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Using Foundational Literacy Skills and a Collaboration between Home and School to Promote
Literacy Success in Children

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Literacy Education

Hamline University

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To my husband Mike, and kids Allie and Matthew for believing in me even when I was ready to give up. I love you all, and couldn't have done this without your support.

To my parents and friends for being my biggest cheerleaders and sharing this journey with me, and for understanding when I couldn't spend the time with you that I wanted.

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"Bird by Bird"

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Learning to read is a powerful experience. The opportunity to explore new people, places, and things is enhanced through books. Whether children read independently, or listen to someone read to them, their world is opened up through reading. For children learning to read, that moment when those words begin to make sense and they are encouraged by their teachers and family is often a major milestone. They begin to feel like a reader. Equally important are the times when children are able to go to a bookshelf or a book bin to choose new books for themselves. These are empowering times for children. Unfortunately, for many of them, the journey towards reading is not an easy one. They lack the support system at home, and exposure to literacy experiences, which in turn can impact their self-esteem and shape their course as readers.

Children's ability to read is strongly correlated to the literacy experiences they have early on in their lives, as well as their belief in themselves as capable readers. The people who read to them, the number of books that they are exposed to in their homes, the vocabulary and words that they hear and are encouraged to use can all impact their reading achievement as they enter the all-important world of literacy. Although many children have multiple support sources within their homes and school, just as many lack the necessary foundation coming to school.

In my daily work as a kindergarten through fifth grade intervention teacher, I frequently am given the task of helping students learn or strengthen emergent literacy skills. I am often shocked at how many of my students come to school without the requisite skills for literacy success, and how much work is needed in order to catch them up and get them ready to be

readers. I think about their home lives and wonder how many of these children have families who encourage literacy, who work with their children to develop the skills they need. Could more be done to support these students, even before they get to us?

Given the work that I do, and the knowledge that I have, I am led to ask the question “*How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?*”

As I address this question, it is important to reflect on my own reading journey and my beliefs about literacy. A logical starting point is to explore my literacy life, both as a young child, then as a parent, and finally as an educator.

My Early Years

I grew up an only child with two parents who placed high value on education. My upbringing included exposure to travel, the arts, and quality educational experiences both formal and informal. In spite of all of these factors, I was one of those early struggling readers. Learning to read did not come easily to me, and it took a lot of skilled teachers, several years of additional tutoring and the support of my family to allow me to believe in my abilities and succeed as a reader.

My father traveled a lot as I was growing up, and my mother and I spent a lot of time together. One of the activities we did frequently was go to the library and check out books to read together. Some of my favorite times were sitting with my mom reading *Ramona and Mrs. Piggle Wiggle* books. I could read them several times over and never be bored. My mother was the most patient woman I knew. She understood that it was not always easy for me to read, but she pushed me gently towards confidence with her kind and caring nature.

I not only loved the books from the library, but was surrounded by books within the confines of my home as well. I think the experience of reading those favorite books repeatedly with my mother helped to strengthen my belief in my own abilities as a reader. I was one of the lucky ones. I had a support system on my side within my own family. I developed as a reader because I had people who helped me believe in myself and who surrounded me with literacy experiences.

My Role as a Mother

When I became a mom, I could not wait to expose my children to the joys of reading. When they were little, we made weekly journeys to the library, participating in story hour and carefully selecting books that they wanted to take home and savor. Those library visits were often the highlight of our week, and my children treasured their time to interact with the numerous quantities of books that awaited them on the book shelves.

Both of my children attended preschool three days a week, and spent the other two days with each of their grandmothers. Their days were filled with literacy experiences, whether it was choosing books to look at during “choice time”, doing projects that reinforced letter learning, or sitting on the lap of an adult reading with them. My children thrived in these settings and truly loved literacy.

As they entered elementary school, we continued fostering their love for books and reading by ordering books from the school book orders and paying a visit to the twice yearly school book fair. I delighted in spending money on books, knowing that they brought such joy to my children.

The actual process of learning to read for each of my children was very different. I worried that they would struggle like I did, and I would be forced to revisit my own childhood experiences. Thankfully, their development as readers was far less challenging than mine.

I vividly remember the “light bulb” going off in my daughter Allie’s head when the pieces fit together and she began truly reading. We were reading a beginning reader book, and she worked tirelessly through the words until the sentence was constructed and she had read the entire page. I will always remember the look on her face of pure joy and pride in her accomplishment. I, of course, was proud as well. In addition to that pride, I felt confident that she was beginning on the path to being a lifelong reader.

In contrast, my son was an early reader, entering kindergarten with the ability to read. I remember someone once saying to me “you must have worked with him since you’re a teacher”. That was far from the truth, as I knew that being a reader going into kindergarten was not always an advantage. For my son, his above- average reading ability leveled out in about fifth grade, and we were put into the situation of having to rebuild his confidence in his abilities to do something that came so easily to him earlier on in his literacy life.

Both of my children were fortunate. They were on the receiving end of a world surrounded by books and a love for reading that was fostered by the people around them. They believed that they were readers because that message was sent loudly and clearly by the adults in their lives who showed them that reading and books mattered.

My Career Path

I had always wanted to be a teacher. While my initial career path brought me in contact with children in a recreational setting, I knew that my true passion was teaching. After several years in the working world, I returned to college to obtain my teaching license. During my time

in the teaching licensure program, I also became a mom. I knew that my calling was teaching, whether it was my own children or working with others in a school setting.

As a newer classroom teacher, I felt inadequate and unprepared to reach my students who were struggling readers. These were the ones who lacked not only the foundational skills needed to be able to read successfully, but had limited support from their families as well. There were many questions I asked myself, in my quest to make sure that my students were in line to be effective readers. How could I fill in the literacy gaps that these students were missing? How could I get their families to understand the value of ensuring that their children were reading at home? What could we do at school with families to collaborate in making sure the students who struggled most received the greatest amount of time with good fit books that they could read independently and gain enjoyment from?

When I left the classroom and became an intervention teacher working with kindergarten through grade five students, I began to learn that there are numerous reasons why a child struggles with reading. I also learned that there are ways to help students and their families understand the importance of literacy, and that there are foundational elements necessary in order to help the students become successful readers. Many of the struggling readers I work with have entered school missing key foundational literacy skills. They often are lacking the opportunities to listen to people read books to them, to visit the library or bookstore, or to have someone model reading for them in their home. Because they lack these experiences, many of them come to formal education already in need of intervention. My job is to provide that for them, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that the earlier we can intervene and educate these particular students, the more successful their literacy journey will be.

The connection between factors of early literacy skill development, the involvement of home and family and the need for early education and intervention for struggling readers is a strong one, and again brings me back to the question *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?”*

My Graduate School Experience

As I entered graduate school in the fall of 2014, I was excited and nervous to become a student again. I was re-entering the world of college, a world that I had not been part of for over 19 years. A large driving force this time around was motivation-I was incredibly motivated on this journey of higher learning and ready to take on the challenge. Yes, it was a huge commitment both timewise and financially, but I knew that gaining a Masters’ Degree in Literacy Education would only make me a better intervention teacher.

When we were first asked to begin exploring topics in literacy that were of interest to us in our “Essentials in Literacy” course, I immediately was taken back to my limited experiences as a classroom teacher where I was challenged to understand how to help my most struggling readers. I wrote my special topics paper for the course on reading motivation. I began to think more and more about how the students I work with lack the foundational skills, and how that contributes to their struggles as developing readers. I also thought a lot about their home lives, and wondered how much that impacted their abilities.

I have been fortunate in my career and graduate school experience thus far, to learn from some very knowledgeable professionals. I work closely with our school’s literacy coach, who holds a wealth of knowledge on reading interventions and keeps us informed of best practices for reaching the most struggling students. During two years of the Hamline Summer Literacy Institute, I had the opportunity to listen to a number of highly esteemed speakers on various

topics of literacy. Many of the sessions challenged me to think more about the power of my role as an intervention teacher in ensuring that all students achieve reading success. Equally important is the coursework that I did over the summer, which included my “Foundations in Reading” course. Throughout the summer I was given the chance to explore many facets of reading instruction, part of which included learning about the various theories behind reading development, and the role that family and early literacy skills play in shaping a child as a reader.

Summary and Looking Ahead

As teacher who provides literacy interventions, it is imperative that I understand why some students enter school with a strong literacy foundation, while others struggle to grasp the most basic of literacy skills. I must also explore the correlation between family literacy and children’s success as readers. Lastly, understanding ways for the home and school environments to collaborate towards student literacy success will also help in my daily work as an intervention teacher.

In Chapter Two of this capstone, my intent is to delve into the research behind how early literacy skill development and family involvement in young children impacts their future success as readers, and understand how early education and intervention are necessary for providing the support for our most struggling students to become capable and confident readers. In Chapter Three, I will share my plan for developing a support system for the most struggling readers I work with, attempting to intervene far before they ever set foot in our school building, and ensuring that a partnership exists between their home and school. In doing this, I will also discuss the demographics of our school setting and provide pertinent information about the population within the school, as well as describing the programs that we currently have in place to support literacy instruction. In Chapter Four, the details of my proposed program and

curricular components will be highlighted, as well as discussing the process that I went through to gather the information that drove the program development. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will review the literature and its' impact on the development of my program, as well as revisit my research question. Additionally, I will discuss implications and challenges that were presented to me as I went through this research process, and reflect on how this capstone project can further benefit the students with whom I work.

