prior experiences and their involvement in literacy activities at home has recently come to my attention from my philosophy of education and from observations that I made my first full year as a kindergarten teacher. The interactions that I had with some of the parents were unsettling, so I began to wonder about their involvement with literacy activities at home and how their prior literacy experiences influenced this involvement.

## **Data Collection**

I collected the data for this study through interviewing parents who had children in my kindergarten classroom.

### **Interviews**

From interviewing parents, I have learned about the parents on a deeper level and built a trusting relationship because of the information that they shared. The interview questions were aimed to help me understand the background of the parents and how it influences their involvement with literacy activities at home. There are some important questions that need to be answered by the parents such as; what do you believe is the purpose of school, what has been your experience with literacy as a child and as a adult, what kinds of literacy activities do you engage your child in at home. During the interview, I allowed time for additional questions because of how the parents' responded to the interview questions. I conducted the interviews one on one to ensure their full attention and I scribed their responses in a research journal. In addition, I audio recorded their responses to ensure the accuracy of the parents' responses.

### **Interview Questions**

How many adults and children live in your home?

When and how often do you read to or with your children?

What kinds of literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) do you or another family member participate in with your child at home? Literacy activities can take any many forms such as books, newspaper, computer, TV, iPad, etc.

What types of literacy activities do you participate in with your child outside of home?

How often do you or another family member participate in literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) at home?

What was your experience with reading and writing growing up (who, when, how often)?

What kinds of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening) activities did you participate in growing up?

What did you use literacy for? Please give some examples.

What was your experience with literacy while in school (positive and/or negative)?

Please give some examples.

When you were a child did you think you were a good reader? Writer? Why or why not?

What are your goals for child's literacy learning?

### **Data Analysis**

After all interviews were conducted I reviewed the audio recordings to verify that what I scribed matched the parents' responses, because I didn't want to misrepresent their responses. This analysis was conducted using the constant comparison methodology. The constant comparison methodology "involves deriving categories from data over time, and then using the categories to develop a theory" (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 120). After all the responses were verified for accuracy, I first analyzed each parent's responses to see if their prior literacy experiences and background contributed to the overall engagement of literacy activities at home with their child. Next, I compared the parents' responses to one another to look for commonalities across prior literacy experiences to uncover any themes that may exist.

Then I compared how they were involved in literacy experiences at home and noted the similarities and differences.

### **Procedures**

Since I interact with the parents on a regular basis and due to their children being in my kindergarten classroom, I needed to stay objective during this study. The interviews were conducted at a time and place that worked with the parents' schedule and was familiar and comfortable for the parents. This place happened to be their home. Before the interviews took place, I reminded the parents that their responses and participation in this study were for the purpose of understanding how their prior experiences influence their involvement with learning activities at home. I also reminded the parents that their participation was completely voluntary and they can stop the interview at any time. Once they agreed I started asking them questions that helped me answer my research question. All of the interviews were conducted in 5 weeks. There were only two interviews a week which allowed me time to transcribe the information from audio recordings and to analyze parents' responses. After transcribing the data, I utilized another two weeks to compare the parents' responses to one another to look for commonalities across prior literacy experiences. In addition to comparing parents' responses, I compared how they are involved in literacy experiences at home and noted how they vary.

### **Week One**

- Interviewed James and Linda and scribed their responses
- Verified that I scribed parents' responses accurately from audio recordings
- Analyzed parents' responses

## **Week Two**

- Interviewed Ken and Stacey and scribed responses
- Verified that I scribed parents' responses accurately from audio recordings
- Analyzed parents' responses

## **Week Three**

- Interviewed Amy and Ann and scribing responses
- Verified that I scribed parents' responses accurately from audio recordings
- Analyzed parents' responses

## **Week Four**

- Interviewed Tracey and Lisa and scribed responses
- Verified that I scribed parents' responses accurately from audio recordings
- Analyzed parents' responses

## **Week Five**

- Interviewed Tina and Jamie and scribed responses
- Verified that I scribed parents' responses accurately from audiotapes
- Analyzed parents' responses

## **Week Six and Seven**

- Compared the parents' responses to one another and looked for commonalities across prior literacy experiences. Then I compared how they are involved in literacy experiences at home and note how they vary.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

The data that were collected during this study were the parents' responses which were collected through interviews. After the interview session, I listened to the

audio recordings to ensure that I transcribed the correct responses and made adjustments as needed. To ensure credibility of data analysis, I interviewed 10 parents. This allowed me to compare the data across all interviews collected and to make an accurate conclusion based on the interview data from multiple sources.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was focused on the experiences of parents and how those experiences influence their involvement with literacy practices at home. One limitation of this study was that it was not focused on specific literacy activities and how they impacted the children's literacy development and achievement. Another limitation of this study was that the only source of data being collected was interviews.

### **Summary**

This study was conducted in an urban elementary school, which is located in upstate New York through the interviewing of parents. There were 10 parents interviewed during a 7-week data collection which ensured that the analysis of the data is credible and not misrepresented. Since the interviews were conducted with parents who had children in my kindergarten class, I needed to stay objective as a teacher-researcher because the data being collected was to benefit my beliefs about parental involvement.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to uncover how parents' prior literacy experiences, culture, and beliefs influence their involvement with literacy activities at home. This is an important study because parents are the ones who set the tone for literacy learning at home. Most children will carry this tone with them through their entire school career. So, it's important to understand parents' involvement with literacy activities at home because of this.

