

TRAINED HOME LITERACY PROGRAM AND ITS ADVANTAGES IN PRE-
KINDERGARTEN THROUGH FIRST GRADE

by

Zachary Singleton

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, MN

August 2019

Capstone Project Facilitator: Julianne Scullen, Ed.S.

Content Expert: Jessica Foley

Peer Reviewer: Trang Nguyen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	4
Overview.....	4
Researcher’s Background.....	5
Professional Interest in Literacy.....	5
Summary.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	9
Overview.....	9
Literacy Skills.....	9
Intervention.....	20
Home Literacy Environment.....	21
Parent-Teacher Communication.....	23
Trained Home Literacy Program.....	26
Summary.....	32
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology.....	34
Introduction.....	34
Overview of the Project.....	35
Choice of Method and Curriculum Design.....	36
Setting.....	37
Audience.....	38

Project Description.....	38
Timeline: Implementations Timeframe.....	39
Summary.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusions.....	41
Introduction.....	41
Overview.....	41
Learnings and Personal/Professional Growth.....	42
Revisiting Literature Review.....	44
Implications.....	47
Limitations.....	48
Future Plans for Project.....	49
Benefits to Teaching Profession.....	50
Conclusion.....	50
REFERENCES.....	52

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"Oh, magic hour, when a child first knows she can read printed words!" — A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, 1943

Overview

"Mr. Singleton, can I read my book please?" These words evoke in me, and I am sure in most teachers, a sense of overwhelming pride and accomplishment. It is at this point that I realize all the work I put in with this child has paid off and they actually want to read. Once a child actually truly starts reading, there is no stopping them. The pure excitement of early readers is contagious and there is no limit to what a child can do once they have that passion for reading. Frederick Douglass (n.d.) once said, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

In this chapter I will show how I arrived at my research question. I will also explain how I developed such an interest in children's literacy, and provide many examples showing why students' literacy is so exciting and so important. All this is to set a basis as to why I chose the research question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

Researcher's Background

Growing up, I never once thought I would eventually be a teacher. I never did well in school, mainly because I never really applied myself. The one area that always stayed consistent my whole life was my love for reading. This, in part, was thanks to my parents who were lifelong readers themselves. Emilie Buchwald (n.d.) once said, "Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." Even more than reading with them, I learned the fun of reading by just being around books. I would often find one or both of my parents reading somewhere in the house while growing up. My mother was a prolific reader who enjoyed mysteries especially. I remember watching the movie version of many of her detective novels she read and comparing the books to the movie. She always contended that there is nothing like the book. After all, how can someone really tell a story worth hearing in a two hour movie? My father enjoyed books on history, specifically U.S. History. He was a great storyteller himself and loved sharing and talking about historical figures and events that he found interesting. It should not surprise anyone, that to this day, my two favorite genres of reading are mysteries/thrillers and U.S. History.

Professional Interest in Literacy

I did not realize until I became an educator later in life how my parents unknowingly created such a rich literacy environment in my home growing up. I realize now how much my parents' habits and routines influenced the reader I eventually became. Once I became a teacher I did not forget about the importance of a healthy reading environment at home, however it took me awhile to fully take advantage of my students' home environments and to start thinking about my relationship with their

parents as a partnership, a partnership established with the end goal of developing children into readers.

I have been teaching for four years in a variety of grade levels. Those grade levels included first grade, third grade, fourth grade, and sixth grade. I currently will begin my third year in a first grade classroom. The last two years teaching in first grade has reopened my eyes to what reading must look like to early readers. It brought me back to my early years sitting on the carpet of my first grade classroom listening to great read-alouds. I have had to go back to the basics of reading and thoroughly look at all the different components that make up a beginning reader. The reading growth most teachers and parents see in first graders throughout the school year is amazing. They can go from only recognizing letter sounds to reading chapter books in one school year's time and they are becoming readers.

I have noticed that students that make the most progress in their reading have strong literacy environments at home, and have environments where reading is commonplace, with plenty of access to reading materials. It is easy to pick out which students are getting more support at home. I have also learned that I cannot, as a teacher, fully understand the obstacles and difficulties each family is dealing with. Circumstances beyond many parents' control prevent students from getting more support at home.

The success I have seen from students that get consistent support with literacy at home has inspired me to seek out a better way to communicate with and support parents. It is a beautiful thing to see a student who has worked hard all school year really grow and become successful with their reading. For a student to become successful in their reading, the parent must be present. My goal when picking this research topic was to

continue to show families that they can be successful at home and reading is not only learned at school. In my experience as a teacher, the greatest reading intervention is one conducted at home. Students imitate their parents. A solid literacy environment at home is essential in a child's overall learning. Most parents are not trained educators. I have come to the conclusion that they need help that is structured and informative in order to provide the proper support to meet their child's literacy needs.

Summary

All this thinking is what led me to researching Home Trained Reading Programs and trying to figure out if they really work. Once a child gets a foothold with reading, there is no limit to where they can go and what they can achieve. There are many factors which led to me selecting my research question. My own childhood and love of reading helps me understand the joy children have when they discover reading for the first time. My background as a teacher helps me understand why each child needs support not only at school, but at home as well with developing literacy skills. I have seen firsthand homes that provide a healthy literacy environment where reading is encouraged and modeled by parents. I have noticed that children in these households tend to show more growth in their first grade school year.

Research shows that this is not only true in first grade, but in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, which are crucial years in literacy development. In chapter two, I will outline research done surrounding literacy skills (*five pillars of literacy*); how to assess literacy skills; what a home literacy environment is and why it is important; why parent-teacher communication is important; and what a home trained reading program is. In chapter three, I will explain the methods of research. I will share the overview of the

project, research framework, choice of method, setting and audience, project description and timeline for project completion. In chapter four, conclusions will be stated based on the research gathered and project created. Chapter four will also detail how I plan on using the project created. All of this is to help answer the question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

To understand how impactful literacy is at home, it is first important to look at what is literacy, and what type of literacy skills to assess in order to determine if any reading program is successful. Literacy intervention and intervention in a home environment will be considered. From there, the home literacy environment needs to be discussed, which leads to the question of what is it and at what different levels is it implemented in each home? Then, it is crucial to examine parent-to-teacher and teacher-to-parent communication, and how it improves student learning. Finally, the actual implementation of a Trained Home Literacy Program will be examined. The thorough literature review will show how increased communication between teachers and parents help parents better support their child's overall literacy. The research will answer the question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

Literacy Skills

Importance. The importance of reading and developing literacy skills for early readers cannot be overstated. Teachers, parents and students all approach a child's literacy from different perspectives. As Clark (2017) commented in "*What My First*

Grader Taught Me About Reading,” students can learn to read by first and foremost reading, starting out slow and at a basic level and then growing fluency with confidence. Students learn to love books which becomes a lifetime skill. Clark (2017) also mentioned that students come into school with a variety of learned literacy skills at different levels. It can be hard to identify which literacy skills are important and what truly matters in this journey to lifelong reading. Looking at the *five pillars of reading* help identify which literacy skills to look at with any child, and in which areas to focus a Trained Home Literacy Program, implemented at home by parents.

