A Look at Home Literacy Experiences and Parental Support: A Case Study

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A LOOK AT HOME LITERACY EXPERIENCES

A Look at Home Literacy Experiences and Parental Support:

A Case Study

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

The action research study is a case study looking to identify the home literacy practices that encourage parent involvement and best support the literacy development of a kindergarten student. Children require a literacy-rich home environment where a parent’s involvement engages the child in meaningful literacy events. Through seven home visits where the mother and child were observed during literacy-based interactions, it was found that parent involvement and the strategies employed at home effect literacy development. Teachers and schools need to break the barriers in place which make it difficult to support parents. There should be a focus on how to get resources, materials, and strategies into parents’ hands so they can better support their child’s learning from the home.
A Look at Home Literacy Experiences and Parental Support

An important piece of being a parent is the responsibility that has been placed upon them to provide opportunities for children to learn, succeed, and flourish. Parents have the ability to greatly influence their children and one way to promote a positive effect in their child’s life is by becoming an integral part of their education. Parental involvement has been documented as a significant and beneficial element to a successful education program for many years (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Hornby & LaFaele, 2011; Wanat, 2010). There are several advantages that come to mind for a child who is a part of a family in which the parents are able to integrate themselves into their child’s learning such as, consistently completing homework, more self-disciplined, increased motivation and positive attitude towards school (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012) and reduce the achievement gap between students of diverse cultural differences (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Educators and administrators should be making a concentrated effort to act as a team in order to enhance the educational environment and authentic learning opportunities made available to their students. Even with the understanding that family involvement is critical to the cognitive development of a child, there is still not enough emphasis placed on how to increase parent involvement and parents are ineffectively involved in their child’s education (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2012). Becoming a literate adult means so many things today in the 21st century, but most of all literacy achievement promotes success in school, in relationships, and allows a person to function as a productive citizen. Consistent literacy development is a pertinent part of academic success. New York State has made a significant adjustment in education by adopting the common core curriculum which includes shifts in literacy instruction across the content areas with the intent to increase a student’s ability to manipulate various types of texts and make meaning from them. By encouraging parent involvement and providing strategies that can be implemented to help
increase effective support from parents within the school community and from home, our
students have a greater chance to excel academically, specifically increasing their likelihood to
set and obtain heightened literacy goals.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) list several beneficial outcomes to parental involvement
including: “improved parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale and school climate; improved
school attendance, attitudes, behavior and mental health of children; and, increased parental
confidence, satisfaction and interest in their own education” (p. 37). From experience, it seems
there is a lack in easily accessible and easily understood resources available to parents. There is
support politically and is heavily valued by teachers and school districts, but yet there is still a
challenge and various obstacles that prevent parent involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass, 2003). A
concentrated effort to achieve greater parent involvement in student’s education should be a
target for school communities on a national level.

A child’s cognitive development can benefit from parental support and early parental
involvement has been shown to be predictive of future achievement (Froiland et al., 2012). As a
substitute teacher, many times I have been instructed to assign the daily “read for 20-30 minutes”
and parents are asked to sign as proof of completion. Parents need specific strategies that can be
implemented from home to support their child as a reader. Motivation of family participation
can occur through a training or educational model that will allow parents to see the potential
results of improvement in their child’s reading. Given the appropriate push, parents will
hopefully become a more active part of their child’s learning. At times, parents can feel
intimidated by the new literacies that are engaging their young readers. Schools and teachers are
constantly offering additional purposeful learning experiences through new literacies such as,
internet exploration, blogs, and podcasts (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). Our students are building their
repertoire of communication and learning methods. We want to offer multi-modal styles of instruction in the classroom and there should be continuity between learning from home and school to reinforce the practice of the various types of literacies. A commonly reviewed home literacy practice is shared reading. Children and family members are reading text while including dialogue about the content and vocabulary. As children are exposed to shared reading in their homes, they are increasing their “development of word knowledge, understanding the meaning of print, and awareness of written letters and words” (Rashid, Morris, Sevcik, 2005, p. 2). Most homes naturally provide opportunities for children to interact with text and language. Shared reading is typically linked to home literacy practices, but Dolezal-Sams, Nordquist, and Twardosz (2009) recommend paying close attention to the daily routines because book reading is not the only means to transmit literacy development. When discussing the home literacy environment, it is important to recognize this goes beyond shared reading or the type of activities children are participating in. Rashid et al. (2005) includes family members ability to promote literacy activities and motivation. Providing activities that capture a child’s interest can increase their motivation to continue their learning outside of school. If parents are unable to influence their child to partake in literacy activities at home, it is still important to show that literacy is valued within the home. Conveying literacy values can simply be modeled by family members who read and write while the child is present (Baroody and Diamond, 2010). Through my research, I hope to find the home literacy practices that parents are employing to support their child’s literacy development. I plan to uncover what barriers may exist in providing literacy-rich environment and experiences at home. By exploring this topic, I hope to benefit those families who are finding it difficult to continue effective learning practices from home.
My interest in what parent involvement looks like from home guided me towards a question surrounding parent involvement of a kindergarten student and identifying what literacy home practices were being effectively employed to benefit the student’s literacy achievement. The socio-cultural historical learning theory guided the action research study due to the fact that parent involvement is social in nature. There are culturally relevant situations that a child encounters each day with their families and community members that promote literacy development. Parent involvement is a significant factor of a child’s academic achievement overall. When parents feel they have the support from the school they are encouraged to enter into their own safe learning environment with other parents and educators to become better equipped to employ literacy practices within their own home. Creating a school-wide initiative to outline what parent involvement looks like and providing appropriate strategies could cause an increase in the school-wide and even district-wide literacy achievement. If teachers are able to model and guide parents through the steps it will take to implement effective home literacy practices, we are doing what is best for the students and their overall academic growth.

**Theoretical Framework**

Children enter the world into a family and social group in which they identify with. Each family connects with a social group that follows a social framework which is often an unconscious decision, but being a member of a social group structures a source of beliefs and behaviors (Kucer, 2009). I recognize literacy as the “control of secondary uses of language” (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourses) (Gee, 1989, p. 23). Gee describes discourses as an “identity kit” (p. 18) that encompasses socially accepted uses of language, thinking and acting. The secondary discourse Gee speaks of is the language used in various social institutions outside of one’s dominant social group. Secondary discourse includes both oral and written language
use that builds upon our primary discourse. According to Gee, we build on our primary language in order to function within our secondary discourses. Gee’s statement supports that there must be a partnership between home and school. With a student’s comprehension of secondary discourses being heavily based on one’s primary discourse, educators must encourage the importance of effective learning practices that must cross-over into a student’s home life.

Sociocultural theory says learning occurs through interactions within multiple learning communities and other social, cultural, and historical experiences (Larson & Marsh, 2005). It is evident that parental and cultural influence will benefit students who are struggling readers. There is learning and literacy acquisition that occurs naturally through one’s home and cultural community. Students should be engaging in meaningful discussions with their families and members of their community.

The theoretical focus guiding the present research is the sociocultural-historical learning theory. Sociocultural-historical learning theory is defined by Larson and Marsh (2005) viewing a child as “an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems” (p. 100). With the sociocultural theory guiding the present study, there is a clear connection to the research question. By taking a close look at types of parent involvement within a child’s home environment conveys there is value in identifying how the cultural attitudes of one’s family influence their learning. There are culturally relevant situations that a child encounters each day that promote literacy development. Children learn through both formal and informal sociocultural activity (Larson and Marsh). Learning occurs through both types of contexts which confirms the significance of understanding not only classroom learning patterns, but those developed at home. Sociocultural theory says that literacy events are the activities where text is
a key component in facilitating learning through some sort of goal-oriented activity (Larson & Marsh, 2005). My data collection revolves around the various ways in which a child is interacting with text. By analyzing the different types of activities a child encounters within their home will shed light on what activities and strategies are most successful in facilitating literacy development when implemented at home.

The sociocultural theory has identified the role of different communities as shaping children in many ways as they progress through their day as a member of multiple communities themselves and take on the role of student, child and learner (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Children are navigating through multiple communities over the course of a day where they recognize and adapt to appropriate social practices of each. As teachers, we are challenged with the task of creating a community of learners each year. Parents are also creating communities at home for their child and providing opportunities for their child to access other communities where they can find comfort in relating to other people who have a common endeavor. Teachers and parents both supply a gateway toward the apprenticeship stage of interacting within a community. Parents and teachers are regulating activities, control the frequency and execute a skillful model during cooperative participation of an activity (Larson and Marsh). My interest sparks from a wondering of how parents go about implementing activities which promote literacy development. I am further invested in the parent’s ability to scaffold an activity and provide links between their child’s knowledge and the content they are focusing on. By providing guided participation experiences, parents will be asking questions, orient students to task, and provide multi-modal interaction with text (Larson and Marsh). One goal I am looking to reach by the completion of this study is to introduce and model effective strategies and activities in which parents feel comfortable engaging their child in guided participation experiences from home.
Research Question

Parental support is a large factor in students’ academic success and literacy acquisition, but yet schools are failing to utilize parents effectively. There seems to be a limited amount of communication from schools encouraging parents to actively participate in their child’s learning, as well as limited opportunities to increase a families understanding of what an operative home literacy environment is composed of. After identifying the above limitations, I have chosen to research the following question: What are the components of a home literacy environment for a primary level student?

Literature Review

Prior to initiating action research in the area of home literacy experiences and parent support, it is important to review the literature in order to identify the essential points of knowledge surrounding the research question. In this literature review, three themes have been identified that influence the current research. The first theme introduces the effects of parent involvement on student achievement. Children enter formal schooling with a variety of literacy and language experiences. Although there is limited research surrounding parental involvement and home literacy environments of students who are struggling readers, there are many studies which observe parental involvement and literacy experiences at home that show a positive correlation to student literacy and academic achievement. The second theme addresses home literacy experiences for students who are part of an at-risk population, English language learners (ELL’s), and children with disabilities. Children who identify within one of the noted categories are at-risk for becoming a struggling reader. The third theme presents strategies that improve home literacy experiences. Parent support can go beyond the shared reading experiences that are
encouraged during the early stages of literacy development. Many strategies that support effective home literacy practices require school to home connections or mild parent coaching.

**Effects of Parent Involvement on Student Achievement**

Parent involvement has become commonly noted as a predictor of academic achievement and cognitive development among our population’s youth (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006; Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2012; Young, Austin & Growe, 2013). Parent involvement can be defined in multiple ways. Without a clear definition of parent involvement and identifying what that looks like is setting up parents, teachers, and administrators to fail. Young et al. (2013) found that when administrators were asked to define parental involvement there were multiple variations of responses and there were several categories that emerged based on the different definitions that were submitted. It is important to recognize what some administrators (principals) value as their standard of parental involvement because if parents are confused of what is expected on their end, the likelihood of parental involvement being effective is not so. The categories derived by Young et al. included “parents actively engaged, parents supporting, parents as advocates, parents being knowledgeable, and parents communication” (p. 294). Each of these areas requires parents to interact with their child’s education in a different way. In order to support the values of the school in the best way, families need to be aware of the parental involvement expectations of their school administration. Parents being actively engaged includes parents supporting their child by participating in school-based events (Young et al.). Parents making their presence known in schools is one way to build upon the parent-child relationship. Being engaged in parent-teacher conferences, volunteering, and other school-based activities adds to the potential dialogue between a parent and their child. Parents should have conversations about how they are planning
to become connected to the school community and later discuss how their involvement is supporting their child’s success. Parental support is how the parent provides assistance from home (Young et al.). By taking on the role of a homework helper and creating a comfortable environment for a child to share their academic progress or struggles with you is going to allow parents to become aware of school curriculum and the strengths and areas of need in their child. Parents as advocates requires a parent to be aware of their child’s social, emotional, and psychological development (Young et al.) in order to help the school recognize what kind of support system needs to be implemented to help their child succeed academically and emotionally. A parent who is able to identify their child’s strengths and weakness in their development can help the school better assist the student in the classroom. Recognizing a child’s needs increases the parent’s ability to be an effective advocate for the child. Typically children are not aware of what their needs are and without the parent communicating these areas, it is less likely the child will reach their academic goals. Young et al. identified parent communication is a two-way process. Parents have to do their part and take responsibility for responding to teacher and school requests as well as making their voice heard if they are in need of answers.