### **Research Question**

Through a qualitative study I learned about parents' prior literacy experiences. Through this research study I answered this question:

How is parental involvement in their child's literacy at home influenced by the parents' prior literacy experiences?

The data were collected through the use of interviews with the parents. The interviews were audio recorded to verify the accuracy of the information presented by the parents. During the interviews, I recorded the parents' responses and my thoughts in a research journal. These interviews took place in the parents' homes. I interviewed 10 parents of children from my kindergarten class. Of the 10 parents, I interviewed a married couple, single father, grandmother, and six single mothers.

In this chapter I will present the data that were collected and my analysis of the data in order to answer my research question. I will start this chapter by recounting the parents' interviews by analyzing their responses to see if their prior literacy experiences, background, and beliefs contribute to overall engagement of literacy activities at home with their children. Next, I will compare the parents'

responses to one another and look for commonalities across prior literacy experiences to uncover any themes that may exist. Then I will compare how they are involved in literacy experiences at home and note the similarities and differences.

## **Findings**

The interview questions and responses will be separated into three sections. The first section of the interview will focus on how often the child engages with literacy activities, what literacy activities the child is engaged in, who participates in the literacy activities, and where the literacy activities take place. The next section will focus on the parents' prior literacy experiences; what, where, and whom. The last section will focus on the literacy goals that the parents have for their children. Throughout all the sections I will be looking at the patterns that are present among the parents' prior literacy experiences and how those experiences contribute to their engagement in literacy activities at home as well as the literacy expectations that they have for their children.

### **Parents' Engagement in Literacy Activities with Their Children**

When looking at when and how often the child is read to, Amy expressed what all of the parents shared, when she said "I or another family member try to read to my daughter daily." All of the parents expressed the importance of reading. Lisa's response was representative of how the other parents responded: "reading is very important and needs to happen often." So, they ensure that their child gets read to as much as possible and that is why they or another family member tries to read to them on daily basis. When parents were asked when they read to their children, James shared what every parent shared, when he said "I or another family member read to

my son at night before he goes to bed.” In addition, the parents explained that the books are found throughout the house and their children can read the books whenever they want. All of the parents who were interviewed ensure that their children are read to daily and that the books are available to children to read on their own.

Many of the parents expressed similar comments as the one shared by Tracey when she said “I’m not able to read with my daughter as much as I would like to because of work commitments” and that is why another family members reads to or with them. This helps to understand why many of the parents have another adult/family member in the house, which was evident from the parents’ responses during the interview. These parents have expressed that because of their work commitments they have to rely on other family members to engage in literacy activities with their children. In addition, the parents have also expressed that they are not happy with another family member being in charge of the literacy activities. As Stacey said “I would rather be reading with my son because I don’t know if he is being read to.” This helps to show that they want to be the ones participating in the literacy activities with their children, but as Ken said “it is better than no one.” The other family members serve another purpose besides a caregiver in the parents’ absence; they are the literacy providers as well.

Not only do parents put other family members in charge of literacy learning, they expect that older children are in charge of their own literacy learning. As Linda said “they are old enough to do it by themselves and they don’t need me or anyone else to do it for them anymore.” Tina also said “my two older children are expected to do their own reading because I don’t have time to help them.” This suggests that once the children are in control of them learning the parents take a step back and let them take them lead.

The parents' responses about what literacy activities are taking place with the child at home were all similar. The literacy activities that the parents or another adult were participating in with children ranged from homework or completing a work book, reading books, speaking to and with their children, and technology (iPads, computer, T.V., kindle, and cell phone). James said "I read with my child every day, but after a page of reading my son takes over." Lisa has her "daughter read signs while shopping." Stacey explained "I read with my son every day and complete homework when it is sent home." Other parents expressed, as Ann said, "technology has made it easier to read with my child." This is because all parents in this study have either an iPad or a smartphone that allows them to have books at their fingertips. Many parents explained that technology has allowed them to access educational games for free. This is because as Ken said "I don't have extra money to spend." Technology has allowed these parents to access books and educational games that they would otherwise not have access to. This helps to understand that the use of technology is a critical component that helps parents engage in literacy activities with their children.

All parents stressed the importance of using technology as a literacy tool in the home. Linda expressed "I use the Kindle with my daughter for reading and playing education games together." Ken said he and his son "spend most nights before bed reading books on the iPad." Lisa says her son "reads books on the computer through the RAZ kids website." James explained "I play a lot of video games and I have my son read what is on the TV." Technology seems to be an important literacy tool at home, because as Ann says "my daughter would rather pick up the iPad over a book." This helps to understand why parents utilize technology as a literacy tool.

The literacy tool that is the most dominant across all parents is the use of technology. All the parents expressed that they use technology as a literacy tool with their children. However, they all use technology in different ways and for different purposes. Ken and his son “read books on the iPad” and at times “my son takes over the reading.” Linda and her daughter “play educational games to help improve her ability to identify letters and read words by matching pictures to words.” James has his son “read video game content because it provides him with the chance to read and apply what he has read to succeed in the game.” No matter what the activity is that the parents are engaging in with their children, its main purpose is to support their children’s literacy development.