I hope that by reviewing professional and educational literature, developing a better understanding of the relationship between early literacy skill development and home and school, and developing activities for families to do with their children, I am better equipped to answer the question *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?”*.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In chapter one of this capstone, I provided a brief overview of my own development as a reader. I shared my experiences as a child struggling with reading and discussed how the support of my parents, especially my mother, contributed to my eventual literacy success. In addition to my own life experience, I highlighted the impact that I had on my own children as they were becoming developing readers and the importance that our involvement as parents played into that development. Lastly, I provided insight into how my professional career and graduate school work thus far has given me a better understanding of the challenges that many children face as they learn to become readers.

As I thought about my own journey so far, I have been led to further investigate the correlation between the need for strong early literacy skill development, the importance of family involvement, and how both of those factors contribute to student success as a reader. Looking at these major literacy concepts, I ask myself the question: *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?”* In order to fully understand the correlation between these concepts, I did an extensive literature review and studied the works of many professionals in the education field. As I sorted through the numerous studies, theories and ideas, several pertinent themes came to the forefront and provided the framework for this capstone.

First, is the development of the early literacy skills that are foundational for students becoming successful readers. In the first section, I will discuss the concept of emergent literacy,

as it relates to the reading process. Additionally, I will define those key skills, and indicate each skill's connection to literacy.

Of equal importance to children's literacy development is the role of the family. In the second section of this chapter, the importance of building a strong literacy environment within the home will be highlighted. In addition, I will revisit the foundational skills, and make a case for the types of support that families can provide in developing these skills within their children.

Finally, the partnership between children's home environment and school can be a strong factor in determining the level of literacy success that they achieve. I will provide rationale for the importance of fostering that relationship of home and school, so that all students are prepared for a successful early start in becoming accomplished readers.

Emergent literacy

In order to fully grasp the importance of what children need to become literate, it is vital to understand the concept of emergent literacy. Wolfe and Nevills (2004, p. 8) describe emergent literacy skills, or "early childhood readiness skills" as the skills that children acquire early in childhood that prepare them for successful reading upon entering school. Zygouris -Coe (2001, p. 6) defines emergent literacy as "a developing range of understanding about print and non-conventional literacy behaviors that begins before schooling and leads into conventional reading, speaking, viewing, and thinking". One should be cautioned that although the concept of emergent literacy primarily focuses on the years between birth and age five, there is also the belief that emergent literacy is correlated to "a functional level of performance rather than to a chronological age" (Tracey and Morrow, 2012 p. 99). Whereas some children may have mastered the emergent literacy skills necessary to become proficient readers early on in their schooling, others may remain at the emergent phase and need intensive intervention in order to

acquire the ability to read and write at proficient levels. These type of students are the ones that I see most often in my daily work as an intervention teacher.

The Theory of Emergent Literacy (Tracey and Morrow, 2012) is based on the concept that literacy skill development is interrelated and that children who demonstrate proficiency in one or more areas of literacy will be more likely to also excel in other areas. Likewise, children who struggle to develop literacy skills in a certain area could also experience difficulty in mastering all areas of literacy development. Morrow (2009) explains that as children go through the stage of emergent literacy, the relationship between spoken and written language becomes more clearly defined for them, which in turn increases the likelihood for early literacy success. Children who do not have a solid grasp of the interrelationship between listening, speaking, reading and writing will be more likely to struggle with literacy.

Early literacy skills. In order for young children to become literate, there are a number of crucial skills that must be developed. The work of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) helped set the framework for the importance of early literacy development in children ages birth to five years old, by identifying foundational skills that should be in place by the time children begin school. These skills are precursors to literacy success.

The first foundational skill area is related to the alphabet and letters. Children must be able to recite the names of and recognize letters from the alphabet, According to Wolfe and Nevills, (2004), the ability to quickly and accurately name letters is “a predictive factor for learning to read”. In addition to naming and recognizing the letters, children must understand the correlation between each letter and its’ corresponding sound. This concept, named by Adams (1990) is called the alphabetic principle, and also plays a significant role in a child’s ability to read.

A second key skill area that needs to be developed in order for children to be ready to read is that of phonemic awareness, the idea that individual sounds or phonemes can be combined to comprise words (Wolfe and Nevills, 2004). Demonstrating phonemic awareness involves the segmenting and isolating of sounds within words, as well as having the ability to hear rhyming within words. Phonemic awareness is correlated to oral language, but is also a crucial skill to building the foundation for reading success. In fact, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Development report, the element of phonemic awareness is the single strongest predictor for children's success in learning to read (NICHD, 2000).

An additional developmental skill necessary for reading readiness is children's ability to quickly and automatically name objects and colors that are presented to them in sets, as well as be able to rapidly name letters and numbers. This skill demonstrates their ability to complete a task with fluency, a necessary component for reading ability (NELP, 2008).

According to the NELP, children's readiness for reading must also include the ability to write not only their own name, but demonstrate the ability to write letters in isolation. Understanding of letters and how they translate onto paper is an important skill for literacy achievement.

The final skill listed by the NELP is that of phonological memory, children's ability to store information into memory and retrieve it as needed in order to practice reading comprehension. Children with deficient phonological memory may have trouble comprehending longer, more complex sentences, especially if the sentences contain vocabulary that is new to them.

In addition to the foundational skills that have just been described, the NELP (2008) identified five other early literacy skills that also serve as predictors of reading success, especially as children get closer to beginning their formal schooling experience. Those skills are:

- concepts about print, including the idea that a book is read from left to right, from front to back
- print knowledge, which involves knowledge of the alphabet, as well as early decoding abilities
- reading readiness, that requires children to have phonemic awareness, strong knowledge of the alphabet and good phonological memory
- oral language, which is the ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, including vocabulary and grammar
- visual processing, where children are asked to match or discriminate visually presented symbols

The development of the aforementioned foundational literacy skills are vital to children's success. Unfortunately, in some cases families lack the ability, confidence, or knowledge to provide the experiences that children need in order to become literacy proficient. Without the requisite foundational skill development, many children start their formal schooling already behind their peers, and those same children tend to remain behind in their reading development (Torgesen, 2005, as cited in Yeo, Ong and Ng, 2014). In fact, students who enter kindergarten lacking in foundational skills are less likely to benefit from the literacy instruction they will get in school (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). Additional research by Juel (1998) discovered that children who struggle with reading in first grade have a very high likelihood of continuing to be a struggling reader in fourth grade. As well, the presence of poor reading skills in students has

often been associated with the development of emotional and behavioral problems such as aggressive and hyperactive behaviors, as well as issues with lack of effort, and deficits in feelings of self-worth (Good, Simmons and Smith, 1998). The impact on children's reading success is certainly significant when looking at deficient early literacy skill development.

Of particular importance when discussing the foundational literacy skills is the concept coined by Stanovich (1986) called the "Matthew Effect". When looking at variances in reading ability in children, the idea behind the Matthew effect is students who experience challenges with phonological awareness are also at greater risk of remaining behind their peers when it comes to all areas of reading achievement, including decoding abilities and decreased exposure to vocabulary, which leads to lower levels of reading motivation. Time spent reading is vital to building success as a reader, and students who lack skill and motivation will continue to fall further behind in their reading abilities, while their higher achieving peers continue to grow and succeed as readers. The "Matthew effect" in reading addresses the idea that the rich get richer (strong readers get stronger), while the poor get poorer (struggling readers continue to struggle).

In this section, I have made the connection between emergent literacy stage and children's literacy development, along with highlighting the theory behind emergent literacy. Additionally, I discussed the impact on children's literacy success when foundational skill development is deficient.

In order for foundational early literacy skills to be developed, children must be exposed to literacy experiences both in and out of the home. In the next section, I will address the role that the family can play in ensuring that children become successfully literate.

Family Literacy

The journey to literacy learning for children begins in the home. When thinking about the role of family, it is important to remember that the parent is the child's first teacher. Parents serve a critical role in building early literacy and language skills with their children, both prior to and while children are receiving formal schooling (Korth and Marshall, 2009). In this section, the concept of family literacy will be discussed and will include information on the impact of family on children's reading development. Additionally, I will provide information as it relates to ways for families to encourage emergent literacy skills within their children.

Building a literacy environment. Perhaps the largest impact on children's literacy development comes from their families. Through their research, Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) discovered that parents attitudes towards, and beliefs about reading are major contributors to the effective emergent literacy development of children.

In terms of creating a supportive literacy environment, several factors should be discussed. Firstly, parent's beliefs in the importance of literacy should be taken into account when looking at how children develop literacy skills. A study by DeBaryshe (1995) determined that there was a strong correlation between parents' beliefs in literacy and the quantity and quality of parent and child reading experiences within the home. Additionally, parents who highly valued literacy development, and saw the importance of their own role in supporting that development were far more likely to provide home environments that actively engaged their children in literacy-related activities (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2005). The attitudes that families place on reading is also crucial to the development of the reading attitudes of the children. Parents' beliefs about the nature and value of literacy has been found to have a

significant impact and lasting effect on the attitudes that children have towards reading (Snow et al., 1998).

