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The Impact of Parent Established Home Literacy Experiences on Early Childhood Literacy Acquisition

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Abstract

This research paper asks the question, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition? Investigation was completed in a home in Williston, New York (pseudonym) with a kindergarten girl and her mother. Through pre and post assessments, observations and a parent interview three themes emerged from the data collection. These themes focused on the level of parent engagement in literacy activities, parental background and experiences, and opportunities offered in a home environment. Through these themes it can be seen how parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition. As a result, these findings encourage teachers to involve parents in creating effective instructional activities in their home environment as it has a huge impact on student learning.

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The Impact of Parent Established Home Literacy Experiences on
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ABSTRACT

This research paper asks the question, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition? Investigation was completed in a home in Williston, New York (pseudonym) with a kindergarten girl and her mother. Through pre and post assessments, observations and a parent interview three themes emerged from the data collection. These themes focused on the level of parent engagement in literacy activities, parental background and experiences, and opportunities offered in a home environment. Through these themes it can be seen how parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition. As a result, these findings encourage teachers to involve parents in creating effective instructional activities in their home environment as it has a huge impact on student learning.

The Impact of Parent Established Home Literacy Experiences on Early Childhood Literacy Acquisition

From birth, children begin learning from the environment around them and the experiences they have in that environment. They gather and create concepts about the world that are based on their distinct and personal upbringing. These conceptions made by each child are individual and original as their experiences and involvements are all unique. As a result of these ideas, when children first begin to make literacy acquisitions, they do so based on their home setting.

Generally, it is the adults in a child's life that have the most impact on their literacy learning as the adults are typically the ones that promote language in the lives of young children. Adults are greatly involved in the development as they model the uses of language and also assist children as they try to use the language themselves (Goodman, 2001). Often, as children first begin to talk, parents and caregivers work to support their child in their tries through using correcting strategies to encourage conventional speaking (Kucer 2009).

Many parents and caregivers also promote language acquisition through participating in different literacy related activities with their children. This can include reading storybooks, singing the alphabet, pointing out letters in writing, etc. Through creating these experiences, parents and caregivers support their children in their literacy growth by nurturing and promoting language usage and practice.

With this concept in mind, it is important to note that young children receive a variety of early literacy experiences from their parents and caregivers. These experiences are based upon the parent's and caregiver's personal ideas on what constitutes as an important literacy

involvement which they want their child to have. Heath (1982) researched this idea as she explored several different communities to see the impact that the different settings had on the ways in which the children were taught and developed. Through study she found that the different backgrounds caused for a significant difference in how the children learned and the skills they had acquired upon time for their admittance to school. As a result of this, due to their unique experiences and environments, young children all enter school with different ideas on literacy and at different levels of acquisition.

This issue can prove problematic, as teachers then have to deal with a classroom full of children who are all at different language levels. Often in these cases, children are then labeled based upon their incoming literacy knowledge. Children who have a higher level of understanding are deemed to have bright futures while those who seem to be lacking in their knowledge are identified as low achieving and even considered to be at risk.

In reality though, it is not the abilities of the young children that should be judged but rather the literacy experiences which their parents and caregivers have provided for them. As the children are going to have an easier time understanding concepts that they have been previously exposed taught, it is important to note their background and the experiences they have had with their parents. For example, a child whose parents read to them is most likely going to have a greater understanding of literacy and language than one whose parents does not. Even within that though, a child whose parents reads to them while pointing out words and asking them questions about the story may have an even greater understanding of concepts. Perhaps a parent does not really read with their child, but instead they show them how to write their name, or play educational games with them, or allow them to play educational games on the computer, etc.

This child will have a unique understand of literacy concepts based upon the experiences which have been provided for him of her.

In her work, Meier (2003) pointed out that children from different backgrounds also “...learn to use language in culturally specific ways” (p.242). In her research, she found that children took away and shared information from stories based on what was deemed important by their culture. For example, some cultures do not promote the sharing of “obvious” or “known answer” questions in shared class discussion. Children from these cultures then do not consider openly acknowledging this information as important. As a result of this, when theses children are placed in a classroom where theses types of questions are asked and deemed important they are unlikely to answer and participate. Consequently, teachers may then assume the students do not know the answers and need extra help and instruction.

Through researching the different types of experiences parents and caregivers provide for their children, one can look at the experiences and the outcome abilities of the child. They can compare and identify which experiences seem to have the most effect on the children. Through looking at children who are at different language levels, one can determine which experiences seem to be most effective in the children’s literacy acquisition process. After finding this information out, parents and caregivers can then be informed of the methods that are shown to be more successful and the one’s that are not. They can then use this information to continue working with their child and providing meaningful experiences. Overall, as children begin to enter school on a more level ability field, it will be easier to continue working with the children to further their development. It will also ensure that children are not mislabeled in their abilities or left behind.

Overall, through research and data the question, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition, can be answered through several themes. These themes were found through completing a credible, action research project where the literacy interactions between a young girl and her mother were observed and measured to learn about the different techniques used in a home environment and how affective they were in the child's learning. As found through evaluation of the collected data, when it comes to creating effective home literacy experiences, parents need to consider their level of engagement in the literacy experiences they provide, their own literacy background and experiences and the literacy opportunities that are available based on their home environment. Once parents can thoroughly comprehend the effect they have on their children's learning, they will be able to supply their children with home literacy experiences that are effective and that will expand their literacy knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

According to Freebody and Luke (1990), literacy is "...a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of the text" (p.15) Through this definition, they are stating that literacy is more than simply reading a text. Effective literacy requires a number of skills and practices that are necessary in order to fully comprehend text and extend learning beyond printed text. Overall, Freebody and Luke state that literacy is a social practice and therefore requires socialization.

As socialization has shown to be key component of early literacy acquisition, it is important to remember that children have individual social experiences based upon their

environments. As children grow up in different homes and with different guardians, they learn distinctive skills and retain knowledge based upon the personal experiences that they have had. As a result, children largely begin to first acquire their language knowledge based upon the adults around them. Children model their behavior and the literacy experiences they see after them. Due to this, Goodman (2001) points out that children who grow up in homes where there are college professors and computer programmers will have a much different experiences than children who grow up in homes where only the bible is read or writing is used occasionally. These children will develop their literacy skills at separate rates and in different ways based on their individual practice.

As children predominately learn from those around them, social communication has shown to be an integral part of literacy learning. The theory that literacy is a social practice and therefore requires socialization is from the sociocultural perspective (Kucer, 2009; Larson & Marsh, 2005). According to sociocultural theory, learning occurs through participation in social and cultural settings that require interaction (Kucer, 2009). Thus, literacy knowledge is constructed through participating in social activity. Larson and Marsh (2005) share a similar view as they define sociocultural theory as "...the child [being] an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems" (p. 100). Again, the importance of participation and being active in culture and society are highlighted.

As literacy requires socialization the early interactions between parents and caregivers and their children are very important. They are defining moments which ultimately begin to shape the language awareness and understandings of the children. As these are significant moments, it is important to note the different literacy experiences children have and explore

which ones have the most impact on their learning. For instance, even though a parent may read to their child, if they do not point words or draw attention to the writing as a whole the child may not pick up on different text features. Even a trip to the grocery store can be utilized as an important literacy learning experience for a child if they are properly engaged and instructed. Through making parents mindful of these significant moments of socialization they can properly use them to benefit their children. After learning this information, parents can become better aware of which experiences are more meaningful or how to make an experience more meaningful. From this, children will better benefit from their early literacy experiences and ultimately be more likely to succeed when they start school.

Research Question

As socialization has shown to be key component of early literacy acquisition, it is important to note the social experiences young children have had as they enter school. As these experiences are primary with their parents and caregivers, one can propose that it is through parents and caregivers that children learn their early language skills. Given that these interactions primary happen in the home setting, this action research project asks, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition?