Five pillar overview. In 1997, a panel was formed “to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 1-1). The panel was originally referred to as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. This group was eventually renamed and became the National Reading Panel (NRP). This group reported that there are five main areas to look at while assessing literacy skills:

1. Phonemic awareness; the ability to hear, identify and manipulate sounds or phonemes (NRP, 2000).
2. Phonics, learning how letter sounds in spoken language connect to spelling patterns in written language (NRP, 2000).
3. Vocabulary, words students need to read and understand (NRP, 2000).
4. Fluency, the ability to “read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression” (NRP, 2000, p. 3-1).
5. Comprehension, understanding the text (NRP, 2000).

These areas became known as the five pillars of reading instruction (Cassidy, Montalvo Valadez & Garrett, 2010). The five pillars became synonymous with literacy instruction and intervention, which included Trained Home Literacy Programs.

The education community quickly adopted these five pillars as the most important part of reading instruction (Cassidy, 2010). These five pillars became part of funding reading programs, especially in elementary schools. Teachers then needed to learn and understand how to best assess students in these areas. This can be a very complex process. “Putting together the components of data from data analysis, with the reading pillar, with a set of strategies is like designing a complex puzzle” (Anderson, 2009, p. 22). The NRP (2000) listed out a variety of assessments to better evaluate students in each of the five pillars of literacy.

Assessing the five pillars. Assessing a child in today’s literacy environment usually consists of all five pillars. Any literacy program, regardless of the setting, at home or in the classroom, required consideration of each of the five pillars: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Cassidy, 2010). Assessing the five pillars gave teachers an opportunity to evaluate if a program was successful and if a student was meeting expectations in their reading (NRP, 2000). The NRP looked at assessing each of the five pillars in detail.

Phonemic awareness. The English language is made up of 41 phonemes. Phonemic awareness and being able to manipulate phonemes is essential, especially for emerging readers. Being able to manipulate phonemes and distinguish letter sounds is vital when learning a spoken language, but then later can assist in other areas such as written language, phonics instruction, fluency, comprehension and overall reading

instruction (NRP, 2000). The ability to isolate sounds is one of the basic skills needed to be mastered before any of the other five pillars can be concentrated on. The five pillars of literacy build on each other in literacy instruction for grades pre-kindergarten through elementary grades. Phonemic Awareness is the base building block that the other pillars are built on top of when considering how children learn to read (Adams, 1990).

Phonemic awareness, being so important in a child's early literacy development, is the basis for any literacy program implemented at home or in the classroom. Adams (1990) wrote that "the child's level of phonemic awareness on entering school may be the single most powerful determinant of success she or he will experience in learning to read and of the likelihood that she or he will fail" (p. 304). When assessing a child's level of reading, especially in pre-kindergarten through first grade, mastery of phonemic awareness is measured first. Which types of assessments used when assessing phonemic awareness is important as well.

The NRP (2000) identified six tasks that are used to assess phonemic awareness:

1. Phoneme isolation. This task shows the ability to recognize individual sounds in words, for example, "What is the last sound in hat." (/t/)
2. Phoneme identity. This task assesses the ability of the subject to identify common sounds in different words, for example, "Which sound is the same in all three words, dog, dad, duck?" (/d/)
3. Phoneme categorization. This task consists of the subject recognizing the word and sound that is out of place in the sequence of words, for example, "Which word does not fit with the other words? dig, did, hit." (hit)

4. Phoneme blending. The subject listens to a series of spoken sounds and is asked to put them together into a word. For example, “What word am I trying to say? /b/a/t/.” (bat)
5. Phoneme segmentation. Subject can break the word apart by sounds. For example, “How many sounds are in shop?” (/sh/o/p/)
6. Phoneme deletion. Subject identifies what is left of the word after a phoneme is taken away. For example, “What is the word kite if you take away k/?” (ite)
(NRP, 2000)

All of the assessments that measure phonemic awareness mentioned are capable of evaluating where a child is and the areas that need more practice. This fact alone makes phonemic awareness assessment essential to include when developing any literacy program or curriculum, including a program implemented at home by parents. The data gathered from the assessment allows the instructor to create a program based on students' needs. The next literacy pillar is phonics. These pillars build off of one another.

Phonics. Phonics instruction has grown in popularity since the 1980s and 1990s, especially for those who believe in a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction. Phonics instruction has become prevalent in any literacy instruction (Willingham, 2015). Research demonstrated that phonics is the base of any reading program especially in primary grades, including pre-kindergarten. A literacy program without an element of phonics cannot be as useful as a program where phonics is one of the main skills practiced. Adams (1990) wrote:

Perhaps the most influential arguments for teaching phonics are based on studies comparing the relative effectiveness of different approaches to teaching beginning

reading. Collectively these studies suggest, with impressive consistency, that programs including systematic instruction on letter-to-sound correspondences lead to higher achievement in both word recognition and spelling, at least in the early grades and especially for slower or economically disadvantaged students. (p. 31)

Phonics, similar to phonemic awareness, is essential when developing any literacy curriculum. This is especially true for lower achieving students and students in difficult home situations. With phonics instruction at the focus, it is further proof that an at-home literacy program is essential for all students, especially students in pre-kindergarten through first grade. Phonics centered literacy programs lead to better student achievement (Adams, 1990).

Phonics needs to be assessed in a Trained Home Literacy Program, in order to evaluate where students need more support in the program. In order to measure the effects of phonics instruction, the NRP (2000) looked at six different areas:

1. Decoding regularly spelled real words
2. Reading novel words in the form of pseudowords
3. Reading miscellaneous words some of which were irregularly spelled
4. Spelling words
5. Comprehending text read silently or orally
6. Reading text accurately aloud (NRP, 2000)

Any of the previously mentioned phonics assessments and others not mentioned, when administered by educators, help them measure the gains made by students in a Trained Home Literacy Program. One or a combination of phonics assessments evaluate if a

literacy program is successful and if the overall goal of the program is being achieved. When building an at-home literacy program administered by parents, teachers do not see the curriculum implemented directly. This can make traditional formative assessments through observation difficult. Teachers rely on parents to provide feedback on student engagement and other areas of assessment. To make up for the lack of formative assessment through observation, teachers depend on more progress monitoring assessments (phonics assessment types mentioned previously). Through these phonic assessments there is access to a wealth of raw data to inform teachers on where students are in the development of their phonics skills. For the next of the five pillars of literacy, this is not necessarily the case (Silverman & Hartranft, 2014).

Vocabulary. Vocabulary assessment is not as well known as assessment for phonics instruction, fluency or comprehension. Even so, the need to assess a child's vocabulary knowledge is important when developing a Trained Home Literacy Program. It is also necessary when revising the program to better meet students' needs. A child's development of vocabulary is complex and progresses simultaneously along different avenues. First, students learn a wide range of words at a more shallow level. Their knowledge of these words is more a case of learning a quantity of words, rather than learning words in more depth. At the same time, students are also learning vocabulary in more depth. Children are learning more than just the surface meaning, learning all the different ways a word can be used (Silverman & Hartranft, 2014). Both of these strategies are helpful while building a child's vocabulary.

It is beneficial to recognize the complexity of vocabulary instruction before looking at ways to assess children in vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary assessment is

equally complex. Silverman and Hartranft (2014) explained the complicated nature of assessing vocabulary knowledge best:

Vocabulary depth includes knowledge of phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Thus, to measure children's knowledge of a word like print, an assessment would need to capture whether children can say the word, recognize its spelling, understand how print, printed, and printing are related, know how to use print in a sentence, relate print to other words such as write and type, and recognize what print means in different situations (e.g., "print your name on your paper" versus "download and print out a copy of your word list at home"). (p. 121)

Creating an assessment first, before even considering the instruction, is recommended. Teachers are able to then build the vocabulary instruction and connect it directly to one specific learning outcome. Furthermore, no one assessment fully captures everything a child knows about words. It is recommended to use multiple assessment models. Teachers can use already published assessments or develop their own, or use a combination of the two. When developing a Trained Home Literacy Program it is important to use multiple assessments to gauge where students are in the program and where they or their parents might need more support. A greater overall vocabulary can help students that have difficulty reading with fluency.