Secondly, in order to create a literacy environment that is supportive of development of emergent literacy skills, families must show their children that reading is a valuable and desirable activity. One way to accomplish this task is for parents to serve as reading role models, allowing their children to see them reading themselves (Topping & Wolfendale, 1985). Children who are encouraged to read but never see a family member reading will struggle to adopt the right attitude towards reading. As well, families whose attitudes towards reading include the viewpoint that reading is for pleasure are more likely to have children with better attitudes towards reading, as well as higher levels of academic achievement (Baker, 2003). Family attitudes towards literacy are also vital to the development of children as readers and writers, and can impact the effectiveness of the acquisition of the foundational skills (Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014).

Thirdly, the experience of shared reading is an additional way to create a literacy environment for children to develop emergent skills. The message given to families from literacy professionals is that reading books is one of the most important ways that they can promote language and literacy development with their children (Burns, Snow & Griffin, 1999). Children who listen to an adult read and who share interactions with the text are building a solid foundation of early literacy skills, and gaining readiness for future success in reading. The reciprocal interactions with text are what make the activity valuable. Without the experience of interacting with the text, children simply listening to a book being read aloud will not benefit nearly as much as the ones who are read to and have conversations about the book they've just heard. Even with large quantities of books in the homes of children, it is the activities related to the books that change the quality of the literacy learning (Kirby and Hogan, 2008).

Concepts of print, vocabulary learning, and understanding of story structures are all elements that are developed through children listening to someone reading books (Dickinson and Tabors, 1991). Through that experience, not only do they develop literacy skills, but the value and enjoyment around reading becomes enhanced as well.

The case for frequent book reading between adults and children is solid. According to Crain-Thoreson & Dale (1992), families who engage in shared reading with their children have a strong positive influence upon the verbal skill development of the children, as well as helping them to understand how print works. Additionally, through the experience of shared reading, children learn how to learn (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992). If the goal is to build proficient and successful readers, it is imperative that families provide these shared reading and early literacy experiences with children.

Recent research has shown that not only is there strong correlation between the literacy skill development of children and the home environment, but in fact that contribution is more powerful than their participation in a high quality preschool or kindergarten program (Jordan, Snow, and Porche, 2000, as cited in Tracey and Morrow, 2012). Additionally, Edwards (2004) uses various statements that are reflective of multiple researchers to describe the benefits of family involvement on student learning and academic achievement. Some of these include:

- Success of a school's literacy program is dependent upon the home literacy environment (Morrow, 1993, as cited in Edwards 2004).
- The adults who regularly live and interact with children can have a significant influence on both quality and quantity of their literacy experiences (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

- Literacy behaviors are modeled for children through their families, and children who lack proper literacy role models find themselves falling further behind in school each year (Darling, 1998, as cited in Edwards, 2004).

Although it is vital that children acquire the necessary skills, it is also important to note that the development should occur not only within a formal instructional program or by teaching each individual skill, but naturally through children's daily experiences (Wolfe and Nevills, 2004). The more natural the learning environment, the more authentic the experience will be for them.

Each of the foundational literacy skills discussed in the previous section can be cultivated within children's home environments. These skills include letter and sound recognition, phonemic and phonological awareness, concepts of print, and oral language development. I will now present information that shows how some of these skills can be supported by the family.

Firstly, a child should be able to not only recognize letters of the alphabet, but have the knowledge that each individual letter also represents a sound. Beginning with the letters in their own name, children should be exposed to numerous activities that require the recognition of letters and sounds. Activities like playing with magnetic letters, doing letter puzzles and engaging with alphabet books are all examples of ways for families to give their children opportunities to acquire the names and sounds of letters (NELP, 2008).

Giving young children time to attach letter recognition with movement activity will also help solidify the learning while giving them much needed time to move their bodies (Culatta, Hall-Kenyon and Black, 2013). Jumping when learning about the letter "J" or pretending to be a dog while learning about letter "D" are examples of ways to incorporate movement into letter name and sound learning. Doing a search for letters, as well as sorting and manipulating them

will also provide engaging opportunities for letter learning (Culatta, Hall-Kenyon and Black, 2013).

In addition to being able to name the letters and the sounds each of them make, the automaticity of the task is very important. The fluency and accuracy in which children can name letters and sounds is a highly predictive factor of their ability to learn to read. More of children's working memory can be used to see patterns of letters rather than expending mental energy recalling the names of the letters and the sounds they make (Wolfe and Nevills, 2004). As is noted, developing letter and sound recognition in children early on is key for their literacy development.

Secondly, children must be exposed to multiple opportunities to play with sounds, in order to develop phonemic and phonological awareness. There must be an understanding that each individual letter stands for a certain sound, and that phonemes, or sound units can be manipulated to form words. Phonological awareness is the broad term that also encompasses skills such as blending and segmenting sounds within words, and recognizing that words have onset, medial, and ending sounds (Brown, 2014).

Children who struggle with phonological and phonemic awareness are often limited in their ability to decode words and comprehend effectively what they are reading, and are likely to experience difficulty in their reading development (Shanahan and Lonigan, 2013). In many cases, the work that is done through intervention settings such as the one in my school include explicit instruction in decoding skills, in order to build the bridge to increased reading proficiency.

In order to build phonological and phonemic awareness in young children, families should be encouraged to provide many activities for children to play with words. Again,

engagement with books are crucial. Brown (2014) suggests that books from Dr. Seuss which involve rhyming, letter sounds and alliteration are excellent avenues for building this foundational skill. Additionally, word games that ask children to identify the sound they hear at the beginning or end of a word, as well as listening to songs, nursery rhymes and doing finger plays can all contribute towards the development of phonological and phonemic awareness.

There are several additional crucial literacy skills that can be promoted within a family and home environment. These include concepts of print, oral language and vocabulary development.

Concepts of print. Early on in their lives, children should be given opportunities to see print in many different formats, in order to develop the understanding of what it looks like, how it works and the idea that print is connected to the meaning of what they read (Strickland and Schickedanz, 2009). Teaching children that a book is held right side up, showing them the front and back of a book, indicating that print is read from left to right on a page, and that the print, not the pictures are what is read in a book are all necessary skills that children should be developing in order to become proficient readers. Additionally, by labeling items in the home, or pointing out signs in everyday settings, children have the opportunity to recognize print and understand that it is representative of something to be read. As adults in the home read books or texts with young children, they should also work to ensure that they are interacting with the print of the text with their children, in order to foster their knowledge of concepts of print (Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013).

Oral language and vocabulary. Oral language and vocabulary are also key concepts that can be fostered within a home and family environment, and that contribute to the literacy success of children. The NELP (2000) believes that exposing children to language rich activities

such as asking them questions about what they see and asking them to respond are examples of ways families can help foster their children's oral language development. According to the NELP (2000), the development of children's oral language skills can be enhanced by the numerous opportunities that they have to use language with adults and with one another. Children should have time to talk not only individually with others, but in small group settings as well. They should also practice their oral language skills during story time. Letting children listen to stories being read aloud and told orally will assist in building background knowledge for them, and will increase their vocabulary understanding (NELP, 2000).

According to the theory of Sociolinguistics, the acquisition of oral language is foundational to children's reading and writing achievement as well (Apel & Masterson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, as cited in Tracey and Morrow, 2012). Vocabulary learning and exposure to words is an essential component to reading success, and highlights the need for children to be involved in activities that provide them with large quantities of word learning.

In respect to oral language and vocabulary and home environments, there is a large discrepancy in what children are exposed to by the time they enter kindergarten. Studies have shown that the socioeconomic status of a family contributes strongly to the vocabulary development of the child. According to Hart and Risley (1995), the number of words that children from economically advantaged homes are exposed to can differ as much as 30 million words as that of a peer who resides in a lower income setting. Hart and Risley also found that professional working parents talked to their children three times as much as those parents who received economic assistance. Both of these studies underscore the tremendous imbalance that exists for children in regards to literacy learning, and provides evidence that children, especially those from families of lower socio-economic status, must be exposed to large quantities of words

in order to achieve literacy success. Additionally, the way that vocabulary is used can convey different messages about the value of literacy (Willingham, 2015). Vocabulary development is a crucial component to developing literate children, and must include meaningful interactions between adult and child and provide a means for gaining background knowledge about the world. Without this, a child's literacy development will be hindered.

As I have shown in this section, tremendous value is placed on the role of the family in creating environments that foster early literacy skill development in children. In addition to creating a supportive literacy environment, the skill development within the home and factors such as building oral language and vocabulary all contribute to the child's reading development.

In the next section, I will discuss home and school environments, and elaborate on the ways that the two can work together to ensure the literacy success of children. I will look at early identification and intervention for struggling students, and will highlight program structures that can maximize the partnership between home and school.

Home and School Partnerships

The type of family involvement in children's literacy life can be as varied as the family itself. For a variety of reasons, families may or may not be as involved with their children's development as a reader. In this section, I will highlight the importance of early education. Additionally, I will investigate ways that early identification and intervention can impact children's literacy education. Lastly, I will provide examples of ways families and educators can work in partnership towards building literacy success for the children in their lives.

Early education. As I mentioned in the previous section, home is where children begin their literacy learning. Unfortunately, many students, especially those whose families are of low socioeconomic status or who have limited English proficiency skills are raised in homes that do

not provide adequate early literacy experiences. These children begin their formal educational journey without the necessary tools for literacy success (Gettinger and Stoiber, 2007), and require additional support in acquiring those needed skills so that they can achieve sufficient levels of literacy learning.

