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Home Literacy Activities in the Preschool Classroom:
Increasing Participation among Male Students

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by
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Abstract

Through the lens of sociocultural theory, this action research paper looks into the home literacy activities of a group of six three-year old males and explores how the students’ home literacy activities can be integrated into the preschool classroom to increase their participation. Because students bring a wealth of literacy knowledge and experience to school with them, having already mastered their primary discourse, it is imperative that this knowledge is used in the classroom to engage students in learning. By collecting home literacy diaries, and observing and interviewing six male participants, this study supports the idea that students’ home experiences and activities can be integrated into the classroom and curriculum to increase their participation.
Home Literacy Activities in the Preschool Classroom:

Increasing Participation among Male Students

This paper will explore the use of home literacy activities inside of the preschool classroom and uncover which literacy activities students bring with them from home can be used within the classroom to engage and increase participation among male students.

Using home literacy activities within the classroom is important because it validates what children bring with them from their home life, gives them confidence to participate in class, engages students in what they are learning, and through this increased participation and engagement, instills a love of learning within the student (Meier, 2003; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994 & Heath, 1982). Meier (2003) confirms the importance of using home literacy activities in the classroom stating that “children from every linguistic community learn to use language in ways that are highly complex and that provide a strong linguistic foundation for teachers to build on in literacy instruction” (p. 242). It is therefore important that we not only acknowledge that students come into our classroom with knowledge of literacy that they have acquired at home, but equally imperative that this knowledge is utilized as a common ground for that child.

If the use of home literacy activities within the classroom is not explored, those students who come from different and diverse backgrounds with varying interests and understandings of literacy, that may not align with school, will suffer (Heath, 1982). When we understand what knowledge students bring with them into the classroom, and utilize their knowledge from home to help students learn, we can help students who may otherwise be marginalized by discourse and literacy activities used within schools. Heath’s (1982) study of Roadville, Trackton, and Mainville illustrates how home literacy activities that do not align with school literacy activities can leave students behind as they progress through school. When these home literacy activities
are not acknowledged or utilized by teachers, the students cannot as easily acquire and learn literacy being taught within school.

Studies have been done to better understand how a student’s primary discourse, their home literacy, effects their participation and success in school (Heath, 1982 & Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). Heath (1982) studied three communities, Maintown, Roadville, and Trackton. In Maintown, home literacy practices were most similar to those within the school setting and revolved around reading and interacting with books daily. Roadville children read at home, but their home literacy activities focused on reading and responding with little connection and comprehension. Lastly, Trackton students’ home literacy activities were based on verbal interactions and storytelling with little exposure to written texts. The Trackton students suffered most in school because the literacy activities they engaged in at home did not correlate to how learning occurred in school. Most importantly, Heath concludes that there are “a range of alternatives to ways of learning and displaying knowledge,” and “knowing more about how these alternatives are learned at early ages in different sociocultural conditions can help the school to provide opportunities for all students” (pp. 92-93). Assuming that all students come to school with similar knowledge about literacy, or that all students should easily conform to learn in the way that we teach is ignoring individual sociocultural norms and practices that the children have acquired thus far in their lives. Merely teaching in one universal way, expecting each child to succeed, is teaching without understanding the importance of the knowledge that each child possesses.

To understand utilizing home literacy resources as a classroom tool, Moll and Gonzalez (1994) also went into students’ homes. Though their research focused more on “cultural resources” and “funds of knowledge”, they similarly concluded that “a major limitation of most
classroom innovations is that they do not require (or motivate) teachers or students to go beyond the classroom walls to make instruction work” (p. 451). If students are expected to engage, participate, and succeed in the classroom, then teachers must understand how students engage in literacy activities in the home and know which activities they can integrate into the classroom to ensure student success. The children in a classroom cannot be understood and described solely based on what they do when they are inside of the classroom, therefore teaching cannot be effective when it ignores what students do outside of the classroom.

Knowing how important using home literacies within the classroom is to benefit students, this action research project explored which home literacy activity can be best integrated into the preschool classroom to increase participation among male students. To understand what children engaged in at home, and how it could be utilized in the classroom, this study looked at six three-year old males and their families. Using results from data collected through Home Literacy Diaries completed by parents and interviews with students, popular culture in the form of a cartoon train was found to be a commonality and was then integrated into the curriculum. The train book was integrated into the daily curriculum because the topic of the book aligned to what was currently being studied. Through observations and recordings of a lesson following the current curriculum, and a lesson done with the train book, this study found that integrating home literacy activities into the classroom does engage male students. This engagement then fostered the males’ participation in the classroom.

**Theoretical Framework**

In exploring how home literacy activities can be utilized in the classroom to increase participation among male students, the components of sociocultural theory must be discussed. Because literacy is a social practice involving more than just reading and writing, it is crucial to
understand the values and norms of language and learning that students bring with them into the classroom. Understanding how students acquire literacy at home is based not only on the ideas of sociocultural theory, but also Gee’s (1989) discussion on primary and secondary discourse.

In studying the acquisition of language, Gee (1989) explores how our primary discourse is one we have naturally acquired, and this initial knowledge of language can then be used to help us acquire and learn a secondary discourse, usually a school discourse. A primary discourse is our “socioculturally determined way of using our native face-to-face communication with intimates” and is something that has been naturally acquired from birth (Gee, 1989, p. 22). Because each child is emerged in their primary discourse, soaking up ideas of language, literacy, and social interactions from the time they are born, teachers must use this knowledge that has been so easily and naturally acquired in tackling a new discourse that may often seem foreign and overwhelming when the child enters school. Once a new discourse needs to be learned, we then use our primary discourse knowledge and through a mixture of acquisition and learning, must gain “control of secondary uses of language” (p. 23). The control of secondary discourse is what Gee defines literacy as. It is the control and mastery of a secondary discourse that may cause a child to be left behind or to become disengaged with new material when it is not taught in a way that they are familiar with. Knowing that students have already mastered a primary discourse at home helps in understanding why utilizing home literacy in the classroom is important to helping these disengaged students. Home literacies provide a common ground and starting point in the classroom to make the child feel comfortable and gain the confidence they need to learn new material.

Children initially acquire language and literacy through social experiences at home. Prior to school, children are exposed to varying forms of literacy in different ways because literacy
comes from social interactions, and individual children experience literacy based on their different sociocultural practices (McGee & Richgels, 2008). This explanation of literacy is based in sociocultural theory and supports Gee’s (1989) idea of a primary discourse. Larson and Marsh (2005) similarly define sociocultural theory as a child being “an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is socially constructed by larger cultural systems” (p. 100). If the knowledge that children construct at home and through their experiences does not align to what is being done in school, that child may feel that their personal knowledge of literacy and language is wrong. This may cause them to withdraw in school or not participate for fear of being wrong. Rogoff et al. (2001) further describes how “children are key in constructing the learning” and they construct it through the use of “artifacts” and practices used inside and outside of school (p. 276). These artifacts outside of school do not have to be different than artifacts within school. Children need to see that what they do at home is meaningful and relevant to what they are doing in the classroom. They need to understand that both their home and their school lives are important and can help them to learn and grow. In each explanation of the sociocultural theory of literacy, literacy experiences and knowledge center around experiences before the child enters school, and stress the importance of understanding what this literacy knowledge and experience is when the child enters the classroom. Though the way a child has acquired literacy and language may not align to that of school discourse, it does not mean that they do not have knowledge about oral and written language and its’ functions.

