The Home Environment And Its Impact on Literacy Development

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The Home Environment And Its Impact on Literacy Development

Abstract
Due to the understanding that literacy development is based on an individual's discourse, and is acquired through social interactions with others it is essential to look at literacy acquisition through the perspective of the home environment. How does a child's home environment impact the development of a child's literacy acquisition? By studying the home life of five student participants and five parent participants, it became clear that parents are the greatest influence on a child's ability to read and write. Inevitably, there is a continued link between home and school and teachers must take this knowledge and help support parents by teaching parents the skills they need to help their children.

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Abstract

Due to the understanding that literacy development is based on an individual's discourse, and is acquired through social interactions with others, it is essential to look at literacy acquisition through the perspective of the home environment. How does a child's home environment impact the development of a child's literacy acquisition? By studying the home life of five student participants and five parent participants, it became clear that parents are the greatest influence on a child's ability to read and write. Inevitably, there is a continued link between home and school and teachers must take this knowledge and help support parents by teaching parents the skills they need to help their children.
The Home Environment and Its Impact on Literacy Development

Throughout the course of my educational career it has been stated to make sure you have a good relationship with the parents of your students. I believed that this relationship would serve as a great network for making sure my students had a successful school year. This relationship would not only help my days in the classroom, but it would also allow for a well established working relationship at home. After all, parents are their children’s first teachers.

When I began my first teaching job, I thought that this relationship would be easy to establish because from my background of growing up, parents are always supportive of school and their child’s classroom teacher. I grew up in an environment where my parents sat down and did my homework with me. My parents were very supportive and had taught me that school came first. When I reflect back, it was also evident that my friends and peers around me also had similar beliefs. This idea that everyone had similar beliefs about school is what I believed was the norm. However, after beginning teaching, it quickly became evident that the “picture perfect” fit between parents and teacher was not as I expected it to be. Parents did not seem to see school as important as I did. Homework was not a part of some parents’ nightly routines, and reading with their child was something parents just did not see as necessary as I thought they would or should. This belief is where I became stuck. How can a parent not be interested in reading and writing with their child?

As I have continued to grow as a teacher, it has become more evident to me that not all parents feel the same way, nor truly understand the impact literacy plays in their child’s life in and outside of school. I have seen a variety of situations in which some parents have worked hard to make sure their children read at home, while others do not push their children at all. These decisions seem to impact their children’s own literacy development. Gee (2001) discusses
the home and its impact on literacy when he addresses the idea of discourse. An individual’s accepted way of life impacts the way someone learns. Gee states, “individuals do not speak and act, but that historically and socially defined discourses speak to each other through individuals” (p. 539). This accepted way is based on the culture the child has been brought up in. Halliday (1969) looked at children’s development and how they acquired language. He identified how culture and linguistic variation take part. Halliday (1969) states, “the child’s understanding of what language is, is derived from his own experience of language in situations of use” (p. 53). When children are at a young age, they model what is taught and shown of them. Therefore, some researchers such as Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim (2009) feel that there is a relationship between child/family literacy practices and a child’s literacy abilities. This premise made me wonder how the home environment impacts a child’s literacy development?

Using this question as the framework of my research project, I began my research by discovering, analyzing, and synthesizing what information was already on this topic. I think it was essential to interpret what other researchers had already discovered, so I had background on where to begin my own research. Then, I took my research into the classroom. Here, I began by administering a parent questionnaire to parent’s in order to determine the amount of literacy practices the children had throughout their development. I also used the parent questionnaire in order to learn about their child’s progress with their literacy development. Then, I used student interviews in order to ask students questions about their parents’ responses. I also asked students about what types of literacy activities they complete in their home. Finally, I took this data with their current reading levels in order to cross examine the data and determine how their home environment affects their literacy acquisition.
Theoretical Framework

For years, researchers have been investigating and defining literacy. Today, researchers continue to work to find a definition that truly fits the full meaning of what literacy is. In order to understand how substantially the home environment impacts literacy acquisition, it is critical to understand that literacy is a social practice. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) understand that, “literacy is a matter of social practices. Literacies are bound up with social, institutional and cultural relationships...Literacies are always embedded in Discourses” (p. 8). This definition reflects the belief that literacy is based around social interactions. Students learn or acquire literacy by interacting with others in society, along with the people that surround them on a regular basis. Discourse is defined by Gee (2001) as, “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’ ” (p. 537). Therefore, ones’ society or home environment and the interactions within that society or home environment allow an individual to become literate.

Similarly, Larson and Marsh (2005) believe, “literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (p. 10). Therefore, when you think about the impact the home environment may have on literacy development, it is important to understand that literacy development is embedded in social interactions and social environments.
When reflecting on both of these strong definitions, it is necessary to look at literacy from the sociocultural-historical perspective. This theory defines a child learning literacy as, “an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems” (Larson and Marsh, 2005, p.101). Early on in a child’s life, this community of learners is considered to be the child’s family. Goodman (2001) believes that, “learning language is learning how to mean… children discover that they can make sense through written language as they use it themselves” (p. 317). Again, the sociocultural-historical perspective looks at literacy as a social interaction of individuals. When looking at both of these definitions, you get a greater understanding of what literacy is. Literacy is social. It consists of interactions with others, in one’s culture and one’s society, which impacts how it is acquired. Literacy is learned by being around others, talking with others, and interacting in social, cultural, and political backgrounds. Therefore, as children grow and develop, they are greatly impacted by the home environment around them. This environment is where they are talking with others, interacting with others, and being around others.

As stated above, people acquire literacy in many different social ways. Halliday (1969) states that a “child knows what language is because he knows what language does” (p.50). Halliday (1969) identifies that young children are taught literacy by being exposed and immersed in it. This exposure usually takes place with the family in the home as children develop. This immersion and exposure is the developmental process acquiring literacy takes, and teachers must recognize this to encompass all that the child knows language to be. Teachers must look at the home in order to determine their student’s language and literacy development. Language must encompass all of the child’s own models, to take account of the varied demands of society. These models give us a glimpse at understanding why children develop the way they do.
models include, the instrumental or the “I want,” the regulatory or the “do as I tell you,” the interactional or the “me and him,” the personal or the “here I come,” the heuristic or the “tell me why,” the imaginative or the “let’s pretend,” and finally the representational or the “I’ve got something to tell you” model (Halliday, 1969, p.53). These models begin in the home, by the way parents and other adults interact with their children. Therefore, all of these developmental patterns affect how literacy is learned. Thus, in looking and understanding what literacy is and how it is acquired, the home environment of a child should have an impact on how that child attains literacy.

**Research Question**

Due to the understanding that literacy development is based on an individual’s discourse, and is acquired through social interactions with others, this action research project questions, how does a child’s home environment impact the development of that child’s literacy acquisition?