A strong case can be made for programs that foster early literacy skill development, especially for the most at-risk students (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2007). One such program is Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), which is affiliated with the Minnesota Department of Education. The program serves children from birth to kindergarten entrance, and is offered through Minnesota public school districts. The mission of ECFE is to “enhance the ability of all parents and other family members to provide the best possible environment for their child’s learning and growth” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015). A second example of early literacy programs is Head Start, a federally funded initiative which began in 1965. Head Start is a comprehensive program that involves four major components, all of which are vital to ensuring that children’s needs are met. These components include:

- Education, including providing learning experiences that help children grow intellectually, socially and emotionally
- Health, which involves providing health services for children and families
- Parent involvement, that encourages families to be involved in planning and implementation of activities for children, as well as participation in classes and workshops on child development
- Social services, ensuring that families are connected to receiving whatever services they need in order to be successful (National Head Start Association, 2016).

From age's three to five, preschool education has been found to be extremely beneficial, especially for children from socio-economically disadvantaged families (Elliot, 2006; Sylva et al. 2004, as cited in Buckingham, Beaman & Wheldall, 2014). Preschool programs can provide the literacy experiences that are not afforded children within their homes, and can assist in ensuring that they will be at lower risk for special education referrals later on in their school career (Temple, Reynolds & Arteaga, 2010).

A high quality preschool program that includes phonological awareness activities and shared reading experiences is a major contributor to improving the likelihood of greater literacy success in school. Once again, it is the children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds that will benefit most from attending such a program. Although participation in preschool does not completely compensate for gaps in children's home literacy learning, it can certainly assist in making strong gains for their early skill development (Buckingham 2014).

While the research supports programs for disadvantaged students to help ensure the building of early literacy skills, there is a disconnect in the number of children who actually attend these programs. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011), and the United States Census Bureau (2010), children who could benefit the most from attendance in a preschool program are also the least likely to actually participate. Changes to early education policy could help to offset this troubling trend and ensure that more disadvantaged students gain the advantage that is afforded their peers from more affluent homes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2010, as cited in Buckingham , Beaman & Wheldall, 2014).

Early education has been proven to be highly beneficial for literacy skill development, but for those who are not given the rich opportunities to build the emergent literacy skills,

systems should be in place to ensure the identification and potential intervention for those children who will need additional support. In this next section, I will provide information related to early identification and intervention for students.

Early identification and intervention. The school plays a vital role in ensuring that children continue to learn to be literate. Although some children come into formal schooling completely prepared with the foundational skill set, others will require additional support in order to build the basic skills that are needed to begin their literacy journey. In my daily work as an intervention teacher, I see the impact on children who have come to school without the necessary skills. I view my role as a vital piece of the puzzle, where home, family, early education and formal schooling must fit together to complete the literacy experience for these children.

Prior to entering elementary school, it is crucial that children who lack the emergent literacy skills be identified early on and provided intensive skill-based intervention. Identification of students who are at risk for literacy success is extremely important, and can occur in various ways and in different settings. According to Lonigan, Allan and Lerner (2011), three main types of assessment can be used in determining students' educational needs and instructional support. Firstly, informal assessments are used to determine levels of student knowledge in preschool. These assessments include teacher observation, ratings scales and portfolios of student work. Secondly, screening and progress monitoring are methods that are used to determine which early literacy skill areas need additional support, and are utilized by the teachers to inform their instruction. Examples of two widely used screening methods are Get Ready to Read! Revised Screening Tool (GTTR-R; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001; Lonigan & Wilson, 2008, as cited in Lonigan, Allan & Lerner, 2011), and Individual Growth and

Development Indicators (IGDI's; McConnell, 2002, as cited in Lonigan, Allan & Lerner, 2011). Get Ready to Read! Revised Screening Tool measures print knowledge and phonemic awareness, while IGDI measures the areas of alliteration, initial and sound identification.

Thirdly, diagnostic assessments provide educators with specific and detailed information about a particular skill area. These diagnostic assessments provide reliable data, but are also costly and time intensive in their administration. Throughout this literature review, one of the most commonly discussed diagnostic assessment tools was the Test of Preschool Early Literacy, or TOPEL (Lonigan, Wagner, Torgesen & Rashotte, 2007, as cited in Lonigan, Allan & Lerner, 2011). The TOPEL includes assessment in the areas of vocabulary, phonological awareness, and print knowledge,

All of the above mentioned identification tools provide vital information for educators to use when determining which children are in need of early intervention. Once students are identified, plans for implementation of interventions can be set into motion.

An intervention program model in early literacy can effectively influence the path to successful reading, even prior to beginning kindergarten (Hilbert & Eis, 2013). High quality programs serve the purpose of reducing the numbers of children who enter school with weak literacy skills, and decreasing the numbers of students who will eventually need special education services (Snow et al., 1998).

According to Gettinger & Stoiber, 2007, those developing an intervention program for early childhood learners should take careful consideration to include the following elements:

- Classroom activities that involve literacy-rich learning opportunities, and that are guided by research-based curriculum

- Best practice methods of delivering instruction in the four crucial foundational literacy skills
- Identification/screening and progress monitoring procedures that are used to provide needed interventions at various levels of intensity for students
- Professional development and coaching for early childhood teachers, to ensure that they are skilled in providing developmentally appropriate skill based intervention for their students

An example of one such program is the Exemplary Model of Early Reading Growth and Excellence (EMERGE), a partnership program involving Head Start Milwaukee, Head Start Day Care Partner Program of Milwaukee, and University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and Madison. The EMERGE program is funded through the United States Department of Education, as an Early Reading First initiative. In addition to the student/classroom learning environment, the EMERGE program includes an element of family literacy. Once per week, families can learn from literacy specialists about ways to support literacy learning outside of the home, and can access books to check out for parent and child to engage in shared reading experiences.

Besides the previously mentioned recommendations for early literacy intervention programs, elements to consider should include targeted skill-based intervention. By allowing for the interventions to be tailored specifically to the skill area that the children need most, the likelihood of the interventions being most beneficial will be greatly increased (Lonigan, Allan & Lerner, 2011). Flexibility of grouping students should also be factored into an effective intervention program, allowing for opportunities to individualize instruction and provide various levels of requisite intensity of the intervention as deemed necessary (Kaminski, Powell-Smith, Hommel, McMahon & Bravo Aguayo, 2015).

Identification and interventions within the school setting can assist in providing children with literacy skill support, and help to ensure their reading success. Additionally, the partnership between home and school can be a major contributor towards the student's literacy learning. In this final section, I will provide information and suggestions for strategies that allow schools and homes to work in collaboration towards student literacy success.

Building home and school partnerships. As stated previously, the home environment of children plays a vital role in helping to develop literacy skills. Home is where they first experience language and literacy (Hart & Risley, 1995; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010; Strickland, 1990, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013). Because home environments vary so greatly for children, the level at which they are given literacy opportunities varies as well. This variation explains discrepancies in literacy readiness in children, and supports the need for partnerships between the home environment and school.

Crucial to the partnership between home and school is the value that is placed on the existing literacy beliefs and activities that occur within families. It is vital that teachers and schools recognize, value and encourage the types of literacy experiences that families are providing for their children, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background (Bingham, Korth and Marshall, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013). Teachers should keep in mind that literacy support and how it is valued can look very different among families of various backgrounds, and can be considered in contrast to the literacy views of teachers and other educational professionals. Because the responsibility of teaching literacy is shared between home and school, it is crucial for there to be a mutual understanding and appreciation of the efforts of all stakeholders.

There are numerous variations in the ways that family involvement and home school partnerships can be interpreted. Some models suggest a more traditional approach, viewing the teacher and school as the guide in providing information on ways that families should get involved. Although this type of approach attempts to involve families, its' focus puts the teacher in charge of defining what the involvement looks like and allows the school to have most of the control (Christianakis, 2011, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013).

Instead, according to Bingham, Korth & Marshall (as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013), schools should consider an approach that views family involvement and home/school partnership as collaborative. This approach embraces the multitude of experiences both culturally and socially that families bring to school, and recognizes that regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds, parents want to provide positive support for their children's learning. Moll (1992) brings us the notion of "funds of knowledge". Within this concept, the idea exists that rather than viewing students' home lives as deficient, teachers and other school staff should encourage family involvement by gathering information about the cultural background of the family. From this information, involvement can be cultivated that meets the needs of both family and school.

Shephard and Rose's "empowerment model" (1992) views parents as vital sources of information that can be used to help them make meaningful contributions to their children's lives and to their communities. The empowerment model is comprised of four steps, all of which build upon each other.

These four steps involve:

- basic communication, where families establish a line of communication with their children's teacher and school

- home improvement, which involves activities within the home that are intended to improve children's home learning environments
- volunteering, in which families begin to interact with other parents and families at school
- advocacy, which provides ways for families to get involved with decision making agencies at various levels to assist in improving educational opportunities for their students

The partnership between the home environment and the school is key to ensuring that children are equipped with the necessary foundational skills that will facilitate literacy learning. In fact, it is imperative that children understand the connection between their home and community literacy experiences, and those within their school setting. Without that connection, they could experience a literacy learning gap (McGee & Richardson, 2000). By embracing and empowering families to get involved in educational opportunities within a school setting, teachers are attempting to create a strong pipeline for literacy success for children.

As formal schooling begins for children, a second teacher enters their life. In order to ensure that they become successful in school, and particularly within the context of literacy, a partnership should be forged between home and school. Neither party should be solely responsible for children's literacy learning, but instead should find ways to collaborate to ensure that opportunities for learning are maximized (Edwards, 2009).

