

Peering Through the Window: An Exploratory Study of Early Literacy within the Home Environment

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ABSTRACT: *This study was an exploratory case study regarding parent perspectives of early literacy within the context of the home environment. Eight parents participated in data collection by attending an introductory interview and keeping a home-learning journal beginning in May, 2000 and entering data through August, 2000. The participants in this study were drawn from a Title I school in a north-central Oklahoman community. All the parents shared two important background components, their children were enrolled in the same neighborhood school, and were enrolled in that school's prekindergarten class. Using thematic analysis techniques, the data was fractured into individual learning events, arranged in categories based on similar emergent themes, then linked to other learning events in each theme area to provide a rich description of each category. Major findings resulted in the identification of several major themes in early literacy interactions within the home environment of the participants. The overarching themes were reading, writing, oral communication, skill-based activities, technology, and the use of community resources. Excerpts taken directly from participant's home learning journals illustrate each theme area with descriptions of literacy events. The researcher suggests that more research is needed in the areas of literacy acquisition in single child versus multiple child homes, the use of technology as a literacy learning tool, and paternal roles in the area of literacy interactions within the home environment.*

Keywords: *Child Development, Early Literacy, Parent-School Partnerships, Paternal roles in Literacy, Home school Achievement.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As I began teaching pre-kindergarten in the Fall of 1997, I realized the children entering my classroom had a significant background in early literacy. Many demonstrated awareness of the concepts of print, some exhibited skill with book handling tasks. Although I was their first formal school teacher, they had obviously experienced another teacher long before my appearance in their lives. Their parents had already begun the work of building a foundation for literacy attainment.

I found myself wondering about the home environment of my students. How do parents, most without training in literacy education, provide experiences which foster the development of literacy? What am I missing in terms of literacy interaction moments that occur within the home? How can I begin to gain access to these important family events as the pre-kindergarten teacher?

Research supports the idea that public schools must move beyond surface involvement to an actual teamwork approach between teachers and parents (Cairney & Munsie, 1995). The Goals 2000 document calls for increased attention to parent-school partnerships which support children's academic work in the home environment (U.S. Congress, 1994). This document further suggests that every school should form these partnerships in the interest of equipping parents to support children's academic work at home. While schools have focused on parent **involvement** in the past, the terminology of the Goals 2000 document demands a higher standard of the home-school relationship, that of a **partnership**. DeJesus (1985) found that parents expected the school to educate the child and the school expected the home to provide a solid foundation for learning; however, neither were aware of the other's basic assumptions. Parent beliefs and knowledge concerning education have high correlations with children's school achievement (Schaefer, 1991). In addition, research has shown that children acquire literacy more successfully when teachers adjust their instruction to the experiences and understandings children bring into school from their home environment (Snow et al, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Webster & Feiler, 1998). Schools and parents must understand the way each encourages, develops, and values literacy in order to build effective partnerships. If schools are to support home literacy interactions, we must truly understand the dynamics of those learning events that occur outside of the classroom.

As a pre-kindergarten lead teacher, a large part of my job is building home-school partnerships with families, yet I still do not understand the intricate details of literacy in children's homes. In short, I was attempting to reach parents and solicit teamwork without completely understanding their point-of-view or the overall themes of children's home literacy experiences.

II. PURPOSE

“From T-shirts to bubble gum wrappers, children live in a world fashioned in print. Few can escape the abundance of words that fill their homes, and yet we know very little about that world...” (Taylor, 1998, preface)

The purpose of this research is to provide a rich contextual description of themes of early literacy interactions as they are woven into the home lives of young children. From the data, outstanding themes of literacy interactions that occur within the home environments of the participants will be generated. Parents are the child’s first teacher. Just as a child’s second grade teacher goes in September to that same child’s first grade teacher for advice, so should educators look to the parents. As educators plan lessons, they should first be aware of the child’s recent home-learning experiences. When teachers attempt to assess a child, they need to inquire as to the parent’s impressions of the child’s development.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Researchers have called for in-depth studies of the parent-child interactions that center around literacy (Taylor, 1998; Webster & Feiler, 1998), and the parental assumptions and predispositions about literacy (De Temple & Tabors, 1994). This study examines the literacy interactions embedded in the context of the home. This study also explores home interactions in all areas of early literacy development; identified by Strickland & Morrow (1989) as reading, writing, and speaking.

Past studies have established the importance of parent-child literacy interactions using quantitative methodologies (DeBaryshe, 1992; Marvin & Mirenda, 1993; LeFevre & Senechal, 1999; Rush, 1999). However, this study utilizes qualitative research techniques in order to provide data that is rich in both depth and context. Teale (1986) points out that the naturalistic paradigm is particularly useful for getting at descriptions of home literacy and suggests a need to go beyond merely calculating correlations. The interactions which occur between a parent and a child are multi-layered in meaning, intention, and outcome; therefore, it is difficult to study these intense interactions using instruments which require black and white, yes or no answers (such as a checklist or frequency rating). Qualitative research offers the flexibility needed to collect relevant data which may not contain easy answers.