With all of these pieces recognized as the significant factors that administrators believe equal healthy parent involvement, there is a strong need for a concise and coherent definition laid out for families in order to help parents develop their role as a partner in their child’s success. Similarly, Fan, Williams, and Wolters (2012) defined several types of parental involvement categories. It is challenging to define parent involvement in one particular way with the evidence that there are several categories that have emerged through valid research. Each piece mentioned above is an essential part of parental involvement overall; therefore, when discussing parent involvement as a general term, unless otherwise noted, we will be considering each
category. Most often parental involvement discussed throughout this research will often be in reference to parental involvement from home as the discussion will predominantly cover the home literacy experiences and environments provided by parents.

Parental involvement is commonly discussed in regards to how family support impacts overall academic achievement, but we will pay attention to research which concentrates specifically on the effect parent involvement has on the development of a child’s literacy skills. Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, and Weiss (2006) and Reglin, Cameron, Losike-Sedimo (2012) support a model of parent involvement that includes parents and family interacting with the actual school environment. There is thought surrounding how to create a strong home-school partnership. Parents who have the ability to show their face at conferences, school events, and volunteering in the classroom are using their physical presence to encourage positive academic outcomes. The results provided by Dearing et al. (2006) showed a positive correlation with increased parent involvement and a child’s literacy performance. Parents interacting with their child at school and having face to face communication with teachers can increase a parent’s familiarity with curriculum and school expectations. Dearing et al. also found that children who had negative feelings associated with literacy performance at kindergarten lessened over time if families were very involved. Even with the research proving that a parent’s interaction with the school environment positively affects a child’s literacy development, there are barriers to this type of involvement and that is why it is vital to increase parent awareness of how they can support their child from home. One benefit of providing literacy-rich experiences at home is families choose which home-practices fit best for them and their environment. Most children have opportunities to experience print in their homes. Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2006) highlight the efforts made by parents to directly involve children in activities geared towards
fostering literacy development. Providing direct interaction with text and language can only have some sort of positive affect on a child in ways including strengthening existing literacy skills, promote positivity of reading and writing, or instill a positive attitude about reading and writing. Weigel et al. also encourages parents to model their literacy habits. Families should construct a routine which enable them to include interaction with text daily. Senechal (2009) states home literacy experiences are divided into two categories: informal and formal. By defining two categories, families are able to determine how they can fit literacy experiences into their environment. Informal experiences would include shared book readings where children are exposed to written language, but not focused directly on the print (Senechal). Shared book reading can promote the message that print carries meaning and instill an excitement for reading in the emergent stage of literacy. Formal experiences focus attention on written language and the structure (Senechal). This does not include packets and workbooks, but more so the natural contact with written language in ways such as pointing out nutrition labels of food items or the letters of a street sign. Home literacy practices allow parents to strengthen their child’s language, comprehension and attitudes towards literacy experiences from the comfort of their own space.

There is a plethora of literature that identifies parent involvement as a predictor of student achievement (Fan et al., 2012; Froiland et al., 2012; Senechal, 2009), but there is good reason to also take a look at the effect parental involvement has on student motivation because high motivation in academics can lead to heightened engagement in school and enhance student achievement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Parents usually value the social components of their relationship with their child. In other words, a parent finds high importance in the quantity and quality of sharing opinions, stories and emotions through oral communication with their child.
Parents who communicate openly with their children may provide input and guidance on everything from how their child dresses to what college they should attend. Within parent-child dialogue and interactions, there are expectations that are usually presented as children develop through each stage of childhood. Cheung and Pomerantz define child motivation to be parent oriented “when it is driven by a concern with meeting parents’ expectation in the academic arena so as to gain their approval” (p.820). In other words, children sometimes allow their academic motivation to be based upon their efforts to meet their parent’s expectations. In a study that followed seventh grade students through eighth grade (Cheung & Pomerantz), it was determined that parent oriented motivation caused children to report heightened metacognitive abilities which predicted improved academic achievement in these adolescents. Increased metacognitive ability is when a child can think about their thinking and can play a significant role in a child’s reading comprehension. The same study also found a link between parent involvement and increasing a child’s natural motivation and enjoyment for learning:

The relatedness to parents established among children by parents’ involvement may lead children to internalize parents’ values about school, which may be conveyed via their involvement (Grolnick et al., 1997); such internalization may ultimately build children’s skills, leading them to find academic endeavors pleasurable, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation. Moreover, in the context of their involvement, parents may directly emphasize the enjoyable aspects of learning. (Cheung & Pomerantz, p. 829)

Being vocal about academic expectations and being an active participant in your child’s education is especially a significant factor of younger children and children who are just beginning their formal schooling experience. Discussing family values and expectations could strengthen positive academic habits. Parent involvement increases communication which may
raise the likelihood that their children will soon be intrinsically motivated, meaning that their behaviors are influenced based on their personal satisfaction (Fan et al., 2012). The vast effects of parental involvement do give children such a substantial advantage. Starting early is important in that older adolescents may form a need to distinguish themselves from their parents which makes it less likely that parent-oriented motivation would develop (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Contrasting documentation does exist, providing a guide to understanding the forms of parent involvement which actually cause students to decrease their school engagement. A study done across multiple ethnic groups including, Asian American, Hispanic, Caucasian, and African American students (Fan et al., 2012) found parent communication between parents and schools regarding negative behavioral and academic issues caused students to feel less confident in their academic abilities as well as disengaging in their schooling. Focusing attention only on negative behaviors may damage a student’s view of the potential positive outcomes that can occur from parent-school communication.

Stemming from parent expectations is the idea that parental beliefs can be viewed as a starting point to how a family structures home literacy experiences and the type of space created for them (Weigel et al., 2006). Home literacy experiences provide the initial development of literacy acquisition; therefore, it is important to identify how parental beliefs impact the home literacy experiences that are valued by different families. Weigel et al. focused specifically on the mother’s literacy beliefs and how those beliefs related to parts of the home literacy environment and children’s developing literacy skills. By examining the data there were two types of mothers that were defined by the study. Facilitative mothers included mothers who took an active role in teaching their child (Weigel). Being active reflects an internal motivation that requires the mother to make learning a priority. These mothers frequently read books with their
children and believed that by providing children with interactions with print and oral language they would help to foster behaviors and knowledge that will support formal school instruction (Weigel). An important piece of facilitative mothers is that they are concerned with creating experiences that will support their child’s formal schooling. It is beneficial to the child if the parent is able to provide values that are similar to school. The other set of mothers were labeled conventional and described having beliefs that there was not much they could do to prepare their child for formal school instruction (Weigel). It is likely through daily routines that the children of conventional mothers are still interacting with print and oral language in some form, but it seems that if parents are unable to provide values of literacy within their home children may find challenges when they enter school. If mothers are unable to find ways to introduce written language then hopefully they can provide a model for their child who is able to display importance of reading and writing by exhibiting their own positive literacy interaction such as reading for pleasure and writing to convey meaning. Weigel et al. found that facilitative mother’s children were showing interest in reading book independently and had strong knowledge of print and emergent writing skills. This study focusing only on the mother puts a lot of pressure on just one family members, but as other studies show (Dearing et al., 2006; Reglin et al., 2012), there is responsibility placed on the family as a unit and the environment as a whole.

Parent involvement is a part of early literacy development and can be a predictor of later literacy achievement (Reglin, 2012; Senechal, 2009). Promoting strong values of literacy should be a common practice in households of all children in order to provide the initial building block for children’s literacy acquisition. Culture and family structure play a role in the development of
home literacy experiences and the format of a home literacy environment. The next section identifies home literacy experiences of students who are at-risk of becoming struggling readers.

**Home Literacy Experiences of At-Risk Students and Children with Disabilities**

Children who are at-risk of becoming struggling readers and having low academic achievement is an essential area to investigate in order to decrease the achievement gap. Children are more likely to have reading difficulties in the future and entering school with limited phonemic awareness abilities than their peers if they come from families who speak a language other than English or have been identified having low-income status (Baroody & Diamond, 2010; Froiland, Powell, Diamond, & Son, 2013). With early literacy skills being such strong predictors of later reading ability, exploring at-risk preschool children is justified. Socio-economic well-being has become a predictor of home literacy environments and experiences. Children of middle-income communities often have access to a variety of literacy resources while children who come from poor communities rely mostly on public institutions for literacy experiences (Froiland et al., 2013). Families are encouraged to utilize their public library in order to provide a literacy-rich environment, but if only library visits are limited, children are missing out on valuable exposure to print, written language, and potential oral language exchanges. This shocking evidence is alarming considering “poor literacy skills in elementary school strongly predict underdeveloped literacy skills throughout the school years” (Froiland et al., p. 755).

Gillanders and Jiménez (2004) have noted “the importance of education achievement of minority children increases every year as the population of the USA becomes more linguistically and culturally diverse” (p. 243). As this number continues to grow, there should be concentrated
efforts being made as an educator to learn and master instructional approaches that will benefit
academic achievement and literacy acquisition for children who are learning English. Children
who are English Language Learners (ELL) or who have immigrant parents are part of the at-risk
population of students that continues to grow in this country (Loera, Rueda & Nakamoto, 2011). ELL’s require extra support from teachers and service providers including implementation of
learning strategies that will promote literacy acquisition. Data collected from the National
Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2007) found that Latino children constitute
almost 20% of the nation’s K-12 population and 79% of those students are ELL’s who have
limited economic resources. The NCELA also found that Latino students are trailing behind
their European-American peers and continue to struggle with acquiring the fundamental
knowledge and skills to become proficient readers. It is evident that parent involvement,
aspirations, and expectations in Latino families play a legitimate role in regards to literacy
acquisition (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Loera et al., 2011). There have been contrasting
studies revolving around parent involvement of the Latino population. Loera et al. identifies
studies where Latino parents were less involved in their child’s education as a result of feeling
misinformed, unsure of the role they play in their child’s education, intimidated by school staff
and teachers, or they feel by integrating themselves into the school environment that they are
meddling in teacher business. Latino parents are strongly linked to the belief that learning to
read occurs through formal instruction (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004). Therefore, interacting
with text through a shared reading with a parent or assisting a parent to write a shopping list are
not valued. Exploring text informally does not lead to learning to read in the eyes of some
Latino families. On the opposite spectrum, Ada and Zubizarreta (2001) found Latino families to
have a strong desire to be a part of their child’s school events in order to foster academic success.
Their study found that Latino parents have a goal of their children successfully learning English while maintaining their Spanish language and culture. Bilingualism can have implications for Latino children’s literacy learning considering it has been found that knowing two languages has positive impacts on metalinguistic awareness (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004). In other words, students who speak two languages are likely to have abilities to think about language and the meaning that extends beyond the letters in print and being able to recognize the structure of language. Typically, parent beliefs in literacy learning depend upon formal education available or afforded by their socio-economic status or the forms of literacy they have access to according to Gillanders & Jiménez. This information seems to highlight the importance of parent-school communication because with cultural barriers causing few opportunities for literacy experiences, it seems like the next step would be to enlist school support to strengthen family literacy values. Even with cultural differences on how literacy acquisition occurs, most Latino parents acknowledge that effective reading skills and education from the United States can equate to better job opportunities, higher living standards and the ability to assist less fortunate relatives (Loera et al., 2011); therefore, Latino parents place value on the academic achievements of their children.