Related to the core ideas of sociocultural theory is the idea of family literacy. Family literacy similarly explains how children acquire language and literacy and is defined as “the ways parents and children naturally use literacy at home and in their daily lives” (Kindervatar &
Padak, 2008, p. 54). This definition, like primary discourse, discusses literacy in the home and is not limited to literacies that align with school. Though the term family literacy is often associated with certain programs offered in a school or community, it still highlights the importance of understanding what literacy activities are used at home and how teachers can “build bridges” from home literacy activities to “school-like activities” (p. 55). In order to best utilize family literacy teachers must “expand our notions of the sites for children’s literacy instruction to embrace the potential of outside-of-school activities and programs” (p. 63). Understanding how children engage in language and literacy activities at home and utilizing these experiences and knowledge can help to engage students within the classroom and connect home and school to make more meaningful and relevant learning experiences. This understanding of bridging a gap between home and school is why integrating home literacy activities into the classroom can help increase participation among students who may not otherwise see the relevance of what is being learned in school. When the teacher incorporates part of that child’s culture, hobbies, or interest into the classroom, they know that their knowledge is valued and they are encouraged to participate in the meaningful activity.

Because children acquire language and literacy through their primary discourse, the home literacy activities that students’ participate in which have aided in this acquisition can help them to acquire their secondary discourse. The understanding of acquisition shows the importance of this research project. When we know what literacy knowledge students bring with them to school, teachers can then understand how to best help them learn a secondary discourse and ensure that they know how to control this secondary discourse. Acquiring a secondary discourse is different for each child in the classroom, and even children who have similar sociocultural backgrounds can vary in their knowledge and interests. Engaging in literacy activities can even
vary by gender. Many boys hold interest and activities at home that are much different from the activities they engage in during the school day (Compton-Lily, 2009). Therefore this research project must not only identify home literacy activities that students engage in, but also explore which home literacy activities boys engage in at home that can be used within school to increase their participation.

**Research Question**

Given that literacy is a social practice based on primary discourse and literacy knowledge one has first acquired in the home, this action research project asks, which home literacy activity can be best integrated into the preschool classroom to increase participation among three-year-old boys?

**Literature Review**

In order to understand how to best integrate home literacies into the classroom, and what home literacies have proven effective in engaging boys in the classroom, the idea of home literacy activities must first be discussed. To understand home literacy, this paper will first address the home environment, literature within the home, and other home literacy activities, such as gaming, play, etc. Once home literacy is better understood, this paper will discuss studies that have been done that show home literacy activities can be integrated into classroom curriculum. The home literacy activities that will be discussed are video games, computers, and popular culture. After the integration of home literacy into the classroom is discussed, the importance of increasing participation among male students, as well as how home literacies can benefit males in the classroom will be explored.

**Understanding Home Literacy**

Understanding the many dimensions of home literacy is explored by researchers to help better understand how the knowledge and skills students acquire from home effect how they
perform in school (de Jong & Leseman, 2007; Storch, 2001; Umek, 2005; Waller, 2010; Weigel, Martin, & Bennet, 2006). The main focus of home literacy research is in three main areas: the home environment and parental beliefs, literature in the home, and home activities. Each area of home literacy is crucial to understanding the individuality of students, and each one supports the idea that “literacy does not happen within the bubble of a classroom” (Waller, 2010, p. 16).

**Home Environment.**

The idea that students come to school with prior knowledge in oral and written language is just one aspect of understanding a student’s home literacy environment. Other factors that affect home literacy environment are parents’ beliefs and habits, frequency and quality of literacy interactions, as well as access to literacy materials (Umek, 2005; Storch, 2001; de Jong & Leseman, 2007; and Weigel, Martin, & Bennet, 2006). Both de Jong & Leseman (2007) and Weigel et al. (2006) studied the importance of the frequency and quality of parental interactions during literacy activities. The quality of interactions was based on both instructional and social-emotional qualities, which were reflected not only in traditional literacy activities, such as reading aloud, but also in nonliteracy interactions and play. While De Jong and Leseman (2007) found correlations of instructional and social-emotional quality in the home influencing success in first and third grades, Weigel et. al (2006) focused more on linking parent’s literacy beliefs as models for their children. In their study, Weigel et al (2006) found that the beliefs parents held about literacy were linked to the child’s interest to read, their participation in literacy activities, and their emergent literacy skills. Furthermore, parents who were facilitative at home and frequently read to their child and modeled literacy behaviors similar to those engaged in at school had children who held more print knowledge and a greater interest in reading. These beliefs were also proven to hold over a year’s time when the children were assessed again.
Weigel et al’s (2006) study shows the importance of parental literacy beliefs and home literacy activities and the impact that they can have on a child’s success in school.

Other studies looked at parents’ literacy beliefs in relation to their socioeconomic status (Storch, 2001). Taking a different approach to measuring home literacy activities, Storch (2001) claimed that “there are large social class differences in children’s exposure to experiences that might support the development of literacy skills” (p. 54). This study followed students from Head Start to second grade and assessed students each year comparing their scores with the child’s literacy environment, parental expectations, and parental characteristics. The findings of this study were that home and family characteristics accounted for the greatest variation in success among students, supporting their idea that students from low-income backgrounds are at an “early deficit” because of their home literacy environment (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001, p. 66). Similar to the idea of a deficit in home literacy environments among students of low-income, Umek and Fekonja (2005) found correlations of deficits in the home literacy environment among mothers with lower educational levels. In both of these studies, researchers tried to discover what successful home literacy environments looked like so that teachers could help support parents and the home environment to ensure the success of students in school.

**Literature in the Home.**

In addition to parental beliefs and interactions, home literacy environments, where parents model reading and read aloud to their child, help to foster a love of reading and literature. Merisuo-Storm (2006) identified a correlation of a rich reading environment in the home, and parents who have frequently read to their child, with a positive attitude about reading and learning among children. To foster this rich reading environment, families’ home literature goes beyond books to include newspapers, comics, and magazines.
When children are read to and their enjoyment of listening to books is fostered, they then want to become readers and learn to independently interact with books (Senechal & Lefevre, 2001 & Lever-Chain, 2008). This initial independent reading grows when a child has a favorite book which is first read to them, and then mastered by them through repeated readings. A favorite book also represents a child’s early interest, as well as how they value books and reading. Senechal and Lefevre (2001) went beyond books to study how parents try to teach their children while interacting with books. They found that students excelled in kindergarten and first grade if parents had worked with them at home on reading and writing words, as well as read aloud to them modeling fluent reading. Understanding that children have received education at home regarding books gives a foundation for teachers to build upon in the classroom.