**Literature Review**

In this literature review, a variety of areas of research will be discussed and analyzed. These areas include the following: parental involvement, parent beliefs and perceptions, parent practices, and family structure. These areas have been found to be common threads in recognizing and understanding how the home environment influence’s a child’s literacy development. All of the categories are pertinent in understanding the impact family has on a child’s literacy development, as they provide an understanding of what has been researched in this field and what still needs to be studied.
Parental Involvement

When considering how a child’s home environment influences a child’s literacy development, it is important to understand how parent involvement relates to the home life. Therefore, when you look at one’s literacy achievement, you must begin by looking at children’s homes and how their parents are involved in their schooling, especially their literacy development. This correlation between parent involvement and reading achievement can lead to a deeper understanding of how home life impacts literacy growth.

Hawes and Plourde (2005), Tam and Chan (2009), Schulz and Kantor (2005), and Cooper, Crosnose, Suizzo, and Pituch (2009) have looked at the relationship between parent involvement, the home, and reading achievement. Hawes and Plourde (2005) completed a recent study on parent involvement and the implications surrounding it. They wanted to prove that there is a relationship with reading achievement when reading is seen as important at home and at school (Hawes & Plourde). In this study, parents who spent time reading with their children, helping with homework, and attending parent teacher conferences in school, were considered to prioritize school in the home, which was considered the criteria for parent involvement (Hawes & Plourde). Through the use of parent and student surveys, along with student reading levels, Hawes and Plourde were able to prove that there is a small relationship between the amount of time parents spend with their children and their schooling compared to their child’s reading abilities. Tam and Chan (2009) also discovered that a, “gain in children’s academic efficacy with higher parental involvement level is observed among junior primary students” (p. 81). Students who have support with their academics at school and at home tend to do better academically.

In another study, Schulz and Kantor (2005) looked at how diverse families or families that are from different cultures are involved in their children’s schooling. Through their
research, they discovered that parents who are culturally aware of their child’s school environment and understand the language of that school were more adept to participate in their child’s academic life. These parents were often found to volunteer at school more. They also actively participated in school activities, such as homework, with their children at home. However, families whose cultural and language backgrounds were different from their children’s school culture often times did not participate. These differences have shown that children from a more diverse cultural background do not do as well in school and their academic achievement is not as high (Schulz & Kantor, 2005). Similarly, Cooper, Crosnose, Suizzo, and Pituch (2009) found that there was also a difference in the amount of parent involvement based on parents’ race as they claimed that, “White parents reported the highest levels on each of the four measures. Hispanic parents were the least likely to provide cognitively stimulating materials, involve their children in organized activities, or home-learning activities. Black parents had the lowest levels of school-based involvement” (Cooper, Crosnose, Suizzo, & Pituch, 2009, p. 872). Other aspects of this study showed that when parents are involved with academic activities in the home, then reading achievement of these children are greater.

These differences in why parents become involved in school show that even though cultural differences have an impact on children, the amount of parent involvement parents put forth continues to have an impact on a child’s academic success. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to look at the correlation between parent involvement and children’s literacy acquisition in order to learn exactly how that relationship impacts a child’s development. It is also important to understand that much of this parent involvement begins in the home environment.
Parent Beliefs, Perceptions and Education

Not only does parent involvement influence a child’s achievements in literacy, but a parent’s own beliefs and perceptions of their child’s education combined with the belief in their own ability to help with their child’s educational development, have been found to impact their children’s literacy acquisition. These beliefs, perceptions, and former education always begins at home with their children and this has been shown to directly impact reading skills.

In a 2007 study, researchers examined different ways parents became involved in their child’s schooling, and the reasons that influenced them to become involved (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler). These researchers focused their investigation around the impact of parents’ motivational beliefs in how they can help their child; along with a parents’ perceptions of themselves. These perceptions identify how a parent feels when they are asked to become involved in some sort of school situation, along with how they feel they can be beneficial in helping with school assignments and activities. Their study targeted categories consisting of parents’ motivational beliefs, parents’ perceptions of invitations to involvement from others, parents’ perceptions of life context variables, and a families’ socioeconomic status (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler). Through the use of questionnaires, they were able to conclude that, “parents home-based involvement was predicted by perceptions of specific child invitations, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-perceived time and energy for involvement” (p. 540). Parents were more prone to become involved in their schoolwork at school and at home, when they were invited by teachers and children. They also became more involved when they had self-efficacy in helping their children with their schoolwork at home (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler). Self-efficacy is defined as, “a person’s belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes” (p. 533). Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and
Sandler found that when parents believed that they would be helpful in helping their children, than there was more parent involvement at home. Parent involvement in the home is a positive attribute to literacy achievement. Similarly, Lynch (2002) also completed a study around parents’ self-efficacy beliefs. Lynch believed that there may be a correlation between a parents’ self-efficacy and reading achievement. Through the use of questionnaires for parents, standardized reading tests, and the Pearson-Product Moment Method Test, Lynch (2002) discovered that, “Negative relationships were found between father’s self-efficacy and children’s self-perceptions. Therefore, the higher father’s self-efficacy beliefs for helping improve boy’s reading achievement, the lower boys’ perceived themselves as readers” (p. 65). It was also discovered that girls tended to have a higher self-perception of themselves than boys did (Lynch, 2002). Lynch (2002) concluded her study with, “Reading achievement is critical for students’ entire academic success. Since parents play a major role on children’s success in school, psychological factors, in particular, a focus for research on parental self-efficacy and its relationship to children’s reading is pertinent” (p. 66). This concept is similar to the findings of Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler (2007). When a parent does not believe in themselves, than they are unable to help and provide children with the skills they need to develop. When tying this back into how the home takes part in literacy development, parents need to first believe in themselves so that they can help their child in promoting reading and writing growth.

Phillips and Lonigan (2009), Spera (2006), and Stephenson, Parrila, Georgiou, and Kirby (2008) have also completed studies in order to look at parent’s perceptions and the influence it may have on reading achievement and development. In another study focusing on parent’s beliefs and perceptions, Phillips and Lonigan (2009) looked at parents who believe in assisting
with and teaching their children literate skills, and how this may affect their children’s literacy development. They completed a study in which they were trying to understand how parent behaviors impact children’s educational growth. Through the use of home literacy questionnaires, central findings concluded that literacy activities related to a families socioeconomic status, family living circumstances, caregiver stress, and reading ability impacted literacy teaching behaviors (Phillips & Lonigan). Results from the study, “support a model of home literacy behavior informed not only by knowledge and resources but also by parental beliefs and deliberate choices” (Phillips & Lonigan, 2009, p. 146). Again, this study proves that a parent’s belief in oneself, as educational beings, can promote literacy growth. Another study completed by Spera, in 2006, looked at how parents’ goals for their children, along with their perceptions of their children, can impact their child’s motivation and achievement. Findings from the study showed that when parents have set high goals for their children, and have high beliefs and perceptions of their child, than that child is more motivated to work in school (Spera). Therefore, when a child is motivated by their parents’ belief in them and parents hold them to high expectations, than that child has more academic success. Similarly, Stephenson, Parrila, Georgiou, and Kirby (2008) stated, “parents beliefs about their children’s reading ability, and children’s task-focused behavior were significant predictors” (p. 24). Home life which can be defined by how parents perceive and believe in their children, has proved to have a direct impact on literacy achievement and acquisition.