It seems fitting to highlight the Latino families whose children are finding success in the US education systems and reading at levels above their peers. Gillanders and Jiménez (2004) studied Latino children who displayed high levels of emergent literacy in school. They found that these families were able to provide the type of help from home that supported school values, such as offering direction instruction in areas of learning the alphabet and letters in the child’s name. One of the families was consistent in requesting children to write, placing emphasis on graph-phonetic cues (letters and sounds), using workbooks, and comparing vocabulary in text to
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other forms of literacy around. While other families were not as focused on explicit instruction, but offered discussion around functional reading opportunities such as reading road signs and grocery lists. Shared book reading is linked closely with children’s literacy development and is not a common practice in the homes of low-income Latino families (Gillanders & Jiménez). Although, the families who were a part of this study were requesting the classroom teacher to send home books in Spanish which increased the frequency of read alouds. These Latino families identify with a foreign culture, low socio-economic status, and speak English as a second language, but these children were challenging the deficit theory in that what would normally be a prediction of low literacy skills, they developed skills comparable or above their peers. These families allowed for continuities from school to home. These families took encouragement from schools seriously and were willing to adapt to new circumstances. Parent involvement plays a pivotal role in the development of Latino children and Loera et al. (2011) suggests that schools encourage family involvement after finding a positive relationship related to Latino parent involvement and children’s reading engagement. Parents should play an active role in their child’s education by going beyond listening and reading to their child, but also pursuing literacy resources is a critical part of the process.

Coming closer to narrowing the gap of literacy requires a larger focus of the children who are at-risk for developing reading disabilities or who are struggling to reach the same literacy goals as their peers. Breit-Smith, Cabell and Justice (2010) suggest “children with disabilities are one group of children who often experience significant reading difficulties in reading and writing in both the emergent and later stages of literacy development” (p. 99), documenting 64% of children with disabilities in fourth grade reading below grade level compared to 36% of typically developing children. Students with disabilities are a group of children who need more
meaningful home literacy experiences. Home practices may require more than the parent-child interactions that are usually investigated. Dolezal-Sams, Nordquist, and Twardosz (2009) have suggested there is more to explore than the typical family literacy program structure which encourages daily integration of print, frequent library visits, and teaching parents how to read to their children; therefore, there needs to be attention placed upon the everyday life of a child’s family, how time management is utilized within the home, the physical features of the home and the family relationships. Families who have children with a disability may be struggling with the demands of daily life and the challenges that may arise by having a child with a disability. Dolezal-Sams et al. introduces the possibility that time does not allow for frequent literacy interactions in the home when families must devote ample amount of time to therapy travels and extra time spent developing self-care practices. Parents may have their priorities arranged differently because of this factor. Carlson, Bitterman and Jenkins (2012) research extends this idea by revealing that parents of children with disabilities placed less value on literacy skills and aimed their efforts on improving self-care and communication skills. It should also be taken into account that children with disabilities may hinder reading experiences with their family based on behavior associated with a child’s disability, such as opposing parent’s wishes or their inability to pay attention (Dolezal-Sams et al.) The study conducted by Dolezal-Sams et al. spends time looking at features of the home and identifying any family activity within the home that may impede upon quality literacy interactions. Some of the problems that families faced who participated in this study reported reading one to three times per week had difficulty establishing a routine incorporating book-reading, inviting other family members to help keep distractions to a minimum or making reading materials accessible. The families who read to their children daily were able to provide predictable routines that included one of the challenging features mentioned
above. All parents of the study were capable of reading to their child in an appropriate fashion. The research implicates that families need to make adjustments in their schedules, physical space and recruiting assistance from family members who are available.

Exploring young children’s literacy development is important because at this stage a child is beginning to structure their knowledge and values of reading, writing, and oral language. Understanding the types of home literacy experiences that young children are exposed to have been identified as formal and informal (Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Formal literacy experiences include the activities where parents are explicitly teaching children to read and write. Informal literacy involves parent-child interactions that involve discussion to increase comprehension versus focusing on the print. A study of children identified with reading disabilities at an early age concluded that the home literacy environment (evaluating mostly formal experiences) did not account for inconsistencies in reading skills such as, decoding, reading comprehension and spelling (Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005). The study did find that the literacy experiences children observed their parents taking part in was a predictor of reading comprehension. One might suppose that parents who had increased literacy interaction themselves might be more equipped to create more informal home literacy experiences surrounding dialogue of a text. When looking at preschoolers with disabilities Carlson, Bitterman, and Jenkins (2012) have identified that the home literacy scale outcomes of children with a low severity disability (specific disabilities were not mentioned) was a predictor of measured receptive vocabulary and reading comprehension, but no significance was identified in children with more severe disabilities. Similarly, children with specific language impairment found that it was the quality of home literacy which contributed to predicting a child’s print knowledge (McGinty & Justice, 2009). This disability has not been classified as a low,
A LOOK AT HOME LITERACY EXPERIENCES

moderate, or severe type. Adding attention difficulties to specific language impairments has shown to pose added risk to print knowledge, which supports Breit-Smith et al.’s (2010) finding that children with multiple disabilities had less exposure and opportunities to interact with print than children who had a single disability. Children who struggle with monitoring their own behavior may be creating barriers for home literacy experiences to occur on a frequent basis. Also children who have poor language skills may have a difficult time understanding language instruction in general (Baroody & Diamond, 2010). By expanding the research on what the home literacy environment looks like of children with more severe disabilities, specifically down syndrome Al Otaiba, Lewis, Whalon, Dyrlund and McKenzie (2009) found that more than 75% of children with down syndrome who were in emergent literacy stages had what could be interpreted as low literacy goals for their children, stating they were aiming for their child to identify the letters of the alphabet instead of heightened expectations such as, reading for meaning. With a goal of only letter identification, parents are holding their children back from the true purpose of reading. Making meaning of text and print allows one to function within society. A survey given to parents of typically developing children and children with disabilities presented that children without disabilities were able to recognize more letters of the alphabet and able to write their names independently (Breit-Smith et al., 2010). Maybe there is justification in the lower expectation of families of children with more severe disabilities, but there is no research documented that would explain those parents not wanting more amplified reading goals. Families of children who have down syndrome also were reporting having more than 50 children’s books inside their homes, reading to their children daily and using a variety of reading materials (Al Otaiba et al., 2009), without assessing these children’s emergent literacy abilities formally, it is leaving room for exploration. Although, Breit-Smith et al. (2010)
concluded no substantial differences in the frequency of home literacy activities being reported in the homes of children with and without disabilities which challenges the theory that children with disabilities have disadvantaged literacy experiences. There still seems to be open-endedness in regards to children with more severe disabilities and there is room for conclusive research on factors such as, if the home literacy environment is a positive factor for these children’s reading comprehension and other literacy skills.

A focus on children who are at-risk for reading difficulties need support as they develop their literacy skills. Consideration of culture and a child’s disability should be a significant factor in guiding a teacher’s literacy instruction. Reading being an essential area that forecasts a child’s success as a functioning adult of society (Baroody & Diamond, 2010) requires further development of the types of interventions needed to promote literacy achievement.

**Strategies to Improve Home Literacy Experiences**

When we think of ways to improve the quality of home literacy experiences, it seems that intervention opportunities provided by the school can help to extend effective literacy practices into the home (Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). The school can play a pivotal role in supporting parents at home with their child’s literacy development. Learning to read and reading performance is closely related to the family literacy environment (Cook-Cottone, 2004; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). Families may need assistance in recognizing effective literacy environments. Teachers and staff should first identify the structure of the existing home literacy environment and aid families in how to build upon the framework they are already providing. Family provides the cultural structure and order which is constantly being shaped by the experiences each family takes part in (Pransky & Bailey, 2003). Some students face the cultural
mismatch from home to school and there are efforts being made to narrow the gap by focusing on blending concepts of school success, literacy, and parent-child interactions through the schools efforts to develop family literacy programs. A family literacy program typically is developed using a multi-component approach involving parent participation in a number of concise workshops where the families are coached on how to effectively use a variety of literacy strategies with their child from home (Cook-Cottone, 2004; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). Professional learning communities would be one of the best methods to ensure that a variety of research-based practices are being used. The strategies introduced are chosen specifically to provide effective communication of literacy knowledge from parent to child (Cook-Cottone, 2004). Without this information, parents may struggle to know what practices are developmentally appropriate for their child. Saint-Laurent and Giasson (2005) have found that family literacy programs which include book reading with parents, support for writing activities, and providing enjoyable literacy activities at home positively impact the reading achievement and writing scores of students in first grade. With a team in place to design an effective family literacy practice, it is imperative to include each of the previously mentioned criteria. The family literacy program Saint-Laurent and Giasson designed required parents to attend nine workshops over the course of the school year where the content of the workshops varied and included: book reading, importance of manipulating letters of the alphabet to encourage invented spelling, functional reading and writing, listening to your child read, and writing plays. Children whose parents attended each workshop scored higher on a reading achievement assessment than those students whose parents were not provided with literacy resources that can be used at home. The use of scaffolding strategies is limited by parents when supporting their child during at-home reading. Parents who attended the workshops reported that their style of intervention with
reading activities shifted which suggests that amplified parental scaffolding skills aid school performance in reading (Saint-Laurent & Giasson).

Similarly, a study conducted by Cook-Cottone (2004) found that a family literacy program caused growth in the areas of context strategies, decoding strategies, and structural analysis in children between the ages of seven and twelve. Cook-Cottone’s family literacy program had a goal of turning parents into literacy mentors. Through the duration of the family literacy program, Cook-Cottone highlights how the program allows families to take the tools learned from the workshops and modify the strategies to fit the child’s household and cultural practices. Parents were trained in a variety of areas including read alouds, decoding and phonics, sight words and creative written expression. One difference in Cook-Cottone’s study was that there was a focus on making the program available for bilingual students and their families. There is significant evidence that shows Latino children typically fall behind English-speaking children in terms of reading achievement (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004); therefore, bilingual families should be an influential part of the design of family literacy programs.