Teacher research is one area within education which typically uses naturalistic inquiry strategies (Hubbard & Power, 1999). Wallace (1997) refers to John Dewey’s writings concerning teacher research. Dewey wrote, It seems to me that the contributions that might come from classroom teachers are a comparatively neglected field; or, to change the metaphor, an almost unworked mine.... For these teachers are the ones in direct contact with pupils and hence the ones through whom the results of scientific findings finally reach students. They are the channels through which the consequences of educational theory come into the lives of those at school. (Wallace, 1997, 27-28)

Rudduck and Hopkins (1985) cite an interesting view of research in education as discussed by Lawrence Stenhouse: In agriculture the equation of invested input against gross yield is all: it does not matter if individual plants fail to thrive or die so long as the cost of saving them is greater than the cost of losing them... This does not apply to the careful gardener whose labour is not costed, but a labour of love. He wants each of his plants to thrive, and he can treat each one individually. Indeed he can grow a hundred different plants in his garden and differentiate his treatment of each, pruning his roses, but not his sweet peas. Gardening rather than agriculture is the analogy for education. (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, 26)

This analogy illustrates the differences between large-scale educational research, which is often quantitative in nature, and teacher-research, which often utilizes qualitative methodologies.

It paints a portrait of the teacher-researcher as a “careful gardener” whose interest is that each plant thrive, who is willing to “differentiate his treatment of each” in order to facilitate its success.

The same analogy could be applied to home environments. Educators must sift through the preconceived notions of family backgrounds and learning in the home environment to understand the dynamics of the families in their classroom during any particular year. As with the children in classrooms, the overarching needs and goals of each group of parents often differs from one year to the next. When a new group of parents enters the doors of a classroom in the fall, the teacher again becomes the “careful gardener” tending to the changing categories of family needs which arise each new school year.

Through this study, data was generated which reveals major literacy themes which are present in the home environment of young children. Using this study, teachers will begin to acquire an understanding of parents' perceptions concerning home literacy interactions in order to develop true home-school partnerships. Educators will also gain insight into child initiated literacy interactions in order to further incorporate child-Teale (1986) points out that the naturalistic paradigm is particularly useful for getting at descriptions of centered activities into an existing literacy curriculum.

IV. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Past research provides a base to begin to explore how literacy interactions are woven into the daily home lives of young children. In an effort to isolate those areas specific to this study, this review of literature will address the following sub areas: Emergent Literacy Concepts, Parent as Early Literacy Facilitator, and Low-Income Families as Context for Early Literacy.

Overview of Emergent Literacy Concepts

Children gain an emerging view of literacy as they interact with people and objects within their environment. Emergent literacy philosophy includes the belief that reading is a skill that uses both social and linguistic processes to actively construct literacy understanding (Saracho, 1997). Researchers have presented a portrait of young literacy learners. They assert that literacy begins at a very early age, during the first few months of life; literacy learning usually occurs in an authentic context, a real life setting to accomplish authentic goals; reading and writing develop concurrently in young children; and children learn literacy through active engagement (Teale & Sulzby, 1989; Mason & Sinha, 1993; Saracho, 1997). Teale (1986) found that home literacy events were frequently embedded in functional household activities such as shopping, writing letters, paying bills, or reading recipes. Literacy's early beginnings offer a special opportunity for parents as the child's first teacher, and home offers a truly authentic context for many literacy learning opportunities.

Children continue to gain experiences manipulating and working with language in daily interactions; looking through a favorite catalog, choosing a soda pop based on the appearance of the label, or pretending to write a grocery list making long squiggled lines across a page. As children interact with language on a daily basis, their view of literacy concepts becomes clearer...more refined.

Research has identified four aspects of emergent literacy that are essential if children are to experience success in literacy acquisition: sharing books and stories, emergent writing skills, environmental print awareness, and phonological awareness (Goswami, 1994; Nutbrown & Hannon, 1993; Miller, 1998). Book sharing has been emphasized as a very important family activity to convey positive literacy ideals. Emergent writing skills are often witnessed as long squiggled lines running from top to bottom, left to right reminiscent of adult cursive penmanship, strings of letter-like forms, or strings of identifiable letters. Children demonstrate an awareness of environmental print by such activities as choosing a favorite candy bar by its wrapper, recognizing the sign of a favorite restaurant, or pointing out a stop sign. Phonological awareness is built when children play with word sounds; making up nonsense words to rhyme with frequently used words; orally listing words that begin or end with a chosen letter, experiencing rhyming poetry, or singing lyrics of a favorite song.