Now the question remains about who is participating in the literacy activities at home if the parents have work commitments? From the interviews, the parents had provided a variety of answers to this question. Linda, Ken, and Stacey all shared similar responses and as Stacey said “my son goes to his grandmother’s house every day after school because I am at work.” As Amy said “I work the night shift and my sister takes care of my daughter after school.” Lisa said “my older daughter is home after school and it is her job to make sure homework and reading is done before I get home from work.” James explained “I’m working when my son gets out of work and my wife does most of the literacy activities.” Many of the parents who were interviewed shared that they have another family member or an older child providing care to their child while they are fulfilling other obligations. This means, that same family member is in charge of participating in literacy activities in the parents absence.

As noticed from the responses above, most of the parents are working when their children get out of school. This means that they need to rely on other adults or

an older child to help engage in literacy activities with their younger child because they are not home. As a teacher this is something to keep in mind when thinking parents aren't involved in literacy activities. Even though the parents are not engaging in literacy activities with their children, they made sure another person is engaging in these activities with their children.

### **Parents' Prior Literacy Experiences**

This section is going to focus on the parents' prior literacy experiences and how those experiences influence their participation in literacy activities. Ann expressed what every parent shared, when she said, "I had positive literacy experiences." Since most of parents expressed that they had positive literacy experiences, who was responsible for those positive literacy experiences? Amy's response was representative of how the other parents responded: "I had support from my parents." The two other parents had positive literacy experiences, but as Tracey expressed "the positive literacy experiences were because of her teachers." From the interviews there are two groups of parents: parents without support at home and parents who had support at home. To understand how parents' prior literacy experiences influence their participation in literacy activities, the two groups of parents will need to be looked at separately.

### **Parents without Support at Home**

Within those positive experiences, there were those who were supported and not supported in literacy by their parents. There were two parents, who both expressed, as Linda said, "I had to push myself with literacy because my mom was not around." Even though Tracey and Linda didn't have their mothers around to

support their literacy development, they still had positive literary experiences as children.

As children these parents were often in someone else's care, leaving the non-parental figure with the responsibility of helping with reading and homework. When Linda got out of school her "grandmother was there to provide care." Linda explained "my grandmother was only there as a caregiver and I didn't remember participating in literacy activities with her." This shows that it was up Linda to develop her literacy skills as child. Linda said "when I got home from school I would play school and I would pretend to be the teacher by copying what the teacher did that day." Tracey was another parent who didn't have support at home with literacy. This was because "I was cared for by my older sister." As Tracey said "she was just there to make sure I was safe and had food to eat." This was because her mom was never home. Tracey explained that her sister never participated in reading and writing with her because "my sister had her own school work to do and didn't have time to help me." When Tracey was at home she "just watched T.V. until my sister told me to go to bed." This means that Tracey did not engage in literacy activities at home. It is also important to note parents not being involved with these interviewees had nothing to do with motivation or lack of desire on the parents' part; they just simply were not available. How did these parents have a positive literacy experience growing up then? The help and the positive literacy experiences that these parents received came from their teachers.

The adults who contributed to these parents having a positive literacy experience were teachers. As Tracey said, "if it weren't for the positive teacher support that I received in grammar school I would not enjoy reading and writing as much as I do." Linda said "my mom was never around so my second grade teacher

gave me the extra support and attention that I needed with reading and writing.” Both parents mentioned that the teachers were there for them when they needed it and challenged them. Linda said “my grammar school teacher provided me with reading challenges for prizes and helped me with competing in the school’s spelling bee.” It was because of these teachers who Linda and Tracey had that helped create positive literacy experiences while growing up. This is a true testament that teachers can make a difference in a child’s life that lasts.

### **Parents with Support at Home**

The parents who had support at home also had a positive experience with literacy while growing up. All of the parents who fit in this group had a parent who engaged in literacy activities with them. Ann said “my mom had me reading all the time.” Ann wasn’t just reading books at home, she would “read street signs, the names of stores, and items at the grocery store.” Ann’s mom participated in daily reading through formal and informal experiences. James said “my dad had me engage in reading and writing whenever there was an opportunity.” Anytime there was something to read “my dad would make me read it” James said. Similar comments were shared by the other six parents as well. The parents who were supported by their own parents engaged in literacy activities every day. These literacy activities were reading, writing, and going to the library.

The parents also expressed that these literacy activities were done with and without parents. As Stacey said, “if I weren’t supported by my mom I would not have read on my own.” She “showed me how to sound out words, find words I know inside words, and how to tell what happened in my own words” said Stacey. Stacey’s mom provided Stacey with reading and comprehension strategies that she could use

on her own. Stacey said “I did these things with and without my mom because she helped me understand how to use them.” This shows that because the parents had been supported it allowed them to engage in literacy activities on their own.

The parents who were supported by their own parents engaged in a variety of literacy activities. These activities involved reading that went beyond reading a book. Their parents were engaging in practical and meaningful reading. This means that they were reading and engaging with the world around them. This is because the parents wanted their children to be able to be able successfully interact with the world around them. This and other expectations will be more fully discussed in the next section.

### **Parents’ Literacy Learning Expectations**

No matter what support or where the support came from while the parents were growing up, they have high literacy expectations for their children. The parents who were supported by their parents have the same expectations for their children that their parents had placed on them. Also, the parents who didn’t have support from their parents have literacy expectations that were placed on them from teachers.