Researchers have also looked at a parent’s educational background, and how that impacts a child’s language development. In a study completed by Myrberg and Rosen (2009), they looked at how a parents’ level of education, “has during the last decades been shown to be the most important dimension of socioeconomic influence on school performance in many
countries” (Myrberg & Rosen, 2008, p. 507). Through this study, they were able to determine that a parent’s educational background determines a child’s reading achievement (Myrberg & Rosen). Myrberg and Rosen looked at different factors in order to determine this correlation. In 2009, Myrberg and Rosen looked further into this study by looking at the effects of parent’s education on children in Sweden. They discovered that there was a relationship between parents’ educational level and the amount of books in their home (Myrberg & Rosen). They were able to, “conclude that early reading activities with children in the home mediate a great part of the influence of books” (p. 708). As a result of this, “Early reading activities in turn affect early reading abilities (p. 708). There has even been suggestion that parents with little education should attend programs to help them improve their home literacy activities. Lynch (2009) suggested that,

educators working in intervention programs recognize that parents with low levels of formal education engage in many meaningful print literacy activities in their everyday lives. Recommendations made to parents about involvement in literacy activities with their children can be connected to some of their own everyday literacy activities (p. 515).

These everyday literacy activities can take place right in the home environment.

The results identified above prove that parents’ perception and beliefs in themselves can and has impacted how their children develop when they are in their home environment. A parent’s educational level can also influence the development and acquisition of reading, along with the amount of literacy activities that are completed in the home. All of these factors can and does have an impact on children and how they grow and develop in their acquisition of language.
Parent Practices

Parents and family play a pertinent role in the development of their children. Families hold literacy practices in the home, which directly relate to reading and writing growth. These practices consist of an array of ideas and concepts which many are completed in the home environment. Some of these activities include the following: shared reading with a parent, the type and number of children’s books in a home, the amount of time children read and parents read independently, along with the amount of other print related texts that are in the house, such as magazines and newspapers (Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn, & Petrill, 2008). Parent practices are also affected by many other factors. A few of these factors include a parent’s education, the amount of stress in families’ home, and the kind of household environment.

Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005), Senechal and Young (2008), Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim (2008) have completed research around home literacy activities and the impact these activities have on language development. Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal (2005) completed a study on how the environment in the home can influence and predict preschool children’s emergent literacy skills. Their research looked at a variety of family practices that were completed in the home environment. These practices consisted of how often parents completed shared book reading with their children, the types of maternal strategies mother’s completed when they read with their child, if children enjoyed reading books, and maternal sensitivity. The study also looked at the home environment as a whole (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal). This aspect of the study looked at “the primary caregiver’s emotional and verbal responsivity, acceptance of the child’s behavior, organization of the environment, academic and language stimulation, and maternal involvement with the child” (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005, p. 351). These aspects of the study were all essential in understanding how the home environment
relates to literacy achievement as they directly impact the life of the child. In their findings, they discovered that there were some correlations with the home literacy practices (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal). Their biggest finding was that the home environment was their “most consistent predictor of children’s language and literacy outcomes” (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005, p. 355). Therefore, the home environment has a great impact on the reading development and achievement of children. It also, “contributed over and above the specific literacy practice measures in predicting children’s early language and literacy development” (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005, p. 355). Similarly, Senechal and Young (2008) took a look at how family literacy activities effected children’s literacy acquisition. They focused on testing and determining if the amount of reading activities completed between parents and children impacted or improved children’s reading acquisition (Senechal & Young). This study looked at the impact that parent tutoring and listening to children read correlated to language development (Senechal & Young). Contradictory to Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal, Senechal and Young (2008) discovered that, “parent tutoring with activities and parent listening to the child read books enhanced children’s literacy skills” (p. 891). When looking at these findings closer, Senechal and Young (2008) were able to determine that while they were both affecting parenting practices, parent tutoring was more productive than reading with children. More specifically, Senechal and Young discovered that it is extremely helpful when parents are taught to listen to their children read. Senechal and Young (2008) state, “the studies included in this report suggest that training parents to tutor their children using specific literacy activities can have a large affect on children’s reading performance” (p. 889). However, Senechal and Young also believe that they need to determine if it is tutoring parents on how to work with their children or is it more of a larger program of instruction that is beneficial.
In comparison to the work of Senechal and Young, Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim (2008), believed, “it is plausible to hypothesize that child and family literacy practices will not only enhance the child’s literacy skills but also his or her enthusiasm and sense of competence towards reading” (p. 265). This belief reflects the idea that parents who complete literacy activities at home, will help in the promotion and development of their children’s reading comprehension. Through the assistance of standardized tests, child administered surveys, and parent questionnaires, Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim (2008) were able to conclude that, “children who more frequently engaged in literacy practices at home tended to have a more positive attitude toward reading” (p. 270). They also learned that children who have been exposed to literacy activities in their home environment have a stronger belief in themselves as a reader, which allows for greater achievement in reading comprehension. This confidence in themselves as readers, similar to a parents' belief in themselves, is impacted by how much language learning is completed in the home environment, especially early on in their education.

Another form of parent practices consists of the amount of stress and disarray in a child’s home. This type of stress has shown to affect literacy growth and development of the children living in that home. Noel, Peterson, and Jesso (2008), looked to “assess how child temperament and parenting stress relate to preschool-aged children’s vocabulary and productive narrative ability among an economically disadvantaged sample prior to intervention” (p. 828). They focused on preschool children and their mothers’ expressive and receptive vocabulary, and the children’s ability to write stories. Results concluded that a mother’s stress level directly related to a child’s expressive vocabulary. The study found that when a parent reported that there was a higher amount of stress in their home, the children in that home had poorer expressive vocabularies (Noel, Peterson, & Jesso). Findings from the study also stated that, “Likewise,
children’s receptive vocabularies were significantly related to their mother’s reported parenting stress” (p. 837). Similarly, Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn, and Petrill (2008) examined how household order and chaos impacted a child’s early reading development. Chaos in the home can impact reading skills, and results of the study determined that, “household order but not household quiet is associated with children’s expressive vocabulary” (p. 461). They found that, “household order taps a more fundamental characteristic of parents or households, such as maternal industriousness, planning ability, or conscientiousness that gives rise to both orderliness and better reading skills in children” (p. 462). Children who are able to grow up in a home that is calm and orderly are able to focus more on their reading skills, than homes that have disarray and disorganization in their day to day lives.

Parent practices have had a significant impact on children’s acquisition of language. Practices such as the amount of time spent in the home with reading and writing, the amount of stress or chaos in the home, along with the types of literacy activities completed have shown to have a great impact on language development and how the home environment influences that.