Though we have become a computerized generation, newspapers are still found in households across the nation and world, and also shown to impact student performance in the classroom. Sargent, Mwavita, and Smith (2009) conducted a study utilizing the Newspaper in Education program. This study showed an increase in engagement among male students in third through fifth grade. The results of the study were that both females and males who participated in the Newspaper program “enjoyed a higher reading attitude” (p. 234). Programs like this one can bridge literature that parents and students engage in at home, such as newspapers and magazines, to what they learn from and engage in within the classroom.

Home Activities.

Non-traditional forms of literacy are another aspect of home literacy that can be utilized within the classroom to elicit participation among students. These non-traditional literacies are described by some researchers as life reading media (Hyatt, 2002). These home literacy
activities that are often not seen in the classroom are video games, television, movies, email, texting, chat rooms, web pages, computer gaming, and musical lyrics (Hyatt, 2002; Sanford, 2005; & Scieszka, 2002). These activities are usually viewed as non-educational, when in actuality they foster discussion, interaction, problem-solving, and many other skills necessary for being an engaged learner. Merisuo-Storm (2006) supports utilizing home literacies within the classroom and stresses that by utilizing them, teachers are awakening children’s interest, giving them a lasting and positive attitude towards reading and writing, and increasing their abilities through developing positive habits and the confidence to choose.

**Integrating Home Literacy Activities into the Classroom**

Knowing the importance of bridging home and school leads teachers to find ways to integrate literacy activities students’ participate in at home to what is done in school. In a world where “literacies are rapidly shifting” (Dredger et.al, 2010, p. 86) it is imperative to know and understand what literacy activities students’ are participating in at home and how these activities can be integrated into the classroom. Currently, there is a gap in the educational system between in-school and out-of-school literacies (Sanford, 2005). This gap has encouraged research into home literacy activities, as well as how these activities can be incorporated into the classroom to benefit students. A third space (Dredger et.al. 2010; & Pahl, 2005) can be created when home and school literacies meet, and serve as a way to make learning authentic and meaningful for the student. When activities are authentic and meaningful, students’ are engaged, participate, and love learning. It is imperative that “when considering the interdisciplinary nature of education, researchers need to acknowledge students’ traditional and multimodal literacies and learning environments” (Abrams, 2009, p. 335). The bridge from home literacies to school literacies can engage the disengaged child and make learning more meaningful, relevant, and long lasting.
Internet and Computers in the Classroom Curriculum.

The current generation of students is being referred to by teachers and researchers alike as the “net generation” because of their immersion in the internet, computer, and technology (Annetta et al, 2009). Using these skills that children have in regards to the computer and technology is a way to further bridge the in school and out of school literacy gap, as well as to encourage students to participate and enjoy learning. Many forms of computer use within elementary schools have been researched and studies have been done to show the benefits of computers in regards to social media, hand-held computers, PowerPoint, and email (Kuhlman et al, 2006; Merchant, 2003; Myers, 2005; & Waller, 2010). Each study utilizes tools and skills that children hold from their interactions at home and incorporates them into the curriculum.

Blogs, social media, and email have been explored to foster learning and participation among adolescent students. Dredger et al (2010) discuss the importance of utilizing these technological home literacies and say, “to create authentic spaces for learning, teachers must work to integrate preexisting literacy practices that build upon the funds of knowledge students bring with them to the modern day classroom” (p. 87). Their study analyzed the motivational attitudes of 7th to 12th grade students and found a gap between in-school and out-of–literacies. Similar to Pahl (2005), Dredger et al (2010) addressed how a “third space” can be created through integrating out of school new literacies into current curriculum. They discuss how these activities that students engage in at home which are often viewed as non-educational because they are non-traditional actually “consists of tools that allow students to find and publish to authentic audiences, communicate with experts and enthusiasts, collaborate with geographically-distant peers, and to make their place in the world” ( p. 85). This authentic audience and meaningful experience with reading and writing that students engage in at home can easily be
integrated into current curriculum to encourage participation and desire to learn from students who find themselves being left behind by the gap which separates home and school literacies.

Dredger et al (2010) also address how some home literacies can be introduced into the classroom. Teachers can utilize blogs for writing instead of a traditional essay, tweeting or texting notes or classroom news, and emailing school and community members. Waller (2010) explored the use of social media in a primary classroom to bridge the gap between traditional writing and new literacies. Instead of journaling and writing a response on paper, students can get on the computer and tweet their thoughts or ideas, or share information about what is going on in the classroom. Dredger et al. (2010) hold a similar view to Waller (2010) and found through their research that,

New technologies should not be used simply for the sake of using them. Rather, teachers should view technology as a means to the same end; it is very possible to achieve the same objects using varied routes. Technology is just one of the pathways teachers can employ to increase literacy. (p. 95).

Through this warning, Dredger et al. (2010) hope to encourage teachers to meaningfully integrate technology into their classroom as a way of teaching the curriculum. When students are engaging with technology to learn new material or show creativity for a presentation they are encouraged to participate and show the skills they already possess from engaging with the technology at home. This idea of meaningful integration is also discussed in the implications of this study by encouraging teachers to bridge the home and school gap through the curriculum in a way that does not separate or demean what is done at home.

Though adolescent and high school students may more frequently engage in social networking, blogging, and email, elementary school students still engage in and are part of this
‘net generation’. Valkanova & Watts (2007) studied 37 eight year olds based on data collected from voice over narrations and discussions with students. Students in this study made videos to document school experiences, particularly in their science class, and then had to do voice over narrations of what was happening in the video. The editing was done on PC’s through computer software. This activity engaged students in exploring the content areas and increasing comprehension of lessons and information, while also utilizing students’ creativity and interests. As Dredger et al (2010) previously warned, the use of technology was the same means to an end of comprehending material, but instead of giving the students a test, or having them retell and discuss what was taught, the researchers utilized technology to interact with the material. Standards were still met and the vocabulary of the unit became meaningful because students had to utilize it to describe what was happening. Student narrations helped the “internal become external” and showed teachers how students were processing what they were teaching and how they were making sense of it. Like Waller’s (2010) study utilizing twitter in the classroom, these students utilized a technology that is often only engaged in at home. All of these benefits from utilizing video on a computer, a home literacy often deemed non-educational.