Literature Review

Before research, a review of literature around the topic of parented home literacy experiences was completed in order to access background knowledge and any previously made conclusions on the subject. In the literature review, three themes will be explored and analyzed. The first theme examines parent beliefs and attitudes toward early literacy development. As parents are a great influence on their children, the outlook they have on literacy and the habits

they exhibit will have an impact on their children's attitude toward literacy. Further, the beliefs parents' have about the process of literacy acquisition will influence the experiences and interactions they provide for their children. The second theme discusses the aspects and effects of home environment. This theme focuses on the atmosphere a child is raised in and how it will have significant impact on their learning and development. The third theme reviews different home literacy activities and experiences parents provide and their influence on their children. Though many parents attempt to create literacy experiences that their children can learn from, the quality of these experiences are not all the same. Some are more purposeful than others and overall, more meaningful to children.

Parent Beliefs and Attitudes toward Early Literacy Development

Parents have long proven to make substantial impacts on their children. When it comes to children's development and learning, research has shown that children whose parents take an active role in supporting their growth and progression are more likely to thrive and succeed. In her research, Cohan (2010) found that when parents took on a more active role in their children's education, the children were more likely to achieve higher. This vital support is initiated by the beliefs parents hold on the impacts they have on their child. In her work, Cohan states "parents who believe they can make a difference in their child's education and view their role as that of teacher are more likely to become involved and engaged in stimulating home activities" (p. 23). In other words, parents who understand the important role they play as educators to their children create key experiences for their children to help them succeed. Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006a) shared a similar viewpoint in their work as they researched the effects of parents who had high beliefs about the value of their involvement in their children's literacy development. Through study, they found positive correlations between children's language comprehension and

beginning writing progression and parent's involvement in their child's development. In their work, Weigel et al. also acknowledged the importance of the attitudes that parents showed toward literacy and the resulted outlooks which were passed to their children. They stated:

Parents who express positive attitudes about reading and actively engage their children in literacy enhancing activities are creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm, for literacy and learning. Parents who express negative attitudes about reading and refrain from engaging children in literacy activities are creating an atmosphere of disinterest, or even disdain, for reading. (Weigel et al., p. 374)

In other words, children whose parents present reading and writing to them as fun and enjoyable activities will be excited to learn and engage in different literacy experiences. Whereas children whose parents demonstrate reading and writing as tedious and boring will be unexcited about literacy learning and see it as a chore.

While investigating this topic, Brown and Byrnes (2013) found that "...parents with stronger literacy profiles and habits, ...were more likely to read to their children on a daily basis, and these children were more likely to have developed hypotheses about the structure of printed words" (p. 262). Usually, parents who have a strong literacy foundation take the time to share it with their children and as a result, their children developed their own literacy foundations faster. Brown and Byrnes also noted that "the parents' own literacy interest, practices and assets acted as models of literacy of activities for the children" (p.263). Meaning that as parents participated their normal literacy habitats, they also acted as models of how to participate in literacy practices for their children. Overall, Brown and Byrnes concluded that:

...The richness of the parents' own literacy activities was associated with how frequently they read to their children suggesting that generally, literacy was a strongly valued feature of the family culture with which parents were attempting to imbue their children. (p. 270)

Basically, they proved that if the literacy skills are valued by the family and the parents, then they will work to instill that same value in their child. As a result of this exposure, these children gain deeper literacy fundamentals at a faster rate. Similarly to these findings, Kluczniok, Lehl, Kuger and Rossbach (2013) noted that family structure and parent educational beliefs strongly impacted the literacy experiences their children had. Through research, they found "the degree to which the home environment encourages early literacy is more dependent on the structural characteristics of the family ..." (Kluczniok et al., p. 432). In short, family dynamics and operations can be an indication of the literacy skills young children will attain.

In her writing, Cohan (2010) promoted this idea that the significance of reading and learning in a parent's life largely affected the significance their children would place on them. She stated "...parents can substantially influence children's learning, beginning with the placement of value on learning and communication of that value to their children" (Cohan, p. 23). In short, children will appreciate that which they see their parent's appreciate. As young children acquire their literacy skills based on their surroundings, it is important to note this affect that parent's literacy behaviors and habits have on their children. Kluczniok et al. (2013) also stated that parents who had strong educational values were more likely to promote literacy skills in their children. These parents were reported to have "...aspirations, hopes and plans for [their] child's educational career..." (Kluczniok et al., p. 422). Due to their targets, parents strongly encouraged literacy learning and knowledge in the home to uphold the plans they had for their

children. Martini and Sénéchal (2012) shared a similar viewpoint in their work as they investigated the effect of parent expectation on early childhood literacy acquisition. In their research, Martini and Sénéchal noted, “that parent expectations regarding their child’s academic success in school related to their child’s letter recognition skills, the grade the child receives in reading and spelling, and later reading ability” (p.217). They found a positive correlation between the factors.

Audet, Evans, Williamson and Reynolds (2008) also wrote about the importance and effects of parent’s literacy beliefs in their work. They indicated that the beliefs parents’ hold about children’s development result in the interactions they have with their children. Meaning that parents expose their children to different educational activities based upon their ideals of when they feel their child should be developing certain qualities (Audet et al.). From this idea comes the notion that it is the goals parents have for their children and their development that drive the experiences parents create for their children. In their work, Audet et al. gave the example that “...parents may believe that phonics or sight recognition or print concepts are important, but if shared reading is not viewed as a context for developing these, such teaching behaviors in this context are not expected to occur” (p. 134). Simply, if parents do not believe an experience is going to be beneficial to their child’s literacy development then they are not going to expose their child to that experience. Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006b) further explored this concept in their research by specifically looking at mothers and their beliefs about their role in their children’s literacy development. Through study, Weigel et al. found there to be two types of mothers – facilitative and conventional. Facilitative mothers showed to take a more active role in their children’s literacy development. They believed through providing their children with learning experiences they would succeed better in school. Conventional mothers on the other

hand, did not show to provide many learning experiences for their children as they claimed it was the job of schools to do so.

Through further research into these two distinct conceptions, Weigel et al. (2006b) found that facilitative mothers tended to have reached higher levels of education and received higher grades throughout their schooling than conventional mothers. Facilitative mothers also tended to appreciate reading themselves and found it enjoyable to read with their children. In contrast, conventional mothers largely did not read for fun and reported to face many obstacles when they tried to read with their children. However, in their work, Westerlund and Lagerberg (2007) found contradicting evidence to this belief. After completing a study with numerous participants testing the expressive vocabulary of mothers with their young toddlers, they found there not to be any substantial correlation between the development of the child and the education of the mother. In fact, Westerlund and Lagerberg reported that "...higher-educated mothers found their total workload to be heavier and their tasks more conflicting than lower-educated mothers [which] possibly resulted in reduced opportunities for conversation" (p. 262). Due to their higher educations, the mothers found themselves with more opportunities that kept them busy and as a result, sometimes unable to engage in literacy interactions with their children.

Overall, the literacy behaviors and attitudes of parents are found to have very strong influences over their children. Parents who strongly believe in the importance of education and literacy development show to encourage their children in their literacy acquisition and help guide them through their learning. Children whose parents understand their role in their child's learning and take on a more active role in this development tend to make higher achievements. Further research shows that parents who have firm literacy habits are more likely to encourage their children in their literacy acquisition as they tend to share their practices and model their

behaviors to their children. Lastly, by having goals for their children's literacy development, parents will create literacy experiences that they feel are beneficial to their children and follow the attainment of such goals.

Home Environment Effects on Literacy Development

When considering the literacy development of a child it is important to take into account the home they are raised in and the experiences they receive from that environment. For instance, family life, culture and socio-economic status are all factors that can have a huge impact on the occurrences a child is exposed to. In their research, Dolezal-Sams, Nordquist and Twardosz (2009) comment on the features of the home environment and how they affect literacy activities and development. Even seemingly very basic aspects can have a huge impact. For instance:

Time spent by family members at work, school and extracurricular activities ... helps determine how much time is left for reading together, writing letters or going to the library. Lack of a predictable family schedule can further hamper the development of literacy routines. (Dolezal-Sams et al., p. 604)

In other words, in order for children to have literacy experiences there first needs to be the opportunity of them to occur. Though the majority of families today are busy with demanding schedules and a variety of commitments it is important to remember the vital literacy experiences that young children should be exposed to. To ensure these experiences, it is key that families create consistent routines in which they reserve time for literacy learning and development. Kuo, Franke, Regalado, and Halfon (2004) support this idea in their writing as they discovered that the "odds of daily reading are lower for full-time parents than for nonworking parents..." (p. 1946).