Family Structure

Similar to a parents’ involvement with their child’s schooling, parent beliefs and perceptions, and parent practices, there is another area that is pertinent in understanding the influence home and families have on language development. All children come from families of all different types, sizes, cultures, and structures. The type of family structure that a child grows up in has also shown to have an impact on their reading and writing development and achievements.

Studies completed by Schulz and Kantor (2005) and Hampden-Johnson (2009) looked at the influence family structure has on literacy education. Schulz and Kantor (2005), looked at
how home and school are connected and how home life promotes academic achievement.

According to Schulz and Kantor (2005), “home and school are more connected for some students and families than for others” (p. 59). Schulz and Kantor (2005) discovered that the amount of involvement a parent puts forth can be determined by their culture. For example, one family in the study learned English as a second language. This parent was considered to be an outsider and as a result, was not involved in their child’s school. The child from this family was below grade level in his reading and writing abilities. Another family structure investigated in this study, a family from the middle class, had a daughter who met grade level standards. Her mother was involved in her daughter’s school, as she often volunteered in the school and classroom (Schulz & Kantor, 2005). From these two families, Schulz and Kantor learned that in order to get parents, from diverse backgrounds, more involved in their child’s schooling, they need, “a cultural informant who explicitly helps him navigate this strange institutional world” (p. 75). Once parents are informed on what’s going on in the school systems, they are more likely to take part in home literacy activities, which will promote academic growth. This study specifically identified that children from family structures that understand the school culture, are more likely to succeed in school compared to families that do not understand the school culture.

Another study looked at two different family structures, consisting of single-parent homes and two-parent homes. The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a relationship between a families’ structure and literacy achievement. Hampden-Thompson (2009) was also trying to discover if there is a literacy gap when comparing children from two-parent families and children from one-parent families. Findings imply a variety of results in regards to family structure, and they include the following: “children who reside in single families are more likely to be at academic risk than their two-parent counterparts” (p. 530). Research also
stated that, “children from two-parent families report higher levels of social and cultural involvement with their families” (p. 530). It was also noted that, “the economic resources of a family account for some of the literacy achievement gap between the two family structures” (p. 530). These conclusions determine that not only does family structure in the home, such as single-parent families and two-parent families, impact a child’s development, but often that parent’s socioeconomic status also plays a role in language and literacy development. A child’s family structure is their first exposure and first experiences with literacy in the home, and this structure does impact learning.

Studies over the past 10 years have shown that there are some key categories which target and attempt to answer the question, how does the home environment influence a child’s literacy development? These studies show strong implications that the home life of a child directly impacts that child’s language and literacy development. These categories, such as parents’ beliefs and perceptions, parents’ practices, and family structure all take apart in the development of language. Parental involvement is essential in understanding why the home and school connection is so important. There are still many gaps in the research of exactly how development is affected. Some research, such as the study completed by Roberts, Burgens, and Burchinal (2005) shows that literacy practices in the home help students with their growth. Others, such as Senechal and Young (2008) show smaller correlations, where more research around these concepts need to be studied. However, after reflecting on what has already been discovered, it is clear that home and all other social contexts around children impact their education. Epstein (2001) states,

It is simply a social fact that youngsters learn from their families, teachers, peers, relatives, part-time employers, and other adults in the community. Students develop in
all three contexts simultaneously and continuously. Thus, the bridges of home, school, and community are inevitably connected (p. 161).

In looking through the research, I continue to question, exactly how does the home environment influence a child’s development?

**Methods**

**Context**

The research for this study was conducted at Bayville Elementary School. All locations and names of students, for the purpose of anonymity, were assigned pseudonyms. Bayville Elementary is considered a sister school to Oceanview Elementary School. Bayville Elementary is an intermediate school that houses grades three through five, while Oceanview is a primary school that contains grades preschool through second grade. Bayville Elementary has a total enrollment of 299 students, while Oceanview has a total enrollment of 266 students. Bayville is a culturally diverse school with their ethnic make-up consisting of Caucasian, Asian-Pacific Islander, African-American, and Hispanic Cultures. Oceanview is also considered to be a culturally diverse school with their ethnic make-up consisting of Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Cultures. This study was conducted in a fourth grade classroom at Bayville, where five students and their parents took part in the research.

The atmosphere in the fourth grade classroom was a collaborative classroom with two teachers. There were 19 students in the classroom, consisting of 11 girls and eight boys. The ethnic make-up of the classroom consisted of Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanic students. It was an integrated co-taught classroom with one full time General Education Teacher
and one full time Special Education Teacher. The students in the classroom saw both adults as equal. I was the full time Special Education Teacher in the classroom. The students in the class worked well with each other and considered each other to be a community of learners. There were not many parents that came and volunteered in the classroom. Only a few parents had volunteered to come in throughout the year to help with classroom parties and other big events.

**Participants**

Michelle was a 9 year old student who attended Bayville Elementary School and was in the fourth grade. She was a Caucasian female who was currently reading at a Fountas and Pinnell Level P, which is the end of a third grade to beginning of fourth grade reading level. She was currently reading one year behind grade level. Michelle had an Individual Education Plan and received Special Education Services for Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. She often needed reminders to read at home for her homework. Michelle’s mother completed a parent questionnaire as a part of this study, in order to provide information about her literacy development.

Jeremy was a 9 year old Caucasian male who also attended Bayville Elementary School and was in the fourth grade. He was currently reading at a Fountas and Pinnell Level P, which is considered to be one year below grade level. Jeremy liked to read. He was recently classified with a disability and will be starting the next school year with an Individual Education Plan and Special Education Teacher Services. Jeremy’s mother completed a parent questionnaire as part of this research study.

Sarah was a 10 year old Caucasian female who was in fourth grade at Bayville. She described herself as nice, funny, and shy. Sarah was currently reading at a Fountas and Pinnell
Level T and was considered to be reading at a beginning of fifth grade reading level. Sarah loved to read and often spent a lot of extra time reading at home. Her mother was part of this study, as she completed a parent questionnaire on Sarah’s literacy growth and development.

Madison was a 9 year old Caucasian female who was in fourth grade at Bayville Elementary School. Madison described herself as cool, friendly, and awesome. She currently had an Individual Education Plan and received Special Education Teacher Services for Reading, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. According to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark levels, she was reading at a level M, which was similar to a beginning of third grade reading level. Madison often needed encouragement from her teachers to keep reading in school and at home. Madison’s mother took part in this study. She completed a parent questionnaire discussing Madison’s literacy development and home environment.

Firestar was a 9 year old Caucasian male who also attended Bayville Elementary School and was in the fourth grade. He described himself as fast, intelligent, and talkative. Firestar was reading at a Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Level U, which is similar to a middle to end of fifth grade reading level. Firestar’s mother took part in this study because she completed a parent questionnaire on his home environment and literacy growth. Firestar enjoyed reading and appeared to be happy when he was reading in school.