**Television, Popular Culture, and Video Games.**

In addition to computer activities, television, current popular culture, and video gaming are also engaged in at home and can be incorporated within school. There is limited research on effectively utilizing and integrating the home literacies of television and popular culture in the classroom, but in a study conducted by Marsh (2003) parents of nursery school students were asked how they felt the curriculum addressed home literacies. Parents in this study felt the current curriculum was sufficient, but pointed out the lack of the curriculum addressing current pop culture and what their children are watching and playing with at home.
Most research surrounding the home literacy activities of boys centers on the use of video games as a means for engaging and motivating boys to interact and participate with the classroom curriculum (Abrams, 2009; Annetta, 2009; Apperly, 2010; & Jayakathan, 2002). There is a wealth of studies on utilizing video games to bridge the gap between in and out of school literacies. Jayakathan (2002) discusses that though there have been numerous studies, the initial results of significant learning provided by video games in the classroom has not heeded as much data as the increase in student participation and motivation. The struggle is for teachers to utilize videogames, while still addressing the issues and topics in the curriculum (Apperly, 2010). This struggle is relevant because the way video games are utilized in the home may not necessarily be monitored, and the kinds of games may not be explored for their benefits. When utilized in the classroom, teachers can have students turn video game play into a narrative utilizing stills and pictures from the videogame. Their writing can be based on the game play, but in addition to using videogames to encourage writing, it is important for teachers to acknowledge that videogame players are making informed decisions by reading visual, narrative, and aural clues provided by the game. These skills are utilized regardless of if students are in school or not, so it would be meaningful and relevant for students who are gamers to learn material and curriculum in this same framework of skills. Regarding addressing the curriculum through video games, a history of video games could be taught alongside other historical events required by the curriculum, and would teach the evolution of gaming and technology.

Conflicting ideas on the concept of gaming in the classroom are based on the gender of students. Sanford (2005) concluded in a study about gendered literacy experiences that boys play racing, war, and fantasy role games, while girls play adventure role and skill games. The issues of gender will be later discussed, but is of issue in regards to video games because of the
different skill sets used and required to play video games in and out of school. Sanford (2005) views girls’ interest as a deficit, and feels that because of the increased interest in motivating boys through the use of their home literacies, girls are being left behind in regard to the skills that boys have acquired on their own through home literacies such as video gaming. This study explores the issue of gender but makes an opposite claim of other studies, such as Meriuso-Storm (2006) and Lever-Chain (2008), by claiming that girls are at a deficit.

**A New Use for Home Literacy.**

In order for home literacies to be incorporated within the classroom, students, teachers, and parents need to hold a new attitude towards the integration of home literacies into the curriculum. Though teachers have good intentions when incorporating children’s literacy activities from home, often “this growing appreciation of the role of parents and families in young children’s’ lives soon became focused upon ways in which parents could support literacy development of children in school” (Marsh, 2003, p. 370). When school is viewed as a dominant literacy, as opposed to a secondary discourse, parents may feel they need to change what they do at home to conform to school. Similarly, teachers may feel that they need to educate parents on how literacy should be taught, instead of valuing how it is taught in the child’s home. Souto-Manning (2010) described how the process of integrating home literacies in the classroom should be cyclical and recursive. This relationship should be on-going and changing meeting the needs of students and families. A study done on African American males by Wilson-Jones (2004) also stresses the importance of not viewing school as a dominant discourse. The study found that these students worked best, and had the best attitude and perception towards learning, when they were working in groups and learning is a social activity. This study shows that
students work best when the school environment reflects practices they are familiar with at home.

**Increasing Participation among Male Students Through the Use of Home Literacies**

Once it is understood that students bring a learned knowledge of language with them from home, and that their home activities can be integrated into school, it is then necessary to identify why boys should be set apart from girls in utilizing home literacies. This section will explore studies in which males were the focus of study because researchers hypothesized that their lack of engagement and participation was due to the materials being utilized to teach them (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Wilhelm, 2000). Once the research focusing on males is addressed, this section will then address how males can benefit when their home knowledge and activities are used in their classroom instruction.

**Why Focus on Male Students?**

Utilizing home literacies in school is shown to engage males in the classroom (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Dredger et al, 2010). A large reason home literacies in the classroom help to engage participation among boys is because their interests do not typically align with school texts and discourse (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Activities based around the computer, literature, television, video games, and popular culture that boys engage in at home are often viewed differently in the classroom. For males to be engaged and succeed they need reading and writing experiences that are interesting and fun, relatable, and have a purpose, function, and audience that are meaningful (Dredger et al., 2010; Meriuso-Storm, 2006).

In contrast to the importance of integrating home literacy to motivate boys, Dredger et al (2010) discusses that different way boys use computers and internet benefits their literacy skills. Because boys use computers for gaming, internet downloads, and online sports and girls are
shown to use it mainly for word processing and homework, Dredger et al. (2010) discussed how
girls are lacking in the ability to develop these new literacy and technology skills that boys thrive
in. Their suggestion is that both boys and girls are exposed and taught these same new literacy
skills, hypothesizing that girls’ participation and success in school will also benefit from this
instruction. This suggestion links to Sanford’s (2006) study and the conclusions that were made
that girls’ too will benefit from new literacies and technologies normally seen in the home to be
brought into the classroom. Most researchers focus on males however, because girls are so strong
in traditional literacy and school discourse and more easily acquire other skills because of their
already existing confidence and participation.

Studies have been done to show not only the lag in participation and motivation among
boys, but also how this participation and engagement in school changes as students get older
(Sargent et al, 2001; Pecjak, 2008). Sargent et al (2001) focused on boys in their study due to the
fact that boys often take longer in learning to read, read less, and are often less enthusiastic about
reading. Furthermore, Sargent et al (2001) goes on to say that girls are not likely to repeat a
grade or drop out of school and are more likely to finish college. Girls meet or exceed boys in
national reading and writing assessments, and though they may be lacking in new literacy skills,
they are avid participators and learners within the classroom, motivated to interact with the
material. Studies have also shown how the desire to participate and learn decreases over time.
Pecjak (2008) found that pupils’ positive attitude toward reading decreases during elementary
school years, and this is more so in boys. Because of this, attention should be paid to those boys
who start school with negative attitudes about reading and writing from their home environment,
and the positives of their home environment should be highlighted and reflected within the
curriculum. For example, if a child’s parents do not have literature in the home and he does not
view them reading, but he does enjoy watching sports on the television or playing computer
games, sports clips or computer games can be integrated into the classroom curriculum to engage
that student and show them that though what they do at home may look different then what is
done in school, it is still relevant and useful.

Though boys and girls may have different interests and skill bases, there are similarities
among them. A study by Wilhelm (2000) found that though both boys and girls report the need
to communicate through out of school writing, but boys reported an “alliterate” attitude towards
school assignments. Girls also were more likely to report that they liked to write. Another
similarity among boys and girls in regards to literacy is genres of literature. Merisuo-Storm
(2006) found the top three genres among boys and girls were comics, humor, and adventure, but
girls favored adventures whereas boys favored comics. It is important to not only now how boys
and girls interest differ, but how they are the same so that all students can be engaged within the
classroom. In regards to technology and gaming, Valkanove & Watts (2007) found in their study
that males engaged in a playful activity with making and narrating their videos, girls connected
differently to the material. All students in the class were more engaged during the video and
narrating project, and all achieved the desired results of comprehension and participation. The
difference is that boys and girls got to the understanding differently.