Teachers send home daily homework assignments and it is common to have nightly reading as a piece of an assignment. Family literacy programs are designed for families to practice new skills (Cook-Cottone, 2004). One of the many benefits of the program is the introduction of different materials that can be used in the home to ensure quality literacy experiences from home. Cook-Cottone was able to provide items for families including, dry-erase boards, family syllable games, and reading strategy game supplies. Introducing parents to the variety of tools that can be used in the home beyond their family’s literature is going to improve the quality of home literacy experiences. Some parents find difficulty in understanding their child’s challenges in reading and feel they are not equipped to help from home (Kabuto,
By providing materials or even verbal examples of materials that may either be found in the home or purchased inexpensively, parents' confidence in their ability to promote literacy experiences from home increases. One study on Mexican immigrant parents and their kindergarten children (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004) found that parents of bilingual students did not initiate shared reading at home because they did not have many books in Spanish or English. Parents should be able to use their child’s school as a valuable resource and feel comfortable to request more books be sent home to ensure that their child is reading outside of the classroom doors. Parents can become more knowledgeable and competent in useful literacy tools by committing to a family literacy program (Cook-Cottone, 2004). The benefits of a family literacy program are only going to strengthen child literacy skills. It requires a dedicated team of teachers, reading specialists, and administrators to introduce a new family literacy program within their schools. The evidence shows the positive impact they have on student reading achievement (Cook-Cottone, 2004; Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Morrow, Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2006).

One piece of reading instruction includes working with students to become fluent readers (Morrow, Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2006). Fluency is one piece of reading that can help a child to further their reading comprehension skills. In Morrow et al.’s study of family literacy programs that were working to create more fluent readers, parents were really connecting to the school curriculum and practices through their participation. This study required parents to attend three parent workshops. The training that was provided allowed parents to observe a demonstration and take part in echo reading, choral reading, and partner reading. These are three fluency strategies that can easily be done at home, but parents first need proper instruction on what each of these look like. Using these strategies with one text helps with decoding,
understanding the text, new vocabulary, and being able to apply appropriate expression through repetition (Morrow et al.). Repeated readings can easily become part of a family’s daily routine by designating at least one special time for the child to orally read, but offering a variety of opportunities to perform their oral read would be best. This family literacy program which focused on fluency, explained the importance of oral reading suggesting that children are provided with a good model for reading and creating a sense of community when they are a part of this practice (Morrow et al.). The challenge in the beginning may be the find a space to fit this practice into the daily routine. When a parent and child are participating in an oral read the opportunity for think alouds arise (Kabuto, 2012). Thinking aloud promotes awareness of different features of a text. Children as readers are learning to identify problem-solving strategies and think alouds create the room for exploratory discussion between a skilled reader and themselves (Barnes, 1993). Modeling for young readers is beneficial to helping children identify what fluent reading looks and sounds like. Through exploratory talk, children are participating in an exchange with another person causing them to restructure old ideas into new ones (Kabuto, 2012). This reformation of a child’s schema can provide as a means of knowledge construction. While oral readings improve fluency, they can cause significant discussion in the areas of exploring written language and create and confirm predictions (Kabuto) which will strengthen the reader’s comprehension of a text. Talking about text can lead to making inferences, predictions, and summarizing. All of which are components of reading which convey a reader’s comprehension. Morrow et al. (2006) integrated the oral reading into the family literacy program alongside specific oral reading strategies (choral reading, echo reading, and partner reading) which resulted in positive outcomes regarding parent involvement and student reading achievement. Teachers were commenting on the improvement of the struggling readers
in their class as a result of the repeated readings which required parents to implement the oral reading strategies.

Morrow et al. (2006) suggests that with increased fluency, meaning appropriate pacing, expression, and phasing, children increase their comprehension. Constructing meaning is one of the most important aspects of reading, even before accuracy. Hindin and Paratore (2007) explain “readers need to reach a point at which word recognition is an automatic process requiring limited attention by the reader so they will be able to dedicate attention to meaning construction as they read” (p. 310). The importance of a child reading at their instructional level or independent level is important when strengthening fluency. Checking the appropriateness of a text is imperative. Fluency increases automaticity and Hindin and Paratore found similarly to Morrow et al. (2006) that repeated readings at home are an effective way to produce more fluent readers in the classroom. Listen to a child oral read promotes discussion about the things that the parent heard during the read and gives children a change to practice again after receiving feedback. The study conducted by Hindin and Paratore (2007) required participants who were low performing readers in their second grade classrooms. They were inspired to perform their own action research in order to help struggling readers who may not be receiving quality literacy experiences at home. Children who were a part of the study were sent home with take-home story and audiotapes. Families were asked to record each reading at home to permit accurate analysis of each reading. From repeated readings four times per week at home with a parent, children in the study made considerable gains in regards to their accuracy and fluency of the take-home text. These students were also assessed independently on areas of word reading, oral reading, reading fluency, and reading comprehension which showed growth for all students. Hindin and Paratore were pleased to find that the repeated readings were able to advance overall
reading knowledge and improvement was not specific to just the take-home stories. In other words, improvement would continue to present itself with similar types of text. Repeated readings is a successful home literacy strategy because they are easy to understand and initiate and do not take too much time (Morrow et al., 2006). When discussing strategies that will encourage children to take part in literacy activities at home, it is important to remember a key to the success of home literacy is the integration and support provided by parents.

Researchers, Kabuto (2009) and Mansell, Evans, and Hamilton-Hulak (2005), have found the importance of introducing miscue analysis to parents with the goal of helping parents recognize their child’s reading strengths. Miscue analysis is a strategy used more often in classrooms and will encourage valuable dialogue between parents and their child. The concept of miscue analysis presented by Kabuto and Mansell et al. requires parent and child interaction by listening intently to an oral read and allowing the reading to guide a discussion of the strengths and areas of need of their child as a reader. Kabuto (2012) has built his research on miscue analysis and oral reading events “on a Vygotskian perspective on how talk mediates and contributes to knowledge” (p. 170). This promotes the idea that learning happens in a social context. Shared book reading is a heavily research-based strategy which identifies the relationship between parent and child orally sharing a piece of literature together to be beneficial to a child’s early literacy skills and further, early achievement is predictive of later achievement (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2012; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). Book reading at home lends itself naturally to discussion about story features, illustrations, and communicating how one relates to the text. Often parents have greater concern for their child to read with accuracy and appropriate speed, but parents should be shifting their focus to recognize reading as comprehension (Kabuto, 2009). Reading for meaning can make reading more enjoyable if the
child realizes they can focus on how they relate to story versus getting every single word correct in a sentence. In order for a parent to be a strategic reading partner from home, they must be able to address high-quality miscues made through their child’s oral reading (Kabuto). Most parents do not hold the term miscue in their personal vocabulary and need support from schools to turn this into a successful strategy used at home. A miscue is a produced response that is different than the anticipated response in the text (Kabuto). If students are reading texts at their instructional level based on their reading abilities, it is likely that a miscue or error will turn up in their oral read. The miscue can only be identified if a child is reading aloud. Kabuto focused on the high-quality miscue, which is an error that does not change the meaning of the sentence or story. This type of miscue proves the reader is making attempts to construct meaning. Analyzing and discussing miscues is a technique used during guided reading sessions and daily instruction in the classroom and there are great benefits that can come from weaving this strategy into at-home read alouds. Parents are typically focused on accuracy and jump in quickly to correct miscues. There are two questions that parents need to center their child’s miscue around: Does it make sense within the sentence and is it grammatically acceptable? (Kabuto). The next step is discussing the miscues. Choosing to discuss high-quality miscues promotes for exploration of the text. Parents should focus on scaffolding and giving clues to encourage children to try again (Mansell et al., 2005). Continued practice with miscue analysis will lead parents to becoming more comfortable with identifying high-quality miscues and to reduce the need to quickly correct their child. The studies conducted by both Kabuto and Mansell et al. (2005) sparked revelation in parents regarding the strengths and abilities of their children and that there was actually comprehension even with miscues. These studies were able to correct the misconception of miscues equaling a negative behavior. As children moved forward into higher
grades, Mansell et al. (2005) found that parents were ignoring miscues as they were able to recognize the high-quality miscue which meant their child was still able to make meaning, the correct meaning, of the text. It is evident that with repetition over time and guidance from a professional, parents can become strategic reading partners at home.

Much of what was discussed in this section emphasizes the importance of not only parent involvement, but the benefits to a child’s reading achievement based on the support from schools. Parents are more equipped to help their child from home due to workshops and materials being sent home. There has to be communication between parents and schools to ensure that parents are evolving into reading mentors and strategic reading partners by implementing research-based methods and strategies from home.

The three themes that were introduced will influence the current research. The effects of parent involvement on student achievement are evidently beneficial to overall academic achievement as well as development of literacy skills. The home literacy experiences for students who are part of an at-risk population, English language learners (ELL’s), and children with disabilities require extended support from school administration, teachers, and parents. There are strategies that can be implemented to improve home literacy experiences. Parent support can go beyond the shared reading experiences that are encouraged during the early stages of literacy development. Many strategies that support effective home literacy practices require school to home connections or mild parent coaching. Parent involvement at home requires families to hold high value of their child’s literacy acquisition.
Method

Context

The research for this study will take place in the family home of the focus child, Dante Taylor (pseudonyms for the student and his family members will be used). Most of the study will take place in their living area, which has a small round table to work on or at the kitchen table. The Taylor home is made up of two parents (mother and father), Dante, and his younger sister, Corrina. The Taylor family lives in a raised ranch style home in a suburb of Western New York.

A small portion of the study will take place in the elementary school Dante currently attends. According to the New York State District Report Card, the Taylor family’s district was comprised of 11,478 students in the 2011-2012 school year. Forty percent of those students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches. The student population was made up 74% Caucasian, 13% African American, 9% Hispanic, and 3% Asian during the given school year.

Participants

Dante is a kindergartner who turned five in October 2013. He is in his first year attending a public school facility. Dante attended a Montessori preschool beginning at the age of three where he started his early childhood education. He is half white and half African American. Dante comes from a family of higher socioeconomic background. Dante lives at home with both of his parents and spends a significant amount of time with his mother’s parents. His grandmother is a retired elementary school principal and his grandfather is retired from a transit company in the area. Both Dante’s mother and grandmother are weekly volunteers in his kindergarten classroom. Dante reports that he likes school and his favorite part of the day is when they do art. He is an active boy with high energy and enjoys interactive, hands-on
activities. Dante’s reading abilities will be assessed in the areas of sight word ability and determining his instructional reading level using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment system. Dante is currently receiving speech services at school.

Dante’s mother, Lucy Taylor, will be participating in most of the sessions. Lucy attended a prestigious college of Rochester for management and hospitality, as well as studying the culinary arts abroad in Italy. She now commutes to a shop for work in a close by town where she creates fresh pasta dishes daily. Mrs. Taylor is able to ensure the completion of homework assignments and check Dante’s parent communication folder each night.

Dante’s grandmother, Vivian Costello, will be participating through her submission of a literacy activity tracking chart. Mrs. Costello spends 3-4 hours each afternoon with her grandson after school. Dante’s grandmother is the primary caretaker when he has been released from school as his mother’s work schedule does not permit her to leave work until the evening. Mrs. Costello is a retired educator. She spent her final years in administration as a principal in the same district Dante currently attends school.

Dante’s classroom teacher was approached by the researcher in order to identify the teacher, school, and district expectations surrounding parent involvement. After meeting with the teacher and having a face to face interview that was not recorded, the teacher’s responses could not be used for the purposes of this study. Leah Baker, a teacher in a city school district will be participating by responding to interview questions via email. Mrs. Baker has been teaching in a city school district for four years as an ESOL teacher. She holds her teacher certification in TESOL, grades birth-12. She works with children who speak English as a second language by pulling small groups of children who have similar academic goals for thirty minute sessions daily. Mrs. Baker works in a school where there are K-6 grade students. She primarily
works with students K-2, but also teaches third grade students. I was curious to gain her perspective of parent involvement as an educator and as a parent of a preschool-aged emergent reader.