Fluency. Based on the NRP's (2000) research on the five pillars of literacy, it is evident that each of the five pillars build on one another in order. All the other pillars need to be taught and learned in order to properly support an early reader. Never is this more true than with the literacy skill of fluency (NRP, 2000). This key information is

relevant and connects directly to any Trained Home Literacy Program. In any literacy program, in the primary grades, fluency is one of the final skills that are developed. Fluency, therefore, is admitted later into the program once phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary have been practiced and established.

Unlike vocabulary, there are numerous ways to assess fluency and the assessments are more straightforward. A student is either reading with speed, accuracy, and expression, or they are not. Proficiency in fluency is more easily measured. There are numerous ways to assess fluent reading (NRP, 2000):

1. Informal reading inventories (IRIs): assess each specific child's word recognition, aloud reading, fluency, and comprehension through grade-level word lists and short passages (Flippo, Holland, McCarthy & Swinning, 2009).
2. Miscue analysis: analysis of a child's miscues during oral reading (Goodman, 1996).
3. Running records: a formative assessment used by teachers to assess where a child is in his or her reading development. Teacher observes student read out loud while observing and coding a running records sheet that shows percentage of words read correctly (accuracy), self corrections, and each type of error made (meaning, visual or structure). Fluency is also measured through time allowed and by evaluating tone and expression during reading. Comprehension of the text is also measured through several comprehension questions asked to the student after the text is read (Ross, 2004).

4. Reading speed calculations: Calculating how fast students read a text.

Calculations are stated by WCPM (Words Read Correctly Per-Minute).

(Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1992).

Fluency assessments by themselves tell much about a child's reading level and how comfortable they are with the text they read. Combined with assessments in the other *five pillar* disciplines teachers can see how the student is developing as an overall reader (NRP, 2000). Teachers are then able to adapt any home literacy program to better support parents at home as they go through the program with their children. The steady progression of each of the five pillars included in a *Trained Home Literacy Program* and the assessments that correspond to the skills learned for each of the five pillars of literacy, culminate with the last of the five pillars. For most literacy programs, comprehension is the apex of the program.

Comprehension. Since 2000 when the Reading First programs were popular most interventions focused mainly on the first of the five pillars. Educators and districts focused on interventions that supported students in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and vocabulary. Comprehension was not concentrated on as much. Since then, studies have concluded that “comprehension interventions were superior to all other types of intervention for enhancing comprehension” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 223). It can be argued that we learn to read for meaning. Comprehension is essential in early reader development. Children strive to read for meaning, that is the end goal. Comprehension has become known as the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993). Stevens, Slavin, and Farnish (1991) described the importance of an early reader's comprehension:

Learning to read is one of the most important things children accomplish in elementary school because it is the foundation for most of their future academic endeavors. From the middle elementary years through the rest of their lives as students, children spend much of their time reading and learning information presented in text. The activity of reading to learn requires students to comprehend and recall the main ideas or themes presented in...text. (p. 8)

Comprehension is the is the overarching measurement of a successful reader.

Understanding what is read is the culmination of the process of learning to read.

Therefore, any comprehension assessment is a reflection of the overall reader. A child's phonemic awareness development, phonics development, attainment of vocabulary, and fluency ability are all represented within comprehension assessment, making the evaluation of a student's understanding of what they read essential when developing any literacy program or curriculum.

There are numerous comprehension assessment strategies, too many to mention in any one source. Instead of listing out each type of assessment, it is important when developing comprehension assessments, to keep four principles in mind. First, students do not only need to understand what they are reading, but they need to also be able to apply that knowledge to other reading-related tasks. Second, the assessment is a reflection of all the basic elements of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency). Third, that comprehension is the purpose and desired outcome to reading instruction. It is the overall measurement to a child's reading development. Lastly, the assessment needs to connect to the reality of the child's experiences and environments outside of the classroom. For example, asking a child after reading a story if they have

ever had something similar happen to them and to tell that story, connecting their understanding to real life situations (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). When developing comprehension activities for a Trained Home Literacy Program, it is important to keep these four principles in mind. It is also important to recognize that parents are implementing the activities at home. This type of at-home literacy program is a type of intervention and a determining one.

Intervention

Reading intervention is instruction and strategies developed to meet students where they are in their reading, with proper support. The end-goal is to help students become successful in their reading. There are many different types of reading intervention, motivational intervention or changing teaching practices to engage students with the texts that they are reading (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). There are also interventions that connect directly to the five pillars of reading instruction. It is a common misconception that reading intervention is done solely at school, in a small group, or one-on-one. Reading intervention can be implemented at home as well. In the article, *A Family Literacy Intervention to Support Parents in Children's Early Literacy Learning*, Steiner recognized that for many children the home literacy intervention starts at an early age, especially through the reading of storybooks. This then acts as a sort of preparation for school-based literacy instruction later (Steiner, 2014). To understand how home-based literacy intervention benefits a child's literacy, it is important to look at what a home literacy environment looks like.

Home Literacy Environment

“A top priority for early literacy education is that children develop a strong language and literacy foundation before they enter formal schooling” (Curry, Reeves, & McIntyre, 2016, p. 69). For each student, the home literacy environment looks different. The increase in awareness of child illiteracy and school failure in the United States has led to more of a focus on literacy at home (Curry, Reeves & McIntyre, 2016).

A year-long literacy intervention project was conducted with 248 kindergarten students. The study was designed to increase the frequency and quality of language interaction between parents and their children, specifically around at-home book activities. The project was called Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education). Results showed that children whose families are more engaged in these at-home language and literacy activities have more gains overall. “The greatest gains were found in those low-achieving students who started out with low language skills at pretest and strong home literacy support” (Jordan, Snow & Porche, 2000, p.525). The results from the at-home intervention demonstrated the need for literacy intervention at home by parents. At-home literacy intervention is directly connected to the home literacy environment. The Project EASE study found that home literacy intervention strengthens the overall home literacy environment. Children whose parents who are engaged in the intervention and are committed to creating a positive home literacy environment, tend to show bigger gains in their reading. The implication is clear. In order for early readers to become better readers, a literacy intervention at home is required. A Trained Home Literacy Program, a formal at-home literacy intervention serves in this capacity. The purpose of the literacy

program is to create a simple, engaging, and structured design that helps parents better support their children in their reading.

There is further evidence that proves that a positive home literacy environment is imperative in order to support children in the development of their literacy skills. A series of meta-analyses were done on 99 studies that centered around leisure time reading and reading in a home literacy environment. In this series of meta-analyses Mol and Bus (2011) found that students who read at home for leisure had a wider range of literacy skills and reading strategies. “During their development, children who choose to read books in their leisure time have larger vocabularies, better reading comprehension, and better technical reading and spelling skills than peers who do not read as frequently” (Mol & Bus, 2011, p. 285). Implied again, is the need for a combination of a positive home literacy environment and a home literacy program in order for children to reach their full reading potential.