### **Literacy Expectations from Parents with Support at Home**

The parents who had support from their parents replicated the literacy expectations that they had growing up. James had a dad who made learning literacy fun, practical, and made sure he didn’t quit. While growing up James said “I played a variety of educational games with my dad who wanted to make learning fun and engaging.” This helps to understand why James uses video games as a literacy activity with his son. James also explained that “my dad made sure I understood the

reason why I was learning something.” Another important aspect to note from James’s childhood was that “once I started something, my dad would not let me quit.” This was because “my dad always told me that it is important to always finish what I started.” James explained that “I have similar expectations for my son because I turned out just fine.” This means that James wants his son to have fun, understand the practical use of literacy, and not to quit.

Ken always participated in literacy activities with his mom. Ken said “my mom would read to me numerous times a day and at times I would read to her or to myself because books were everywhere.” It wasn’t always reading. Ken said “I would write grocery lists or notes for my mom.” Ken said that “it may seem like I always read with my mom, but we played games too.” Ken said “because of all the support from my mom with reading and writing, I was placed in advanced reading and writing classes.” While Ken’s mom had a lot of time to participate in literacy activities, Ken explained that he “doesn’t have a lot of time to participate in literacy activities at home.” However, Ken explained “that I want my son to be learning and achieving above grade level like I was.” Even though Ken can’t participate as much as his mom, he has expectations that are similar to his own literacy experiences in school.

When growing up Stacey’s mom understood that the purpose of reading was to understand what you read. This is evident from the interview with Stacey because she said “my mom read to me on a daily basis and after reading we would talk about the story.” The conversations that Stacey and her mom had were to ensure that Stacey understood the story and that she could say it in her own words. This shows that while Stacey was growing up she was expected to understand what she has read and to be able talk about it in her own words. With her own child, Stacey explained “that I

participate in daily reading and ensure that my son and I talk about the story.” Stacey said “I want my son to understand what he reads and to be able to explain it in his own words.” This shows that Stacey has similar literacy expectations for her child.

When growing up Amy spent many hours reading and writing. Amy explained that she would “read a book and then be expected to write it.” Amy said “my mom was there to help me with my reading and writing.” This was because as Amy said “my mom was an English teacher and she expected me to be an excellent reader and writer.” Even though Amy works nights, she still expects her daughter to be reading and writing every day. Amy said “when I get home from work I look at my daughter’s writing and we read together before she goes to school.” This shows that Amy tries to replicate the literacy experiences that she experienced while growing up. Amy said “I want my daughter to be a good reader and writer.” Even though Amy works, she places an emphasis on reading and writing.

### **Literacy Expectations from Parents without Support at Home**

The parents who had no literacy support from their parents placed the expectations that their teachers had placed on them to their child. In grammar school Linda’s teachers had high expectations for her because of her participation in the school spelling bee and doing well with the reading challenges. Linda said “I have high expectations for my daughter and want her to be above grade level with reading and writing.” In addition, Linda expects her daughter to do reading and writing on her own. This has a direct connection to how Linda participated in reading and writing growing up. She didn’t have support so she had to do it on her own.

Tracey had a similar experience while growing up. It was her second grade teacher who pushed and supported her with reading and writing. Tracey explained

“my teacher placed an emphasis on understanding the text and pushed me to read more.” Her teacher did this by having her “read during specials and lunch.” Tracey explained that at the time “I liked all the extra attention and the extra opportunities to read, but I missed out on other experiences because of it.” Tracey has similar literacy expectations with her child. She said “I want my child to understand what he reads, but I’m not going to push him.” This is because as Tracey said “I want his teachers to push him because they have the resources and ability to push him more than I can.” Tracey’s literacy expectations are deeply rooted in her school experiences and she is transferring those literacy expectations on to her child.

This is evidence that all parents have literacy learning expectations that mirrored their literacy experiences learning growing up. Some parents mirrored the expectations that their parents had for them and others tried to match the expectations that another adult had for them. The reason that these literacy expectations vary is because all the parents had different experiences while growing up. Since their experiences growing up were different the high expectations that they have are going to look different from one another.

### **How Parents’ Prior Experiences Influence Their Involvement in Literacy Experiences with Their Children**

After interviewing the parents and analyzing the conversations, I noticed a theme across the parents who had support at home. These parents replicated the literacy experiences they had growing up with their own children. In addition, the literacy expectations that the parents have for their children resembles the literacy experiences that they had growing up. The way that the parents replicate the literacy experiences is going to vary because of their prior experiences and who supported

them with literacy. As mentioned previously, there are two groups of parents; those who were supported in literacy by their parents and those who were supported by teachers.

The two parents who had support from their teachers tried to replicate the experiences they had with their teachers. While in school Linda said “during my lunch time, free time, and sometimes during specials I would read to my teacher.” This was because it allowed “me one-on-one time with my teacher and during this time my teacher would provide feedback to help improve my reading.” Linda explained that “I have my daughter read to me aloud and then I help her with words she does not know while reading.” Also, during this one-on-one time Linda said “my teacher would provide me with additional literacy activities such as worksheets, games, and listening to books on tape.” These are the same kinds of activities that Linda has her daughter engaged in at home. Her daughter “has workbooks when there is no homework, she plays educational games on the kindle, and there are also audio books on the kindle that she listens to when I’m busy or at work.”