Due to their jobs and work schedule, some parents may just not have the time to fit reading with the child in everyday.

Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006a) also looked into the different aspects of the home environment's effects on literacy development and found "... that the home literacy environment is multifaceted and that different components of that environment can influence different developmental and educational outcomes" (p.358). In other words, the home environment can be very complex as there are many aspects within it. These aspects are what shape the child and ultimately the literacy experiences they have. For instance, children are going to have experienced different developments in their literacy acquisition based upon whether there are books out and easily accessible in the house, whether the family makes frequent trips to the library, the amount of television watched and the channels that are chosen, if books are given and received as presents, etc. In their work, Dolezal-Sams et al. (2009) even referred to the importance of aspects such as furniture and lighting stating that "... comfortable furniture and adequate lighting may encourage children and parents to remain involved with print for longer periods of time" (p. 604). Meaning that if they are comfortable, they are sure to carry on the activity.

Even the number of children in a family can effect the home environment and the literacy experiences the children receive. Through study, Westerlund and Lagerberg (2007) discovered a strong correlation between child birth order and shared reading occurrences with parents. They identified first-born children to have more shared reading experiences than later-born children. Kuo et al. (2004) found similar results in their study as they claimed the chances of daily reading unlikely "...for children in households with 2 children or with 3 children compared with children who are the only child in the household" (p. 1946). Again, the possibility that families who have

more than one child will be able to read everyday is questionable. As a result overall, the first-born child of a family will most likely have more chances to receive reading experiences than the later-born children.

When considering the home environment of a young child, it is important to note that that environment may include other caregivers who are not the child's parents. Today, there are a large number of families who have both parents working full time jobs. There has also been a great increase in the number of single parent homes. As a result of this, the traditional 'stay-at-home-mom' route for families with young children is not always an option and so childcare by a third party must be sought for. In their work, Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2006) took a look at the variety of caregivers young children are exposed to and the effects it has on their literacy development discovering that "... nonfamilial caregivers, such as daycare providers and early childcare educators, make meaningful contributions to the early expressive language of young children" (p. 584). Basically, those who care for and interact with a young child will influence his or her literacy learning. However, it is important to note that Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans did comment in their research that one should consider the quality of care when detecting how great these influences will be.

As the United States has a huge immigrant population today, it is important to note how those from different cultures may have different views on children's literacy acquisition and development and so therefore, provide different literacy experiences in their home. From their research, Cline and Edwards (2013) found:

Parents from minority populations may also endorse values and beliefs about child development and education that are at odds with the educational approaches and formats

primarily utilized in American schools; families' and schools' contrasting views can present challenges when children enter school and are expected to exhibit competencies that have not been emphasized as part of the home socialization experience. (p. 1215)

Basically, as those from other cultures may place value on different features of child development, they will create learning experiences for their children based upon the aspects that are important to them. The features they hold important may be completely different from the 'average American developmental ideal' and so therefore, their children will be raised with somewhat opposing beliefs. This can prove problematic for immigrant children when they enter school and find 'average' experiences completely new and foreign to them. LeFevre, Polyzoi, Skwarchuk, Fast and Sowinski (2010) had a similar viewpoint in their work as they also researched the cultural differences in parents' view about the learning experiences that were deemed important for their children. In their research they found parents of Eastern Asia or of Eastern Asian decent to have higher expectations for their children's development and academics than parents from North America or those of European decent. Phillipson and Phillipson (2007) also completed a study in which they tested the academic expectations of parents in Hong Kong and parents in mainland China. As many foreign individuals have come to call Hong Kong home, the culture of Hong Kong has radically shifted and become known to reflect that of western culture. Mainland China on the other hand, has stayed true to its historic Chinese culture. From their research, Phillipson and Phillipson found that parent expectations did indeed differ between the two cultures and as a result student achievement also differed. From their study, they concluded, "...that differences in parent involvement and parent attitudes toward academic standards and educational aspirations are a function of culture" (Phillipson and Phillipson, p. 330). In other words, culture is a great influence on the mindsets people have about child

development and the outlooks they have on their part in in helping their children to achieve such developments.

A families' socio-economic status is another factor that can influence the home experience a young child will receive in their literacy learning. In their research, Bennett, Weigel and Martin (2002) posed the argument that economic strain created anxiety and pressure in the family unit. This weight in turn creates family stress which results in adults being unable to foster favorable literacy environments for children to learn in. Bennett et al. state that it is "...families characterized by high resources and routines, as well as few daily stressors, are those also likely to afford their children opportunities to learn..." (p.311). In other words, they are able to afford to spend focused time on instructional activities. Kluczniok at al. (2013) shared a similar viewpoint as they pointed out the ability of higher income families to provide "the expenses for extracurricular activities [which are] significant and positively related to social support and [the] promotion of literacy. The amount of money a family spends on the child's activities (e.g. sports or music lessons) contributes to the[se] promotion[s]..." (p.431). In short, money parents spend for their children to participate in extracurriculars connects to the additional literacy experiences these children are then able to receive.

However, Rodriguez, Tamis-Lemonda, Spellmann, Pan, Raikes, Lugo-Gil and Luze (2009) disagree with these ideas as they conducted research in "...variation[s] that exist in the literacy environments of young children from low-income families..." (p.690). They completed a study in which they looked at a large number of young children from low-income families and compared them to see if there were any variations in the children's literacy acquisitions based on their individual home environment. From their studies, they found that there were indeed a number of differences between the levels of literacy learning each child had achieved. In their

research, they concluded there are many key factors influencing a child's home literacy environment, including but not limited to, mother's employment status, father's residency in the home and race of the family. Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans and Jared (2006) share a similar view in this understanding as they state that "...not all home experiences affect children's literacy development in the same fashion" (p.68) Meaning, two children who go through a similar experience will not necessarily be affected in the same way.

Overall, there are many aspects of the home environment to consider when examining the literacy development of a child. Children will have a variety of literacy experiences based upon these differentiated components. Such factors can include: family routines and entertainment choices, parent work schedules, ability of the family to have the child cared for in the home versus at a child care center, number of children in the family, cultural viewpoints and socio-economic status. Though children can be affected by any one of these aspects, it is important to remember that each of these influences have unique implications based upon the child and their home environment.

The Impacts of the Variety of Home Literacy Activities and Experiences Children are Exposed to

In order to help their children develop their literacy skills, parents provide a variety of literacy activities and experiences for them. Through exploring this topic, Farrant and Zubrick (2011) emphasized the value and importance of proximal processes, or the "...patterns of reciprocal social interaction that occur on a regular basis over time" (p. 344). In short, they are the shared communications people continuously exchange. Proximal processes are key as they aid in the development of literacy skills and learning. In their work, Farrant and Zubrick focused

on the uses of proximal processes in the development of vocabulary. Specifically, the proximal processes of joint attention and parent-child book reading. Overall they proved to be very beneficial and help expand vocabulary knowledge. Evans, Reynolds, Shaw and Pursoo (2011) also explored the factors that help develop vocabulary knowledge in their research. Through study they investigated the different methods parents might use during shared book reading when a new or unusual word is introduced by the text. They found the most frequently used techniques were reiteration and the use of synonyms. Other approaches included giving a description of the word, making associations between the significance of the word and the text and pictures, making associations between the significance of the word and the specific encounters of the child and just making broad remarks about a part of the word (Evans et al.). In short, a variety of techniques were used. However overall, Evans et al. found that for the most part, parents missed many of the opportunities to introduce new vocabulary words as they were often over looked in the tested shared reading experiences. From this finding, they indicated that the "...results suggest that parents for them most part were not capitalizing on shared book reading as a context in which to explicitly coach vocabulary development" (Evans et al., p. 203) Meaning, parents were overlooking the chance to actively teach their children specific word meanings.