In their study Boerma, Mol and Jolles (2017) sampled 117 primary school children in the Netherlands. The study examined the correlation between a child’s home literacy environment and their reading skills. More specifically the child’s print exposure at home was looked at in connection to reading comprehension. A connection was found between children’s home literacy environment and their reading comprehension. The study concluded based on the results that a child’s leisure reading in a home literacy environment does lead to better reading comprehension skills (Boerma, Mol & Jolles, 2017). Furthermore, a parent’s own print exposure is directly related to a child’s home literacy experience (Boerma, Mol & Jolles, 2017). Research shows that parents who read a high volume of quality books themselves in the home environment tend to have

children who read as well (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Doan Holbein, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011). This is further evidence that a strong home literacy environment is key to a child's literacy development. Supporting parents in creating a thriving home literacy environment then becomes just as important. In the next section, finding the best approach to communicating with and supporting parents will be discussed.

Parent-Teacher Communication

Connection to home literacy environment. A correlation can be made between the home literacy environment and parent-teacher communication. Parents need direction from their child's teacher in order to form a healthy literacy environment where reading is encouraged. A survey was conducted in a large suburban high school not too far from Minneapolis, Minnesota (Koschinska, 2005). This survey asked numerous questions concerning parent-teacher communication. There were 35 surveys returned by parents. When asked to rate the importance of parent-teacher communication, 71% rated it as very important, 20% as important. The majority of parents look at parent-teacher communication as important and needed, however the second question in the survey asked on a scale of one to five how effective the current communication was, a one being not effective at all and five being very effective. The majority rated the communication at a three out of five and 20% rated it as a two (Koschinska, 2005). This study was conducted in a secondary school as compared to an elementary school setting which related to the research question more directly, but the point is still made; although parents look at parent-teacher communication as important, they do not always find it effective or worthwhile. Creating a sense of value within the support of a home literacy environment and communication with families, will determine if a Trained home literacy program is

successful or not. Parents do not know what is not communicated to them and some parents might not be willing to ask.

How to talk to parents. It is important to look at how, as educators, we talk and communicate with parents. Mahmood (2013) concluded that teachers want their parents to see them as relatable. Information communicated in a reliable and efficient manner is more likely to be accepted by parents. With any literacy program teachers want families to buy in to the program and how teachers communicate with and support parents will determine if they will or not. This is especially true when looking at how parent teacher communication is changing.

The more planned and formal way to communicate is through parent-teacher conferences. However, today's technology allows for more regular and immediate conversations (Ediger, 2016). Emails, phone calls, and class webpages, school social apps, and even text messages are more common than they have been in the past. With more regular communication, conversations and communication with parents should be purposeful and efficient. Koschinska (2005) found that a child's progress at school and behavior was on the top of the list of importance when hearing from their child's teacher. What vehicle teachers use to communicate this type of information with parents can determine if the information is communicated efficiently. This is especially important to consider when supporting parents with a complex literacy program that they are responsible for implementing at home.

Implications. In a study of parent-teacher interactions, Pillet-Shore (2012) discovered that when teachers give praise about a child to that child's parent, the parent takes the praise as a compliment. Also, when a parent praises their own child while

having a conversation with a teacher, they are basically self-praising. Giving praise about a student does have its consequences:

Although the action of praising students would seem to, a priori, afford a mutually enjoyable moment of celebration transparently supportive of social solidarity, this research has revealed that conference participants treat this action as interactionally problematic precisely because utterances that praise students implicate praise of parents (p. 200).

The implication Pillet-Shore (2012) eluded to is that praise of students to their parents is not always best practice for communicating with families. Furthermore, if parents take praise of their own child as praise for themselves, teachers must consider that any criticism or feedback would be taken by the parent the same way. Parents take both praise and critiques of what their child can improve in personally. In order to communicate with and support families this must be kept in mind. When starting an at-home literacy program, students are at different literacy skill levels. Differentiation within the program will be essential (Tomlinson, 2009). Communicating to parents the flexibility available in a literacy program is equally important.

How to work as a team with parents. Working with parents comes with its challenges, especially in early childhood education. Mahmood (2013) concluded:

All the new early childhood teachers in this study were aware of the need to have positive relationships with their students' parents. They emphasized the importance of working with parents and being able to relate to the families.

Participants wanted parents to see them as approachable and friendly and to trust

and respect them. Despite this affirmative understanding of their role, they reported challenges in working with parents (p. 74).

Challenges include, but are not limited to building relationships, socioeconomic status of students and their families, and parent involvement. Teachers have to recognize these challenges and find ways to work around them to build a healthy parent-teacher relationship, which is incredibly important when supporting parents with any home reading program.

The parent-teacher relationship can be successful as long as both parties try. It can work as long as both parties agree to communicate and work towards a relationship. Mahmood (2013) concluded that even new teachers recognize that building a relationship with parents is important. It was also recognized that the more frequent the interactions are between parent and teacher, even with informal conversations, the stronger and more positive that relationship becomes. It was also discovered that it is difficult to communicate for teachers when parents' expectations were unclear as to what the parents expected for their child's education (Mahmood, 2013). Therefore, before teachers can communicate effectively with parents they need to clarify misconceptions and anything else that is unclear. Parents must feel free to ask questions when they need to. This will lead to better communication with and support of students' families.

Trained Home Literacy Program

Research presented earlier in this chapter on literacy skills, home literacy environment, and parent-teacher communication all support the research question proposed: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten*

through first grade? In the next section, the connections between all of the previous research presented previously in the literature review and the Trained Home Literacy Program will be discussed, as well as what is all involved with the program. This will be done by looking at examples of home literacy programs.

Connecting everything to the Trained Home Literacy Program. A three-year study was conducted at an elementary school in the United States. The study set out to see if there was a connection between a home literacy program that was organized and supported by the school, and increased fluency with kindergarten and first grade students (Crosby, Rasinski, Padak & Yildirim, 2015). Fluency was assessed through words read correctly per minute.

The school used a recognized parent training program to help better support parents at home with their child's literacy development. The program was broken down into a total of 58 lessons that were sent home over a period of 29 weeks. The at-home literacy program was called *Fast Start* (Padak & Rasinski, 2005). The program consisted of a family letter that introduced the program to the parents, and gave directions on how to implement the program. During the program, parents were asked to complete four objectives each evening; "read to your child, read with your child, listen to your child read" (p. 10) and then do a couple of activities that connected to the reading. Each lesson consisted of a poem the parent read to their child, and then listened to their child read to them. Then the families were asked to complete one or two activities included with the poem and connected directly to the poem. The activities were quick, simple, and engaging. Activities centered around building up the child's phonemic awareness, phonics skills, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

After the three-year study concluded, the results showed that children of families who consistently used these lessons at home had significantly better fluency scores than those who implemented the lessons less frequently and consistently. During the first year of the study, first grade students whose families completed 11-22 lessons throughout the school year averaged 79.2 words correct per minute (WCPM) in the fluency assessment. Those students averaged a gain of 2.12 WCPM each week. As a comparison, 1st grade students whose parents used 0-10 lessons throughout the school year averaged 73.8 WCPM. Those students averaged a gain of 1.49 WCPM per week (Crosby et al., 2015).