To grab the attention of boys and hold it so that they are participating and interacting with
literacy and being instilled with a love of learning, it is essential that schools expand boys’ views
on what is worthwhile reading and connect literacy instruction to boys interests (Wilhelm, 2000).
This initial engagement can make the difference between grabbing a boys’ attention and making
them want to learn, or not engaging them and fostering their already negative attitude towards
reading, writing, and school. Though Sanford (2005) is worried that girls are dominant in
traditional school literacies and are not focused on for alternative instruction, most boys are lacking in traditional school literacies, and therefore discourage to learn in ways that they do not already enjoy and have mastered. This study also discussed a boy dominated technological space, but if girls are said to dominate traditional literacies, and then want to dominate technology, where would boys stand in literacy? Utilizing what boys know from home within the classroom can help them succeed and gain the confidence to participate, interact, and take chances in the classroom.

**How the Use of Home Literacies in the Classroom Helps Males.**

To understand how home literacies can work within the classroom, and how these integrated activities can influence male students, researchers have utilized individual case studies as well as a classroom study to explore video games and popular culture (Abrams, 2009; Annetta, et al, 2009 & Compton-Lilly, 2010). In Abrams (2009) study of three struggling adolescent males, video games were avidly played at home and utilized in school to provide a context for understanding new material in school. The video games were used to develop schema for classroom material. “Caleb” connected playing Medal of Honor to what he was learning in class about WW2, while Robbie played Battlefield 1942 in conjunction with watching the history channel, listened to military history podcasts, and read reference books to gain schema and different perspectives on a war. In both cases the virtual environment provided interactive visual representation and the students could attempt to be more hands on in their learning. The male students felt the material was more accessible, useful, and relevant once they had a background understanding of it from the video games. Video games also gave students a context for learning vocabulary because they had usually encountered it within their games. The use of video games to build schema informed comprehension and recollection of information for
HOME LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

these students, as well as fostered participation in the classroom during class discussions, assignments, and activities. This study meets Dredger et al’s (2010) expectation of meaningful integration of technology. Students are learning the material to aid in their schema and in comprehending the curriculum, but learning it in a way that is relevant to them and their life. The conclusions drawn in the study align to the importance of integrating home literacy activities into the curriculum to increase the participation among male students, engaging them to want to learn and interact with the new material.

Another study that examined integrating video gaming into the current curriculum was done by Annetta et al (2009) in a fifth grade elementary school classroom. A video game named Dr. Friction, designed using the Multiplayer Educational Gaming Application, helped to teach students about simple machines. The game was composed of riddles and there was an in game agent named Fulcrum to help students when they got stuck. All of the students used the audio of the game, and males utilized the instant message to communicate while playing the game. Not only did the study show that a video game can increase students’ knowledge, in this case on simple machines measured from the pretest to their posttest, it also found that male students were more positive and self-confident in using the computer, especially for gaming.

Because not all male students may engage in computer or video games at home, it is also important to study other home literacies such as popular culture, sports, music, and television (Compton-Lily, 2010). A case study done by Compton-Lily (2010) explored “Kenny’s” frustration with reading and the programs that he had been placed in because of his struggles in reading. When he was asked his interests, Kenny listed rap, wrestling video games, race cars, and basketball. From then on Kenny was provided with books that helped him with “developing his identity as a boy,” as well as incorporating his interest (p. 145). When Kenny moved beyond
familiar books, it was discovered that he did not know all of his letters because his Reading Recovery teachers had been working so hard to get him to show up to his lessons and behave during them. Because of his attendance and behavior, Kenny’s abilities had never been accurately assessed. Compton-Lily (2010) then utilized writings Kenny had done himself that were based on his interests to engage him and reading. Websites were utilized to explore Kenny’s interest and books were then created for Kenny to read based on pictures he’s found and what he writes. When Kenny’s dad went to jail, his writing changed from his home literacy activities to telling his dad how he felt. A strong message from this case study learned from a six year old boy and his teacher is that “popular culture was the hook,” a hook that captured Kenny’s attention after all the failure in reading programs that he had encountered. This same hook showed Kenny that literacy can help him achieve goals, that what he knows can help him learn, and that he does have potential.

Incorporating home literacy into the classroom is a powerful tool to engage male students. Integrating home literacies into the current curriculum can achieve the same goals as utilizing traditional literacy practices, while at the same time capturing students’ attention and encouraging active participation. Through identifying the interest and home activities of male students, teachers can than know how they can adapt their teaching and curriculum to address the needs and interests of their students. The studies identified in this section each showed how incorporating literacy activities students engage in at home into the classroom curriculum has many benefits. It can increase students’ schema on a topic, engage them in learning new material, show them the importance and relevance of what they participate in at home, and increase participation within the classroom.
As Waller (2010) reminds us, literacy does not happen within the bubble of the classroom. Students bring knowledge with them, and it is the job of the teacher to utilize this knowledge to increase the confidence, passion, and desire to learn within their students. By understanding home literacies and the components of parental belief, environment, literature and activities teachers understand the knowledge students have. With this knowledge, teachers can meaningfully integrate home literacies into their classroom curriculum and through this integration, can encourage boys to want to participate and love to learn.

Method

Context

Research for this study occurred in a preschool classroom in a Western New York daycare facility. ABC ChildCare (a pseudonym) serves children from 6 weeks old to school age and has a daily average of about 150 children in the facility. The population of ABC ChildCare is middle-class and primarily Caucasian, with a small population of African American and Asian American children. This study occurred in a preschool classroom composed of a lead teacher, an assistant teacher, and 20 three and four year olds, with 14 children attending daily. In this preschool classroom, 18 students are Caucasian, and 2 students are Asian American.

Participants

Students and Parents.

There were six male students involved in this study, as well as their parents. The parents were involved through providing a log of daily activities that the children participated in at home. Each male student and their family are Caucasian except for Ben Ten (a pseudonym) who is Korean American. The male children who will participate in this study are all three years old. The first student studied will be Ian (a pseudonym). He lives at home with his mother. She is a
single working mother and Ian’s father lives out of state and has no custody or visitation. Ian loves trains and playing outside and in his assessments he excels at gross and fine motor control. In his yearly and monthly evaluations Ian has little knowledge of letters and numbers, though he does recognize shapes and colors. When Ian participates in art projects or plays on the computer he is very focused and engaged. He is enrolled in childcare full time, five days a week.

The second student is Squares (pseudonym). Squares lives at home with his mother, father, and little sister. He likes trains and blocks, enjoys playing outside and riding bikes, and likes to play computer. Academically, Squares is in the top of the class and is able to not only identify all the letters of the alphabet, but also list words that begin with them. He enjoys playing games involving letters and matching. Squares loves listening to books throughout the day and is always actively engaged, often attempting to read along with the teacher. His parents both work full time for a family business and are currently living at Squares’ grandparents to complete work on their own house. Squares attends daycare full time.