Multiple viewpoints on the notion of home and school partnership and family involvement exist. For the purpose of this review, several should be noted:

- Nurturing children's literacy is the responsibility of all who educate and care for children (Stooke, 2005, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013).

- Schools should support parents in their efforts to provide educational activities for the child that are engaging and age appropriate, and that will foster the building of early literacy skills (Tamis-LeMonda & Rodriguez, 2009, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013).
- Parents and teachers often share common goals for students, which should guide the efforts of both parties in working together to help students succeed at every grade level (Edwards, 2004).

There are multiple benefits of a successful home and school partnership, and these have been highly touted in various studies. Henderson & Mapp (2002, as cited in Gambrell & Morrow, 2015) provided a synthesis of research information that revealed several key factors that were attributed to high levels of family involvement. These factors include higher test scores and grades, improved social skills and behaviors, and greater rates of attendance in school.

In order for a successful home and school partnership to be cultivated, the school's climate must be one where families feel trusted and respected, and where their opinions are valued. Teachers play a pivotal role in creating this kind of climate through self-reflection of current practices and thoughtful planning of successful family involvement activities. Edwards (2009) uses a cyclical model to describe the interrelatedness of family involvement, teacher effectiveness, student achievement and positive school climate. This model reinforces the importance of recognizing that all components are crucial to the success of the partnership.

One avenue towards forging the home and school partnership is for schools to examine the ways they involve families in children's education. According to Epstein (as cited in Edwards, 2009), the policies and practices of a school should be evaluated to determine if they are aligned with the goals of encouraging family involvement, and make necessary adjustments

to ensure that families feel welcomed and invited in the school environment. This process should be done periodically, and be undertaken by the entire school community so that the ultimate goal of successful learning for all students can be met.

Schools can gain valuable insight into ways to get their families involved by soliciting information through surveys and conversations. Survey topics such as ways to support children's reading at home, willingness to participate in literacy related activities and attitudes towards parental responsibility can inform teachers and schools about how families view literacy (Edwards, 2009). In order to reach all families, even those who struggle with literacy success, the surveys could also be conducted in the form of an interview or conversation. The important goal is to gather information that will be used to create successful partnerships.

Perhaps the most fundamental point to be reinforced in the discussion on home and school partnerships is that teachers must get to know the families of the students they are working with. They must be able to recognize and respect the cultural and socioeconomic differences within families, and provide a climate where families, regardless of ability and background can be encouraged to support their students' learning both in and out of school (Bingham, Korth & Marshall, as cited in Culatta, Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2013).

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the works of numerous literacy professionals as I researched the areas of early literacy skill development, family literacy, and home and school partnerships. I have shown a significant link between children's reading achievement and the early literacy experiences afforded to them, both at home and school, and provided examples of ways that families can support the literacy development of their children. Additionally, I have highlighted the importance of early education and intervention in order to ensure that children

gain the foundational skills necessary for literacy success. Lastly, I have provided the understanding of the need for a strong partnership between the home environment, early literacy experiences, and that of the school setting.

With these topics in mind, I revisit my research question *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?”*

In the next chapter, my teaching setting will be described, and information provided that supports the need for early identification and intervention for our youngest learners.

Additionally, I will use this opportunity to describe the rationale behind the creation of the curriculum materials that will be used to help support the early literacy skills development for children.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

In chapter two, I analyzed and synthesized professional literature highlighting the concepts of early literacy skill development, family literacy, and home and school partnerships. In doing so, I discovered tremendous correlation between the skill development of a child, the influence of the family, the power of intervention in assisting students who are identified as needing additional educational support, and the value of a partnership between a child's home and the school setting. The literature review provided an opportunity for me to further attempt to my research question: *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child's home and school promote literacy success?”*

To begin this chapter, it is necessary to provide a description of the educational setting in which I work. Additionally, knowing the demographics of the students in my school will serve as a framework for understanding how early literacy skill development and home and school partnerships are so vital to ensuring a child's literacy success. I have used this information to describe the type of curriculum materials that I created to support early literacy skill development. The intended focus audience for the curriculum materials are families of students, in particular those who are looking for additional information on ways to help their children develop literacy skills.

Setting

The district that I am employed in serves approximately 11,000 students from eight different suburbs. Currently, there are ten elementary schools, including one Spanish Immersion program and one Engineering and Arts Magnet school, as well as an International Baccalaureate

Primary Years Program (IBPYP) school. The district also has two middle schools, serving grades six through eight, and two high schools that house students in grades nine through twelve. For both the middle and high schools, the International Baccalaureate Program exists, as well as the Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) and Advanced Placement programs. In addition to magnet schools and rigorous academic program options for students, the district places high value on arts programming. Students in kindergarten through twelfth grade have many different options to explore art, music and theater within the district's programs.

My school is located within a first ring suburb of a large urban area. It is an elementary school serving about 450 students in grades kindergarten through grade five, and includes full day kindergarten classes for all students. Additionally, our school houses the Great Start program, for preschool children ages four and five whose families qualify for free and reduced meals. There is a morning and an afternoon section of the Great Start program.

There is significant diversity within the school, both culturally and socioeconomically. The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals school wide is approximately 67%, and our student diverse population is comprised of 26% representing African, Asian, Hispanic, Hmong and Native American cultures. To support the 11% of students who are not English language proficient, our staff includes one full time licensed English language teacher, as well as a full time educational assistant trained in English language learning.

The school is a neighborhood school for some of our students, and is supported by our local community. Local businesses provide donations for school events, volunteers from a local church serve as weekly reading buddies for some of our struggling readers, and city staff are present at many all-school programs. Of course, we would love to find additional ways to foster

relationships between school and local businesses in the community, particularly to support literacy within our school. That is an area for further consideration.

Because the school has a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals, it has Title 1 school designation. Several years ago, we received school-wide Title status, with the understanding that regardless of free and reduced statistics, all students would be eligible for the academic support that is needed.

As an intervention teacher, a large part of my role is to provide additional support for students in the areas of literacy and math, as well as behavioral interventions. I am part of a five-person team, consisting of 2 licensed teachers and 3 educational assistants who spend our days servicing students in grades K-5. At present, we do not support the students from the Great Start preschool program, but after completing this capstone, it is evident to me that providing interventions with these earliest learners should be part of our daily practice.

In addition to our in-school intervention team, the school provides Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) tutors for students in grades one through three who are in need of additional literacy support. This past year, the school had two full time MRC tutors who helped to bridge the literacy learning gap for our students, by providing daily intensive fluency and comprehension interventions for students. The results this year for students receiving MRC support were strong, with students being able to reach the fluency benchmark at much higher levels than years' past without the support.

On a weekly basis, a team of staff from our school meet to discuss students whose academic status or progress is of concern. I am the lead for this team, and my role is to facilitate discussion of the student, prepare the necessary data, and plan for implementation of intervention once it has been determined what type of support the student needs.

The primary method of data that is used to identify students in need of intervention is our district literacy assessments. The areas that are assessed are:

- letter and sound identification
- phonemic awareness
- word blending and segmenting
- decodable words
- fluency
- comprehension

Currently, we do not progress monitor or collect data for interventions with our Great Start preschool students. Through the work of this capstone and the research that has accompanied it, I am now of the belief that we should be incorporating methods for determining those students earlier on who are in need of literacy intervention. This will be a discussion prior to beginning next school year.

Rationale for Curriculum

Although we utilize district assessments to inform our identification and intervention process, I believe there is far more that we can be doing, especially in the area of our earliest learners-our early childhood and preschool population. Based on the research by Lonigan, Allan and Lerner (2011), it is imperative that we use multiple assessment criteria to help identify students who are potentially in need of additional support.

As I have indicated, there are multiple systems in place to provide support once our students begin school. In order to answer my research question though, I wanted to develop a program that would provide literacy support prior to the child entering school, as well as

including a component that would allow families to learn ways to develop literacy skills with their children.

Curriculum Development

When beginning to think about the type of program that I wanted to develop that would guide the answering of my research question, I found it necessary to gather information from several individuals who are familiar with early childhood education and parent child education programming.

The first individual I spoke with was the director of early childhood programs for the school district where I work. She provided me with valuable information regarding the types of programs that our district offers, the ways in which families learn about these programs, and the curriculum that is used when teaching our youngest learners. Additionally, we began to brainstorm ways that I could assist through my capstone project in providing additional tools for families to access literacy learning for their children and tips for teaching families how to interact with their children and literacy.

The second individual I spoke with was involved with the Parent Child Home Program (PCHP), a national program focused on teaching families how to build school readiness with their children. Although the Parent Child Home Program is nationally based, there is a program model that is being followed locally here in our area which I will use to help guide my curriculum program.

In thinking about all the research that I read and all of the information I have gathered, it is clear to me that the curriculum that I develop must include both tips for families on how to provide literacy learning for their children, and the explicit teaching of methods for giving those children the foundational literacy experiences. Additionally, I plan to offer up ways for school

and community to work in partnership with families to provide these literacy experiences that will better prepare early learners for literacy success. To accomplish this, I have created a one session workshop to be delivered to families on the topic of shared reading, and have developed a literacy pack that includes tips that these families can utilize to support the acquisition of their children's literacy skills. Both the workshop and literacy pack components will be discussed in detail in the upcoming chapter.

Throughout this chapter, my purpose was to provide extensive demographic information of my school and district, and to describe the programs that are available to our students to support their literacy learning. In doing this, my intent was to highlight the types of literacy support that currently exists and to demonstrate that there is room for expansion of ways to assist our families in helping their children in achieving literacy success.