**Researcher Stance**

Currently, I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College working toward my Master’s of Science in Literacy Education, birth through grade 12. I hold a Bachelor’s degree in English which I earned from The College at Brockport. I hold New York State teacher certifications in Early Childhood and Childhood Education, and Students with Disabilities Early Childhood and Childhood Education. Throughout the course of this study I acted as both an active participant observer and a passive observer. I initiated sessions as a passive observer by observing the family’s implementation of the various strategies, meaning I did not interact with the student or his parents (Mills, 2014). Intently listening and watching the family’s interaction was the primary focus. Through observation I did focus on how the parent interacts with her child during each activity and the typical teacher responsibilities were held at bay (Mills). I acted as an active participant observer when the moment required me to intervene in the family’s natural execution of a strategy and through modeling and discussion, I taught the family ways to enhance their home literacy practices (Mills).

**Method**

The purpose of this study is to observe the participating family while they are partaking in literacy activities or implementing strategies introduced by myself. I have collected qualitative and quantitative data over the course of the study. There were seven 45 minute long sessions where the student and mother participated in several activities surrounding literacy which included a sight word game, a read aloud, working with word patterns using magnetic
letters and a white board, a grade level appropriate sight word activity packet, and parent support while the child read a leveled text (where the focus was miscue analysis and during reading teaching points). The first and last visits were mainly to initiate discussion with parent and child, clarify any aspects of the study and assess the student’s reading and sight word ability. The goal of my first visit was to assess the student’s reading abilities by determining his instructional reading level by taking a running reading record using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark System and evaluate the student’s sight word abilities by introducing the first 25 sight words on the Fry Word List: First 100. During this visit, field notes were taken to document the session as well as evidence of the types of literacy resources and text availability to the student that was identified upon my stay. The initial visit allowed for the participating parent and I to discuss the study more in depth (beyond the parent letter) and the parent was given a questionnaire (Appendix A) which reflected her beliefs about whether or not learning occurs from home, what types of interaction with text and other literacy activities her child has, and what type of involvement the adult has in the participating student’s school environment. The literacy activity tracking chart (Appendix B) was distributed to the family where it was hung on the refrigerator as a reminder to fill out daily. The tracking sheet requested the parent to note any/all activities where the child was interacting with text throughout the week. The form also required the parent to note who participated and there was a space for any observations or comments. Each 45 minute session was held on its own individual day and the focus was on one specified strategy each time. The first strategy introduced was a sight word game (Appendix C). I explained the directions to the parent and child and we began to play the game together as it was a multi-player game. Observations were written down in my field notebook. The focus of the next session was to observe parent and child during a shared reading experience.
After observing the parent reading with her child, we discussed strengths and weaknesses I identified. I modeled types of questions, how to initiate visualizing, predicting, and how to make text-to-self connections during a read aloud to the parent. The third activity involved a magnetized alphabet and a white board and using these tools to excite the child about building words and working with certain word patterns. I observed the parent and her dialogue with her child to engage him in using the materials to write and make words using the magnets. I modeled how to choose sight words or one specific word pattern at a time when encouraging the child to make words. The fourth activity included a sight word activity packet (Appendix D). Initially, the mother was not present while I began working with the student. When she became available, she observed my interactions with her child and the dialogue of support I was adding as the child worked through the three-page packet.

The final strategy that was focused on was miscue analysis and during reading teaching points. The student was given a level A text where I observed how the parent supported her child as he read through an instructional level, but somewhat challenging text. The parent and I switched roles and she observed the different teaching points I offered as well as what errors during the read I focused on. The final visit with the family included a post-assessment of the same 25 sight words and a running reading record of a leveled text (not a Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark text). I conducted an interview with the parent (Appendix E) which she responded to eight questions and the interview was recorded and later transcribed.

In order to include Dante’s grandmother’s responses to the literacy activity tracking chart, she was emailed two charts with one being for the first week and another for the second week of the study. Only one tracking chart was collected on the final visit and a signed informed consent form. Dante’s grandmother also completed the initial parent questionnaire in order to
gain insight on her beliefs regarding parent involvement and her own involvement in her grandson’s education.

There was interest in comparing the Taylor family’s understanding of parent involvement, how they actually carried out their involvement in regards to their son’s literacy development and the school community to the responses that would be collected from the student’s classroom teacher. After conducting an interview with the teacher that was not recorded it was determined that we were unable to reschedule. In order to gain the perspective of an educator’s beliefs surrounding parent involvement, an ESOL teacher, Leah Baker, who works in the primary grades (K-2) of a different school district, completed the interview via email (Appendix F).

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

Action research requires the teacher researcher to provide evidence of their promise to ensure the quality and credibility of a study. The present study reflects the characteristics that make a study trustworthy according to Mills (2014) who cites Guba (1981). Those characteristics that are emphasized by Mills (2014) are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and each of the four components will be addressed within this study.

A pertinent part of achieving credibility requires the researcher to have the flexibility necessary to modify their actions and responses based on the complications that may present themselves during a study (Mills, 2014). In order to achieve credibility, I chose to value a reflective space created through discussion with a critical colleague. Mills suggests to take part in peer debriefing. During my interactions with my critical colleague, our goal as a team was to pose questions, provide feedback and listen to each other in order to identify and comprehend the
meaning behind complex results. Researchers must be ready to obtain unexpected data which required me to reflect on what was observed.

The second component to providing a credible and quality body of research requires transferability. Mills (2014) defines transferability as “the researchers beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is to facilitate the developments of descriptive, context-relevant statements” (p. 116). Conducting a study that has transferability means the researcher will provide various forms of descriptive data. I was able to provide transferability by collecting several types of data which brought about questions and cause others interested in the content to reveal their understanding of where the current research may fit into different contexts (Mills).

Dependability is the third component necessary to design a quality study. This concept requires the researcher to provide data that is stable (Mills, 2014) meaning that multiple forms of data that can may analyzed by your peers is delivering dependability. I have accumulated field notes, documenting observations and family work, and collecting questionnaires which helps to establish an audit trail (Mills). I have provided my peers the opportunity to examine the methods I used and the data that I collected.

In addition to credibility, transferability, and dependability, the fourth component, confirmability, will be addressed with equal value. Confirmability is defined by Guba (1981) as the “neutrality of objectivity of the data that has been collected” (Mills, 2014, p. 116). Confirmability is achieved by practicing triangulation throughout the study (Mills) which I have exercised through my multiple methods of data collection. I have measured student growth at the beginning and end of the study, questionnaires have been collected, informal interviews, and field notes of direct observation assist me in obtaining neutral outcomes.
Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before entering into the data collection phase of the present study, the parents received a permission letter which clearly outlined the purpose of the study as well as their own and their child’s role. I requested written confirmation that the child was being given parent permission to participate in the study. The child gave verbal assent that he was willing to participate in the study as well. The mother of the participating child received and signed an informed consent form in order for her to participate in the study alongside her child. The classroom teacher and student’s grandmother were contacted through email where I outlined the purpose of the study and what their role would potentially be upon their agreement to participate. The classroom teacher and student’s grandmother were each given their own informed consent form which was returned signed. As the study developed, the classroom teacher was no longer willing to take part in the study. Another classroom teacher in a different school and district was found and she was first given an informed consent form which she signed and returned to me before responding to interview questions via email. In order to protect the privacy of all participants involved, every person remains anonymous through use of pseudonyms as well as the area the family resides.

Data Collection

After completing my study with the Taylor family, I now have collected multiple forms of data through each of my visits. I have reviewed and analyzed the data to best interpret my findings. Data was collected through a parent questionnaire. The purpose of the parent questionnaire was to determine the parental beliefs surrounding literacy, the parent’s view of the different literacy activities they work on with their child, and their involvement with the school community. A parent interview was conducted to determine what strategies introduced by the
researcher were thought of as valuable, what strategies will continue within the family’s home, to identify any noticeable changes in the child in regards to his interest in reading or writing since the study began, insight on what barriers are present which make it challenging to fit in parent support at home daily, and what types of home-school partnerships are identified by the parent and their personal value of a home-school connection. This interview was recorded at the family’s home. Student assessment (running reading record, Fry Word List) was completed before start of the study and after the study. Field notes/reflections have been documented for each session in the researchers field notebook. One student artifact was collected through the course of the study. The sight word activity packet was the only physical document that could be collected to show student work. It is important for me to find out the parent’s perspective on what types of activities they feel comfortable doing with their child, as well as the home literacy practices being implemented and this was accomplished through questionnaire and interview. Assessing the student before implementing suggested strategies in different areas of literacy and at the end of our time together has provided me with evidence of any progress or regression over the course of the study. Cross-examining the data has strengthened my understanding of the family, the student, and their needs and to provide appropriate implications.

Data Analysis

After the final session of working with and observing Dante Taylor and his mother, I had to review the various forms of data collected through each meeting. The different forms of data included pre and post-test evaluations to identify instructional reading level using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment during the pre-test, while a running reading record of an appropriate leveled text was used for the post-test, pre and post sight word assessment, questionnaires, literacy activity tracking charts, interviews, field notes, and student work. By
examining each form of data I was able to better understand what had been achieved during the meetings with the Taylor family in regards to student learning and development, if any parent growth had surfaced, and the types of parent involvement that were occurring naturally inside the family’s home and the student’s school community. I coded the information collected through the course of the study by reading, reviewing, and analyzing all of it several times until I was clear of the recurring themes that were shining through and any disparities which became evident.

To begin analyzing my data I chose to start by coding the literacy activity tracking chart, questionnaires and interviews. The literacy activity tracking charts (Appendix B) were completed by the participating student’s mother and grandmother. Both family members spend an ample amount of time with the child after school and it was important for me to know how they went about engaging the child in literacy activities and check for patterns. The family members were requested to record the different activities they participated in with their child. The charts allowed me to determine how the mother and grandmother were involved in the target student’s literacy learning from home. The charts also helped me to decide if our sessions were influencing the activities that were taking place on the days we would not meet. The questionnaires were coded next to better understand the parent beliefs and how parents felt they could support their child’s literacy learning from home. The interview responses were analyzed next. By looking at both the parent/exit interview and the teacher interview responses, I was able to compare the beliefs and expectations each had surrounding parent involvement and identify any correlations.

The questionnaires, literacy tracking charts, and interviews were then compared to the pre and post assessment data, student work, and my field notes. There was a similar purpose upon
review of these last forms of data. I was examining the pre and post assessment data and student work to better identify student growth. I then reviewed and compared my field notes to all of the accessed data where I was able to further recognize themes emerging that were being supported through the rigorous coding procedures. The third and final review of the data was done in order to confirm or disconfirm findings that came through during the first and second set of coding. By reviewing each piece of data thoroughly a final time, I was able to pull out strong pieces of evidence which supported and made me question my own perspective surrounding what I observed and reflected upon during and after each session. After completing a comprehensive analysis of the data, I discovered three themes that led me to organize all of the information in a way that would help me to reveal answers to my research question.