Thomas (pseudonym) lives primarily with his mother, though his father does have visitation. He attends ABC DayCare only two days a week, going to a home daycare the other three days. Thomas’ mother works for the post office part time. Thomas loves trains, action figures, and running and climbing. He has only attended the daycare for 5 months, and has only been in the preschool classroom for three months. He rarely sits for circletime and organized whole group activities. Thomas attempts to name letters and numbers, but often confuses the two. He would rather be playing then sitting to listen to a story, but does enjoy organized whole group games and play. Before the studied was finished Thomas disenrolled from ABC DayCare for financial reasons.
Another child in the study is Wiggles (pseudonym). Wiggles lives with his twin sister, mother, father, and cat Tiger. He enjoys playdough, building with blocks, and playing outside. Wiggles currently attends day care part time, two days a week and is in the same class as his twin sister. Two days a week they have a babysitter and the other weekday their mother is home with them. Wiggles attempts to identify letters and numbers, but is not as strong in identifying them as his sister. He enjoys using paint and glue at art, but rarely colors by choice. Wiggles’ mother works part time in Human Resources for a local grocery store and his father is currently working a contracted job after the loss of his career two years ago.

Lightning McQueen (pseudonym) lives with his mother, though his father has recently moved back from out of state and has joint custody. Lightning enjoys playing with his friends, playing cars, and also playing in the classroom dramatic play area. He knows all of his letters and recognizes some numbers but does not usually play letter or number games during centers. Lightning’s mom works full time as a manager in a retail position, and his father is a physical education teacher currently working on his Master’s degree. He is currently enrolled full time at ABC DayCare.

Lastly, Ben Ten (pseudonym) lives at home with his mother, father, and younger sister. They are a Korean American family and English is their second language. When Ben Ten first entered preschool he did not speak any English, but has since acquired not only oral language, but written language too. He can recognize and name all letters of the alphabet. He prefers dramatic play and building with blocks over drawing and art. Ben Ten loves video games and toys and has fun playing video game characters in daycare. He is enrolled part time, three days a week.
**Researcher Stance**

In this study, I was the researcher, as well as the teacher in the classroom. I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College completing my Master’s degree in Literacy Education. My initial teaching certification is in Early Childhood (B-6) with a concentration in English. I am a Caucasian female and fall in the lower level of the middle class. I have been the lead teacher in this preschool classroom for the last 10 months, and have worked at ABC ChildCare for two and a half years. Before teaching Preschool I was a toddler teacher.

By being the teacher in the study, I will be an active participant observer. I know my students and their families, as well as the current curriculum. Through the use of field notes and audio recordings of my lessons, I was able to understand my current teaching, reflect upon it, and change it to reflect the needs of my students and based on the outcomes of this study. Mills (2011) explains that when teachers are actively engaged in teaching they are monitoring and adjusting their teaching and through recording what is happening, they are acting as an active participant observer. This idea of monitoring and adjusting instruction based on observations is what this study entailed. Utilizing field notes and audio recordings, I observed my current lessons and the participation of my students, and then adjusted my instruction and lessons utilizing students’ home literacies to improve my instruction.

**Method**

To obtain the data for this study, I utilized interviews and observations in the classroom, as well as diaries of children’s home literacies. Each of the six children was interviewed to gain a better understanding of their feelings on school and the things they like and dislike (Appendix A). Knowledge of what home literacies and activities children engage in at home were gained
when three of the six parents returned the Home Literacy Diary that documents a week in the life of their child at home.

In addition to the Home Literacy Diary and student interviews, I took field notes and recorded lessons. During both lessons, participation rubrics were filled out to guide observations and serve as a way to measure the increase of participation among the boys (Appendix B). The first lesson observed and recorded documents a book that is in the weekly curriculum written by the daycare provider. The second lesson observed and recorded utilized data from student interviews and Home Literacy Diaries and integrated the children’s home literacy activities.

Validity of Research.

This study will meet all aspects of validity as defined by Guba (1981). Guba (1981) described a valid study as one that has credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There will be credibility to this study through multiple factors. First, prolonged participation at the study site is shown through my length of time at the daycare. A critical colleague will be utilized for “peer debriefing,” and “triangulation” of data sources will be present including raw data such as audio recordings and pictures (Mills, 2011, p. 104). Triangulation also aids in ensuring the confirmability of the data that will be collected. For research to show confirmability, “neutrality or objectivity” should be shown. (Mills, 2011, p. 105). Transferability will be addressed to show the validity of this study through the use of descriptive data as well as detailed descriptions of the context of the study. Lastly, this study shows dependability through the overlapping of methods. The lessons were recorded and used alongside field notes and observation rubrics so that children’s answers can be accurately transcribed and analyzed. Dependability can also be shown through an “audit trail” which will be
utilized in this study through access to original field notes, artifacts, and recordings (Mills, 2011, p. 105). Each component is essential to ensuring that this study will be valid.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants.**

Before this study began, consent from the children’s parents was collected, as well as oral consent from the child. In this study, all names were changed to pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the children. The name of the daycare facility has also been changed.

**Data Collection**

To collect data in this study, different tools were used. First, the six children were interviewed using a survey that I created composed of six questions addressing their likes and dislikes in school, focusing on school literacy activities (Appendix A). Each interview was also audio recorded. A Home Literacy Diary was sent home to each of the six families to document what activities their children participated in at home throughout a seven day period. Of these six Home Literacy Diaries, three were returned. These home literacy diaries were then analyzed for similarities to find commonalities in home activities. Once a commonality was found, I then integrated it into the curriculum, aligning with the current required theme. Field notes were taken, and a rubric served as a guide to measure participation in each lesson (Appendix B). In addition, both lessons were audio recorded and transcribed so that I could sort the data and identify increases in participation.

**Findings and Discussion**

To address if home literacy activities could be integrated into the preschool classroom to increase participation among three-year males, data was collected and analyzed from multiple sources. Before data could be examined to see how utilizing home literacy activities in the classroom can increase participation among males, a home literacy activity was chosen through
finding commonalities in the information gathered by student interviews and parent provided information in the Home Literacy Diaries. Once a common ground among students was found, and an activity that could plausibly be integrated chosen, an increase in participation among boys was then measured. The data showed common themes in activities that were participated in at the boys’ homes. Also, the data from lesson observations and the participation rubric showed that integrating home literacy activities into the preschool classroom curriculum increased participation among the boys through their body language and attention during the lesson, as well as through their comments and ideas shared, and their predictions and connections to the text.

The Link between Popular Culture and Book Choice

Through the use of Home Literacy Diaries that were given to parents and interviews that were done with the children, many common home literacy activities and interests were found. Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Literacy Activities from Home Literacy Diaries Completed by Parents</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plays with toys</td>
<td>1-4 times/day</td>
<td>1-4 times/day</td>
<td>3-5 times/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watched TV</td>
<td>1-2 times/day</td>
<td>1-3 times/day</td>
<td>1-2 times/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read or listened to books</td>
<td>1-3 books/day</td>
<td>3-6 books/day</td>
<td>Books at bedtime each night- # not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and video games</td>
<td>0 times/week</td>
<td>3 times/week</td>
<td>1 time/week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at this data, it is apparent that books, toys, and television are something that each child engages in at home on a daily basis. Each boy played at least once a day, averaging around three times a day. Thomas’ television watching was marked in minutes, usually around 15 minutes of a show or movie at a time. Though Squares’ and Wiggles’ parents did not record the length of television watched, each child did engage in watching television at least once a day.
Some technology use in the home was also recorded. Squares engaged in the use of computer and video games, about three times per week, while Thomas did not, and Wiggles only did one time in a week. The use of computer this one time was recorded as using the computer to watch a movie. Each parent also recorded that they read to their child at bedtime, all recording at least two or three books per night. A similar finding of parents reading daily to their children was researched by Senchal and LeFevre (2001) who explored a link between storybook reading at home and language and literacy development in school. They concluded in their study that an important home literacy experience is shared reading, and when children are frequently read to by parents there are long term benefits and gains by these children.