**Researcher Stance**

During this action research project, I served as a participant observer. Mills (2011) refers to a participant observer as somehow being involved in the activity that is being researched. As a researcher, I had individually worked with each of these students since September 2009. I was one of their teachers in the fourth grade, as I worked in an Integrated Co-Teach Classroom and
my role in the classroom was a Special Education Teacher. For the purposes of this study, I interviewed each student one on one. I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College and I am working on completing my Master’s Degree in Literacy Education. I have a Bachelor’s Degree and Initial Teacher Certification in Childhood and Special Education.

**Method**

For the purpose of this study, I completed my research by collecting three different pieces of data. I began my data collection by administering a parent letter (Appendix A) to all of the parents in my classroom which explained the research that was going to be completed. Five parents and five students agreed to participate in my research, therefore I first focused my research on the parents of my five participants. Parents completed a parent questionnaire (Appendix B) that targeted four main areas of investigation. These questions targeted the topics of parent involvement, family structure, parent beliefs’, perceptions, and education, along with family structure. These topics are essential in understanding how the home environment can influence literacy development. The parents were asked to complete the questionnaire while providing as much information as possible.

After parents completed and returned the parent questionnaire, I sat down with each student and completed a one to one interview with them. During the interview, I began by asking the students any questions that I had as a result of the parent questionnaires. For example, some parents used examples of activities they completed in their home, which I was unclear on. I asked the student to clarify what exactly those activities were, so I had a complete understanding. Then, I asked the students a series of interview questions (Appendix C) that all of the five students were asked. These questions were based primarily around literacy practices
in their home, but also about family structure, their beliefs and perceptions on literacy, and their parent’s involvement in school.

Finally, after the completion of the parent questionnaires and student interviews, I collected and analyzed data from the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark System. These benchmarks provided information on each of the participant’s current reading levels and how it correlated to their grade level expectations.

Once I completed all of the above research, I cross-analyzed all of the information in order to decipher and understand the data I had collected.

Quality and Credibility of Research

In order to make sure that my study was of high quality and was credible, I used four different criteria. The first criterion was credibility. Credibility is defined as, “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Mills, 2011, p. 105). In order to make sure my study was credible, I used triangulation, which is known to use many different sources of data (Mills, 2011). For triangulation, I collected three different sources of data which consisted of parent questionnaires, student interviews, and student reading assessment scores. I also used peer debriefing as a way to make sure my data collection was credible. Peer debriefing is when you work with a colleague in order to reflect on the data collection process (Mills, 2011). With my critical colleague, I talked about, reflected, and made changes to any data collection that may have been needed.

In order to make sure that my study was transferable, I collected data that was able to be compared across different contexts (Mills, 2011). Transferability is defined as the belief that,
“the study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements, that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). I collected data that was as detailed as possible and that was able to be compared with other contexts. This data was targeted specifically towards understanding my study and research question. My research was also considered dependable as well. Mills (2011) defines dependability as, “the stability of the data” (p. 104). In order to ensure dependability, I kept records of all my research in an organized manner with which an outside colleague could look at my paperwork to make sure my work was dependable. The triangulation (Mills 2011) process also allowed for dependability, since I had overlapped my methods of data collection.

Finally, I made sure my research was credible through the process of confirmability. Confirmability is referred to as a way to ensure neutrality when collecting data (Mills 2011). Confirmability will also be ensured through the triangulation process. I practiced reflexivity when collecting data. I continued to go back and reflect on my interview and parent questionnaire questions. I also was able to go back and reflect on my questions as I continued to interview students.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants**

Before I began collecting research for my study, I collected informed consent from both the parents of the students involved, along with signed assent form from the students as well. In order to assure anonymity for all parties involved, I made sure that all of the parents and the students were ensured that their names and any other identifying features would be removed from the research. All of my participants received pseudonyms in order to protect the right of my participants and to guarantee full confidentiality.


Data Collection

In order to keep accurate notes and records of my research, I had an organized system in order to collect data. First, I sent home parent questionnaires (Appendix B) in order to receive timely feedback from the parents involved. Once I received a parent questionnaire back I looked through their responses. Based on their answers, I asked some of the students follow up questions to clarify what their parents stated. For example, one parent talked about circle a word puzzles. Since I was unclear on what circle a word puzzles were, I was then able to ask the student what exactly that was. Students then sat down for student interviews, where they were asked these clarifying questions based on parent questionnaires. They were then asked a set of standard questions (Appendix C) in which all students were asked. Following the parents’ questionnaires and student interviews, I collected and cross examined their current reading levels with the parent questionnaires and student interviews.

Data Analysis

In order to accurately and efficiently analyze my data I completed a variety of steps in order to ensure that I did not miss any pertinent findings. I first began this process by reading through all of my parent questionnaires’ multiple times. Then, I read through my student interviews’ multiple times. When I was finished, I coded my student interviews and parent questionnaires looking for recurring patterns. Some of the common codes that seemed to develop were literacy practices completed in the home, home routines, parent beliefs and influences, early parenting practices, and parent involvement. From these codes, I identified four overarching themes which all of these codes enveloped. The themes were home and family
beliefs of the value of literacy, parent influence on developing literacy skills and home literacy practices.

In order to accurately depict my data, I then reread each parent questionnaire with each of their child’s interview to do a cross analysis. This way, I was able to see the connection between the parents and their children. Finally, I looked at each child’s individual Fountas and Pinnell instructional reading level. I correlated each reading level to an equivalent grade level by using the Fountas and Pinnell Gradient Chart (Appendix D). These levels were used to assist in the interpretation process.

Findings and Discussion

From analyzing the parent questionnaires and student interviews, overarching themes emerged out of the data. These themes helped to provide an understanding of exactly how the home environment influences a child’s literacy development and acquisition. Students’ reading levels were also examined and correlated to grade level. Table 1 below depicts each participant’s reading level. These levels help to understand the participants’ literacy backgrounds and their reading abilities. Reading levels were used to determine if the student was reading at, above, or below grade level. They were essential in developing a literacy background for each participant, so when looking at the findings, you were able to understand where each participant stood when it came to their reading development. The findings show that students’ home literacy practices and activities help to develop literacy acquisition. A parent’s beliefs and values of the importance of literacy also support literacy development, while parental influence in developing literacy skills also impacts literacy acquisition. These themes provide a deeper understanding to how the home environment influences a child’s literacy development.
Table 1

*Student Reading Levels and Grade Level Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Fountas and Pinnell Instructional Reading Level</th>
<th>Grade Level Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Beginning of 5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Beginning of 3rd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Beginning of 4th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firestar</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>Middle of 5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Beginning of 4th Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Importance of Reading and Writing

The first emerging theme was based around the importance of being able to read and write. Home and family beliefs influence and impact the development of a child’s literacy acquisition. From the findings, it was determined that when parents believed that reading and writing was essential in life, than their children also had this understanding as well. For example, after receiving feedback from Madison’s mother on her parent questionnaire, it became evident that Madison’s mother believed highly in the importance of being able to read and write. She felt that being able to read and write was, “very, very important” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). These beliefs also showed through Madison’s beliefs when she was asked the same question. She answered the question by stating, “yes, so you can know more. For reading, so you can read more and get better. For writing, so you write more faster and then get better” (student interview, June 21, 2010). Madison’s beliefs were evident that they were carried over from her mother. Lynch (2002) discovered that parents play such a major role on school success,
and when parents believe in themselves, their children, and the importance of education, students tend to do better in school. When reviewing these findings, it was clear that Madison’s mother had taught Madison that being able to read and write was very important. It is a functional part of life, which is necessary to get through day to day activities. As a result, Madison had acquired the basic skills to read, as she was reading at a beginning of third grade reading level (Table 1). Madison’s reading abilities will allow her to function throughout her future endeavors.