During the second year of the study first grade students whose families completed 31-50 lessons throughout the school year averaged 80.4 words correct per minute (WCPM) in the fluency assessment. Those students averaged a gain of 2.31 WCPM each week. As a comparison, first grade students whose parents used 0-10 lessons throughout the school year averaged 68.4 WCPM. Those students averaged a gain of 1.55 WCPM per week (Crosby et al., 2015).

During the third year of the study, first grade students whose families completed 31-52 lessons throughout the school year averaged 90.8 words correct per minute (WCPM) in the fluency assessment. Those students averaged a gain of 2.42 WCPM each week. As a comparison, first grade students whose parents used 0-10 lessons throughout the school year averaged 82.7 WCPM. Those students averaged a gain of 2.33 WCPM per week (Crosby, et al., 2015).

First grade parents were surveyed each year as to if they felt the lessons were beneficial to their children. In the first year of the study, 82% of parents who participated felt the program was helping their child. In the second year of study, 95% of parents who

participated felt the program was beneficial for their child. The third and final year of the study showed 91% of parents agreeing that the at-home literacy program was beneficial (Crosby, et al., 2015). The program implemented over the three-year period was a success, proving that a structured literacy program used at home by parents, to better support their children did serve to improve literacy skills. Furthermore, the type of activities used in the program, proved to be effective. The quickness, simplicity and engaging nature of the activities also increased parent involvement and thus student motivation. Other literacy interventions, programs, studies and investigations were also successful in proving that literacy intervention in a strong home literacy environment increased students' literacy skills.

Curry, Reeves and McIntyre (2016) conducted an investigation of interactions between three mothers and their preschool children. The investigation included a series of interviews with the participants and the analysis of audio recording of the shared reading of storybooks between mother and child. After looking at interviews and observing shared reading times between parents and their children, they discovered that adult modeling at home between parent and child, such as “correcting/repeating, questioning, elaboration, encouragement and praise were just a few of the interactions that were evident in shared reading events” (p.73) led to better literacy development. Literacy practices in the home are often different than practices in a classroom setting. The experiences children have with parents in a home literacy environment cannot be replicated through classroom literacy instruction. Curry, Reeves and McIntyre (2016) admitted that further research is needed “on specific skills and experiences children receive at home that may lead to more sophisticated reading behaviors” (p. 75). However,

they did conclude that authentic interactions with literacy at home should be encouraged. Children should be allowed to go “off-script” when participating in literacy activities or reading with a parent. “Impromptu interactions and outbursts of enthusiasm during reading, encourages and motivates students to read” (Curry, Reeves and McIntyre, 2016, p. 75). Implied from their conclusions, Curry, Reeves and McIntyre, argued that the home literacy environment should be enjoyed by both parent and child. Enjoyable literacy games, activities and shared reading should be the center to any literacy program conducted at home. Furthermore, the program should be an extension of literacy instruction in the classroom, but not to the point of completely changing the home literacy environment already established at home. The program should reflect enjoyable experiences children are already having with literature at home, such as the shared reading of storybooks, the enjoyment of board and card games, and other engaging activities that are adapted to a more literacy focus (Curry, Reeves & McIntyre, 2016).

Steiner (2014) conducted a study designed to show the connection between trained parent involvement and an increase in a child’s literacy skills for first grade students. For the study, parents were given ongoing training and support on useful read-aloud strategies that the parents then applied to their reading with their children at home. During the course of the study parents were taught techniques that highlighted the following strategies: “(a) making predictions, (b) asking and answering questions, (c) making connections, (d) using illustrations, (e) retelling, and (f) returning to the text after reading” (Steiner, 2014, p.712). The study found that children in families that participated in the study showed greater gains in literacy skills than those that did not participate, demonstrating that the at-home strategies used by parents in the study were effective. The

study also demonstrated the significance of the trained portion of the program. Parents were more successful implementing the strategies with more training and support. The implication being that, any literacy program/intervention carried out at home by parents requires extensive training and support to be effective.

A research study was completed on 148 pre-k students to explore the effectiveness of the Raising A Reader (RAR) program (Chao, Mattocks, Birden & Manarino-Leggett, 2014). The RAR program sought to provide quality books to pre-k students, with the desired outcome of getting parents to take on a more active role in their child's literacy development through interactive read-alouds at home. The study lasted 12 weeks and measured the following:

1. Is the interaction between parent and child during booksharing a positive experience?
2. Do parents establish reading routines with their children as a result of the RAR program?
3. Do parents make more visits to the library during and after the RAR program?
4. Do children have access to books in the home?
5. Are parents willing to learn about early literacy development and reading effectively to their children?
6. Do children improve their receptive vocabulary after participating in the RAR program? (p. 428)

The study reported that the RAR program made a large difference in a number of different ways. Researchers discovered a dramatic increase in parents' ability to establish

reading routines in the home. Also, the quality of the shared reading activities was enhanced significantly. Parents and their children asking more quality questions about the books they read was reported. Implied from the results of the study is the efficiency of the six guiding questions used in the study. These questions, adapted to any literacy program, serve as an impactful model to critique the program. Also implied from the study and the RAR program is the significance of parent involvement connected to the child's motivation to practice their reading. Also, access to quality books are required for any at-home literacy program.

Summary

Represented in this literature review are a combination of research, studies, investigations and existing research-based programs that provide evidence that a Trained Home Literacy Program does increase students' literacy skills. First, which literacy skills to be focused on and which assessments were most beneficial were discussed. It was determined that the five pillars of literacy should be the basis of any literacy program. Second, what makes a strong home literacy environment, how a home literacy environment is connected to the improvement of literacy skills, and how teachers can support a home literacy environment through better parent-teacher communication was also discussed. The research determined that a strong home literacy environment is one in which parents are consistently involved through modeling reading behaviors and actual participation in their child's reading through shared reading activities. The research was consistent in concluding that children with parents who were more involved in their child's reading tended to have better scores on literacy assessments and show more of an interest in reading. Studies also concluded that good parent-teacher communication

overall led to better support in the at-home literacy programs, which translated to experiences for parents and their children at home. Lastly, examples of other home literacy programs were examined and connections were made to the rest of the research mentioned previously. Although not all home literacy programs looked at were trained, the programs all showed remarkable similarities within their results and conclusions. Each of the programs determined that the common thread in a child's improvement with their literacy skills was more parent involvement. The research in this literature review was gathered, considered and discussed in order to better answer the research question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

In the next chapter an overview of the proposed project will be discussed. The research paradigm will be looked at. Then, the choice of method, setting and audience, project description and timeline will be explained in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter the research methodology is discussed to answer the research question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

As shown in chapter two, the research for the literature review stresses the need for a program such as the Trained Home Literacy Program which will be proposed later in this chapter. The research was centered around what literacy skills are, as well as what teachers typically assess when looking at student literacy skills. The five pillars of literacy (reading) were looked at in detail in this section. The Home Literacy Environment was also discussed, as well as why a strong literacy environment is so important at home. Parent-Teacher communication was discussed in detail as a catalyst to better and more effective communication between school and home. Finally, research on the Trained Home Literacy Program was presented and discussed.

Teachers are always reviewing and reflecting on best practices for teaching literacy in the classroom. One of the more powerful tools for long term success in literacy instruction, sometimes not utilized enough, is the use of the home literacy environment and parents as resources for their children. Typically all that is needed is better

communication as to what is expected at home, or even better yet a formal training program for parents, run by their child's teacher. This trained literacy program would be implemented at home by parents, and supported by teachers at school.