Exploring the different types of books, toys, and television programs breaks down the daily activities into themes that the boys are interested in. Though only two of the Home Literacy Diaries received gave specific toy, book, and television information, there are still similarities between these two Diaries. Each child engaged in watching cartoons, reading books with cartoon characters, and in playing with toys that are based on a cartoon figure. Both Thomas and Squares engaged in activities based on Toy Story and PBS shows, such as In Between the Lions and Sesame Street. Another similarity is that both boys played with toy trucks or cars. These similarities, and the next table based on interview information from five of the boys, helped to guide the choice of what home literacy activity should be integrated into the curriculum.

Through interviews, similar themes of interest became apparent. The boys were asked about books they read at school and home and what they like to play.
Table 2

*Student Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What books do you like</td>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Trucks</td>
<td>Dinosaur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that we have in school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What books do you wish</td>
<td>Ben Ten</td>
<td>Fishy</td>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td>Cars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we had?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>book</td>
<td>Race Car Books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you like</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Dominoes</td>
<td>Momma</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>always</td>
<td>Bikes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>comes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you wish we had</td>
<td>Trains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Big choo choo ones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews show similar themes of interest among the boys. Mentioned most frequently were trucks and cars, trains, cartoons, and animals. A favorite school activity was playing outside, and of the three boys who favored outside play, both Ian and Lightning McQueen listed the train as their favorite outdoor activity. Squares and Ian both listed trains as a toy they wish was in school. Many of the students describe similar interests in what they play and what they read. For example, when Ian discusses that he wishes school had “more train books,” he also wishes that school had “big choo choo toys” and described how he loves playing on the big train outside (interview, June 21, 2011). Squares also discusses liking “Thomas” books (Thomas the Train), and wishes that we had more trains at school (interview, June 21, 2011). Utilizing these interests and home activities, I decided to integrate a Thomas the Train book into the current summer curriculum. The interviews, in addition to the information already gathered from the Home Literacy Diaries, all showed an overlap in an interest in a particular theme or character across activities. The most common of these interests was trains. Once this
commonality was found, the mode through which trains would be integrated into the curriculum had to be explored.

Based on Home Literacy Diaries and student interviews, as well as the resources available in the preschool classroom, the home literacy activity that could be best integrated into the current preschool curriculum was books. Because my classroom does not have a television, or internet on the computer, utilizing video or television shows to increase participation among males could not work. Though toys trains could be, and are, present in the classroom, this home activity would not as easily foster learning and meet the curriculum needs like the train book did. Looking at the Home Literacy Diaries and student interviews, not only do students read a variety of books, they also play with toys whose characters or themes can be found within books. For example, looking at the home literacy diaries, Squares played with a Lightning McQueen toy, and the movie Cars was watched by Thomas. Similarly in the student interviews, Squares and Ian both discussed the large play train outside, train books, and classroom train toys. This commonality of trains became the link which was the deciding factor in what home literacy activity to integrate into the classroom. Though the boys may interact with the character in a different way, the same interest and theme is had by both boys. I decided to have the focus of the book to be integrated be trains because this was a popular theme among boys through the interviews and Home Literacy Diaries.

Once the activity was chosen, students were observed listening to a story in the curriculum, and then listening to the Thomas story. Students showed an increase in participation through their body language and attention during the story, the information and ideas they offered, and lastly, the predictions they made during the story and connections they made to the story and theme.
Participation through Body Language and Attention.

Through integrating Thomas the Train into the curriculum, an improvement was seen in the three year old males’ abilities to pay attention and be less distracted. In an attempt to measure the increase in participation when home literacy activities are integrated into the curriculum, an observation rubric was created. In addition to this rubric, audio recordings of the lesson also illustrated an increase in participation. Lesson 1 was a suggested book listed in the curriculum, *Who Wants a Dragon?*, during the study of castles and dragons for the unit on Camelot. Lesson 2 integrated students’ home literacies into the curriculum through the use of the book *Thomas and the Castle*. The way participation was measured throughout the following was measured on a scale of 1-5, 1 being rarely and 5 being consistently.

Table 3

***Data to Support Body Language and Attention from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 1***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student listens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the book with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimal distractions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student looks at</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book and/or teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

***Data to Support Body Language and Attention from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 2***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student listens</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the book with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at the rubrics of both lessons, three out of five students increased their attention to the story and listened with minimal distractions. Squares remained consistent through both readings, while Wiggles was absent for Lesson 2 and the increase in his participation could therefore not be measured. Through observation and field notes, the distractions recorded in the Lesson 1 were with other books and other students. Ben Ten was reading a dinosaur book during the first lesson, but during the second lesson took a book away from another student who was not paying attention to *Thomas and the Castle*. During the first lesson, Ian was distracted by another friend and proceeded to talk and attempt to stand on his head. In the second lesson he was so engaged that he stood up to get a closer look and show something in the picture that he thought was “a monster” (lesson 2, July 6, 2011). Though Wiggles was absent in the second lesson, he was distracted by his twin sister while *Who wants a dragon?* was being read. The significant change in attention with two of the boys shows that integrating a book of their interest and background knowledge increased their desire to pay attention. This initial attention to the story then led the boys to participate verbally because they were following along with the story and were better able to focus and make connections to the new content being heard. Compton-Lily (2010) discovered the importance of the initial engagement of the male student in her case study. Once she was able to get Kenny engaged through the use of popular culture, she could then accurately assess his ability, as well as motivate him to want to read and learn by engaging him in activities that were based on his interest. The initial interest is why teachers before her had struggled to reach Kenny, they were so focused on making him show up to his lessons, and behaving when he did show up, that the teachers were never able to interact with him and
understand what he knew. By engaging a child through the use of their interests and home activities, the teacher can then utilize this initial engagement and attention gained to help the child make connections while also learning new curriculum and ideas.

**Offering Information and Ideas.**

Students also participated through comments they make during and after reading, and questions posed by teacher or students that they answer. These tables show how utilizing a topic that boys are interested in and engage in at home can increase their verbal participation.