Tracey had a similar experience in which her teacher was the one who supported her literacy development. Her teacher had pushed her with her reading and writing. As Tracey said “my teacher spent extra time reading to me, helping me to read by sounding out words, reading and writing words from the dictionary, and playing memory games to help with reading words.” Tracey said “I think what I did with the teacher was due to my disability (she was diagnosed with having dyslexia), but it did help me become a better reader and writer.” The literacy activities that Tracey participates in with her child are connected with those experiences that were provided by the teacher. Tracey explained “I help my daughter sound out words when reading books and signs while we are driving or at the store.” Tracey said “I play

memory games to help build my daughters' vocabulary" like she did when reading and writing words from the dictionary. Also, Tracey said "I read to my daughter and have her read to me." Even though these two parents didn't have their parents to participate in literacy activities with them, they had the next best person, which was their teacher. So, these parents replicated the positive literacy experiences that helped them become a proficient reader with their children.

The parents who had literacy support from their parents also replicated the literacy activities. As a child Ken explained "I had support from my mom with reading, completed workbooks for additional practice, wrote in a journal, and I was involved in advanced educational programs." As Ken stated "the reading that my mom participated in was practical and she wanted me to understand the world around me." When Ken's mom was not around he said "I had workbooks that my mom purchased for extra practice and my mom had me placed in an advanced preschool program to push me further." As a parent, Ken explained that "I ensure I read to and with my son and that he can interact with the world around him." Ken also mentioned that "my son plays educational games on the iPad for additional reading practice instead of the workbooks that I had growing up." Ken also shared "that my son goes to first grade to improve his reading because he is reading above grade level."

Another parent who replicated his literacy learning with his child is James. As a child James shared "I had support from my dad with literacy." James's dad had him "participating in practical uses of reading and writing." Since his dad was an English major in college he wanted him to "understand the practical uses of reading and writing." This is how James engages in literacy practices with his child. He wants him to "understand the everyday uses of literacy and the importance of it." James does this through "real world hands on application of everyday occurrences." James has

his son “read maps, scores from football and basketball games, and boxes while shopping.” James also said “I read to my son, but most of the time he takes the book and reads it himself.” Even the parents who participated in literacy activities with their parents replicated those literacy activities with their children.

There is a link between what the parents experienced and how their children experience/engage in literacy at home. Regardless of who is providing the literacy support, parents are going to try to replicate what they experienced with their children. This also means that if parents did not engage in literacy activities as children, then they might not engage their children in literacy activities at home. Parents’ prior literacy experiences are directly connected to how parents participate in literacy activities with their children at home.

### **Summary**

This study helped to answer my question: how is parental involvement in their children’s literacy at home influenced by the parents’ prior literacy experiences? All of the parents who were interviewed try to ensure that their children are read to on a daily basis. They are able to do this because they have another family member to provide support in their absence. Another reason that this is possible is because of technology. Many of the parents expressed they use technology such as an iPad or Kindle for reading and playing educational games. It may seem that all these parents have similar prior literacy experiences, but they didn’t have the same literacy experiences. Most of the interviewees had support from their parents in literacy, while two of the interviewees had support from their teachers. Since all the parents had support, it contributed to them having positive literacy experiences. These parents then tried to replicate those positive literacy experiences that they had growing up

with their own children. In addition, these positive experiences also played a role in the expectations that the parents have for their children. The parents tried to mimic the expectations that they experienced through their literacy experiences.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to find an answer to my research question regarding parents' involvement with literacy practices at home. My research question was:

How is parental involvement in their child's literacy at home influenced by the parents' prior literacy experiences?

In this chapter I will discuss the conclusions of my findings from this study. Through the findings in chapter four I will discuss how parents' prior literacy experiences influence their involvement in their child's literacy at home. I will also discuss how the findings have benefited me as a teacher as well as recommendations for future research along with my final thoughts.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Positive Literacy Experiences May be Provided by Parents and other Adults**

All of the parents who were interviewed shared that they had positive literacy experiences growing up. They all had positive literacy experiences for different reasons. In addition, the literacy experiences that these parents experienced were due to other adults along with their parents. Eight out of ten parents had positive literacy experiences because of their parents, but they also had other adults who stepped in when their parents weren't around. This is because besides the parents, other adults were willing to help. This is because "in today's world, all children need help from their parents and other caregivers to succeed in school and life" (National PTA, 2000, p. 67). These parents and other adults worked together to support the child's literacy development.

There were two other parents who were interviewed who also shared that they had positive literacy experiences. However, these parents who were interviewed didn't have positive literacy experiences because of their parents nor from another adult at home. They did have another adult at home that provided care when their parents were not around, but didn't participate in literacy activities. These two parents had to get their literacy experiences outside the home environment. These parents got their literacy experience from school and the people who provided them with their literacy experience were their teachers. This is because

teachers can influence the quality of students' social and intellectual experiences via their abilities to instill values in children such as the motivation to learn by providing classroom contexts that stimulate children's motivation and learning by addressing children's need to belong, by developing a social identity, and by serving as regulatory function for the development of emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Davis, 2003, p. 208).

Their teachers provided the literacy experiences that helped create a positive literacy experience that these parents would draw on with their own children. Even though teachers are with their students for a short period of time they can have a lasting impact on their students because of the overall influence that teachers have.

### **Parental Involvement Takes on Many Forms**

Parent involvement is a critical component for children. McBride suggests "parental involvement in children's education helps students form more positive attitudes toward learning and leads to better performance in school" (McBride, Bae, & Wright, 2002, p.108). Even though all parents have similar prior experiences, the

way that they are involved is going to be different because of those experiences.