**Findings and Discussion**

Three themes emerging represented by the coded qualitative data: exploration of literacy skills through daily activities, the influence of parent beliefs and the extent of parent involvement, and the level of motivation and engagement of parent and child. Observing the actual home literacy environment, analyzing the recorded literacy tracking charts and interview responses made it apparent that the Taylor family was using oral and written language opportunities and explicit teaching in their home to support their kindergarteners’ literacy development. The questionnaires, interviews, and field notes largely supported the fact that parent beliefs and parent involvement do influence the primary level-aged student in terms of what interactions with literacy the child will have and has an interest in. The same coded data also guided the idea that the level of motivation and engagement of both the parent and the child can be impacted by the opportunities they have to interact with reading and writing activities.
Before exploring the qualitative data and discussing how it supports the three themes I identified above, I will present a look at the participating student’s development that was identified through the pre and post assessment used to evaluate reading development and pre and post assessment data of 25 sight words which came from Fry’s First 100 list of sight words that most kindergarteners are encountering in their classroom.

Assessing the participating student in the areas of reading and sight word recognition was necessary in order to help identify any areas of need, strengths and in order to determine if there were any positive gains of the student’s literacy achievement by participating in the study. By addressing the quantitative data first, I will be able to determine the effects meeting with the Taylor family had on Dante had on his reading ability and sight word ability. Below, table one illustrates the pre and post assessment scores of a leveled text.

Table 1

*Pre and Post Reading Assessment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accuracy Rate</th>
<th>Error Rate</th>
<th>Self-Correction Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Assessment</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>1:0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Assessment</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>1:10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By reviewing the quantitative data, it looks as though minor progress has been made in the area of reading achievement. Dante read 75% of the pre-assessment text accurately and his accuracy rate actually dropped when assessed at the end of the study. The 1% drop in Dante’s accuracy rate suggests that the home literacy experiences Dante was exposed to over the course of the study did not influence his decoding ability. His ability to decode unfamiliar words in the text did not improve. By reviewing and analyzing the pre and post running records, it is important to
mention that most of the errors Dante made in the post-reading allowed for the meaning of the text to remain and this was not a reading behavior that was identified during the pre-reading. Also, several of the errors Dante made during the post-read were where Dante would read a printed sight word correctly, but out of the order that it was actually written which is coded as an error. The accuracy rate is definitely worth comparing, but it does not equal the measurement of the student’s comprehension which is an essential element of a child’s ability to read. The error rate stayed consistent between the two assessments. After comparing the errors that Dante made in both the pre and post reading assessment, it is evident that progress was made over the course of the study. The pre-assessment shows that Dante’s errors were typically due to the researcher reading an unfamiliar word for him after he had requested help. The student would ask for help before even making an attempt to use visual or contextual clues to determine the unfamiliar word. The post-assessment shows Dante has improved his efforts to try to read an unknown word by using meaning, syntactical, and visual clues to his best ability. The self-correction rate increased significantly from not making any self-corrections at all to making one correction for every ten errors. Not exactly an ideal self-correction rate, but progress was made in regards to the student recognizing his mistakes during his reading. An improvement in self-correction suggests that the concept of miscue analysis discussed and modeled during the session has influenced the student’s corrective skills. If miscue analysis is being employed accurately and effectively during home shared reading experiences, there could be a connection to the types of corrections the student is making on his own. Mrs. Taylor and I discussed that errors which alter the meaning are the most important to focus on. An improvement in Mrs. Taylor’s ability to discuss her child’s errors as he reads is in turn positively affecting the child’s self-correcting abilities. The first text the student read was a level A Fountas and Pinnell benchmark text.
Although, Fountas and Pinnell deem a 75% accuracy rate as a student’s frustational text, the student was not actually upset or showing physical signs of being frustrated. It seems as though he was up for the challenge and wanted to know the words that were unfamiliar to him. During both reading assessments, the student would re-read a sentence after the instructor (myself) assisted him with reading difficult and unfamiliar words. The first assessment, the student was typically sounding unknown words out sound by sound, letter by letter, but he was unable to blend the sounds together in order to come up with a word. The student would not even risk trying a word by guessing at random. Dante’s hesitation to attempt new words could have been due to his discomfort reading with the instructor for the first time. It also was evident that he was not able to use clues from the picture to come up with a word that he thought could make sense. The post-assessment showed the student sounding words out letter by letter such as big, reading first /b/, /i/, /g/, then actually blending the sounds together to accurately read the word big. The student was having a lot of dialogue with himself surrounding how to connect with the picture and even how the story related personally to him. Personal connections help to comprehend a text altogether. The student was making text-to-self connections which were increasing the likelihood of improving his comprehension of the text. There was very limited discussion the first time the student was assessed, as he only spoke to the instructor when he was having trouble with a word. It seems as though his decoding strategies have grown and his ability to recognize his errors by noticing a visual difference in the structure of the word. Although, there were many times when the errors had no letter-sound relationship and the student was just saying what sounded right to him grammatically. Overall, the student may have made more errors, but was often able to continue the same meaning that the text was trying to achieve. Dante was not comfortable attempting unknown words prior to the study and now that
he has had many more opportunities to observe adult reading behaviors and an increase in
dialogue during shared reading experiences, these have influenced Dante’s use of the picture to
help him determine what the text is trying to convey. Using the picture to determine an
unfamiliar word was a strategy that was discussed often with the student informally.

The table below outlines the sight words that the student was able to read when given a
list of the first 25 words list on the Fry’s First 100 list of sight words. There was a significant
improvement in the student’s sight word recognition. During the pre-assessment reading, the
student only recognized six sight words and improved by reading 11 during the post-assessment.
During the study, there was a significant focus on sight word recognition because it seemed that
the student’s limited vocabulary was lowering his accuracy when reading considerably. The
student was given two different strategies to practice sight words with family members and have
continued exposure to them from home (Appendix C & Appendix D).
There is a positive correlation between practicing sight words consistently at home with family members and the ability to read them in isolation. Dante took interest in a game style literacy activity that supported his sight word development and the table illustrates the improvement that can occur when a child has the support of his parents at home to make home-school connections.

**Exploration of Literacy Skills Through Daily Activities**

Upon entering the Taylor home, I requested a tour of the family’s home in order to create a list of the literacy resources accessible to the participating student. It was evident that the child has the opportunity to either observe literate behaviors or engage in age appropriate literacy events or both based upon the list created during my first visit to the family’s home: cook books, large white board with accessible markers at child’s level, picture books, crayons, paper, technology (iPad, laptop), woman’s magazine, college level texts, and foam alphabet bath time.
letters (Field Notes, 1st session, February 20, 2014). Without even conducting a formal investigation of the activities that the participating child engages in with his family, it would seem that there is reading and writing taking place in the Taylor family household. The list of literacy materials taken from my field notes suggests the Taylor family is making attempts to make home-to-school connections by offering materials that are typically used at school such as crayons and picture books. The materials noted such as college level texts and a woman’s magazine reveal that it is very likely that Dante has observed his parents reading with a purpose of learning or for pleasure. There were even items around the home that I noted as opportunities to discuss authentic types of text which correlated to the family’s daily lives such as, various birthday party invitations on the refrigerator, opened pieces of mail, the child’s name spelled out in large letters in his room, and a filled in, dry-erase family calendar (Field notes, 1st session, February 20, 2014). At the time of my first visit I was there with a focus of assessing Dante in reading and sight word identification. It was not until Mrs. Taylor completed the questionnaire did I become aware of the literacy events that Mrs. Taylor recognized were taking place in her home. I was surprised to find that Mrs. Taylor and her son typically read a fictional text before bed and complete homework together on a regular basis (Parent Questionnaire, February 20, 2014). I took notice of the limited types of literacy based activities that were occurring in the home, which did not reflect the many materials/tools that were listed earlier which help to make up Dante’s home literacy environment. The absence of Mrs. Taylor initiating literacy-based activities at home suggests that there may not be an understanding of the types of age-appropriate activities Mrs. Taylor could be implementing from home. Mrs. Costello, Dante’s grandmother, although she does not live in the home, she completed the same questionnaire as the mother due to the significant amount of time she spends babysitting her grandson after
school. Mrs. Costello did not fill in the section of the questionnaire where she was requested to list specific literacy activities, but she did note in one of the earlier questions that she involves herself with her grandchild daily through “instruction and arts and crafts” (Parent Questionnaire, March, 9, 2014). The quantity of instructional activities and arts and crafts that Mrs. Costello initiates with her grandson could be the reason why Mrs. Taylor does not typically incorporate literacy and instructional activities into her daily routine with her son. Froiland, et al. (2012) suggests “early parental involvement increases school readiness skills which greatly influence the academic careers of children” (p. 35) and based on the materials available to Dante in his home and the different types of literacy events he is experiencing based on the questionnaires, this young man is on track to achieve positive academic gains. My only concern up to this point is that it seems Mrs. Taylor may not be aware of all her home is equipped to offer in terms of supporting her son’s literacy development as she listed only utilizing picture books on a regular basis in her questionnaire response. Mrs. Taylor seems to have a restricted understanding of how she can be involved in her child’s literacy development from home. A limited understanding of how to be involved from home could be due to the limited amount of parent education that takes place within Dante’s school. It seems that there must not be enough communication between the school and Mrs. Taylor or else she simply has little motivation to initiate literacy experiences within her home.