Hindman, Connor, Jewkes and Morrison (2008) took a further look into shared reading as they investigated the discussions that occurred between adults and children based around a text and the literacy skills they respectively developed. They looked at this information across contexts to compare if a home shared book reading experience differed from a school shared book reading experience. Results implied:

That children's book-reading experiences at home and school were generally low in code-related talk about letters and sounds, even when books included salient alphabet and

phonological features. Instead, parents used predominately labeling and descriptive talk about the meaning of stories, while teachers most frequently used higher-order recalling, predicting, and inference making talk. (Hindman et al., p.341)

These findings indicate that both parents and teachers tend to focus their shared reading conversations on meaning related information rather than print related material. Lachner and Zevenbergen (2008) also looked into the parent-child discussions occurring during shared reading. However in their research, they focused on references parents made to their children about print as they read an alphabet book. From their analysis they found parents and children to make regular print remarks during their reading. In their study Lachner and Zevenbergen also found there to be a correlation between parent indicated print labeling and the age of their child. Parents of the older children showed to often identify letters throughout their reading experience.

Another key way to encourage literacy development in young children is through the use of environmental print. Environmental print is the text found in one's surroundings that are need for everyday activities (Neumann, Hood & Ford, 2013). Examples of environmental print include labels, signs and logos. Previous research has found that since many:

...Parent-child print-related activities occur around daily living routines (e.g. reading grocery product labels), parents may therefore reference environmental print when caring for or playing with their children by actively pointing out these words and letters, and these interactions many promote emergent literacy development. (Neumann et el., p. 1176)

In other words, as parents and children often interact with surrounding print, as it is key in daily functions, parents can use these interactions as opportunities to provide literacy enriching

experiences to their children. Neumann et al. continued to explore the effects of environmental print on children's letter knowledge and understanding in their own study. Through their investigation, Neumann et al. also found that for the most part, mothers did bring attention to the text seen and used in environmental print. They concluded that these actions had positive correlations to children's letter writing and understanding of text. Neumann, Hood, Ford and Neumann (2011) completed a further review into environmental print. Through a combination of studies they also found positive correlations between environmental print and early literacy development. As learning to read is a progressive procedure they suggested that environmental print can help in the development of those stages. In their conclusions, Neumann et al. also suggested that as environmental print is usually very appealing to children (due to its usually catchy color and font) parents should just take advantage of their children's attractiveness and use the moment to encourage literacy development.

When considering the different literacy activities parents engage in with their children, it is critical to understand the different courses parents take to initiate and maintenance these interactions. Vandermaas-Peeler, Nelson, Bumpass and Sassine (2009) considered this idea as they asserted "...that there is variability in families with regard to the ways literacy is practiced and encouraged, such as what activities are chosen and how they are taught and learned" (p. 297). As different families possess different beliefs about literacy practices they will participate in experiences that are pertinent to their viewpoints. Through study, Vandermaas-Peeler et al. found that children whose parents created literacy interactions which held their child's attention and kept them engaged were more likely to be interested in future interactions. In their work, Vandermaas-Peeler et al. noted the importance of using social connections, such as humor and personal experiences, to involve children. Hindman and Wasik (2010) further support this notion

as they highlighted the importance of allowing children to learn through play a variety of activities. Hindman and Wasik also asserted the importance of the family unit in creating early literacy experiences for children before they enter school and then reinforcing learning once they have started. They encouraged the use of the Head Start program to help with this home reinforcement as they stated "... that Head Start centers could complement children's classroom experience with fun and developmentally appropriate home activities" (Hindman & Wasik, p.117). Meaning, they could create additional instructional situations for outside the classroom which would further encourage learning.

As children have these different early literacy experiences, it is important to note which experiences show to have the most effect on the child's learning. Kluczniok et al. (2013) researched this idea by focusing on the nature of interactions between young children and the adults in their home literacy environments. They also looked at the educational materials the adults used in their interactions to understand the effects they had on learning. From their work, Kluczniok et al. found that "families emphasizing scholastic preparation were found to better promote the literacy ... processes" (p. 431). Through this approach, parents arranged literacy environments and supported their child's literacy acquisition through educational exchanges and connections. Bennett et al. (2002) further support this idea as they expressed a link in literacy acquisition and book-related knowledge and expressive language skills taught to young children. The developmentally appropriate theories and practices of the parents were noted in this study as they showed to have an effect on the instruction they gave their children in their home environments. Bennett et al. state, "... many of these beliefs and practices have been found to be related to preschool children's language and literacy skills. For example, joint book readings has

been associated repeatedly with child literacy outcomes” (p. 309). In other words, they found paired book reading to have a strong link to early childhood literacy acquisition.

In contrast, Levy et al. (2006) declared, “...storybook reading [to] have less impact than expected on children’s early reading acquisition” in their work (p. 68). From their research, they found there was only a moderate association between the amount young children were read storybooks to and their later literacy learning. This view was shared by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) as they researched and defined the different types of literacy experiences children can have in the home. Sénéchal and LeFevre claim:

... That children are exposed to two types of literacy experiences at home; namely, informal and formal activities. Informal literacy activities are those for which the primary goal is the message contained in the print, not the print per se... On the other hand, formal literacy activities are those for which parent and child focus on the print per se. (p. 445-446)

In other words, as they are reading a story, parents can chose to focus their instruction on the meaning of the story or they can focus instruction directly on the printed words of the story. As defined, these different literacy involvements show how children have unique home literacy experiences base on the meaningful occurrences they have. It is due to these differences that Sénéchal and LeFevre also went on to claim that a young child’s exposure to storybooks does not show adequate connection to their literacy acquisition.

Overall, in order to help their children develop their literacy skills parents provide a variety of literacy activities and experiences for them. Some of these experiences include using joint attention, shared book reading, reiteration of words, environmental print and personal

connections. Through there are many literacy practices parents can participate in with their children the majority of them all share the importance of social interaction and shared communication of knowledge. As the type and quality of a home literacy experience can have an effect on a child's early literacy learning it is important to note the materials parents and caregivers use to support their child. Also, the way in which the adult chooses to use the material with the child can have an important impact on the child's learning.

As it can be clearly seen through the research there are many factors to consider when addressing the topic of early childhood literacy acquisition. All of these factors have a huge impact on the development and the process a child goes through to reach this achievement. Parent literacy beliefs and attitudes account largely for the experiences they will provide for their children. As home environment affects how children are raised it will have great impact on their learning and development. As parents provide unique experiences and activities for their children to learn from it is key to assess which experiences are proven to be more beneficial and valuable to learning. Overall, all of these factors will have great impact on the practices children go through and the understandings they foster.

Methods

Context

Research for this study took place in the home of a child living in the City of Williston. Williston is located in western New York, just south of Lake Ontario. It is the center of a metropolitan area and the heart of Monroe County. Williston is home to several larger corporations, such as Kodak and Xerox, as well as a number of highly acclaimed universities, such as the University of Williston and the Williston Institute of Technology. In recent years,

Williston has won several awards noting it's great opportunities and resources making it a desirable place to live and raise a family. In the 2010 Census, Williston's population was approximately 210,565 (United States Census Bureau). The results of the census saw that the majority of the population was almost evenly split between Caucasians and African-Americans with the remaining 15% being compromised primarily of Asian and Hispanic background (United States Census Bureau). This study focused on a single family living in an affluent neighborhood located just inside the city's border with neighboring suburbs. All of the data for this study was collected solely there in the family's home.

Participants

The participants for this study included one child and her mother. Grace (pseudonym) is a five-year-old, Caucasian, female. She lives at home with her mother, father and two siblings. Grace is the middle child. She has an older sister, who is nine, and a younger brother, who is two. Since the birth of her oldest child, Grace's mother has acted mostly as a stay at home mom, working outside the house only one day a week. She currently has an adjunct position at a local college in the nursing department.