Parent “involvement in children’s education can take on a number of forms within in the home” (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007, p. 621). The literacy activities that the parents engage in can take many forms and can be similar to how parents were engaged in literacy activities as a child. Some parents were engaged in formal literacy experiences, others engaged in informal literacy experiences, and some engaged in both types of literacy experiences. The formal literacy experiences were activities that were similar to their school experiences. These formal literacy activities that the parents engaged in consisted of reading books, completing workbooks, writing about what they read, and discussing what was read.

The informal literacy experiences that the parents engaged in as children were activities that their parents built into their everyday routines. These informal literacy activities consisted of reading street signs/billboards, reading labels while shopping, playing educational games, writing grocery lists, writing in a journal, writing poems and songs, having conversations with parents, and playing school. This is because children learn through informal literacy activities because of the authentic literacy experiences that were created by more knowledgeable adults. The informal activities could be seen as processual approach because a “processual approach focuses on the processes of everyday life, in the form of daily activities” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 41). The parents engaged their children in literacy activities that were a part of daily life and were in the form of activities and the children learned valuable information through these experiences. This is because “in the early years, learning is informal and children learn in their natural environments” (Fagnano & Werber, 1994, p. 80). As you would expect, it made their literacy experiences a positive one that they remembered. The literacy experiences and activities that the children were engaging

in allowed them to interact with the world around them. This also helped them to understand how the world around them functioned and how they could be a part of it.

From the interviews parents tried to replicate the literacy experiences that they experienced as children with their own children while creating new experiences at the same time. This is because the parents want to share those positive experiences with their children and to create new ones. The literacy activities that these parents are engaging in are “passed on through social networks of exchange” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 73). Most of the literacy activities that the parents are engaging in are conducted socially and requires their child to talk. This fits with the idea of funds of knowledge because these informal literacy skills help teach skills that are essential to function in society. Funds of knowledge refers to “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Gonzales et al., 2005, p. 25).

This is an important idea to think about because of the diversity that exists in today’s classroom. Students from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences can be found in one classroom. That means that the teacher has to understand many different cultures and how knowledge and skills are obtained. This means that students are obtaining literacy skills through a variety of ways and experiences that may or may not match with the teachers. Once “teachers are aware of families’ unique home literacy experiences, they can recognize the ways that young children express their home literacies in the classroom” (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 10). When teachers are able to identify and understand those unique experiences they can begin to utilize them in the classroom. As Summers & Summers suggest, “families become collaborators in their children’s learning when teachers validate the children and families’ life experiences and implement strategies that respect diverse families

and cultures” (2014, p.14) This will benefit the students because it is how they are used to learning and it will show the parents that you value their experiences and want them to be involved.

This idea can also be used when creating and sustaining relationships with parents. This is because “it is important for educators to learn about the home lives of children and families and use this to shape how they approach family engagement” (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 12). Just as it is important to understand students’ backgrounds, it’s just as important to understand the background of the parents. In addition to learning about the home lives of the families, teachers need to “assume that parents are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge as a start to tapping family expertise regarding children’s education” (Cheatham & Otrsky, 213, p. 168). This is a critical component to understand if teachers are going to get parents involved and to develop a relationship with them.

### **The Importance of Establishing Relationships between Parents and Teachers to Support Literacy Learning**

As mentioned above, other adults along with parents engage in literacy activities at home with children. This is because the parents have other obligations and they require another adult to provide care for their children. If parents are unable to engage in literacy activities with their children, they may be unaware of the literacy strengths and/or needs that their children have. Where are the parents going to obtain this information from? The quick source would be to talk with the other adult who provides care in the parents’ absence. If that adult is unable to provide information then all parents have one other adult who they are able to talk to, the teacher.

However, some parents are hesitant to talk with teachers and some teachers are hesitant to talk with parents. This is because they have not established a relationship with each other that opens the door for communication.

While I was interviewing parents during this study the parents were very hesitant to discuss their childhood or what they do at home with their children. As the interview progressed they shared more information than I had anticipated, some of which was provided in the previous chapter and some has remained confidential. After this study the same parents who I interviewed began to call, email, and visit the classroom more often to inquire about their children's literacy progress. This is because together we created a strong connection and that they "felt more welcome at school and became more involved" (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011, p. 91). This was due to the relationship that was created during this study. In most cases just having a conversation can be the start of relationship and it can be started by the parents or the teachers. Then over time this conversation can be focused on the child's literacy progress. This relationship will help to improve children's academic success because "parents and family members are powerful influences on student achievement" (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011, p. 90).

The children benefit when teachers and parents create and maintain a relationship. This is because it allows the parents and the teachers to communicate with one another and it will benefit the children's literacy development. This is because "students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development" (Hammack, Foote, Garretson, and Thompson, 2012, p. 104). It is important that teachers and parents work together to create a positive relationship between home and school. When creating that positive connection between home and school teachers

need to be careful “not expect parents to adapt to the school environment and teachers need to view parents as capable” (Hammack, et al., 2012, p. 105). These relationships would encourage parents to speak up when advocating for their children. This is because parents and teachers would be working together to support the child’s literacy development and take all the necessary steps to ensure that the children succeed.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

#### **Tailor Learning Experiences to Match Home Learning**

Through interviewing parents about their prior literacy experiences, I uncovered ways that the parents are engaging in literacy activities with their children. This is because “parents are their children’s first and most influential teacher” (Riley, 1999, p. 6) and most parents are teaching their children skills that are necessary to be successful in society. Some children are able to utilize those skills to learn literacy skills in school and others struggle with this. Why? This is because there is a difference between how children are learning at home and school; there is a mismatch. If children are learning the skills necessary to be successful in society while at home, then children should be able to learn academic skills while at school, but sometimes they do not learn the academic skills because of this mismatch in learning experience. Literacy experiences that students have from their parents are engaging and fun. This is because as Ken said “my son uses the iPad for reading” and other parents have shared similar comments. When students come to school they may not think reading a book is fun, if that is not what they experience at home.