In this chapter, an overview of the proposed project will be discussed. The choice of method, setting, audience, project description, and timeline will be explained in detail.

Overview of the Project

The purpose of this project is to create a Trained Home Literacy Program that will benefit both parents and their children. The end goal is to help improve students' overall literacy skills. The need for such a program in primary grades has never been more clear. In a world where educators are judged by test scores, and an emphasis on standardized testing, it is that much more important to find ways to adapt instruction and find additional resources to help support students learning.

The Trained Home Literacy Program is a useful resource to help support students in their reading. The home literacy environment has become another source for more reading intervention. In order to achieve this, a better line of communication and training must be available to parents.

Most teachers might already have a form of a literacy program implemented for their parents to work on with their child, which may include sending home book bags, sight words or other at home learning opportunities. These systems become a more well-rounded training program when formal support from the school and teacher are involved to help parents understand and apply proper support to their children's literacy.

The goal of this project is to create a formal program that will better support parents of students in pre-kindergarten to first grade. The project will consist of specific

directions that allow parents to understand and apply strategies that stem from practices that have been proven to help in all of the five pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). The program consists of literacy activities that focus around the five pillars, and parents are responsible for implementing these activities at home with their child. In the following section, the choice of project and method, along with the curriculum design I followed will be discussed.

Choice of Method and Curriculum Design

When thinking about the best way to implement the Trained Home Literacy Program right away, writing a curriculum seems most appropriate. Creating a professional development for parents was also considered, but I decided that an at-home literacy curriculum which parents would implement with their child would be more useful. I chose to include many of the strategies that would have been taught in the professional development into the directions of the activities I created for the curriculum.

This unit was created based on the *Understanding by Design* model created by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). The three stages of the backward design model were used to develop the curriculum. During the first stage the teacher needs to identify state standards that, when mastered by the student, would show the desired learning outcome. The second stage calls for evidence that students have achieved the desired result. The teacher needs to create assessments or rely on assessments already in place to determine if the desired outcome is reached. The final stage consists of planning of the instruction. This planning stage is the part that requires the most of the teacher's time. This will be

what the student actually encounters. In the next section the setting for the project is discussed.

Setting

The school this program is proposed to be implemented in is a pre-k through fifth grade elementary school in the Midwest United States. It currently has 469 students enrolled. The Trained Home Literacy Program will be used initially with families from my first grade classroom during the 2019-2020 school year. Based on the program performance, it is possible it will expand into other classrooms. This school is in a more affluent part of the overall school district. A majority of parents are college educated which allows for their children to be more exposed to a higher level of vocabulary and academic language. Parents in this setting tend to take a more active role in their child's education.

There is currently no formal operational Trained Home Literacy Program in the school. How parents are communicated with and how they are supported at home differs from teacher to teacher. The school currently has an informal *no homework policy*, based on recent research showing that homework is no longer considered best practice, especially for primary grades. This policy would not interfere with the Trained Home Literacy Program proposed since it is a partnership with parents to bring more awareness to their child's learning.

Audience

This curriculum was developed for first grade students and their parents. Currently enrolled in my class for the 2019-2020 school year are 23 students; 13 boys and 10 girls. The children's ages range from six to seven years of age. As stated

previously in this chapter, a majority of parents are college educated which allows for their children to be more exposed to a higher level of vocabulary and academic language, and they tend to take a more active role in their child's education. This program was written specifically with parents in mind. Parents will be implementing the program at home with their children. Support for the program will come directly from myself as the teacher for the entirety of the program. In the next section, the project will be described in detail.

Project Description

The project is a Trained Home Literacy Program created in the format of a curriculum. The curriculum unit will be 15 weeks long. Parents will be trained on how to use the program at parent-teacher conferences in the fall of the upcoming school year. In addition, simple yet specific directions will be written out in a family letter sent home with the program. Support will be provided by the teacher throughout the program.

The program will be implemented at home by the parents of the first grade students. Parents will take around 15 minutes in the evening, four to five nights a week to take their children through three literacy activities. The three activities change each week focusing on different parts of literacy development. The parents are encouraged to participate in the activities as much as possible.

The three activities each week focus on different parts of the child's literacy development. For the first five weeks, the activities concentrate on phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary. The following five weeks concentrate on phonics, vocabulary and fluency. Fluency activities replace phonemic awareness activities due to where first graders typically are developmentally by that time of the school year. The last five weeks

of the program center around vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Each week's activities builds on the previous week's. The goal and measurement of success is the child's comprehension level. The literacy activities consist of quick, simple and engaging games. The objective is to make the program as engaging as possible in order to motivate parents and their children to participate enthusiastically.

Timeline: Implementations Timeframe

I am planning on implementing the finished project, Trained Home Literacy Program, fall of the 2019-2020 school year. I will start with a pilot within my own classroom for the first full school year. Parents will be introduced to the program during parent-teacher conferences in the fall and will be asked to start the program at home the following week. Parents will be asked to pause the curriculum during school vacations and holidays, such as winter and spring break. Families are busy during these times and are less likely to use the program those weeks. The program should be completed around early May, 2020. Flexibility as to the exact end date will be built into the program. This allows for any unforeseen variables that may keep families from participating in the program.

Summary

For this project, I created a 15 week program in the form of a curriculum unit. I used the backwards design model to create the design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). I designed the program to be implemented by parents of students in my first grade classroom. The program consists of a series of quick and simple literacy activities to be used by families in their homes. I plan on introducing and starting the program this coming fall (2019).

In the next chapter I will reflect on the overall process; make conclusions based off this entire process; discuss what I have learned as a researcher, writer and learner; revisit my research from my literature review; mention possible implications and limitations of my project; discuss where to go from here and the next steps going forward; explain how I will use the results and data collected from my project; and consider how this project benefits the teaching profession.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone project was to help better equip families with an at-home literacy curriculum, the goal being to better support children in their reading development. All this is done with the following research question in mind: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?*

Overview

In this concluding chapter I will reflect on the overall process and end product of my at-home literacy curriculum. I will make conclusions based off this entire process of developing my project, a fifteen week at-home literacy curriculum. I will discuss what I have learned as a researcher, writer and learner. Next, I will revisit my research from my literature review, highlighting research that was most important to developing my project and new understandings realized through creating my project. Later, I will mention possible implications and limitations of my project. Then, I will discuss where to go from here and the next steps going forward. I will also explain how I will use the results and data collected from my project. Finally, I will consider how this project benefits the teaching profession.

Learnings and Personal/Professional Growth

I started this journey towards earning my masters six years ago when I originally started masters classes. I took a break from earning my masters four years ago when I received my initial teaching license. The idea was to get some teaching experience before actually starting my capstone and project. I then started the long and tedious process of developing my capstone paper and project about seven months ago. I have grown as a researcher, writer and learner through out this process.

As a researcher, my idea of what a true researcher does has grown and evolved. Through reading purely scholarly articles and books, I developed an eye for an academic and professional language that I had not experienced since taking a break four years ago. The academic language and mindset needed to complete the proper research for my paper and project was demanding, but it was also rewarding. I found that it was good to be reminded of the professionalism surrounding the profession of teaching, specifically teaching literacy. Even the process of conducting research (breaking down my thesis statement into keywords to search for research, reading the articles and applying them to my capstone project) was illuminating (Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup & Fitzgerald, 2016). I realized that the process is demanding, but is in place for a reason. It also showed me how important proper research is to develop my project. Without research articles that support or even contradict my ideas, it would be impossible to develop a sound literacy curriculum such as the one I created

As a writer, I have grown substantially in regards to applying my research and the research of others to my paper and curriculum. When I first started my paper and project I struggled with writing only a series of facts and statements from my research and was

not able to add my own voice to connect those facts to help bolster my argument.