Though Grace lives in the city school district she attends a private, Catholic School. Angels Catholic School (pseudonym) is an elementary school serving children in grades Pre-K through sixth grade in the suburb of Newtown, New York. There, Grace is currently a kindergartener. Through assessments, Grace has shown to be at or above grade level in her reading and writing. Her instructional level of word identification for the QRI word lists was first grade. For the reading passages it was primer. Grace's writing shows she has clear concepts of representing all her sounds in her spelling. Though she does use some invented spelling, she is able to spell many words conventionally.

Grace's mother was also a participant in the study as she was observed participating in several literacy related activities with Grace. As previously mentioned, Grace's mother has acted mostly as a stay at home mom since the birth of her oldest child. She works outside the home only one day a week. Currently, she is an adjunct in the nursing department at a local college. She has received her Master's degree in Nursing.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College working toward a Master's degree in Literacy Education, birth through grade six. I previously obtained my Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education and Special Education, grades first through sixth. Originally for this study, I had planned to act as an active participant observer, meaning that I would engage in instructional approaches while I observed results within the study (Mills, 2014). I had planned to accomplish this through teaching Grace's parents strategies to employ with her as they read storybooks, played with alphabet letters and completed a writing activity and through then observing the outcomes of the parents' employment of those strategies.

However, after my first visit to Grace's house, I changed my role to that of a passive participant observer. During this visit, I observed several different strategies Grace's mother already had in use as she read storybooks with Grace, played with the alphabet letters with her and helped her complete a writing activity. Through these observations, I became very curious about the strategies Grace's mother already had in place and decided I wanted to focus on them. I then made the data collection of these strategies and the sources of Grace's mother learning such techniques the center of my study.

Method

As I completed this study I collected an assortment of data to show the impact a parent has on their child's home literacy experiences and ultimately their literacy acquisition. I collected my data through qualitative and quantitative measures during three separate visits to Grace's house. Each visit was approximately two hours in length. During the visits I completed pre and post assessment on Grace, made field observations on the literacy experiences Grace's mother provided for her, interviewed her mother and collected student work from Grace.

During the first part of the study, I met with Grace and her mother to determine the literacy experiences Grace's mother provided for her and make some pre-assessments on Grace's current literacy standings. I determined the literacy experiences Grace's mother provide for her through observing them participating in a series of literacy activities together. I had them read two books, play with alphabet letters and complete a writing activity. For each activity I observed how Grace's mother scaffold the activity and how Grace responded to her. During this part I also completed some pre-assessments on Grace to determine her current literacy abilities. I completed these assessments through testing Grace using the Qualitative Reading Inventory – 5 (QRI) and word lists. The QRI is an informal reading assessment used to evaluate the conditions in which a student can identify words and comprehend texts successfully. It uses both narrative and expository texts to evaluate student's prior knowledge, oral and silent reading, comprehension and listening abilities. Using this information, the QRI can identify the student's independent, instructional and frustration reading levels.

In the second part of the study I had originally planned to give Grace's mother instructional strategies to use with Grace as they completed the same literacy activities (reading a book, playing with alphabet letters and completing a writing activity). I had planned to model how to use the strategies with Grace and then observe her mother as she tried them with her,

making suggestions of different techniques when needed. However, as I had become more interested in the instructional strategies Grace's mother had already had in place, I instead changed the study to continue observing their interactions without any input from me. During this part of my study I also administered a parent interview asking Grace's mother about the literacy practices she used with Grace, how she felt in her interactions and where she learned to conduct such interactions.

During the last part of the study, I again met with Grace and her mother and observed them as they participated in the same literacy activities. I observed their interactions and how Grace's mother conducted the activities. I also continued to observe how Grace responded to her mother and the activity they are completing. Lastly, I completed some post-assessments on Grace to determine what any growth she has had in her literacy abilities. I again used the QRI passages and word lists to complete these assessments.

Quality and Credibility of Research

In order to ensure that my study was truthful and creditable I followed Mills (2014) who cited the work of Guba (1981). They emphasized the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to uphold the accountability of a study.

Mills (2014) defines credibility as "...the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (p. 115). In other words, being able to deal with any difficulties that occur along the way and being flexible in overcoming them. To show the credibility of a study, Mills proposes collecting various documents, films, recordings and other artifacts. In order to maintain the credibility of my study I collected various forms of data such as assessments, student work

artifacts and field notes of my observations. These documents show that I have maintained the quality and trustworthiness of my study.

Transferability is another crucial aspect of a creditable study. Mills (2014) defines transferability as the "... researchers' beliefs that everything they study is in the context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop 'truth' statements that be generalized to larger groups of people" (p. 116). Meaning, taking into account the framework and circumstances of where the study takes place. I showed transferability in my study by explaining the contexts in which my study is going to occur.

A credible study also needs to show dependability. Dependability is defined by Mills (2014) as "...the stability of the data" (p. 116). In other words, making sure the data is consistent and firm. Through collecting a variety of data throughout my study I upheld its dependability. I also upheld its dependability through ensuring that any fault of one method of data was counterweighed for by the strength of another (Mills).

Lastly, confirmability is a forth and vital feature needed to uphold the accountability of a study. Mills (2014) defines confirmability as "... the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected" (p. 116). This means ensuring that the data found is impartial and fair. Again, this was shown through my collection of a variety of data in my study.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants

Before completing the study, it was crucial that I obtained the permission of Grace and her mother for their participation in my research. First I asked Grace's mother if she was alright with participating and allowing her daughter to participate. I then had Grace's mother sign a parent permission form, which informed her of the purpose of the study. With her signature I

showed that she had given full permission for Grace to participate. I also had Grace's mother sign an informed consent form for herself. This signature showed that she gave consent to participate in the study as well. I then verbally asked Grace if she is willing to participate in the study. Since she is only in kindergarten I just needed verbal assent from her. Throughout this process I made sure to assure Grace and her parents that I would use pseudonyms when reporting all of my research to protect their identities and privacy.

Data Collection

As I previously mentioned, I collected a few different forms of data through my completion of this study. By collecting an assortment of data I showed that I have proved my research through considering different aspects of information. The first form of data I collected was pre and post assessments. Through testing Grace on her literacy standings at the start and then again at the end, I showed any improvements Grace made through her mother's literacy instruction. I also collected some student work from Grace to compare and show any improvements she has made.

A second form of data I collected was the parent interview. During the second visit of the study I interviewed Grace's mother asking about the literacy experiences she provided for Grace in their home. I asked her about current strategies she used in their interactions, how comfortable she felt in their interactions and where she learned to create such interactions.

A third form of data I collected was field observations. Throughout the whole study and all my visits and interactions with Grace and her family, I observed everything that occurred. During all of my visits, I observed Grace and her mother as they participated in several literacy activities together. I observed how Grace's mothers supported activities for her and how Grace

responded to them. I observed the different instructional strategies Grace's mother used and how they appeared to affect Grace and her learning.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, I began to code the information in order to synthesize the common themes of the research project. The information was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Quantitative data was found through the pre and post assessments administered to Grace at the beginning and end of the project. Qualitative information was taken from the observations of Grace and her mother, as well as the interview conducted with Grace's mother.

The development of learning was quantified by the pre and post assessments. I used the same assessments in both the pre and post evaluations to show any growth throughout the study and the effectiveness of Grace's home literacy. After completing both sets of assessments, I created tables to compare the information and learn whether or not there had been any development. Through the use of tables I was able to parallel all the assessment results side by side and evaluate if Grace had made improvements in her literacy skills and understandings. Drawing this quantitative data allowed me to verify or dismiss the benefits of parent home established literacy.

As I observed Grace and her mother, I recorded field notes of their interactions together. I transcribed these notes for each book I observed Grace and her mother reading, every time Grace and her mother participated in letter play and during exercises in which Grace and her mother were asked to develop a sentence and picture. I then coded all of this data several times to find patterns and understand what techniques Grace's mother employed while promoting literacy in

the home. From the coding, I was able to see common strategies Grace's mother used in her interactions with Grace.