Tailoring instruction will help to “bridge the chasm between household and school” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 40). So, in order get rid of the mismatch to bridge

the gap, teachers need to be uncovering the ways that parents are engaging in literacy activities at home. This is possible because “teachers have developed skills as researchers” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 40). This enables teachers to uncover ways that children are learning at home and then incorporate those into daily instruction while at school. In addition, this helps teachers bring in experiences that are rooted in children’s culture and in their daily routine. As Summers and Summers suggest, “inviting children’s home cultures into the classroom as resources to be used in their learning helps build bridges between home and school (2014, p. 14).

Teachers need to incorporate those same ways that children are learning at home in the classroom. This is because “the two most influential environments in which young children develop are their homes and their early childhood education programs” (Summer & Summer, 2014, p. 8) By connecting these two environments it would allow the ways that the children are learning at home to match up with school learning and also would allow children to learn more easily because of this match. This would give the children the best chance for academic success when their home experiences and school experiences match.

### **Teachers Need to Use Parents as a Resource to Support Students with Limited Parental Involvement**

The parents who I interviewed are engaging in literacy activities with their child at home, but what about those children who are not engaging in literacy activities with their parents at home? If parents are not engaging in literacy activities at home, that means that these children might have limited exposure to literacy when coming to school. It is not because the parents don’t care or value education. It may be due to the parents having limited resources at home. If the parents are able to share

this information then it gives the teacher an idea about where to start literacy instruction with these children when they do come to school. This is because the parents have a “wealth of knowledge about their children and about effective ways of helping their children—ways that might not reflect school practices” (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 9).” It is important to use parents as a resource.

Using parents as a resource will allow the students to start receiving literacy instruction that fits their needs. Identifying which children are and are not engaging in literacy activities at home will help the teacher tailor instruction to fit the immediate needs of the students. The teacher will not have to guess which children have limited literacy exposure or spend extra time identifying these students. Knowing which students will not receive extra help at home means that the school is going to be the main source for literacy experience. To ensure the student can learn and pass on literacy experiences later in life, there will need to be more direct and explicit instruction on an individual bases. While it may differ per child, adding more activities and not keeping them at the same pace as all the other students will be beneficial for the child. In order to accomplish this, teachers need to understand the literacy background that students are coming to school with. This means that the teacher needs to find out which students have a limited literacy background.

### **Teachers and Parents Sharing Literacy Sources and Ideas**

Interviewing parents about their prior literacy experiences have many benefits for teachers, but it is also beneficial for the children. As mentioned above teachers can tailor instruction to match how parents are engaging in literacy activities at home and they can identify which students may need more exposure. In addition, by talking with parents about their engagement with literacy activities teachers will be able to

identify literacy areas that may need to be strengthened. Communicating with each other creates a “learning community” which “is a group of people who come together to learn with and from each other and then seek to act on what they learn” (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 9). Talking is a critical component and there should be “two-way communication between home and school” for students to be successful (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 9).

In the classroom the teacher is considered the expert. They can provide resources that the parents may not be aware of that will help develop certain literacy skills while still allowing the parent to engage in the activity. As mentioned before, the parents are the experts when it comes to their children. Sharing resources and information should be a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the parent. Once the “families and teachers are comfortable engaging in give-and-take, the expert/learner roles become fluid and interchangeable” (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 10). Just as the teacher would want to share resources, ideas, or information with the parent, the parent should be encouraged to share resources, ideas, and information that would be helpful. This is because parents know their child the best and may already know what works and what doesn’t work.

## **Implications for My Teaching**

### **Creating Parent-Teacher Relationships**

Parent-teacher relationships are not only beneficial for parents and teachers, but for children as well. The

collaboration between teachers and parents benefits children; teachers bring expertise based on theories of child development and experiences with young

children in school settings; and parents bring their unique perspectives on the needs of individual children (McBride et al., p.108)

As I was conducting the interviews and talking with the parents about their literacy experiences, I didn't realize the relationship that had just been created. The parents who I interviewed all shared glimpses of their lives as children through literacy. In many cases parents don't have the opportunity to share that with their child's teacher nor do they intend to. When parents do share these stories about their childhood with someone they build trust and "building trust is an important aspect of strong family-school partnerships (Summers & Summers, 2014, p. 9). Once trust is established then a relationship begins to emerge. When a relationship is created it "cannot be an asymmetrical alliance, with one component defining and limiting the role of its counterpart" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 42). Both the teachers and parents should have an equal voice.

Having a relationship between the parents and teachers helps the parents become more involved in children's academic success. When parents are involved there is a better chance for literacy success. As Froiland, Peterson, & Davison suggest, "children's academic success is better predicted by a combination of parent involvement and parental expectations" (2012, p. 34). Once parents get more involved the students' academic success is more likely to improve. I will ensure that I build the relationship early and try to maintain it through a variety of communication measures because it will be beneficial to the child's academic success. In addition, if there are any other concerns I would be able to address those with the parents and provide suggestions as necessary.