**Table 5**

*Data to Support Offering Information and Ideas from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student offers information during the reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students comments after reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6**

*Data to Support Offering Information and Ideas from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student offers information during the reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students comments after reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lightning McQueen, who was rarely offering information in the first lesson, was sharing information about the main character, Thomas, in the second story and other characters that were
encountered in the book. He and two other boys became our train experts and helped us read train names and understand that one set of trains were twins. Through both readings, Squares consistently demonstrated engagement in the book through offering answers to questions posed, as well as repeating words or phrases of the book. Though Ben Ten does not verbally participate in either texts through offering information or adding comments, he does show an increase in participation through the previously described body language descriptors. The biggest change in participation from the first lesson to the second was with Lightning McQueen, a boy who consistently shows he is listening, but was rarely verbally contributing. Waller (2010) made a similar finding about the writing process through utilizing Twitter in the primary classroom. The study discusses how twitter was a way children could demonstrate “their own knowledge of what we had been leaning in class and then trying to guide others” (Waller, 2010, p. 15). Because the boys were familiar with the Thomas character in the book, they could guide the class in understanding the book because they had this background knowledge and interest. This increase in attention and some verbal participation then led the boys to engage in making predictions throughout the story, as well as connecting to what they know on the topic.

Making Predictions and Connections.

The final way that the students change in participation was measured was through their involvement in making predictions and connections. By connecting to their schema on what they knew about Thomas, and what they had already learned in the Camelot unit, students made more significant predictions and connections in the second lesson.

Table 7

Data to Support Making Predictions and Connections from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student predicts the title with class | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1
---|---|---|---|---|---
Student answers prediction questions | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1

Table 8

_Data to Support Making Predictions and Connections from the Observation Rubric for Lesson 2_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 2</th>
<th>Ben Ten</th>
<th>Lightning McQueen</th>
<th>Ian</th>
<th>Squares</th>
<th>Wiggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation Rubric</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student predicts the title with class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student answers prediction questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first lesson, Ian was making predictions such as “he hit them with a sword” (lesson 1, July 5, 2011) when a knight came across the baby dragon in _Who Wants a Dragon?_ and Squares predicted the title of the story as being “The dragon goes to the castle” (lesson 1, July 5, 2011). Though Ian does offer two more predictions throughout the first story, it is not until the second lesson that he makes connections to the texts and more frequently offers ideas and predictions. Ian relates _Thomas and the Castle_ to a Thomas moving that he has saying “Um, um he was getting a monster in the castle and then he said ahh…and then he falls into the muddy marsh, and then he falls into the marsh like in my movie” (lesson 2, July 6, 2011). Though the idea may not align perfectly to the topic, Ian is connecting what he is listening to now to what he has read before. This connection is showing his engagement and personal interest in the book.
HOME LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN THE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

and topic. In studying the use of video games in the classroom, Abrams (2009) concludes that “because the students developed a schema for information in a virtual environment,” a virtual environment usually engaged in at home and not in the school environment, “the material came alive when it was later introduced to them in the classroom” (p. 344).

The data acquired from this study shows that integrating home literacy activities and interests into the curriculum makes a difference in the participation of three-year old males in the preschool classroom. This knowledge effects how future curriculum can be approached in preschool and beyond.

**Implications and Conclusions**

The importance of the results of this action research project stretches beyond the scope of my preschool classroom and reaches classrooms of any age and students of every gender because the data shows that utilizing what students know and do at home into the classroom makes a difference (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2010). In finding that integrating a Thomas the Train Engine story into my preschool curriculum increased participation among male students, I can now make the effort to find other books, games, and toys that can serve the purpose of addressing the curriculum, while also encouraging males who may otherwise be disengaged. As Compton-Lilly (2010) described it, popular culture was the hook that engaged her struggling male reader. For my classroom, Thomas the Train was the hook which engaged my disengaged preschool boys. Similar implications were discussed in Souto-Manning’s (2010) study when it was found that educators need to employ home literacies more integrally in the early childhood classroom. The implication of both studies show the importance of communicating with parents and understanding what each child does at home and outside of school in general.
Though the idea of integrating a train book into a classroom to increase participation may work in preschool, a similar idea applies to teachers of any age group. Teachers of older students can similarly utilize their students home literacy activities and interest into their curriculum. As shown in multiple studies involving late elementary, middle, and high school students, integrating activities on computers and through video games and using popular culture in the classroom can engage male students to want to participate and learn in the classroom (Abrams, 2009; Annetta et. al., 2009; Apperly, 2010; Compton-Lily, 2010; Valkanova & Watts, 2007).

Beyond preschool teachers, and teachers of all age groups, parents must also be involved in this process. When Marsh (2003) interviewed parents and asked if what their child did at home was reflected in the Nursery School curriculum most said yes. Though most say yes, they did not identify ways the school curriculum addressed what was done at home, but instead addressed ways in which what was done at school was then done at home. Because of this, staff at this nursery school developed lessons which integrated media texts into the program. This research project should cause a similar reaction from teachers and parents alike. It is important to build the bridge from school to home and highlight the importance and significance of what students do at home.

By utilizing the knowledge found by this study, that integrating home literacies into the curriculum can benefit students, teachers and parents can work together to ensure the most meaningful and relevant education for their children. Teachers must understand the significance of the activities children participate in at home and be willing to integrate them into the current curriculum in a way that still teaches the required material, but also engages students.
The data from this action research project did support the idea that male preschool students’ participation can increase if home literacies are integrated into the classroom, but it still leaves room for more exploration and leaves some aspects still unanswered. If I were to conduct this study again, I would do more focused work with the parents through interviews and possible home visits to really understand what the child engages in at home, the length, how many times a day, etc. I think that because I only had three Home Literacy Diaries returned, and only two of these were detailed, it would be beneficial to see and document activities firsthand or more thoroughly to be able to pull similar parallels across larger numbers of children. If I did this research again, I would also talk to the students more after the lesson, especially those such as Ben Ten and who did not verbally participate in either lesson. Though these quieter students showed participation through their body language and attention, it was still unclear if they understood the theme and aspects of the topic. Another question I am left with is how can teachers ensure that students continue to participate in the classroom as they get older, even when they face classrooms that don’t integrate their home literacies?

If integrating this one Thomas book, into one day’s curriculum, in one preschool classroom can make a noticeable impact on participation, the possibilities are endless when teachers make this integration a consistent part of their classroom and curriculum. Though this study, and some research discussed in it, focuses primarily on male students, it does not mean that girls are to be ignored. These same ideas of integrating home literacies to increase participation among boys can be used to benefit all students in the classroom.
References


doi: 10.1080/09523980903387480


doi: 10.1080/09500690801968656


doi: 10.1080/0141192031000156006


Appendix A - Student Interview Questions

Do you like coming to school?

What do you like most about school? Or if you don’t like coming to school what don’t you like?

Do you like listening to books at school? What kind of books?

What are your favorite library books that I have brought in?

What books do you want to have in school that we don’t have?
### Appendix B- Lesson Observation Rubric

**Lesson Observation Rubric**
(Measuring student participation)

1- Rarely 2- Sometimes 3- Occasionally 4- Often 5- Consistently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student listens to the book with minimal distractions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student looks at the book and/or teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student predicts the title with class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student answers prediction questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student offers information during the reading</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student comments after reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>