Interviewing Grace's mother was another source of data that I collected and coded to find information. After creating a list of questions, I sat down with Grace's mother and a tape recorder and interviewed her about the literacy experiences she provided for Grace in their home. After the interview, I transcribed the recorded conversation. I was then able to code the interview data several times to look for patterns within the information. The coded data gave light to instructional strategies Grace's mother used during her interactions with Grace and other literacy opportunities Grace has been exposed to through their home environment.

After coding all of the data I then went back over the collected information to highlight similar responses and information. I first began to highlight data that reflected specifically to any techniques Grace's mother used while working with Grace in yellow. I then highlighted any information or response that related to Grace's mother background or personal literacy experiences in green. Lastly, I look for any responses or data that stood out. This information I highlighted blue.

From the highlighting, I began to see common themes emerge from the data. After these themes developed, I went back through all forms of my collected data again to ensure I was making connections within all pieces. The themes that emerged focused on the level of parent engagement in literacy activities, parental background and experiences, and effects of the home environment opportunities on childhood learning. With my themes in mind, I then analyzed my literature review and highlighted commonalities I found within the piece. I coded the commonalities to match the themes.

Findings and Discussions

The quantitative data collected through the study showed Grace to be at a higher level of literacy understanding. For both the pre and post assessments, Grace was tested on her letter recognition, her sight word recognition and her reading through informal reading passages.

Table 1

Number of Letters Grace was Able to Correctly Identify

Pre-Assessment

Upper Case Letter

100%

Lower Case Letters

84.6%

Post-Assessment

Upper Case Letters

100%

Lower Case Letters

100%

In the initial assessment of her letter recognition Grace was able to correctly identify all of the upper case letters of the alphabet. As for the lower case letters, Grace confused the 'b' and 'd' for each other and the 'p' and 'q' for each other. In other words, she made simple visual miscues identifying a 'b' as a 'd,' a 'd' as a 'b,' a 'p' as a 'q' and a 'q' as a 'p.' In the final assessment of her letter recognition, Grace was able to correctly identify all of the upper and lower case letters of the alphabet. During this assessment, she did not make any miscues and accurately named all 26 upper case letters and all 26 lower case letters. Table 1 shows this

information. The increase in her ability to recognize letters of the alphabet shows that Grace is receiving positive and effective literacy instruction.

Table 2

Number of Words Grace was Able to Correctly Identify

Pre-Assessment			
Pre-Primer 1	Pre-Primer 2/3	Primer	First
100%	80%	75%	40%
Post-Assessment			
Pre-Primer 1	Pre-Primer 2/3	Primer	First
100%	85%	80%	50%

In the initial assessment of her sight word recognition Grace reached her instructional level at the primer word list. Though she was able to identify some of the words in the first grade list she was not able to identify the majority of them causing it to fall into her frustration level. This means that these words are too hard for her and surpasses her level of understanding. In the final assessment of her sight word recognition, Grace scored similar results as she again reached her instructional level at the primer word list and frustration at the first grade list meaning that the first grade words were still too hard for her to identify on a consistent basis. However, between the two assessments, Grace again showed growth as she was able to identify more words on the lists overall in her post-assessments. Table 2 shows this. This increase in her ability

to recognize sight words again shows that Grace is receiving positive and effective literacy instruction.

In table three, data is shown from the reading passages conducted in the pre-assessments. The table shows the number of miscues Grace made while reading the text and her comprehension rating of the text. The table also shows the overall level the text was scored at for Grace based upon the number of her miscues and her comprehension level.

Table 3

Pre-Assessment Informal Reading Inventories

Pre-Primer 2	Pre-Primer 3	Primer	Level 1
1 Miscue	4 Miscues	10 Miscues	30 Miscues
80% Comprehension	100% Comprehension	100% Comprehension	50% Comprehension
Independent Text Level	Instructional Text Level	Instructional Text Level	Frustration Text Level

In the initial assessments, I started testing Grace at a Pre-Primer 2 Level. At this level, she made one miscue and had an 80% comprehension level of the text. This put the text at her independent level. I then tested her at a Pre-Primer 3 Level. At this level, she had four miscues and had a 100% comprehension level of the text. This scored the text at her instructional level. After, I tested Grace using a Primer Level text. For this, she made 10 miscues and had a 100% comprehension level of the text. This put the text at her instructional level. Finally, I tested Grace

at a Level 1 passage. This passage proved too hard though as she made 30 miscues and only had a 50% comprehension level of the text. This scored the text at her frustration level as she was not able to read and comprehend the text at a level in which she understood it. The text was too difficult for her.

In table four, data is shown from the reading passages conducted in the post-assessments. Again, the table shows the number of miscues Grace made while reading the text and her comprehension rating of the text. The table also shows the overall level the text was scored at for Grace based upon the number of her miscues and her comprehension level.

Table 4

Post-Assessment Informal Reading Inventories

Pre-Primer 3	Pre-Primer	Level 1
3 Miscues	4 Miscues	15 Miscues
80% Comprehension	80% Comprehension	33.3% Comprehension
Instructional Text Level	Instructional Text Level	Frustration Text Level

In the final assessments, I started assessing Grace at a Pre-Primer 3 Level. At this level, she made three miscues and had an 80% comprehension level of the text. This put the text at her instructional level. I then tested her at a Pre-Primer Level. At this level, she had four miscues and an 80% comprehension level of the text. This scored the text at her instructional level.

Finally, I tested Grace at a Level 1 passage. This passage again proved too hard though as she made 15 miscues and only had a 33.3% comprehension level of the text. This scored the text at Grace's frustration level, as it was still too difficult and at a higher level than she was able to understand.

The quantitative data collected shows that Grace made improvements in her literacy knowledge and understandings over the course of this study. These improvements reflect the literacy instruction Grace has received from her mother through her home literacy experiences. These improvements show that Grace's mother has had a positive impact on Grace's literacy learning.

As previously mentioned, three themes emerged from the collection of qualitative data. These themes focused on the level of parent engagement in literacy activities, parental background and experiences, and effects of the home environment on childhood learning. Through these themes it can be seen how parents established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition.

Level of Parent Engagement in Literacy Activities

The level at which a parent is involved and engaged with his or her child during a literacy interaction will largely impact the influence the experience has on the child's development and learning. While observing Grace and her mother during several different literacy activities, it was noted that Grace's mother took on a very instructional role as she interacted with Grace. She accomplished this role through questioning her daughter about books they read and encouraging Grace to spell new words through her understanding of previously known words and through sounds she was already familiar with. This practice could be seen throughout the study as Grace

and her mother read several books together. During the readings Grace's mother took many opportunities to ask Grace questions and further her learning. For instance, while reading *The Princess and the Pizza* by Mary Jane and Herm Auch, Grace's mother asked Grace questions which encouraged her to make connections. When the story mentions the old princess and the pea trick, Grace's mother asked her about it and prompted her to remember the classic fairytale of the princess and the pea. Later on in the story, while the princess is trying to throw together a meal with some leftover supplies, Grace's mother again questioned Grace to encourage her to make the connection on what was happening. She said, "What is she making even though she doesn't know it?" (Field Notes, February 2014). Through this questioning, Grace's mother was looking for Grace to make the connection that the princess in the story was making a pizza.

During the readings, Grace's mother also asked Grace questions which assessed Grace's understanding of the book and what was going on. Grace's mother asked these questions to make sure Grace was comprehending the text and following all of the events that were occurring. At the end of the story *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff, Grace's mother asked Grace about what she remembered from the story. As Grace retold the story, her mother prompted her to give as much information as possible by asking her about what happened after an event and then what happened at the end (Field Notes, March 2014). Through repeatedly asking these questions and prompting, Grace's mother was ensuring that her daughter had a complete understanding of the text and also helped her to sequence all the occurrences of the story. At the end of the story *Click, Clack, Moo Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin, Grace's mother asked Grace about what happened in the story and then asked her about other animals that could get involved in the story (Field Notes, March 2014). Through these interactions Grace was able to practice retelling, summarizing, drawing conclusions and extending her learning.