Michelle’s mother also held similar beliefs to Madison’s mother. She believed that being able to read and write was very important. She stated, “without reading and writing you will have a hard time succeeding in education or jobs. Now these days a degree is required for a good job” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). Michelle’s mother also believed that you need to be able to read and write in order to work and live through life. This belief had been carried down to Michelle who also understood that she needed to be able to read and write in order to have a good job someday. She stated, “if you didn’t know how to read, say if you had a job and you were supposed to read things and wanted to be a teacher and didn’t know how to read” (student interview, June 21, 2010). She believed, just as her mother had said, that you need to be able to read and write in order to succeed in the workplace and to have a job. You need to be able to read and write in order to function in this world. Again, this supports the theme that when parents believe being able to read and write is important, they pass that concept down to their children. According to Michelle’s current reading level, she is able to read at a beginning of fourth grade reading level (Table 1). This reading ability will allow her to function in the world, similar to Madison’s reading capabilities.

Jeremy’s mom also felt that being able to read and write is essential in order to function in this world. She responded with, “Extremely important! In today’s society it is necessary to
read and write with everything... jobs are hard to come by without being able to read and write” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). Jeremy also believed that reading and writing was important as it helps you with many things, which he even mentioned that it helps you with math. Jeremy understood that not only do you need to be able to read and write to function in regards to literacy acquisition, but you also need it to function and complete other activities, such as math. Jeremy was reading at a beginning of fourth grade reading level. This level will allow him to function in day to day activities in this world, just as his mother believed was essential.

Firestar’s and Sarah’s mothers’ also believed in the importance of being able to read and write. However, both parents felt that it was crucial to be able to read and write, not just functional. Contrary to the other parents’ comments, they felt that being able to read and write is a gateway to being able to communicate with others and with the world. Being able to read and write is not only a way to function in this world, but it is a way to better yourself in your environment and culture. Sarah’s mom stated that reading and writing, “is how you can be a lifelong learner, how you communicate your ideas to others, how you get information from others” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010), while Firestar’s mom believed that being able to read and write helps you to, “read labels, road signs, directions, information, everything you do involves reading and writing” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). These two beliefs seemed to take the importance of reading and writing to the next level. Firestar and Sarah’s parents saw reading and writing as something that is essential in life, not just in jobs. It is what makes the world work. Sarah and Firestar also share in this belief. Sarah summed up her belief in saying, “you need it for your whole life” (student interview, June 23, 2010) Firstar shared with me, “if you don’t read and write you won’t succeed” (student interview, June 24, 2010). These findings
support that a parent’s personal beliefs tend to carry over to their children. Therefore, a parents’ belief about literacy and its importance is the same belief that their child has about literacy.

More importantly, it is not just a parent’s beliefs that are carried over, it is more specifically the different views individuals take in valuing literacy. When a student believes that they need to be able to read and write because it is essential in this world, compared to just being functional, they tend to do better in school since they understand the importance of it. Recent researchers such as, Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) have completed studies around family beliefs and they have found that when parents believed that they would be helpful in helping their children, than there was more parent involvement at home. A families’ beliefs’ consists of how a parent perceives literacy education to themselves and to their children. Beliefs in the home and of the parent also pertain to how a child feels about literacy education and how they bring that belief into their own education and schooling.

**Parental Influence in Developing Literacy Skills**

From my findings, it was evident that parents have an influence on their children when it comes to developing literacy skills. As stated above parents’ beliefs can greatly impact a child, but they also influence a child’s perceptions and help to foster growth and development. This was seen when I asked all five of the participants who they felt were there biggest influences when it came to being able to read and write. Most of the students shared with me that their parents had the greatest influence on their development of reading and writing. Sarah stated,

I think it is mom because she encouraged me when I did not like to read so much. I can remember her saying why don’t you write a story or a letter to someone. She still makes
me write birthday cards to people when it is there birthday (student interview, June 23, 2010).

The concept that Sarah’s mom had taught Sarah to write birthday cards to people when it was their birthday, has shown Sarah that being able to read and write is a functional part of life. In order to communicate with the world, you have to write. By doing this, Sarah’s mom has encouraged her to develop her literacy skills. Phillips and Lonigan (2009) completed a study that looked at a similar concept. They learned that parents who assisted their children with literacy practices in the home had children who typically did better with reading and writing achievement. Parents have the ability to influence their child’s reading and writing skills by completing and promoting literacy activities.

Jeremy’s mom has also encouraged Jeremy in his development of literacy skills. Jeremy stated, “I think my mom because my mom helps me sound out words, chunk them. She helps me read the words that are hard. She helps me very good” (student interview, June 24, 2010) Here, Jeremy’s mom is teaching him to persevere through difficult readings and to develop skills that will help him to get through difficult texts. Obviously, parents have a great influence on motivating and encouraging their children in their development of literacy acquisition. According to their children, they are their greatest influences in their development of reading and writing. Researchers from the past have also found this true. Halliday (1969) believed that children understand language based on the environment around them and how they are taught or influenced. He stated, “the child’s understanding of what language is, is derived from his own experience of language in situations of use” (p. 53).
Home Literacy Practices

Home literacy practices and activities impact and influence a child’s literacy development. Home literacy practices are activities that take place in the home environment or because of something prompted by parents, which include any activity that has to do with reading or writing. Home literacy practices begin as early as a child’s conception, and can include simple things as regular routines in the home to other types of literacy practices, such as reading books or writing bills. From my parent questionnaires and student interviews, I discovered that children complete a wide array of activities in the home that involve literacy.