Learning how to connect my ideas to my research without having it sound like my own opinion was one of my biggest accomplishments as a writer.

Personally I have learned how to stretch myself in my learning. This paper and development of my project has been one of the most demanding tasks I have ever set out to accomplish. Being demanding, this task has taught me to prioritize my time better. In turn, this will serve to help me better implement my project, recognize changes that need to be made, and adapt as needed for my students' learning.

Through designing the literacy curriculum to be implemented by parents, I had to take many factors into consideration. First of all, I needed to figure out which literacy skills I was looking to evaluate and help my students grow in. I landed on the five pillars of literacy (NRP, 2000) as the best way to assess the growth I was looking for in my students through this program. I needed to figure out how to use these five principles of learning to read to help parents better support their children at home. Applying the five pillars of literacy to my project and the idea of an at-home literacy program led to my greatest realization and learning. As a teacher, I knew that the more students worked at home on literacy, the more successful they were in their reading. What I did not realize was the connection between parent involvement in literacy activities and the growth in the student's reading abilities. The research described a healthy home literacy environment as an environment in which parents and their children share in the activities at home. Furthermore, a year long at-home literacy intervention conducted by Jordan, Snow and Porche (2000) proved to lead to better gains in reading for most students, reporting that low achieving students that had more parent participation had more growth

towards their reading goals. Parents that not only participate in an at-home literacy program, but also model a healthy home literacy environment through reading and talking about reading during leisure time, actually promote their children to do the same (Boerma, Mol & Jolles, 2017). It was this realization, that proved that pursuing an at-home literacy program as a curriculum was a worthwhile and promising idea.

All of these learnings have brought me to the conclusion that an at-home literacy program would be the best way to help students make gains in their reading. This process has led me to find, adapt, create and eventually implement my curriculum. As a writer, I have learned how to apply the research of others to better support my argument and research question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?* Personally the entire process has stretched me as a learner, convincing me that implementing this program and keeping it up to date is something I am able to do. Finally, the idea that parent involvement to create a home literacy environment, leading to an increase in a child's reading gains, has been the greatest realization and helped prove that my project will be beneficial to the desired outcome of improving children's literacy skills. It is also important to revisit the literature review section to further support the creation of my project curriculum.

Revisiting Literature Review

All of the research found in my literature review helped to either support my research question or in the development of my project. The main source I based most of my project on was the National Reading Panel (2000), whose research first highlighted the five pillars of literacy. When first starting to create an idea of what I wanted to do for

my project, I was immediately drawn to the five pillars, and I wanted my curriculum to be based off these principles. Most educators base their literacy instruction on these five pillars. I knew that a worthwhile home literacy program should be focused on helping students and their parents better support them in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (five pillars).

Once identifying that the five pillars consisted of all the important criteria within literacy instruction or what we are trying to work on achieving in literacy instruction, I moved on to how to best assess each of the five pillars in order to set the program (project) up in such a way that it would be easy to evaluate where students are being successful or making gains. I understood that to make this project (curriculum) successful in implementation, I needed to find a way to evaluate the program. To be successful this program would have to be adaptable and ever changing to match the needs of students and families. Also needing to be addressed was the problem of keeping children and families motivated to follow through with the at-home literacy program.

I also realized the program would have to be fun and engaging for both the child and the parents. Clark (2017) mentioned in “What My First Grader Taught Me About Reading” that students learn to read through first and foremost reading, and creating a love of reading that will last a lifetime. As children grow in confidence they become more motivated to read. Parents being a part of the reading journey with their children is essential to keep their child motivated to learn to read. Children that are brought up in a home where reading is encouraged, tend to make bigger gains in their reading and tend to read more as a choice (Curry, Reeves & McIntyre, 2016; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011). This research led me to the conclusion that the

curriculum I created needed to be fun, engaging, interactive and something parents could equally participate in. After coming to this conclusion the problem of how to communicate these facts and how to communicate how to use this curriculum was in itself very important.

As part of the literature review, I looked at parent-teacher communication and how best to support families as they participated in this program. I looked at what to avoid along with best practices when communicating with parents. In the literature review, important findings to consider when trying to communicate with parents were; how to talk with parents and how to work as a team with parents. The intended audience for the curriculum is parents. Parents will use these materials to help support their children with their literacy. All of the previous strategies to help improve parent-teacher communication had to be considered while writing the curriculum.

Lastly, other programs similar to the curriculum I created were looked at and considered before starting the project. Two such examples appear in the literature review. First, the three year long study that was done in kindergarten and first grade classrooms with the FastStart reading program was most helpful to look at (Crosby et al., 2015). This at-home literacy program was the most closely aligned program to what I wanted to create. Programs such as the Fast Start program have proven to increase children's literacy skills. These types of literacy programs are important in the development of students as readers (Crosby et al., 2015). The program consisted of short and engaging literacy activities and readings (Padak & Rasinski, 2005). It is evident in the structure of the program that a number of variables were taken into account, knowing that the program was going to be implemented by parents at home, supported by the teacher. I

also took these variables into account while creating my program. When thinking about the time parents and families had together to complete the literacy activities, I made a point to make each activity brief, since families are busy. Getting families to stay consistent with the program was a major concern while writing the at-home curriculum. This was a factor that led me to create activities that could be done anywhere, without too many materials, and would be enjoyable for both parents and their children.

Research discovered for the literature review helped mold what would become my version of an at-home literacy program. I knew I wanted to base my program off the five pillars of literacy laid out by the National Reading Panel (2000). Though my research I also realized I needed to develop assessments for each of the five pillars. These assessments would be important to help recognize when students were accomplishing goals. I learned through research done in the literature review that the program I was designing needed to be engaging with short activities (Padak & Rasinski, 2005). The Fast Start program further supported the same notion, consisting of short and engaging activities taking into account the busy lives of students and their families. Another consideration for a program like this is how it is communicated to parents and how much support will they need while using the curriculum. Certain implications must be considered regarding an at-home literacy program.

Implications

When I started the process of creating my curriculum, I only intended for it to be used with my first grade families. After looking at similar programs and discovering that the literacy skills taught in this program were skills taught throughout the early grade

levels, I started to realize that this program could easily be adapted for other grade levels and used by other teachers.

I realized after exhaustive research that some sort of literacy intervention is needed at home for most students, especially in early grade levels. It is essential in the development of students as readers. Research shows that students reach their reading goals much more quickly when there is a strong literacy environment at home. Children replicate what they see and are engaged if adults around them are engaged (Mol & Bus, 2011). It would be beneficial for most elementary schools in the district, state and across the country to have some sort of literacy program to be used at home by parents.

The implication drawn from this project is that this program does not need to be only for first grade students. It should be considered by other primary and pre-primary teachers. This type of program would be beneficial to any educator teaching early readers. These literacy skills need to be practiced, not only in the classroom, but also at home. Even though the research is mostly supportive of a program like mine, there are still limitations to a program.

Limitations

The main limitation to an at-home literacy program like the one I have created, is the lack of time most families have. Families are busy and an extra program like this could be taxing for some families. Even the fifteen minutes it takes to complete this program four to five days a week could be too much for families.