Overall, Grace was able to greatly benefit from the storybooks, as her mother did not just simply read them to her, but used them as an opportunity to engage in a beneficial learning experience. She questioned Grace to further her learning and make connections that she might not have thought of on her own.

During the interview conducted with Grace's mother, she was questioned about her interactions with Grace while they read together. When she was asked about the questions she asks Grace while they read she replied:

I sometimes ask questions during a book, or we talk about it at after a lot. Grace usually stops me a lot when I'm reading and has questions and comments to say. I encourage that though because it means she's interested. With her we can talk the whole way through the book. (Parent Interview, February 2014)

In the quote, Grace's mother is saying that talking with Grace about the book is an integral part of book reading. This data shows that Grace's mother views book reading as more than just a chance to hear a good story. She sees it as an opportunity to teach her daughter and further develop her learning.

Grace's mother was also observed as taking on a very instructional role with Grace while they participated in letter play together with the alphabet letters. Throughout the experience, Grace's mother encouraged her to spell a variety of words. She let Grace choose the first word to spell but from there she encouraged Grace to form new words by changing different sounds of the previous word. For instance, after coming up with the word 'MAT' Grace's mother encouraged Grace to keep the 'AT' and just change the beginning sounds to form a new word. Through this prompting Grace was able to make the words 'RAT,' 'SAT' and 'HAT' (Field

Observations, February 2014). This instruction from Grace's mother shows her understanding of the importance of using known words and sounds to figure out new words and words that rhyme. Upon coming up with the word 'HAT' Grace's mother then encouraged Grace to change the middle sound of the word. Through this encouragement Grace was able to change the 'A' to an 'O' and create the word 'HOT' (Field Observations, February 2014). Again, this instruction from Grace's mother shows her understanding of the importance of using known words and sounds to figure out new words.

The finding that the level of involvement Grace's mother placed in literacy activities affected Grace's literacy learning was consistent with the work of Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006a). As stated previously, Weigel et al. found positive correlations between children's language comprehension and beginning writing progression and parent's involvement in their child's development. From research they established how the importance of the attitudes that parents showed toward literacy and their participation level in their child's learning resulted in the literacy outlooks their children had and the growth they experienced. Similarly to Weigel et al., this study also found that a parent who has high beliefs about the value of their involvement in their children's literacy development and actively participates in instructional literacy activities with their child will positively affect their child's learning and literacy knowledge.

Parental Background and Experiences

A parent's background and own upbringing will largely affect the literacy experiences and opportunities they provide for his or her children. During the interview with Grace's mother she was able to expand upon her own literacy experiences and how they affected her relationship with literacy education today. Through the interview it was apparent that literacy and education

in general was a priority in Grace's mother's household growing up. The first sign of this came from asking Grace's mother where she learned her teaching methods. She largely gave credit to her own mother, saying:

You know really thinking about it, I have to say I think a lot of it is coming from my own childhood and my mom. She was an English teacher and then stayed home with us, and that was her thing, teaching us everyday. I think I picked up a lot from her. (Parent Interview, March 2014)

In the quote, Grace's mother is saying that her own mother was actually a teacher and then became a stay at home mom when she had children. As a stay at home mom, Grace's grandmother still took on a teacher role in her home as she raised her children. In other words, Grace's grandmother placed a high emphasis on school and learning while Grace's mother was growing up. During the parent interview Grace's mother also mentioned that of her and seven siblings five of them have master's degrees, Grace's mother being one of them. The importance of education is a generational value in Grace's house, which is why the precedent of higher education has been established. Grace's mother has a master's degree.

This finding was consistent with Kluczniok, Lehl, Kuger and Rossbach (2013) who noted in their work that family structure and parent educational beliefs strongly impacted the literacy experiences their children had. Through research, they found that family dynamics and principles can be an indication of the literacy skills young children will attain. This study further proved this belief as Grace's mother showed to place a strong value on education just as it had been instilled in her own childhood.

The experiences a parent has with literacy also largely affect the opportunities they will provide for his or her children. Through the parent interview, it was discovered that Grace's mother volunteers in Grace's classroom each week and as a result, is exposed to different teaching methods such as reading in small groups and questioning. When describing how she is instructed to work with the children, Grace's mother gave a picture of a guided reading scenario. She said:

I get a group of four kids and there's a small, little book. We go through the words first and then like I read it to them, and then we read it together aloud and then they read silently to themselves and then each kid goes around and reads it to me. (Parent Interview, March 2014)

In other words, Grace's mother participates in a small, shared book reading experience with students in which she is able to offer support and guidance when it is needed by the students. This information sheds light to some of the techniques Grace's mother uses with her daughter as they read at home. Through being in the classroom, Grace's mother is able to experience important reading techniques used by Grace's teacher. She is then able to recreate them at home when she works with Grace. During observations of Grace and her mother reading together, it was noted that in several of the books Grace's mother finger pointed to words as she said them throughout the story (Field Notes, February 2014). For instance, during the book *Click, Clack, Moo Cows That Type*, Grace's mother pointed to all the words that the animals in the story said. When asked about this practice during the parent interview, Grace's mother gave credit to this technique to being in Grace's classroom and picking it up from Grace's teacher.

As previously mentioned, Hindman, Connor, Jewkes and Morrison (2008) compared the shared reading experiences that occur at home and at school in their research. They found that parents primary use labeling to discuss a storybook while teachers push for high-level thinking through recalling, predicting and making inferences. Through Grace's mother was able to orchestrate higher-level learning experiences for Grace, the data for this study supports the finding of Hindman et al. as she was only able to create such experiences largely in thanks to the time she spent in Grace's classroom and with Grace's teacher. Grace's mother learned important instructional techniques directly from Grace's teacher and so was able to recreate them at home for her daughter.

Home Environment Opportunities

The literacy opportunities a child has in their home will greatly impact his or her literacy learning and understanding. While analyzing the collected data from this study it became apparent that Grace is exposed to many literacy opportunities in her home. As shown through her high scores on both the pre and post assessments, these experiences have helped to develop and strengthen her literacy understandings.

Book reading is one opportunity that Grace is able to experience in her home. Through observation it can be seen that book reading is a high priority of the family as there were story books all around the house (Field Notes, February 2014). Upon entering the home, books were laying on tables and surfaces throughout the main living area of the home as well as shelved on bookcases. During the parent interview, Grace's mother said she frequently takes opportunities to buy storybooks for her children. She said, "I know some people are like 'well I don't want to buy books for my kid every month and it can be expensive' but I don't care about that, it's

important” (Parent Interview, March 2014). In other words, Grace’s mother does not turn down chances to buy her children books despite the frequency or cost. She believes that having new books to read is significant and places a higher value on the usefulness of the book rather than it’s cost. Grace’s mother also said she is a big fan of the Scholastic book flyers that come home from school and does “...not hesitate to buy [from] those because the teachers earn money and get books back for their classrooms, [and her] kids are building their library” (Parent Interview, March 2014). Meaning, that Grace’s mother is in full support of the program as her children are able to get new books and their teachers are able to earn books through the amount of books their students buy. Along with having a variety of books to choose from, Grace also has the opportunity to be read to often. At home, she is frequently given the chance to participate in reading storybooks. During the parent interview, Grace’s mother said she reads to Grace and her other children daily. Through these encounters Grace is able to receive extra literacy support and strengthening.

Writing and drawing is another opportunity Grace is able to experience in her home. During my visits to Grace’s house I observed paper, markers and crayons out and available to be used at any time. During the parent interview, Grace’s mother said that Grace loves to draw and make stories and that the materials she needs are always accessible. She stated, “there’s just always paper and markers out. They love to draw. Grace makes stories all the time. It’s fun for her” ” (Parent Interview, March 2014). Through observations I was able to see this first hand as Grace showed me a collection of stories she had written and illustrated herself.