Many of the parents shared that when their children were young, they took part in early literacy practices. Madison’s, Michelle’s, Jeremy’, Sarah’s, and Firestar’s mother’s all began reading with their children before they were one year old. Some of the parents even began reading to their children when they were still in the womb. Firestar remembered reading Charlotte’s Web, while Sarah remembered reading Goodnight Moon. Jeremy also remembered reading Green Eggs and Ham. However, Michelle and Madison could not remember what some of the first books they remembered reading. The fact that three out of five of my participants remembered their first books shows the impact early reading has on a child. It is evident that the three students who remembered their first book enjoyed this literacy activity early on in their literacy education. Two of these students are also currently reading above grade level which implies that reading to your children early on can help increase literacy acquisition. This finding correlates to a study completed by Myrberg and Rosen (2009) who discovered that reading to your child early on increases literacy acquisition.
When asking the parents and students about literacy activities that took place in the home, there was a wide array of answers. Many of the parents responded with similar answers, such as writing out bills and checks, along with reading books, magazines, and newspapers. However, some parents had longer more descriptive answers, while other parents only wrote a few things. Sarah’s mom had the longest answer with many literacy activities included in the home. She reported, “reading books, newspapers, bills, magazines, recipes, directions in games, writing notes, emailing, addressing letters, making lists, typing reports for work/school, texting, talking on the phone, and looking up information online” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). Firestar’s mom also responded with a more detailed description of literacy activities that consisted of, “we read the newspaper, magazines, we read things on the TV., we read things on the computer, we read directions to video games and to board games. We type on the computer and email” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). Again, these answers by Firestar and Sarah’s mom portray their value that literacy is essential in life. The answers they listed were activities that were not only needed to function in life, but to be able to communicate and understand what is going on in the world.

The other parents stated activities that were primarily required to function in life. Jeremy’s mom reflected that she completes, “bills, reading books and magazines, computer skills (typing, research, etc.). I often am doing things that require me to read and write… especially with school” (parent questionnaire, June 21, 2010). Madison and Michelle’s mom noted that they complete reading, writing, and listening activities in the home, including writing notes. When comparing these responses with the student’s reading levels, I discovered that these three students were still reading below grade level. While the students’ parents who believe that reading and writing is essential are reading above grade level standards. In interpreting this, it
becomes clear that even though literacy is needed to function in life, it is also needed to have a deep understanding of the world. When students are reading below grade level, but are still able to function in the world, they are still not achieving that deep understanding. Students need to be able to read at a level that is accommodating for their age so they are able to be active members of society and life long learners. Parents do have an influence on this, as they set the stage for students’ attitudes toward reading. Spera (2006) identified similar findings that showed when parents have set high goals and expectations for the child, then that child works harder and succeeds more. In return, they have a better attitude toward reading and writing.

Many of the students had similar responses to the types of literacy activities they completed in their home environment. The students noted literacy activities that included events that they were required to do because of school, such as reading thirty minutes every night, and writing a summary about what they read. Michelle was the only student who noted literacy activities that she needed to complete due to school requirements. This shows that Michelle understands literacy to be a function needed in life. The other students did mention some other literacy activities they completed in their home, which are essential in life. Jeremy stated that not only does he read books at home but he also reads, “sometimes signs, how healthy the snacks are (chips or something)” (student interview, June 24, 2010). Sarah noted that at home she, “likes to do crafts, so we have to read the directions. My whole family likes to play games, so we will get new games and have to read the directions to figure out how to play them” (student interview, June 23, 2010). Sarah also spoke about certain writing activities that she completed at home. She stated,
Sometimes I will write a note to my mom or dad if I want to get something. I will write a persuasive letter to try and get what I want. I usually write when watching TV. I will take a notepad and write a story about something (student interview, June 23, 2010).

Firestar reported that he completed his reading for homework and he reads,

nutrition facts to see if it was really not healthy, calories and fat to find out. At home, I like to read the back of video games because if I just bought one I would know what it was about. And I read the instruction manual (student interview, June 24, 2010).

Madison also reported that she likes to read instructions for how to cook recipes. She also tends to read postcards from her Aunt when she is on vacation. Madison also received birthday cards from Toys’R’Us, which she likes to read as well. When parents go above and beyond with literacy activities, for example completing more activities than the required homework nightly reading, students tend to understand that literacy is needed to become well rounded and life long learners. This skill will promote them in life and allow them to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of reading and writing. This knowledge always begins at home with the parents. According to Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005), they discovered that the home environment was their “most consistent predictor of children’s language and literacy outcomes” (p. 355). Literacy activities that are completed in the home are evidence of literacy development and acquisition.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Since literacy is framed around the sociocultural-historical perspective, it is important to understand how one’s environment, specifically the home environment, affects one’s growth. This perspective leads to an understanding of how the home environment influences a child’s
literacy development. Through reading the literature, along with my own findings, this is a complex and intricate question with no one true answer. However, researchers, such as Cooper, Crosnose, Suizzo, and Pituch (2009) and Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) have found that the home environment does have an impact on literacy acquisition.

The home environment can include a wide variety of people and situations. Parents are typically seen as the individuals who have the greatest impact on children. According to my findings, a majority of my student participants believed that their mom and dad were their greatest influence when it came to their abilities to be able to read and write. This finding alone speaks profoundly to the importance and influence parents have on children’s development. It is essential that parents understand the importance that they play in their child’s literacy development. For teachers, they need to be able to provide parents, as early as pre-school, with information on how to support their children with literacy acquisition. Parents need to understand that reading to your child, writing with your child, and exposing your child to all literacy activities is essential in early development. Hawes and Plourde (2005) and Tam and Chan (2009) discovered similar results from their study when they learned that the more parents are involved with school activities and learning activities at home, the more efficient children are in reading and writing. When looking at my students reading levels and the amount of parent involvement each parent admitted to participating in, it was evident that the students who spent more time reading and writing at home had higher reading scores. Parents need to become involved with the child by reading and writing with them early on. However, teachers need to support parents and teach parents how to do this.

My findings often concluded that there was a difference in how parents and then coincidentally their students perceived the value of literacy. It became evident that some parents
and children perceived literacy to be a function or a way to get through life, while other parents
and children perceived literacy to be essential in life as it is a way to become a lifelong learner
and to communicate with the world around us. As a result of these beliefs, children who
believed, along with their parents, that literacy is functional, tended not to score as high when it
came to their reading levels. The three students who believed this were below grade level
standards in their reading abilities. Children who believed, along with their parents, that literacy
is essential scored higher and were above grade level standards in their reading abilities. As an
educator, this is extremely important to know and understand. With this knowledge, teachers
can again enforce how being knowledgeable in reading and writing plays an essential component
in living in this world. Since we have learned that parents and the home environment play a key
role in literacy acquisition, then once again, teachers need to step forward and educate parents on
this importance.

While my data showed that parental influence impacts a child’s ability to want to read
and write, along with acquiring literacy skills, this influence also determines the kind of literacy
practices that will be completed in the home. The kind of literacy practices completed in the
home connects to a child’s belief in the importance of reading and writing. If a parent believes
that reading and writing is important, then their child will also learn how important reading and
writing is. As a result, there will be more literacy practices completed in the home and students
who complete a wide range of activities tend to have higher reading levels. Similarly, Schulz
and Kantor (2005) discovered that parents who are culturally aware of their child’s school
environment and understand the language of that school were more adept to participate in their
child’s academic life. Therefore, there is ultimately a connection amongst all of my findings. A
parent’s beliefs in the value of literacy impact the amount of home literacy practices that are
completed in the home, which impacts the level of ability children have in regards to reading and writing.