Children begin to assimilate and accommodate literacy information from their environment long before they enter the formal school system. As researchers began to discover the importance of a child's earliest years on their potential for literacy attainment, the parent as an early literacy facilitator emerged as a crucial factor in the education of young children.

Parents as Early Literacy Facilitators

Parents are a child's first teacher; therefore, they have a great responsibility to begin the educational process from birth through a child's first days of school (Amundson, 1988; Snow et al., 1998). In fact, researchers have found that the best overall predictor of literacy

Several home environmental factors have been identified as conducive to literacy development including: opportunity for reading as a part of the family schedule (Greaney, 1986), parental interest in reading (Greaney, 1986; Leichter, 1984; Webster & Feiler, 1998), parental leisure reading (Greaney, 1986; Leichter, 1984; Rowe, 1991), parent-child reading (Greaney, 1986), access to reading materials (Hess & Holloway, 1984; Leichter, 1984; Greaney, 1986), and quantity of interpersonal interactions (Leichter, 1984; Greaney, 1986; Rowe, 1991).

Past research studies have emphasized the importance of parents' active support of children's literacy development through appropriate parent-child interactions to realize full academic potential (Amundson, 1988; Oakes & Lipton, 1990; Rush, 1999). Parents' encouragement and active involvement in literacy development, or lack thereof, have a lasting effect on literacy learning.

Parents' personal beliefs and attitudes toward literacy have great potential to influence children's literacy development (DeBaryshe, 1995; Baker et al., 1997; Spiegel, 1994, Snow et al., 1998). The family's positive or negative ideas toward literacy are transmitted to the children and have a great effect on their motivation toward learning to read and write. Two recurrent themes have emerged from the parents' approach to literacy learning. These two themes are (1) literacy as a source of entertainment and (2) literacy as a set of skills to be learned (Sonnenschein et al., 1996; Baker et al., 1997). Furthermore, Sonnenschein and Baker found that viewing literacy as entertainment was positively related to an orientation toward print tasks, narrative competence, and phonological awareness. Approaching literacy as a set of skills to be learned was either negatively related or not significantly related to the same three early literacy concepts (Sonnenschein et al., 1996; Baker et al., 1997).

The contextual nature of early literacy focuses attention onto the naturally occurring, everyday activities of family life. Weinberger (1998) studied the literacy learning that occurred in everyday activities of children in the home environment and found a set of recurring themes including environmental print engagement, nursery rhymes, storytelling, drawing and writing, games, toys, literacy packages, television, and parents reading to children. All participating families in the Weinberger study, regardless of socioeconomic status, were surrounded by environmental print as it appeared on buses, packaging, clothing, and television. In addition, everyday language interactions such as mealtime conversations between parent and child have been linked to a larger vocabulary and complex sentence usage which ultimately support children in learning to read and write (Snow, 1993).

Unfortunately, many parents feel insecure about their role as their child's teacher of literacy (Potter, 1995; Roderick, 1990). Potter (1995) reported that when asked how to teach children to read and write before formal schooling, mothers responded they would read stories to their children, pick out words in books to point out while reading, and use play to teach literacy. Those same mothers remarked that they did not know if this was the "right" way to teach their children to read, and worried that their approach might interfere with later schooling if the teachers taught reading using a different approach.

Parents are a child's first teacher. Indeed, all parents are responsible for facilitating their child's literacy attainment; however, educators and researchers alike share acute concern for one group in particular: low-income families. It has long been assumed that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more at risk of literacy failure than children from other economic circumstances (Chall et al., 1990).

Low-Income Families and Early Literacy

In the past, educators believed that low-income families did not provide the quantity or quality of home literacy interactions that higher socioeconomic status families provided such as storybook reading as well as access to a greater quantity of children's literature, which led us to automatically label low-income children at-risk. Actual research findings, however, have resulted in a number of opposing viewpoints of the low-income family as a context for literacy learning. Stewart (1995) examined the home literacy environments of four low-income families and found that although the parents provided support for literacy in different ways, all four environments were supportive of early literacy learning. Feiler and Webster (1998) also found that most of the low-income children in their study had rich literacy experiences in the context of their family. In fact, researchers are now finding that a substantial amount of low-SES homes provide a literacy environment that offers a substantial, varied uses of print in children's daily lives (Purcell-Gates et al., 1995; Teale, 1986; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1998). Implications of this data suggest a need for teachers to look at each child as an individual with a unique family setting instead of grouping children together and attaching labels based solely on socioeconomic status.