A much clearer representation of the reading, writing, and text interaction opportunities Dante encounters daily is offered by reviewing the literacy tracking charts completed by Dante’s mother and grandmother. Mrs. Taylor shared that the first week the study took place that she participated in several literacy activities with her son including “read book” (Literacy Tracking Chart, Monday, February 24, 2014), “spelling game” (Tuesday, February 25, 2014), “practiced
spelling 3 letter words with ABC magnets” (Wednesday, February 26, 2014), “practiced reading familiar words” (Saturday, March 1, 2014), “matching game-picture with word” (Sunday, March 2, 2014) and “worked on note to Grandma” (Friday, February 28, 2014). It seems that the family’s participation in the study has influenced Mrs. Taylor to incorporate working with Dante through instructional and literacy-based activities daily. Mrs. Taylor has learned new strategies and activities through participating in the study such as using alphabet magnets to work with words, practice “familiar words” such as sight words like “me, my, the, it, is” (Literacy Tracking Chart, Saturday, March 1, 2014) and integrating shared reading. The study has acted as an educational experience for Mrs. Taylor and is influencing her style of parent involvement. If there was specific instruction or modeling provided by the school or school district, Mrs. Taylor could be implementing activities or reading books supported by the school and their curriculum. It seems that before the study took place, Mrs. Taylor found herself initiating text interactions with Dante 2-3 times per week (Questionnaire, February 20, 2014). Mrs. Taylor could be finding it difficult to incorporate literacy experiences into her families daily routine due to the fact that she is unable to partake in parent education provided by the school. Mrs. Taylor mentioned in her exit interview, “There are certainly family nights, but they aren’t oriented around learning so much” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). Maybe if the school reached out to parents more often to education them on how to help their child’s literacy development from home, Mrs. Taylor would be more motivated to initiate activities from home. Once Mrs. Taylor and her son began participating in the study, she admitted, “it’s [the study] really given me a lot more motivation to devote time to working on his literacy getting him to where he needs to be” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). The study has helped Mrs. Taylor recognize that literacy development is of high importance. Working with Mrs. Taylor on how she can be interacting
with her son at home is showing her that daily parental involvement is possible. Mrs. Taylor was prompted to only record the activities on her tracking chart that occur naturally within the family’s day and with the encouragement of the study behind her, Mrs. Taylor was motivated to interact with her son on a more frequent basis. The tracking chart for the first week of the study lists at least one activity each day of the week. Baroody and Diamond (2012) suggest when children are engaging “in naturalistic and meaningful” (p. 79) literacy-related experiences, learning and development are more likely to follow. Approximately 55% of the activities Mrs. Taylor supported her son in of the first week involved word work of sight words and three-letter words. Mrs. Taylor’s may have been introducing sight word and three-letter word work due to the fact that the first and third strategy that I introduced to the family was a sight word game and they were also given magnetized letters to build known words and explore onset and rime. I placed an emphasis on introducing activities that would support Dante’s sight word development because based on his pre assessment of the Fry’s First 100 sight words, it was evident that the student had a very limited bank of sight words. Mrs. Taylor seemed to place an emphasis on more direct instructional methods during both weeks of the study. Throughout the study there was a heavy emphasis on direct instructional methods like initiating the use of magnets to build words and how to teach sight words and Mrs. Taylor may have felt like interacting with her son using a direct instruction approach was how she felt most comfortable. She may have seen signs of interest from her son that urged her to continue using a direct instruction approach. Two times during the first week, Mrs. Taylor, read a book with her son before bed. Shared reading was one of the originally listed literacy activities that Mrs. Taylor listed on the parent questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Mrs. Taylor noted that by participating in the study she now understands the “useful areas where I can ask a question or prompt dialogue” (Parent Interview, March 9,
2014). By having appropriate shared reading behaviors modeled by the instructor and being explicitly advised to talk about the text in order to support the meaning Dante is making about the text, Mrs. Taylor will lessen the rush to just get through a piece of literature. Mrs. Taylor is able to identify the purpose of a shared reading experience with her son. When I first observed Mrs. Taylor and her son’s shared reading experiences I noted the experience felt rushed and there was very little discussion around the text (Field Notes, Fourth Session, February 24, 2014). Mrs. Taylor did not recognize prior to the study that reading is not just the act of reciting the printed text on the page. In order to help her son strengthen his comprehension skills, it had to be demonstrated how to appropriately talk about the text to increase Mrs. Taylor’s ability to create a meaningful read aloud. I also noted during my observation of Mrs. Taylor and her son participating in a share reading experience that Dante’s younger sister caused some distraction away from Dante and the text because she was interested in retelling or asking questions (Field Notes, Fourth Session, February 24, 2014). The frequent interruptions from Dante’s sister may have encouraged a speed reading of the text because of how much longer it was taking to get through each page with her interruptions. Mrs. Taylor and I switched roles mid-way through the story and she observed how I engaged Dante by interacting with the text through prompting questions, modeling how to visualize the text before seeing the picture and encouraging discussion that prompted text-to self connections. Later, during an informal conversation with Mrs. Taylor about shared reading experiences, I encouraged her to give Dante a purpose for reading so that he will begin to think about what is reading in connection to a given prompt. From Mrs. Taylor’s interview response, it seems that she really took away valuable tools that will enhance her and Dante’s shared reading experiences. By creating engaging read alouds that
are rich with discussion, Dante’s comprehension skills could improve as he continues to build on what he learns at school from home.

Dante’s grandmother, Mrs. Costello, did complete a literacy tracking chart for the second week of the study. It is known that Mrs. Costello is a retired teacher/administrator. Mrs. Costello seems to engage her grandson in explicit instructional activities 67% of the time. By introducing activities which are mainly led by the adult suggests that after spending many years leading students in a classroom, Mrs. Costello may naturally begin activities with her grandson using an explicit instructional approach before supporting him during an activity through scaffolding. Mrs. Costello’s approach to working with her grandson from home could be due to her past professional experiences she may have more resources which allow her to involve Dante in more structured literacy experiences. She may feel comfortable supporting her grandson by helping him with his kindergarten homework assignments. Both Dante’s grandmother and mother noted student initiated activities that were completed at the request of the child. By moving forward with activities which are initiated by Dante, Mom and Grandmother may feel more compelled to stick with what Dante’s interest is at that time. Dante may only cooperate when his interest at that time is being taken into consideration, but allowing Dante to guide where the literacy interactions go from home is allowing him to feel comfortable doing literacy learning activities and keeping it feeling fun instead of like work. At home with his mother, Dante requested a spelling game that him and his mother played three times throughout the first week of the study. Mrs. Taylor mentioned that Dante is “eager to play games and participate in activities he is familiar with. I think he feels a sense of pride that he is doing well and he likes that feeling” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). Continuing to build Dante’s sense of pride could be why Mrs. Taylor felt compelled to stick to child-initiated literacy activities versus doing
what she had planned. All children enjoy feeling successful and Dante could have been choosing this activity because of the amount of success and positive recognition he received from a familiar activity. Dante’s grandmother and mother both listed during the third week of the study, March 3, 2014 - March 9, 2014 a technology-based literacy activity that was student initiated. Mrs. Taylor referred to Dante “spending personal time on the iPad playing a game” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014) which would suggest why he may have inquired about using websites such as, abcmouse.com, to engage in alphabet related activities. If there is a significant interest in technology, family members can encourage technology-based literacy interactions by rewarding the child with time to play literacy-based games on the iPad or computer. Since the family has both a laptop and iPad, it would be beneficial for Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Costello to obtain education through literature or a school-based program that can help them navigate applications and software that can strengthen literacy skills.

Many of the literacy-based activities that Dante is engaging in from home typically are guided through direct-instruction, shared reading or student-initiated/requested activities. It would be beneficial for Mrs. Taylor to extend her repertoire of literacy-based experiences at home by integrating some of the already existing literacy resources in her home. Both Dante’s mother and grandmother are spending a significant amount of time during their daily routines directing Dante towards a specific reading and writing task or interaction with text of some sort. Dante’s family is promoting cognitive growth through their prominent role and regular involvement in his education (Froiland et al., 2012).

**Influence of Parent Beliefs and the Extent of Parent Involvement**

Weigel et al. (2006) suggests a key piece of a child’s home literacy environment is the exposure a child has to different models of reading and writing behaviors. By reviewing the
responses given on the parent questionnaires, Mrs. Taylor shares that Dante observes her reading and composing emails daily, developing new recipes, revising a business plan, and frequently reading cook books and magazines (Parent Questionnaire, February 20, 2014). With Mrs. Taylor interacting with text throughout the day in front of her son, she is conveying the significance of reading for a purpose and promoting the concept that print carries meaning. Although Mrs. Taylor is not necessarily reading leisurely for pleasure, she is reading for a purpose, voluntarily and those are the positive behaviors that Weigel et al. (2006) say relate to “positive reading outcomes for children” (p. 195). Dante also observes his grandmother reading books, newspapers, magazines, and recipes daily (Parent Questionnaire, March 9, 2014). With a continued emphasis on the importance of print surrounding Dante’s home literacy environment, Dante could be more likely to want to read the more he observes his mother and grandmother doing it. Mrs. Costello also notes that she often designs her own greeting cards, grocery lists, to-do lists, and business correspondence and these are all literacy habits that Dante typically views his grandmother partaking in. Dante’s mother and grandmother have a passion for cooking and have both referenced in the parent questionnaire of writing down/following recipes. During the interview with Mrs. Taylor, she mentions that when “I’m working on a grocery list, he wants to build a grocery list. Or like a prep list” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). Mrs. Taylor’s response from the interview suggests that Dante is highly influenced by the behaviors he observes of his mother. It also suggests that Dante’s relationship with his mother differs from that of his grandmother or anyone else and that because of the dynamic between a mother and her son, Dante is more likely to engage during literacy activities differently with her than someone else or the way he does at school. Dante is conveying a genuine interest in things that
his mother and grandmother are in and by their modeling, they are creating opportunities for interacting with written and oral language.

Throughout this study the reference of parent involvement is typically being discussed in connection with the literacy support from home, but it is important for the purpose of the study to touch on the full extent of parent involvement among Dante’s family. Reglin et al. (2012) describes behavioral parent involvement is the parent action surrounding their child’s education in regards to attending school events such as open house or volunteering at their child’s school. Both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Costello volunteer each week inside of Dante’s classroom (Parent Questionnaire). Their involvement in the classroom can change the way they interact with Dante in regards to his literacy learning from home. Both women have some sort of relationship with the classroom teacher which will most likely increase the amount of parent-teacher communication that occurs. By having better communication with the classroom teacher, Dante’s family is on track to be more in tune with his strengths and areas of need which could in turn effect they types of games, books, or strategies are used when working with Dante one-on-one at home. Mrs. Taylor can be seen in her son’s classroom once a week, while Mrs. Costello has the availability which allows her to enter in to the classroom twice per week. Mrs. Taylor mentioned attending a “Halloween event” and being aware of a “jump-a-thon” and “family movie night” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). By Mrs. Taylor being present in the school and making it a point to attend school events with her son, Dante is able to identify early on in his education that his mother values school, learning, and education overall. Parent values are highly influential of their child’s motivation and it is important to begin involvement in a child’s early education versus waiting. Mrs. Taylor is illustrating to her son that her presence in the school is positive and this is better than linking parent involvement in the school only when
negative behavior arises. Dearing et al. (2006) refers to the documentation that repeatedly conveys that families who are more involved in the actual school community are more likely to have a child who displays higher levels of achievement and achievement may have some direct correlation to a child’s literacy. Although both Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. Costello feel equipped in their abilities to help Dante make positive gains academically (Parent Questionnaire), Mrs. Taylor implied there is a lack of school-wide or district-wide initiative to involve families in the school through family literacy nights or informative sessions with a goal of helping parents identify ways they can support their child’s learning from home. Mrs. Taylor responded in the exit interview by saying, “no, I haven’t found there is a school wide or district thing” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014) and stated how “she [the classroom teacher] gives certain questions to prompt conversation” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). Mrs. Taylor’s response suggests that she only recognizes that it is the classroom teacher’s responsibility for encouraging parent involvement and education surrounding how to support their children from home. The school and the district are putting a lot of pressure on the classroom teacher to get parents involved because they are not making it obvious to their school’s families that literacy development through parent involvement is a common value. Dante’s classroom teacher has played a positive role in keeping the Taylor family updated on what is specifically happening in the classroom each week by distributing a weekly newsletter. Mrs. Taylor says, “in terms of strategies, she gives points on how to ease frustration during homework, how to spread homework out over a length of time, if it’s lengthy” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014) which helps parents manage specific assignments that are coming home. With the classroom teacher mostly introducing strategies for homework management, that suggests to parents that their involvement should be limited to solely assisting with their child’s homework. At this time, the teacher newsletter and
communication does not urge parents to extend their support beyond their child’s homework and it should not be the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher to encourage involvement beyond homework help. If a school-wide initiative were to be implemented on how to support parents and their understanding of how they are expected to integrate themselves in their child’s education, there would be a stronger outcome. Dante’s mother had very positive things to say in regards to the teacher’s communication and the effectiveness:

Well the teacher really, really communicates a lot about what’s going on and what they’re working on and one thing she does to foster some assistance is at the end of each newsletter after discussing what they’re working on, she provides a list of questions that might spark up a conversation about a book they might have read in school or about a unit they might be working on. Some vocabulary. (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014)