With these implications in place, other questions have arisen, which I believe are important in helping to further understand the impact the home environment can have on literacy development. From the parent questionnaires, all of the parents stated that they wanted to be involved in their child’s education and schooling. As we have learned, parent involvement in a child’s education is essential and impacts the amount of learning that takes place in the home environment. However, what happens when parents just say this? Do they truly mean it? How, even with teacher support, do we encourage parents to become involved in their child’s education? Sometimes, teachers do everything they can and it still falls on the shoulders of the parents. How do we help these students then? I also often wonder what happens when a child grows up in a home environment where the parents and family members are never around? Again, how can teachers help in this situation? These questions are important in furthering the understanding and knowledge of the home environment and its true impact on literacy acquisition.

If I were to pursue this topic further, there are other questions that have come up within my own research, which I believe may have limited my study. Due to the time constraint of it being the end of the school year, it was difficult to collect a wide range of data from the parents and students. In the future, I would like to complete one on one parent interviews, along with home visits where I can see the types of literacy activities that are being completed in the home. I also have considered researching the home environment and its impact on literacy acquisition by completing a case study on one student and their family. Completing a case study that
focused on one family would allow for an in depth look into their home environment and its affect on literacy development through the eyes of one individual.

Finally, it is clear that the home environment is a huge predictor of literacy growth and achievement. Now more than ever, teachers need to strive to make the connection with parents. If teachers reach out to parents, especially parents of children who come from environments where literacy is not a priority, than there is a chance that more literacy activities and literacy awareness will take place in the home. Once again, there is an inevitable link between home and school. If a child is to truly get a well rounded education, than parents need to be able to work with teachers and teachers must be willing to work with parents. Parents must realize what an important part they play in their child’s education. It can not solely rest on a teacher. Parents truly are their children’s first teachers and they do have the greatest influence on their children. Teachers need to do their best to support parents and to show them how they can help with their child’s education. After all, the children that are sitting in our classrooms today are our future leaders of tomorrow. Education always begins somewhere. This somewhere is always the home first, then school.
References


Appendix A

Parent Letter

June 10, 2010

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently finishing my Masters’ Degree at St. John Fisher College in the area of Literacy Education. As part of an end of program requirement, I have to complete an Action Research Project. The purpose of an Action Research Project in the Education Field is to learn and research new strategies and/or opportunities for professional growth. In order to complete this project, I have to do some of my research in the classroom with students and parents.

The purpose of my study is to look at the relationship between a child’s home environment and their literacy development. Throughout the course of this study, I will be using parent questionnaires, student interviews, and student reading levels to interpret and analyze the relationship between home and literacy development. My hope is to gather enough information and research, so I will be able to promote a better connection between home, school and literacy education.

I would like to take the opportunity to ask you and your child if you would be willing to take part in this project. If you are interested, I am planning to send home a parent questionnaire for parents to complete. I would also like to interview your son/daughter around the type of literacy activities they complete at home. Finally, I will be looking at your son/daughter’s reading levels.

This study presents no risks to you or your child. The benefit of this project is for the opportunity for improved teaching, along with the completion of my Masters Degree. I will also not be attaching your name, your child’s name, or the location of the research in the project. This information will be changed to protect you and your child’s anonymity.

If you and your child are interested in helping me with this project, please sign and return the permission forms attached. There are two different forms. One form is for the parent to sign and the other form is for your child to sign. You can keep one copy of each for you and return the other two copies to me. In order to complete my research before the school year is out, I would need to know if you are interested in helping me as soon as possible. Due to the short time frame I have to complete this, if you could let me know if you are interested by Monday, June 14, I would greatly appreciate it!

If you have any questions about this, feel free to give me a call or send me an email. I appreciate your consideration in helping me further my abilities as a professional teacher in the field of literacy education.

In Learning,

Amy Sawyer
Appendix B

Parent Questionnaire

Your Name: ____________________________________________

Your Child’s Name and Age: ______________________________

Who would you consider to be part of your family structure? (ie: other parents/guardians, siblings, etc.)

How many of these family members, listed above, live with you?

Do you consider any of these family members to have an influence on your child’s education? If so, who would it be and why?

What is your (parent/guardian’s) educational background?

How important do you feel it is to be able to read and write? Why?

When you were younger did reading and writing come easy to you or was it more difficult? If it was difficult, what did you do to work through it?

Do you volunteer with your child’s school? Why or why not?

If you could volunteer at your child’s school, what would you like to do?

What types of literacy activities, including reading, writing, listening, speaking do you (the parent/guardian) complete in your home? (ie: Reading books, newspapers, magazines, bills, etc. Writing notes, letters, typing, computer skills, etc.)
Appendix B

Parent Questionnaire

How often do you complete these activities? Does your child see you completing these activities?

What types of literacy activities do you encourage your child to complete when they are at home? (Both currently and when they were younger)

When did you first start reading to your child? When did they first start to show an interest in books? Have they shown an interest in books?

When did your child first start writing? What types of writing activities do they complete at home?

How often do you read to your child?

How often do you let your child read to you?

When you read with your child, do you help them through difficult text or do you let them work through it on their own? What about when they were younger?

Do you have a routine with your child when completing homework? If so, how consistent do you feel that this routine is?

Do you sit down and do homework with your child? If so, how often?

Are there any other influences that you think might be helpful in understanding your child's literacy development?
Appendix C

Student Interview Questions

What family members at home do you think have helped you to read and write? Why?

What is the first book your remember reading? Do you remember how old you were?

How often do you read at home right now? How long? Where do you usually read?

Do you read by yourself or with your parents or another adult? Do you prefer to read by yourself or with another adult?

What kinds of things does you mom, step-dad, and grandparents help you with in regards to reading and writing?

What types of things that include reading do you do at home?

Do you see your mom, step-dad, or grandparents do any of these things? Do you ever do them together?

What types of writing do you do at home? What do you write about?

Do you see your mom, step-dad, or grandparents do any of these things? Do you ever do them together?

What types of things do you see your family reading?

What types of writing do you see your family doing?
Appendix C

Student Interview Questions

If your family could volunteer at school more, would you want them too? Do you think this would help you in school? How?

What types of games do you play at home? What types of toys do you like to play with? Currently or when you were younger?

Do you have a lot of books at home? What kinds? Where do you keep them? How often do you read them?

Do you ever go to a bookstore? Why or why not? A library? Why or why not?

Do you think it is important to be able to read or write? Why? Who taught you the importance of reading and writing?

What do you think is the most important thing that has helped you learn to read and write? At school? At home?
Appendix D

Fountas and Pinnell Reading Gradient Chart

Level
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
J
K
L
M
N
O
F
Q
R
S
T
U
V
W
X
Y
Z

Kindergarten

Grade One

Grade Two

Grade Three

Grade Four

Grade Five

Grade Six,

Grades Seven, Eight and Above