In chapter four, I will use the demographical data and existing program information from the previous chapter to guide the development of curriculum. The goal of this is to increase family awareness, and educate families about the importance of building the necessary foundational literacy skills within their children.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

In chapter two of this capstone, I discussed the importance of creating literacy environments that are conducive to development of early literacy skills. I also discussed the specific skills that can be fostered through literacy interactions between family members and children. As I continue to examine my research question “*How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success*”, I am compelled to create curriculum that will provide families with practical methods and materials for helping to develop early literacy skills with their children. In particular, I have chosen shared reading for my focus, since this is one crucial way that families can interact with their children and foster early literacy skills simultaneously.

In chapter four, I will highlight the workshop and literacy packs that I have developed to support families in assisting their children in the area of literacy, and provide rationale for the inclusion of each component. The purpose of the curriculum is to educate families on ways to experience shared reading with their children, and could be offered both at the elementary and preschool settings for families, particularly where limited literacy opportunities exist.

Workshop

The first component of my curriculum will be a workshop (PowerPoint: Appendix A), that can be used to inform families of how to read with their children. Although I myself would plan to use this workshop in our elementary school setting, I foresee the possibility of our district early childhood department also utilizing it with early childhood families. In particular, my hope

is that this workshop be used during family literacy nights or parent teacher conference nights at the elementary level, or as a family education session for early childhood families.

The length of the workshop is 75 minutes, which could deter families from participating, especially if this workshop is given on the same night as a parent/teacher conference. A future consideration would be to make the workshop session shorter, but offer additional nights and make the focus of each workshop session a different literacy component.

Rationale. Many families are told that reading with their children is important, but often they do not have the requisite tools to know how to maximize that experience so that the foundational literacy skills can be developed during that shared reading. It is important to not only tell families that they should be reading with their children, but for families who struggle with literacy themselves, it is vital to provide explicit instruction on how to read with their children. These families must understand that through shared reading, they would be providing opportunities for literacy skill development to occur. Through participation in a workshop, the hope is that these families not only understand why it is important to read with their children, but will also take away practical tips for how to make that happen.

Workshop format. The intent of this workshop is for it to be enjoyable and interactive for both parent and children, and for families to walk away from the session with hands-on ideas and tips for experiencing reading with their children. Depending on the composition of the attendees of the workshop, a translator could be provided in the participant's native language.

The structure of the workshop (APPENDIX A) would include:

- Introduction-welcoming families, asking them to introduce themselves and their children. A community building activity would also be included in this part of the session, so that families and children feel the sense of belonging to the group and

make connections to others. The community builder that I have in mind for this first workshop is to 1) have families make introductions of themselves; 2) have family members complete the following prompt: “Something that I enjoy doing together with my child is...” At the conclusion of this activity, children would go into a separate room, or section of the room that the workshop is held in. The children would be reading books with a “reading buddy”, either a middle or high school student volunteer. This would allow the adults to receive the crucial information while their children are otherwise occupied in a literacy activity.

- Overview of the workshop-rationale for the topic, what the learning objective would be for the time together
- Description of the benefits of reading with children, to help families understand why it is so vital that they have this experience with their children.
- Modeling of shared reading time. Families would observe while workshop presenter demonstrates how to read with the child. Follow up by asking families to share what they noticed during the modeling session.
- Individual practice time. This would be the time that the children re-join their family members. Families would now have the chance to practice what they observed with their own children. The workshop facilitator would circulate around the room, coaching as needed and providing feedback to each family. Giving them the ability to practice will help to solidify the learning for each family member, as they will have had the time to put the specific skill and strategy into action. Books for this activity would be provided in multiple languages, in order to meet the diverse needs of our families. Additionally,

families would be shown how to access online resources that could be used for the shared reading activity, such as Tumble Books or Storyline Online, both available through our school's media center website. These resources would be particularly important for those families who may have limited access to bookstores or libraries, but have technology in the home to support online reading. Currently, Tumble Books also has online stories in Spanish, although limited in quantity.

- Whole group discussion. Give families opportunity to ask specific questions, reflect on the shared reading experience.
- Goal setting (APPENDIX B). Ask families to set a goal for themselves in relationship to reading with their children. Encourage them to commit to a realistic amount of time per week that they can use for reading together. Have them fill out the goal on the form provided. Make copies for facilitator to keep (to use for following up in future sessions), and send goal sheet home with families. Ask them to display the goal in a location where they will be reminded of what they are striving towards.
- Evaluation/reflection (APPENDIX C). Thank families for attending and ask them to fill out evaluation/reflection form. This will assist in guiding development of future family education sessions.

Although the workshop is a key component of informing families on how to experience shared reading with their children, I also wanted to provide those families with practical tips to use when they are reading with their children at home. In this next section, I will describe the elements of the literacy pack that has been designed, and will show how each element of the pack can be used by family members during their shared reading time.

Literacy Packs

An additional component of the developed curriculum is literacy packs. The intent of these packs is for families to have something tangible to have, that will help to support literacy opportunities in reading with their children. These packs would be assembled prior to the workshop, and handed out to family members at the completion of the workshop.

Rationale. The research indicates that children who are read to more frequently display higher levels of reading achievement (Kirby and Hogan, 2008). Additionally though, the quality of the time and the types of activities occurring during the shared reading process is just as vital to ensuring high levels of reading achievement for the child. My intent is to provide a literacy pack for families to use when they are sitting down to read with their children, to serve as a resource. By using items in the pack, I hope the reading experience will be enhanced for families, and that reading together will be enjoyable as well as provide opportunities for increased literacy skill development.

Contents. I wanted to ensure that families have a variety of items to take with them in their literacy packs, but purposefully do not want to overwhelm them with so many things that the process of reading with their children becomes unmanageable. In thinking about what would be most beneficial, I have decided to include the following items in the pack:

- A gallon-size Ziploc bag, which will be used to hold the contents of items in the literacy pack. As I mentioned previously, each bag would be pre-assembled prior to the start of the workshop so that families can simply take the literacy pack with them at the completion of the evening.
- A list of the items that are included in the literacy pack

- Book list (APPENDIX D). This is a list of books that support basic literacy skill development. This list includes books to enhance phonological awareness, letter and sound recognition, and that will encourage rich discussion around new vocabulary. The list also includes books that are diverse and multicultural. While the list may seem long and overwhelming to families, I have tried to list the books by skill, and kept each section short enough so that families have a few choices within each section. The list could be used when families visit the children's school library, public library or bookstore.
- Question List (APPENDIX E)

I have included both a list of questions and a set of question sticks that can prompt families to use with their children while reading with them. The questions are meant to provoke conversation about the stories being read. These will assist families in knowing what types of things to ask their children, so that the discussion around the book is rich and meaningful. The list of questions are color-coded to help families with questions to use before, during and after reading. All questions are open-ended, so that children are encouraged to discuss the book with their family, rather than simply answering a question. For families with limited literacy capabilities, I have chosen three basic questions that could be used as a starting point during the shared reading. The scaffolding of the types of questions hopefully will encourage families to feel comfortable at various levels of the experience. These key questions are listed in bold on the question list.
- Discussion sticks (APPENDIX F). These would be used as an additional resource, so that families have examples of questions they can ask their children during the shared reading experience. Either the child or family member reading with them could pick a

stick, and have the discussion at that point center on the chosen question. If adequate funding is available for the workshop, families could make their own set of discussion sticks to take home and use during the shared reading activity.

- Reading Tips handout (APPENDIX G) The literacy pack will also include a reading tips sheet for families. Tips are meant to guide families towards making reading with their children a more interactive experience, and one that will help children foster the requisite foundational literacy skills. Reading tips sheet could also be translated into other languages, again addressing the diverse language needs of our families.

Having the opportunity to attend a workshop, and to receive a literacy pack, my goal is for families to receive enough information and materials to feel confident and competent to engage with their children in shared reading.

In this chapter, I have described the contents and rationale for the curriculum materials that I have created to help answer my research question, “*How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?*” My hope is that by utilizing the materials within my curriculum, families will gain a better understanding of how to help their children foster the necessary foundational literacy skills within their home environment. Additionally, through the use of the curriculum materials, the goal is that greater numbers of children will begin their formal schooling with more abundant literacy skills than if their families had not had this exposure. The curriculum that I have developed is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of information and examples of ways for families to support the literacy skill development of their children.

In chapter five, I will revisit my research question while reflecting on the literature used in this capstone. I will also discuss the limitations of the capstone project, and present ideas for

future study in relationship to my research question. Lastly, I will provide final thoughts on this project and the learnings that resulted throughout the capstone.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Introduction

When I began the process of choosing a topic for my capstone, I reflected on my own experience as a teacher, as well as that of being a parent. Additionally, I looked back at my journey as a child who struggled to learn to read. I gave careful consideration to the fact that I was blessed to have the support of patient parents, especially my mother, and teachers who eventually understood that reading was a challenge for me and adapted their ways so that I could achieve that ultimate goal of being a reader.