Mrs. Taylor’s response signifies the way she chooses to interact with her son at home in regards to literacy and academic development is largely due to the communication provided by the teacher in the newsletter. That one piece of literature from the classroom teacher is guiding the type of home-based interactions Mrs. Taylor creates for her son. If that is all that she has to rely on, then her involvement from home is going to continue to be rather limited. Creating dialogue about the school curriculum is beneficial for students in order to be able to reflect on their learning experiences of the day and the fact that Dante’s teacher supports the Taylor family in this way by providing essential questions and even specific vocabulary suggests she values parent involvement. Mrs. Taylor expressed she does value a home-school partnership during her interview. Dante’s family has built a positive relationship with the classroom teacher by staying connected through volunteering efforts and staying up to date with the classroom newsletter and these efforts are impacting Dante’s academic achievement positively.
The Level of Motivation and Engagement of Parent and Child

Parental beliefs and modeling positive literacy behaviors is one way to encourage engagement of children in literacy-based activities from home, but the Taylor family identified barriers to creating a space that promoted home literacy interactions. When Mrs. Taylor was asked if she could identify any barriers to effective parent involvement surrounding home literacy practices, she told me “noise alone can be a huge road block in getting work done and him being able to focus” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014). If noise acts as a barrier to following through with literacy activities at home, that can lead to unsuccessful and incomplete literacy events which can then lead to halting Dante’s literacy development. Overall, living at home with two parents and a younger sibling, providing a quiet work environment for Dante might be a challenge. Mrs. Taylor should look into creating a space for her son where he can be free of distractions and where they can work together on strengthening his literacy skills with no interruptions. Teachers are always working hard to create a safe and comfortable learning space for their students and Mrs. Taylor’s comment suggests that environment at home has a strong effect on a child’s learning from home as well. Mrs. Taylor also references how having a sibling who is “eager to participate” and has a “dominating personality” has caused Dante to “check out” (Parent Interview) of an activity that he was doing with his mother at home. Mrs. Taylor’s admission that her daughter has characteristics which may cause interruptions during Dante’s interactions with his mother proves there is need for a comfortable, quiet space where Dante and his mother can retreat to in order to accomplish certain educational tasks. Designing a location for Dante that feels special may increase his motivation to work on selected tasks from home. Creating a safe space where learning can occur can promote engagement in literacy home
practices and should be a starting point for the Taylor family when they are initiating home literacy activities.

Mrs. Taylor felt motivated by being a part of a study that focused on the literacy practices occurring in the home. By shining a spotlight on the topic of literacy, Mrs. Taylor felt a push to “devote more time on his [Dante’s] literacy” (Parent Interview, March 9, 2014), while Mrs. Taylor noticed a positive attitude adjustment surrounding reading and homework when she discussed noticeable changes in Dante with me saying there is “a greater interest in reading. Now, he’s super, super motivated and proud to show me what he’s doing” (Parent Interview). By participating in the study, Mrs. Taylor was creating more time for mother-son interactions surrounding text. It seems there is a positive correlation between Dante’s attitude adjustment towards reading and homework and the increased amount of parent involvement practices at home. With the increased time spent on literacy activities at home, Dante must be recognizing that his mother is now placing value on these types of activities which in turn is causing him to take pride in successful completion and making progress. Being given a few different resources, strategies, and game ideas gave Mrs. Taylor the necessary inspiration to identify where she can insert more literacy time in their family’s routine in order to better support her son’s literacy development from home.

**Implications and Conclusions**

My interest in what parent involvement looks like from home guided me towards a question surrounding parent involvement of a kindergarten student and identifying what literacy home practices were being effectively employed to benefit the student’s literacy achievement. The socio-cultural historical learning theory guided the action research study due to the fact that parent involvement is social in nature. There are culturally relevant situations that a child
encounters each day with their families and community members that promote literacy development. Parent involvement is a significant factor of a child’s academic achievement overall. When parents feel they have the support from the school they are encouraged to enter into their own safe learning environment with other parents and educators to become better equipped to employ literacy practices within their own home. Creating a school-wide initiative to outline what parent involvement looks like and providing appropriate strategies could cause an increase in the school-wide and even district-wide literacy achievement. If teachers are able to model and guide parents through the steps it will take to implement effective home literacy practices, we are doing what is best for the students and their overall academic growth.

Designing and implementing an action research study has made me question my own teacher practices and how I can better support the families of my students. The family that participated in the present study had a lot of positive features that cause them to stand out in the areas of parent involvement. The Taylor family had an ample amount of parent involvement within the school community and had materials at home that would make it simple to model and employ a variety of home literacy practices. The one thing that stood out to me was, the mother of the participating student was busy with a family and full-time work and was not seeking out the information necessary to better support her son from home in the area of literacy development. As educators we have to be understanding of the circumstances and challenges that some of our families may face. Many parents and their families lead busy lives and they do not know how to gain information about home support literacy practices or obtain the necessary resources. It needs to become a priority as teachers to ignite the spark in the school district to design programs that will provide parents with background information on the importance of parent involvement and what types of activities and conversations should be being implemented
from home to increase literacy achievement. By providing different strategies and engaging conversations with an educator to the mother of the Taylor family, she was inspired to develop a routine that would fit their family’s needs and promote more literacy practices from home.

There is great importance in building relationships with the families of the students we teach and initiating ongoing communication through emails, newsletters, take-home folders, parent-teacher log books and conferences, but the classroom teacher is only one piece of the school community puzzle. There needs to be a district-wide initiative that will have the ability to reach more parents than just the families of a single classroom. With the support of the entire district to facilitate family literacy nights where parents will have different strategies modeled through explicit instruction methods. Families can then be given the opportunity to try newly learned strategies in the presence of an educator, someone who uses these strategies daily, who can clarify any misunderstanding and interpret how these can be best used in the home. A large piece of parent involvement as a whole is to get the families accessing their child’s school environment. We need to focus on creating a safe space for parents to be open-minded to trying new things and feeling comfortable to ask questions. By getting parents together as a whole school or district community, it will also be much easier to outline what types of parent involvement will be offered to encourage parents to play a larger role in the school community which will in turn create discussions at home. The schools expectations to create a positive home-school partnership should be conveyed so that parents have a clear understanding of how they can adjust their role to support their child’s learning from home.

As with any study, there were some limitations which caused me to fall short of my goals. If there had been more time to develop and implement the research, I would have worked with several families over a longer period of time giving me the opportunity to provide more
strategies for parents to use at home with their child. Only interacting with one family was able to give me insight on how one parent perceives parent involvement and how she was taking action through her role as a parent. It would be interesting to compare multiple families experiences with a variety of strategies and determine any other barriers that might be out there making it difficult to become involved from home. Working with a variety of students at different grade levels, comparing gender, and different learning abilities would enhance the research by covering a range of students and their families. I would have liked to gain more teacher perspectives. As a teacher, I think I may generalize that all teachers have the same goals and expectations when it comes to parent involvement and how they perceive it is going at their school, but really that may not be the case.

Parent involvement is a significant factor of a child’s academic achievement overall and because of the weight that it carries in regards to a child’s academic success and literacy development, I was drawn in to make sense of what parents are doing to integrate themselves into their child’s education. Identifying what works and what does not work for one family is only adding to a fraction of the literature that is out there surrounding parent involvement. Through my research I was able to determine what may have strengthened a kindergarten student’s literacy skills and how his family was making a positive impact in his development. Parents are their child’s support system and it is only fair that parents gain the support of the school system and teachers as they are learning how to be effective from home. If teachers are able to model and guide parents towards appropriate home literacy practices, we are doing what is best for the students and their overall academic growth.
References


National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition (NCELA). (2007). *The growing numbers of limited English proficient students*.


Appendix A

Questionnaire

Please fill out this questionnaire to the best of your ability and return to Stephanie Bullock upon completion. Thank you.

1. What is your relationship to the participating student?

2. What is your involvement with your child’s school environment/community?

3. How many times per week do you interact with your child while he is completing an assigned task sent home from school?

   Circle your answer:  1/week   2/week   3/week   4 or more/week

4. How many times per week do you initiate opportunities for your child to interact with text while you are together?

   Circle your answer:  1/week   2/week   3/week   4 or more/week

5. What types of literacy habits does your child observe you partaking in weekly? (ie. Reading magazines, the newspaper)

6. Do you agree with the statement below?

   There is little I can do to help my child get ready to do well in school.

   Circle you answer: yes no
7. Do you agree with the statement below?

I would like to help my child learn but feel limited in my ability to do so.

Circle you answer: yes  no

8. Do you and your child partake in shared reading experiences each week?

Circle you answer: yes  no

9. Please list below any/all activities that you and your child participate in together where you are interacting with text through reading or writing activities.
Appendix B

Use the chart below to track the literacy activities (reading/writing/interacting with text) that **you** and **your child** participated in each day. Examples may include, but are not limited to, homework assignments, nighttime reading, writing letters to family members, or any other activities your child has completed with the support of a family member.

Thank you!

Week of ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Who Participated</th>
<th>Comments/Observations</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Monday</td>
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Appendix C

A Dinosaur Sight Word Game

Teacher Directions: Print cards on cardstock, laminate and cut out cards.

Student Directions: Draw a card and read the word on the card. If you read the word correctly, keep the card. If you do not put the card back at the bottom of the deck. Be careful, there are special cards. The winner is the player with the most cards at the end of the game.

By Angela Gorres Groome from Extra Special Teaching
© 2012

A Dinosaur Sight Word Game

Featuring words typically taught in Kindergarten & First Grade

By Angela Gorres Groome from Extra Special Teaching
© 2012
Sample Game Cards

- a
- the
- and
- go
- had
- he

Found a dinosaur!  
Draw again.

Volcano erupts!  
Lose a turn.

Dinosaur steals 2 cards!

Found a dinosaur!  
Draw again.

Volcano erupts!  
Lose a turn.

Dinosaur steals 2 cards!
Appendix D

Name

Sight Word Practice Pages
kindergarten kindergarten.com

look  at  the  my  see

Read. Color the word the correct color.

Look at the dog.

I see a bunny.

Look at my book.

I can see a bird.

I can see the bus.

Look at the fish.
<table>
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</table>
Cut and paste the letters to make the sight words:

look  look  look
at  at  at
the  the  the
my  my  my
see  see  see
Appendix E

Parent Interview Questions

March 2014

QUESTIONs

Do you feel that our meetings together helped you recognize different ways that you can support child’s literacy development from home?

Are there any strategies or activities that you feel you would use beyond working within the study?

Have you noticed any changes within your child surrounding their literacy development and interest in literacy-based activities?

How do you feel that you can best support your child’s literacy development from home?

Do you value homeschool partnership to support your child’s learning?

Do you feel that the behavior surrounding your child’s own literacy practices reflects the things he observes you doing?

Are opportunities for parent and family involvement within the school environment communicated clearly with families? Specifically, surrounding strategies that parents can use to help their child at home?

Do you feel there are any barriers to being involved in your child’s school community or providing support from home?
Appendix F

Educator Interview Questions

March 2014

QUESTIONS

Please record your responses to the following questions in the space provided. I appreciate your time and support of the present study. Thank you!

What is your current teaching position (district and title) and how long have you been teaching?

What is your definition or idea of parent involvement in a child’s education?

How does your definition of parent involvement compare to the expectations of the school you currently teach at?

What is your expectation of parent involvement from home? (ie. homework support, learning activities at home)

How do you feel your expectations for parent involvement from home compare to what is actually happening in your school?

What kind of assignments or activities do you send home that require parent involvement each week? Or what do you find classroom teachers sending home?

Are there any after-school opportunities made available to students who may need extra academic support?

Does the literacy program your school employs provide opportunities for parent involvement?

Does your school or district offer family literacy programs of any kind?