In their research, Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006a) also looked into the different aspects of the home environment’s effects on literacy development. They found that as home literacy is multifaceted and complex, there are many different factors within it that can affect and

shape the literacy experiences a child has. Through having books and writing supplies that are always out and accessible, Grace is able to participate in literacy activities regularly and frequently.

During the parent interview I also asked Grace's mother about how she responds to her children when they ask her how to spell a word. Grace's mother said, "...if I know she knows the words or knows the sounds I tell her to sound it out and she can do it. But if I know she would have no clue, I just spell it out" (Parent Interview, March 2014). Meaning, if she thinks Grace can figure out the word based upon sounds she already knows, she encourages her to do so. In short, Grace's mother tries to allow Grace to figure out an answer on her own if she can. Grace's mother uses these interactions as opportunities to provide literacy enriching experiences for her children.

Grace also has literacy opportunities due to her having siblings. During the parent interview, it came to my attention that Grace's older sister, Maggie (pseudonym), has taken on a significant role in Grace's literacy learning and understanding. Through interactions with Maggie, Grace has had experiences which have encouraged her learning of letters, sounds and words. Maggie and Grace play school just about every day when they get home from school. Maggie wants to be a teacher one day and so likes to practice with Grace (Parent Interview, March 2014). As Maggie finds the idea of school and teaching fun, she often recruits Grace to 'practice' it with her during their playtime. When I asked about Grace's letter knowledge Grace's mother said:

That's where I need to give a lot of credit to [Maggie.] When they play school... she has all these papers out, there are lessons, they have these activity books that have letters and

some basic shorter words and Maggie goes over all of them with Grace. (Parent Interview, March 2014)

In other words, during their 'school play sessions' Maggie goes over a number of letters and words with Grace which has helped her in her letter and word knowledge and understanding. In short, Maggie has had a huge impact on Grace's learning. Due to their school playing and the opportunity Maggie has provided, Grace has been able to receive a whole extra level of literacy support and encouragement.

This finding contradicted early research mentioned from Westerlund and Lagerberg (2007). In their work, Westerlund and Lagerberg (2007) discovered a strong correlation between child birth order and shared reading occurrences with parents. They identified first-born children to have more shared reading experiences than later-born children. This study showed their claim to be untrue however, as Grace is a second born, middle child. Despite her birth order, Grace is able to experience shared reading experiences with her mother daily. In fact, data from this study shows that Grace's older sister has actually played a significant role in Grace's literacy learning and understanding. If anything, the findings suggest that Grace would not be at her current level of literacy acquisition if it were not for her having an older sister.

Implications and Conclusions

This action research project asked, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition? Through research and data analysis themes developed to show that it is the level at which a parent participants in a literacy activity with their child, the parents own background and experiences and that it is the opportunities that arise from their home life which has the most impact on a child's literacy learning.

The findings of this study imply that it is not just important for a parent to supply a literacy activity for their child but vital that they actively participate and engage in the activity with their child if they want the experience to be effective in their child's literacy development. This conclusion was consistent with the ideas of Hindman, Connor, Jewkes and Morison (2008) who researched across contexts to compare if a home shared book reading experience differed from a school shared book reading experience. In their research, Hindman et al. found that for the most part, parents did not participate in any of the important higher level thinking or questioning with their children that teachers employ in their classrooms. The research in this study showed that Grace's mother was able to use higher level instruction with Grace but this was largely due to the fact that Grace's mother is an active member in Grace's school and therefore, has been exposed to a variety of instruction strategies from Grace's teacher.

Results of this study also indicate that a strong parental background and experiences in literacy interactions will largely affect the literacy experiences and opportunities they provide for their children. As Grace's mother was raised in a house where literacy and education were deemed of higher importance and significance, Grace's mother turned around and instilled the same beliefs in her own home. These findings are consistent with Cohan (2010). In her writing, Cohan (2010) promoted this idea that the significance of reading and learning in a parent's life largely affected the significance their children would place on them. She stated "...parents can substantially influence children's learning, beginning with the placement of value on learning and communication of that value to their children" (Cohan, p. 23). In short, children will appreciate that which they see their parents' appreciate.

Further conclusions of this study show that the individual opportunities children receive from their home environment have a great impact on their literacy development. As Grace has

been raised in an environment where there are plenty of books to read and writing supplies to use she has developed many strengths in her literacy skills. Sams, Nordquist and Twardosz (2009) agree with the importance of the features of the home environment and how they can affect literacy activities and development. They stated that simple aspects such as the amount of time consumed by work, school and other activities can largely effect the time left for reading and other literacy activities. In other words, in order for children to have literacy experiences there first needs to be the opportunity of them to occur. These opportunities for reading and writing occur daily in Grace's house.

This study is significant as it shows the importance and impact home literacy has on children and their early literacy acquisition. Through understanding their role and the effect it has, parents and caregivers will be able to create successful literacy experiences for their children. The findings of this study will impact my teaching as I will make sure to inform the parents of the children I teach about the importance of the interactions they have with their children. I will send home information and supply materials for parents to create effective literacy experiences with their children. Through encouraging parents to generate higher-level literacy activities, my students will gain extra support that will help them develop and grow as literacy learners.

A limitation of this study is the time I had to collect the data. There was only a three-week window in which I was able to conduct the research for this study. As time was limited, I was not able to gather information as in depth as I would have liked. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct this study over several months to gain a better understanding of the effects home literacy can have and see the full spectrum of literacy acquirements that can be made as a result. Also due to the short amount of time I had to collect the data, I was only able to find one family

to conduct the study with. Ideally, I would have liked to work with several families to account for any limitations one may have.

If I were to repeat this study, I would conduct my data collection over the course of several months. This would allow me to understand the effects of home literacy over a greater period of time. If I were to repeat this study, I would also expand my pool of participants. I would collect data on the literacy interactions of several families in order to compare their experiences and examine the variety of interactions the parents have with their children. I would look to include families with different features, backgrounds, ethnicities and sociocultural and economic statuses to assess which factors were found to have significant influence on creating a success literacy environment and which were not.

After research and study, there are still several questions I have about home literacy experiences and the impact parents have on their children's literacy acquisition. For starters, my study only focused on the affects a mother had on her child's literacy learning. I'd be very curious to learn about the approaches a father would take while participating in literacy activities with his child and see how they compare to those of the mother. I also wonder about the books that would have been chosen if I had allowed Grace's mother to pick any of her choice. For the purposes of this study, I supplied the books that were read. In a future study, I'd be curious to see what type of book a parent chose to read to their child and if they tended to stick with the same type or include a variety. One more question I have relates to the jobs of the parents. In this study, Grace's mother was primarily a stay at home mom which allowed her to read and participate in literacy activities frequently with her children. In a future study I would be curious to see the home literacy experiences of a child with full time working parents and the affects it has on his or her learning.

Overall, through research and data the question, how do parent established home literacy experiences impact early literacy acquisition, can be answered through several themes. These themes were found through completing a credible, action research project where the literacy interactions between a young girl and her mother were observed and measured to learn about the different techniques used in a home environment and how affective they were in the child's learning. As found through evaluation of the collected data, when it comes to creating effective home literacy experiences, parents need to consider their level of engagement in the literacy experiences they provide, their own literacy background and experiences and the literacy opportunities that are available based on their home environment. Once parents can thoroughly comprehend the effect they have on their children's learning, they will be able to supply their children with home literacy experiences that are effective and that will expand their literacy knowledge.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions

What does literacy acquisition mean to you?

What literacy activities would you say you participate in with your child on a regular basis?

How often do you read to your children?

Do you ask questions about these books? IF yes, what kinds of questions do you ask?

Do you ever encourage your children to read to you?

What kinds of genres of books do you explore with your children? Which seem most popular?

How do you encourage writing at home?

If your child asks you how to spell a word how do you respond?

How do you explain words you don't think your children know?

How does your family take trips to the library or bookstore? How often?

How do you give gifts or encourage gifts of books to your children?

What is your highest degree of education?

What are your own literacy habits?

What types of books do you read for recreational purposes?