In my daily work as an intervention teacher, my task is to provide foundational literacy skill instruction for many students who are desperately in need, who haven't been exposed to the same literacy opportunities as those of their higher achieving peers. In working with these students, I am led to wonder what would happen if on a regular basis, these children had families who read to them, who asked them questions as they read, and who played letter and word games with them. In addition, I think about what we can improve upon in school, to ensure that these students' literacy skills are nurtured to the point that they won't struggle to read when they hold a book in their hand. All of these wonderings lead me back to my research question, *"How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child's home and school promote literacy success?"*

In Chapter Five, I will revisit my literature review for this capstone. Additionally, I will connect my learnings and this capstone project to my career. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations that arose from this project, and reflect upon areas that would lead me to future study and action to be taken in order to more effectively prepare students for literacy success.

Revisiting the Literature

As I worked on this capstone project, it was imperative that I understood the research behind the topics of foundational skill development, family literacy and home and school partnerships. While there were many articles to read through and countless studies to interpret, several key ideas continue to impact my thinking.

The National Early Literacy Panel Report (NELP, 2008), as well as several other highly regarded researchers in the area of early literacy skill development highlighted the key foundational skills necessary for children to be adequately prepared for literacy learning once they enter formal schooling. As a parent and a teacher, I knew that children who were exposed to books at home were more likely to come to school prepared for learning, but never fully realized the immense impact that a child's early years had on their future success as literate individuals. In reading the research, the evidence is even more far reaching that the experiences that a child has in their formative years (birth to age five) are extremely vital to their literacy success.

Reading about all the foundational skills and ways that families can support their development leads me to wonder about additional ways we can encourage families to help their children. I am interested in investigating programs that exist in communities, such as Reach Out and Read where families learn about literacy skill development within their visits to the pediatrician. This area for future study will be addressed again in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The literature review for this capstone also lead me to the work of Patricia Edwards and her passion for engaging with parents as partners in children's school experience. Edwards' perspective on finding alternative ways to reaching our school families and embracing their

cultures, values and interests provides me with many questions about the methods that we employ at my school, and now gives me the opportunity to begin dialogue with our new principal on how to use Patricia Edwards research and findings to increase the family involvement within our school. My hope is that by doing so, we honor those families and what they bring to their child's school experience, which in turn will hopefully correlate with higher levels of student achievement.

Limitations

In the process of creating my curriculum, I spent time chatting with our district early childhood director. One of the things that she discussed as a major limitation to their programs was finding families and getting them to attend so that they can learn. I see this is as a potential barrier within our school as well. Although we offer family involvement activities throughout the year, the ones that are least attended are the ones that involve learning for the parents. We must find a more effective way to reach out to our families and engage them enough to want to come and learn with us, to be partners in their child's education rather than watching from the sidelines. My hope is to implement the workshop that I created during our spring conferences this year, as an added activity to participate in while the families are already coming to meet with their children's teachers.

I have the advantage of working with many students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Consequently, I have many potential families within my reach to have as participants in the workshop that I developed. Although the workshop is primarily focused on early years and early skill development, many of our older students' families can benefit from the concepts discussed throughout the workshop. My goal is to personally contact families, to invite them to attend the workshop. Parents receive so much information from school in paper and electronic

form that I think a phone call to invite them will be a nice way to increase the likelihood of them participating.

I did find it challenging to create a book list that would not only be targeted towards the literacy skills to be developed, but be culturally diverse and engaging for families to share with children. My goal in creating the book list was for it to be short enough to not seem overwhelming for families.

Access to books may also be considered a limitation, both in terms of transportation and finances. Families may not have the financial resources to purchase books, or the ability to get to a public library to borrow them. Having a lending library through school, as well as the online reading resources accessed through the school media center website could successfully address this limitation. In an ideal situation, families could borrow books to use after the workshop, to use at home. School provides the books from the list, and families take them home to try out the shared reading activity. I'd like to think about writing a grant to purchase books to use for the workshop.

One additional potential limitation within my capstone project is time. In developing the workshop to be aimed at families, I attempted to consider time and how to most effectively utilize the time with the families. My goal was for the workshop to be engaging and interactive, including technology, while also providing knowledge and information. I recognize that the length of my workshop (seventy-five minutes) is a significant amount of time for families to give up in an evening, especially when bringing their children with them. While I wanted families to learn the "why" behind reading with their children, I also wanted them to see it in action, to have opportunities to practice the activity, to ask questions and to receive feedback. This is a lofty

goal for seventy-five minutes, and in the future I might think about having this workshop be a three-part series, each of which focusing on one or two aspects of the shared reading experience.

Opportunities for Future Study

In attempting to answer my research question, *“How does the development of early literacy skills and the partnership between a child’s home and school promote literacy success?”*

I thought about additional ways to support families’ efforts in providing their children with stronger foundational literacy skills.

One of the areas that I would like to develop further is the workshop model. I foresee that the model could be expanded to a series, in which each session’s focus would be a different foundational literacy skill. Within the workshop model, I see the potential for providing families with a “menu” style handout of possible activity options to help support the development of the particular focus skill. As educators, we are constantly needing to differentiate our instruction to fit our student’s needs. I feel that our families need differentiation as well, in order to help them best meet the needs of their children. Through the menu-styled handouts, families would have choices that allow them to adapt the activities to suit their individual need, living situation, etc.

In addition to expanding the workshop model, I’d like to further investigate the opportunity to partner with programs such as Reach Out and Read, or Parent Child Home Program (PCHP), so that our families are given the necessary tools to build the literacy foundation that their children so desperately need. If we were to take a community approach to educating our children and their families, perhaps we could increase the likelihood that more of our students have the learning readiness skills as they enter their formal schooling.

Partnering with these community-based programs will take extreme collaboration between the school district and the agencies, but if the ultimate goal of improving literacy

readiness for children is at the forefront, I believe that we could make this potential partnership a tremendous success.

Conclusion

As I began graduate school after a nineteen year hiatus from being a college student, I realized that I hadn't given much thought to my journey as a learner, and in particular as a reader. Throughout my two years of graduate coursework, and especially as I journeyed through this capstone project, I have been required to reflect on what it means to be ready for learning and think about whose job it is to prepare children for acquiring the requisite skills. As I looked back on my own life, I realize that I was extremely fortunate to have people who believed in me, who provided me with guidance and support so that I could become a successfully literate student who was ready for learning.

Not all children are as lucky, which is why I chose this particular topic for my capstone project. Each day in my teaching career, I encounter children and their families who are in need of guidance and support so that the children can be successful in their learning journeys. In thinking about our school system and the challenges of meeting the needs of so many diverse learners, I know that we can do better. I know that we can learn to collaborate more effectively with each other as educators, with the local community, and most importantly with our families. We owe it to our students to ensure that they and their families enter the formal schooling process as prepared as they can possibly be.

This capstone project has certainly challenged me beyond anything I ever imagined. While at times it overwhelmed and frustrated me, I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to have gone through the process of selecting a topic, creating a research question, examining scores of literature from top researchers in the field of literacy, and creating what I hope will be a

worthwhile set of curriculum materials to be used to improve the literacy skill development of the students in my district and their families.

While my master's degree learning journey is at its 'end, I am inspired to continue the work I started with my capstone. I commit myself to bringing my new learnings to my career, to help empower our students, their families and my colleagues to better prepare those children for a lifetime of successful literacy.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Workshop PowerPoint

Reading With Children

What does it look like,
and How do I do it?

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." – Emilie Buchwald



Welcome and Introductions

- ▶ Workshop leader's introduction
- ▶ Introduce yourself and your children
- ▶ Complete this statement:

“Something I enjoy doing together with my child is...”



Workshop Agenda



6:00-6:15 Welcome/Introduction/Community Builder

6:15-6:30 Workshop overview-why are we here? What will we learn tonight? Why should I read with my child?

6:30-6:45 Demonstration/modeling of reading with a child

6:45-7:00 Family practice time-your turn to try it!

7:00-7:15 Questions, discussion

7:15 Goal setting, wrap-up

Learning Targets for tonight:

I Can:

- 1) **Understand** why it is important to read with my child
- 2) **Practice** reading with my child and receive feedback from the teacher
- 3) **Set** a goal for reading with my child within our home environment



Why should I read with my child?

Did you know?....

- ▶ Reading with children is one of the most important ways to build their language and literacy skills (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1999).

Reading with children helps them:

- ▶ **develop** vocabulary skills
- ▶ **understand** and identify letters and their sounds
- ▶ **learn** how a book is read and structured (i.e. how to hold a book, that it is read from left to right, etc.)
- ▶ **know** how to listen and understand what they are hearing



Benefits of reading to children (continued)

- ▶ Children who read with their families have better attitudes towards reading. When children see that reading is an enjoyable activity, they are more interested in reading themselves.
- ▶ The **amount** of time you read with your children is not as important as the **types of interactions** you have with them while you are reading (i.e. asking them questions about what you read, asking them to make predictions about what will happen next)
- ▶ When families show their children that reading together is a positive and fun experience, the children show stronger emerging reading skills.



What does it look like when we read with children?

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95vUoHTl85Q> (stop @ 8:12 in the video)



Time to practice!

- ▶ *Choose* a book with your child
- ▶ *Find* a comfortable spot in the room
- ▶ *Read* together
- ▶ *Try to remember* to read WITH your child, not TO them (involve them in the reading by asking questions about what they see in the book, asking them to predict what is happening, what letters they see, etc.)
- ▶ Use **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, **why** and **how** questions when reading with your child-leave the question open so that the child doesn't just answer yes or no



Thoughts? Questions?

- ▶ What did you notice as you were reading with your child?
- ▶ What went well?
- ▶ What questions do you have?