The growing support for more *no homework* policies in elementary schools is another obstacle. The school where I teach has an informal *no homework* policy. The

policy, informal as it is, could dissuade other teachers from using the program, thinking that they might be asking too much from parents.

The lack of time families have to participate in a program like the one I created and the growing popularity of policies of not having homework in elementary schools are two limitations for an at-home literacy program like mine. Knowing the limitations and implications within my program, where to go from here is more clear.

Future Plans for Project

The next step is to implement the program. I have plans to start the fifteen week program with families in my first grade class this fall. The program will be introduced and explained to families at parent-teacher conferences in mid-October. Week one of the curriculum will start the week after conferences. This will allow parents a few days to read through the first week and get acquainted with the activities they will be carrying out with their children. A parent letter will be sent home with the curriculum for explanation and directions. A log will also be included and I will request parents to fill out the log, including which week they are on, the date, how much time they spent on activities, and a section for comments as they work through the program. This log will be returned every Monday with the child.

A letter and short survey will be sent home eight weeks after the curriculum is sent home, checking in to see how the program is going with families and getting feedback on the activities. Another survey will also be sent home for parents and children at the end of the school year to get final thoughts on how the program went. Between the log and the surveys, I should have enough data and feedback to reflect on, adapt, and make changes to the program based on the experiences of my students and their families.

Each summer I intend on making any adjustments and modifying the program based on this feedback and data. The goal is to allow the program to grow and change as the needs of my students and families change. This will keep the program relevant and useful and is best practice for me as a teacher.

The activity log and the two parent and student surveys will help keep the program/curriculum fresh and relevant. The intent is to keep the program centered around the students' and parents' literacy needs. This program will also need to be adapted to meet the needs of other teachers and to help benefit the overall teaching profession.

Benefits to the Teaching Profession

This fifteen week program is easily adaptable and can be used in pre-kindergarten through first grade. It also has the possibility to be used as a reading intervention for older grades. The activities created for the curriculum are solidly based in the what is widely considered the most important literacy skills children can learn (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is also firmly rooted in the best practices of literacy instruction. It would be a helpful addition to any teacher's literacy intervention and instruction.

Conclusion

I have created the project to help answer the question: *How will a Trained Home Literacy Program provided with a curriculum, implemented in a child's home, help improve literacy skills for students pre-kindergarten through first grade?* Through research done in the literature review and the creation of the curriculum, I believe that my at-home literacy program will help improve students' literacy skills. Even considering the limitations of the project, it still is, in my mind, a very useful intervention. There is flexibility built into the program to allow for limitations. The feedback from parents and

students built into the program will allow for the program to change based on students' needs. This program will achieve its goal to meet students literacy needs and support them as they become readers.

REFERENCES

- Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Anderson, C. (2009). The five pillars of reading. *Library Media Connection*, 28, 22-25.
- Boerma, I., Mol, S., & Jolles, J. (2017). The role of home literacy environment, mentalizing, expressive verbal ability, and print exposure in third and fourth graders' reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 21(3), 179-193. doi:10.1080/10888438.2016.1277727
- Booth, W. C., Bizup, J., Colomb, G. G., Fitzgerald, W. T., & Williams, J. M. (2016). *The craft of research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Buchwald, E. (n.d.). Quotable reading quotes. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from <https://www.readingrockets.org/books/fun/quotable>
- Cassidy, J., Valadez, C. M., & Garrett, S. D. (2010). Literacy trends and issues: A look at the five pillars and the cement that supports them. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(8), 644-655. doi:10.1598/rt.63.8.3
- Chao, S. L., Mattocks, G., Birden, A., & Manarino-Leggett, P. (2015). The impact of

the Raising A Reader program on family literacy practices and receptive vocabulary of children in pre-kindergarten. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 43(5), 427-434. doi:10.1007/s10643-014-0670-5

Clark, S. (2017, September). What my first grader taught me about reading. *The Horn Book Magazine*, 93, 42-46. Retrieved from <https://www.hbook.com/?detailStory=books-in-the-home-what-my-first-grader-taught-me-about-reading>

Crosby, S. A., Rasinski, T., Padak, N., & Yildirim, K. (2015). A 3-year study of a school-based parental involvement program in early literacy. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108(2), 165-172. doi:10.1080/00220671.2013.867472

Curry, D. L., Reeves, E., & McIntyre, C. J. (2016). Connecting schools and families: Understanding the influence of home literacy practices. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 4(2), 69-77.

Douglass, F. (n.d.). Quotable reading quotes. Unpublished manuscript. Retrieved from <https://www.readingrockets.org/books/fun/quotable>

Durkin, D. (1993). *Teaching them to read* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Ediger, M. (2016). Quality parent teacher conferences. *College Student Journal*, 50(4), 614+. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.hamline.edu/apps/doc/A474548669/PROF?u=clic_hamline&sid=PROF&xid=34abe5e6

Flippo, R., Holland, D., McCarthy, M., & Swinning, E. (2009). Asking the right

questions: How to select an informal reading inventory. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(1), 79-83. doi:10.1598/RT.63.1.8

Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Doan Holbein, M. F. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 99-123. doi:10.1007/s10648-005-3949-7

Goodman, Y. (1996). Revaluing readers while readers revalue themselves: Retrospective miscue analysis. *The Reading Teacher*, 49(8), 600-609. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20201677>

Hasbrouck, J., & Tindal, G. (1992). Curriculum-based oral reading fluency norms for students in grades 2 through 5. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 24(3), 41-44. doi:10.1177/004005999202400310

Jordan, G. E., Snow, C. E., & Porche, M. V. (2000). Project EASE: The effect of a family literacy project on kindergarten students' early literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(4), 524-546. doi:10.1598/RRQ.35.4.5

Koschinska, T. G. (2005). *What are effective and efficient methods of parent-teacher communication.*(Unpublished capstone project). Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN

Mahmood, S. (2013). First-year preschool and kindergarten teachers: Challenges of working with parents. *School Community Journal*, 23(2), 55-85.

Mol, S. E., & Bus, A. G. (2011). To read or not to read: A meta-analysis of print

exposure from infancy to early adulthood. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(2), 267-296. doi:10.1037/a0021890

Morrow, L. M., & Gambrell L. B. (2019). *Best practices in literacy instruction* (6th ed.) New York, NY: Guilford Press.

National Reading Panel. (2000). Report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Padak, N., & Rasinski, T. (2005). *Fast start for early readers*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Pillet-Shore, D. (2012). The problems with praise in parent-teacher interaction. *Communication Monographs*, 79(2), 181-204.
doi:10.1080/03637751.2012.672998

Ross, J. A. (2004). Effects of running records assessment on early literacy achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 97(4), 186-194.
doi:10.3200/JOER.97.4.186-195

Silverman, R., & Hartranft, A. (2014). *Developing vocabulary and oral language in young children*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Steiner, L. M. (2014). A family literacy intervention to support parents in children's early literacy learning. *Reading Psychology*, 35(8), 703-735.
doi:10.1080/02702711.2013.801215

Stevens, R., Slavin, R., & Farnish, A. (1991). The effects of cooperative learning and direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies on main idea identification. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 83*(1), 8-16.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2009). Intersections between differentiation and literacy instruction: Shared principles worth sharing. *New England Reading Association Journal, 45*(1), 28.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Willingham, D. (2015). *Raising kids who read: What parents and teachers can do*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.