## **Having a Meeting with Parents to Work Together**

To create parent-teacher relationships I will set up a time and place to talk with the parents prior to the beginning of the school year. This can be done through emails, phone calls, in person, text messages, and etc. During this time, I will talk with the parents about a variety of topics with the goal of creating a relationship. The objective is to establish a relationship in which the parents/teachers can trust and learn from one another. As Cheatham and Ostrosky suggest, “parents and other family members working together with professionals in pursuit of a common goal where the relationship between the family and the professional is based on shared decision-making and responsibility and mutual trust and respect” (2013, p. 167). The common goal that both the parent and the teacher share is the student.

After the initial conversation I would talk with the parents about their educational expectations that they have for their child to identify what they want their child to learn, the expectations that they have, and what they would like my role to be. This way it’s the parents telling me what they want versus me telling them what the educational expectations are and what I would like them to do. This helps set the tone that I am there for them and will help in whatever way I can. This part of the relationship is called collaboration and it “consists of the reciprocal exchange of information, problem solving and decision making” (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2013, p. 186) At the same time both the parents and the teachers are collaborating to creating educational expectations that will start at the beginning of the year and remain in place throughout the year. If one person is not following through with these

expectations the other person needs to tell them. This allows both parties to make sure they are following through.

Establishing the relationship with parents early is critical because “the nature of the relationship between parents and professionals may either impede or enhance positive outcomes for parents and their children” (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007, p. 306). Establishing the relationship early will help create a positive relationship with the parents that would be beneficial as the year progresses. The parents will feel they are a part of the learning environment and would be willing to help in whatever they can. At the same time it places expectations on both the parents and the teacher. In order for this relationship to continue both have to accept the expectations and follow through. This means that they need to communicate to the other when they aren’t meeting these expectations. The only way for this to happen is to have a trusting relationship.

### **Creating Student-Teacher Relationships**

As was evident from the interviews that were conducted, two parents were influenced by their teachers because their parents had prior obligations. The ways that these parents now engage in literacy activities at home reflect how they interacted with their teachers. This helps to illustrate the point that teachers can have a lasting impact on a child. This is because “children are greatly influenced by role models that are a consistent part of their lives” (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2012, p. 34). Other than their parents, children are in school with their teachers for a significant period of time and that means they can be seen as a role model to the children. Having a relationship with an adult is important because “adults bring to the relationship resources to support a child’s intellectual, social, and emotional

development” (Davis, 2003, p.207) Teachers need to be mindful and aware that they can have an impact on children because of the relationship that they have with the children.

Teachers can form these relationships with students by getting to know them not only as a student, but as a person and showing that they care. This means that teachers should be taking the time to ask students questions on a personal level. The philosophy that teachers embrace can also impact the relationships that teachers form with students. As Davis suggests, “teachers can influence the quality of their interactions with students and their students’ motivation and learning via the instructional contexts they embrace” (2003, p. 212). The practices that teachers utilize in the classroom can have an impact on the relationships that teachers create with their students.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

### **Increasing the Number of Participants**

This study was limited to only ten parents who were interviewed about their prior literacy experiences. I would recommend that future studies on this topic have a larger number of participants to interview. Having a larger number of participants would help ensure that all parents are being represented in the study. In addition having a larger number of interviewees for this study could produce different results.

### **Monitoring Literacy Progress**

This study was focused on the parents and how their prior literacy experiences influence their involvement in literacy activities at home. To help determine if these literacy activities that the parents are engaging in are effective, the students’ literacy

progress should be monitored. In addition, the parents' involvement should be monitored as well. This will help researchers understand how long parents stay involved in literacy activities at home and to determine the effectiveness of the involvement. Future researchers could expand this topic further to determine the effectiveness of parents' involvement and how long parents stay involved in literacy practices at home. In addition to focusing on how long parents stay involved, future researchers could study if early parent involvement is a predictor of later student success. Also, this topic could be expanded if future researchers focus on the ways that parents are involved.

### **Increasing Parental Involvement**

Since this study identified some of the ways that parents are involved at home, future researchers could focus on the ways that teachers get parents involved and how this has impacted student success. This is because some teachers are highly successful at getting parents involved at school while other teachers are not. Future teacher researchers can also focus on how these teachers are successful at getting parents involved in their child's literacy education. The reason this would be valuable to this topic is because parental involvement is a predictor of future academic success. The more that parents are involved and working together with teachers shows students that they are working together. All teachers are searching for the best ways to get parents involved that this would be a valuable topic to expand.

### **Final Thoughts**

As I think back about my initial thoughts about this study, I realized that parents' prior literacy experiences have a direct influence on their involvement with

their children. This is because parents carry their prior experiences with them as adults. Parents will try to replicate their prior experiences with their children. The literacy activities that parents engaged in as a child are what they will try to engage in with their own children at home. This means that if parents didn't engage in or had negative literacy experiences they are more likely to engage in those literacy experiences with their children at home. As teachers we have no control of how parents' prior literacy experiences influence their involvement at home, but we do have control of how we are involved in literacy activities at school. Teachers have the ability to create positive experiences that children will keep with them and will then try to replicate those experiences as adults. If teachers want more parents to be involved in literacy activities at home, they need to understand that they are the ones that can impact parent involvement.

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