Goal setting

- ▶ Make a commitment to reading with your child!
- ▶ Please fill out the goal sheet. Be **REALISTIC**-make it a goal that you can make happen in your busy lives!
- ▶ You will take this goal sheet home with you-keep it in a place where you will remember what your goal is-you're more likely to make it happen if you can see it in front of you!



Evaluation/Reflection

- ▶ Please fill out the evaluation form and turn in to workshop presenter.
- ▶ Your evaluation will help us to know if we did our job of teaching you. Please be sure to include any questions you have, or areas you would like more information.
- ▶ Thank you for attending tonight's workshop! We look forward to seeing you again.



** We invite you to stay if you would like to learn how to find these online reading resources and practice with them.

Reading resources online

There are a few ways to read books with your child online.

Here is how you get to them:

- 1) Tumble Books (through the Lakeview Elementary School media center page):



<http://www.tumblebooklibrary.com/Home.aspx?categoryID=13>

- 2) Storyline Online (also available through the Lakeview school media center page):



• <http://www.storylineonline.net/>

APPENDIX B

Goal Setting Form

Goal Setting Form



Reading **together** is very important.

I will set a weekly goal of reading with my child/children.

We will work together to make sure we make reading fun!

Names (family members who are reading together)

Books we are reading _____

Week of: _____

Minutes per week that we will read _____



Reading **together** is very important.

I will set a weekly goal of reading with my child/children.

We will work together to make sure we make reading fun!

Names (family members who are reading together)

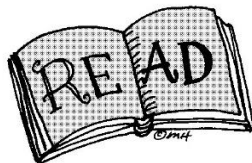
Books we are reading _____

Week of: _____

Minutes per week that we will read _____

APPENDIX C

Parent Workshop Evaluation



Parent Literacy Workshop Evaluation

*Thank you for attending tonight's workshop. Please take a few minutes to give us feedback on how we helped you.

1. I found this workshop to be (**circle one**):

_____ Very helpful

_____ Somewhat helpful

_____ Not helpful

2. What did you learn today that you can and will use in your home? (Please be as specific as you can)

3. What topics would you like to learn more about in future workshops?

4. What are the ages/grades of the children in your home?

5. Do you have any other comments, suggestions, feedback for this workshop? If so, please comment below.

APPENDIX D

Shared Reading Book List

Shared Reading Book List

Alphabet/letter books (to teach letters and letter sounds)

- Dr. Suess' ABC (Dr. Suess)
- Chicka Chicka ABC (Bill Martin Jr., John Archambault)
- Alphabet City-picture book (Stephen P. Johnson)
- Alphabet Mystery (Audrey Wood)
- Eating the Alphabet (Lois Ehlert)
- Creature abc (Andrew Zuckerman)
- I Spy Letters (Jean Marzollo)
- Animalia (Graeme Base)
- AlphaBeep (Debora Pearson)
- Allison's Zinnias (Anita Lobel)
- D is For Dancing Dragon; A China Alphabet (Carol Crane)
- D is For Drinking Gourd; An African American Alphabet (Nancy I. Sanders)
- ABeCedarios; Mexican Folk Art ABC's (Cynthia Weill and K. B. Basseches)

Books to teach phonemic awareness (rhyming)

- The Cat in the Hat (Dr. Suess)
- Moo, Baa, La La La! (Sandra Boynton)
- Each Peach Pear Plum (Janet Ahlberg)
- Sheep in a Jeep (Nancy Shaw)
- Llama, Llama Red Pajama (Anna Dewdney)
- One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish (Dr. Suess)
- A My Name is Alice (Jane Bayer)

Picture books to encourage vocabulary and discussion

- Thesaurus Rex (Laya Steinberg)
- The Word Collector (Sonja Wimmer)
- Tuesday (David Wiesner)
- Good Dog Carl (Alexandra Day)
- Pancakes for Breakfast (Tomie De Paola)
- Rainstorm (Barbara Lehman)
- Zoom (Istvan Banyai)
- Where's Walrus? (Stephen Savage)
- The Treasure Bath (Dan Andreasen)
- The Snowman (Raymond Briggs)

APPENDIX E

Shared Reading Question Discussion List

Orange= before reading questions to ask

Purple= during reading questions to ask

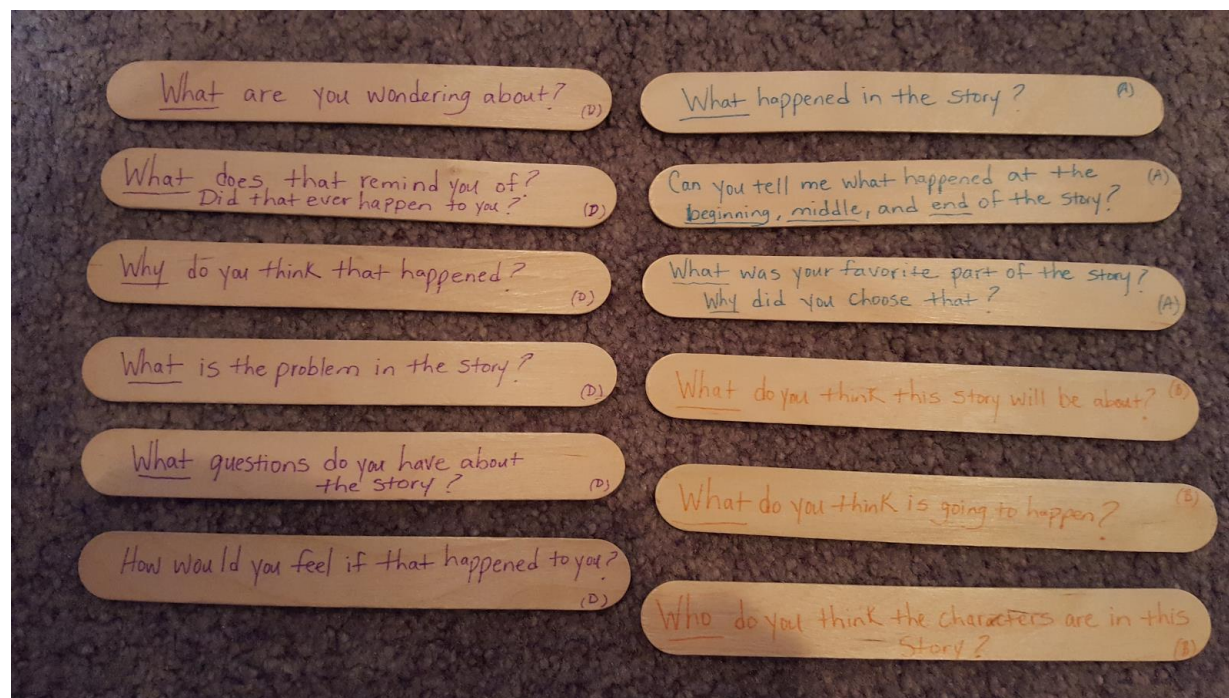
Blue=after reading questions to ask

Questions to ask your children while you read with them

- What do you think the story will be about? (**before** reading)
- What do you think is going to happen? (**before** reading)
- **Who do you think the characters are in the story?** (**before** reading)
- What does that remind you of? Did that ever happen to you? (**during** reading)
- What are you wondering about? (**during** reading)
- How would you feel if you were that character? (**during** reading)
- Why do you think that happened? (**during** reading)
- What questions do you have about the story? (**during** reading)
- What is the problem in the story? (**during** reading)
- How would you feel if that happened to you? (**during** reading)
- **What happened in the story?** (**after** reading)
- Can you tell me what happened at the beginning, middle and end of the story?(**after** reading)
- **What was your favorite part of the story?** Why did you choose that part? (**after** reading)

APPENDIX F

Shared Reading Discussion Question Sticks



APPENDIX G

Shared Reading Tips for Families

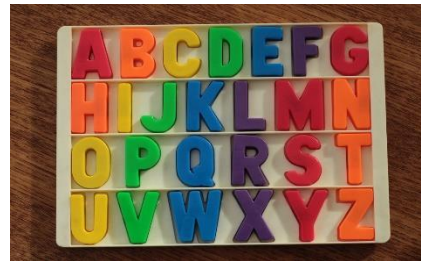


Tips for Reading with Your Children

- Read with your children *every day*. Make it a special time for you and them.
- *Name* the things that you see in books. This is a great way to help build your child's vocabulary. Point out interesting words and objects. (Example, "that is a **construction worker**". "What do you think he does in his job?")
- *Talk* with your children about what you are reading. *Ask questions* about what they notice, what they think will happen next in the story, etc.
- Make reading *fun*. Change your voice as you read to make it sound silly or more interesting. Let children know that you enjoy reading!
- Read books *over and over again*. The more you read a book, the more familiar children will become with it.
- Point out *letters and the sounds* they make as you read. This helps children understand that each letter makes a sound, and helps to build their *phonemic awareness*. As children get older, play with the sounds as you are reading with them. Use rhyming books, tongue twisters, and songs to help children learn about how sounds are used during reading.
- *Show* children how a book is held, and let them know that words on the page are read from left to right. This helps them to understand how stories are structured. Let children

practice **writing** letters or words from the book you are reading so that they begin to understand the idea of writing.

- Connect what you are reading to children’s lives. If you are reading about animals, **make a connection** about a visit you made to the zoo. (For example, “That is a seal in the story”. Do you remember the seal we saw when we went to the zoo?”).



Adapted from Reading Rockets (readingrockets.org)

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