Anderson and Stokes (1984) believe literacy experiences that occur within low income families may have been undervalued because of the priority given to storybook reading. In reality, low-income children participate in many literacy activities embedded in a daily routine (Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984). Literacy experiences within low-income homes have been observed as functional, meaningful, and relevant to daily family life. Experiences noted by observers include daily living tasks such as paying bills, entertainment activities such as reading a television guide, and religious routines such as nightly Bible-reading. Authentic learning is one of the key characteristics of early literacy which provides intrinsic motivation for children to learn to read and write. Indeed, literacy interactions are difficult to avoid in a literate society such as ours.

Parental attitudes and beliefs also have bearing in low-socioeconomic status homes. In homes where family members used literacy for pleasure, entertainment, and leisure, children's understanding of the alphabetic principal was further developed than those homes where literacy was approached differently (Purcell-Gates, 1996). This data is in agreement with research on general populations that suggest families that see literacy as entertainment contain high literacy achieving children.

Past research provided a foundation of understanding so that this study could continue to explore literacy interactions that are woven into the daily home lives of young children. Of particular interest to this study are the past research findings that parents of young children do not feel comfortable with their responsibility as the child's first teacher, and the conflicting findings of past researchers in respect to low-income families as early literacy facilitators. It seems that researchers are beginning to discover that parents in the low socioeconomic group do provide a variety of literacy experiences for their young children; however, low-income families provide different types of experiences than families in other income groups.

V. METHOD

This study is an exploratory case study regarding parent perspectives of early literacy within the context of the home environment. The main methods used for data collection were parent interviews and home learning journals. Parents also had the option to videotape, audiotape, or photograph home learning in order to allow those uncomfortable with writing (as in the journal format) alternate means of recording early literacy as it occurs within their home, although none of the participants in this study opted to use these alternate methods of data collection.

Participants

The term “case study” is defined as “a detailed, in-depth examination of a person or people from a specific group.” (Hubbard & Power, 1999) This study focused on “people from a specific group”. The participants in this study were drawn from a Title I school in a north-central Oklahoma community. All the parents share two important background components, they are enrolled in the same neighborhood school, and they all have children who are enrolled in that school's pre-kindergarten class.

Data was collected from eight parents, out of eleven in attendance at parent meetings. The study participants accepted the open invitation to attend summer parent meetings, consented to participate in the study, and agreed to keep a home-learning journal. (Please note that all participant names have been changed to protect their anonymity.) All eight were two parent households. Seven mothers and one father participated. Of the eight households represented, one was a single-child household, five had two children, one contained three children, and one family had four children (see table 1, p. 15). One child, in the single child household, was adopted nine months before our study.

Table 1: Number of Children in Participating Homes

1 home	1 child
5 homes	2 children
1 home	3 children
1 home	4 children

It is necessary to provide cursory information about each family which will frame their data presented in the coming chapter. A short portrait of each family follows.

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith is a stay at home mother. Mr. Smith works the night shift for the city. The two children in this home are Caleb, 5, and Cassie, 7.

Mrs. Hansen

Mrs. Hansen is a stay at home mother. Mr. Hansen works as an editor for a local newspaper. The two children in this home are Susan, 3, and Marcus, 8.

Mrs. Williams

Mrs. Williams works as a teller at a local bank. Mr. Williams works in one of the local factories. Their two children are Katie, 4, and Amy, 2.

Mrs. Watson

Mrs. Watson is a stay at home mother. Mr. Watson works for a local shipping business. The three children in this home are Lisa, 1, Cody, 4, and Matt, 9.

Mrs. Nash

Mrs. Nash is a stay at home mother. Mr. Nash works in a local factory. Michael, 3, and Kyle, 5, are the two children in this home.

Mrs. Green

Mrs. Green is a department manager in a local department store. Mr. Green is an accountant for a locally owned retail shop. They adopted Tyler, 4, nine months prior to the onset of the study.

Mrs. Redding

Mrs. Redding is a stay at home mother. Mr. Redding is a minister. Their four children are Matthew, 6 months, Mark, 2, Tim, 4, and Sara, 6.

Mr. Parks

Mr. and Mrs. Parks are university students working towards master's degrees. Mr. Parks was the only father to keep a journal of home-learning events. Their two children are Lilly, 4 months, and Donna, 5.

Instructional Setting

According to introductory material provided to new residents by the school district, the surrounding community has high levels of adults (20+) with some college experience (45%) and holding a college degree (33%) when compared with the state averages of adults with some college experience (28%) and holding college degrees (17%). The participating elementary school is one of three Title I schools in the community. The total student population of 390 consists of 260 students qualifying for the federal free and reduced lunch program.

Program Description

In order to further develop a home-school partnership with parents, a summer workshop was offered to families of the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 pre-kindergarten classes. The workshop series, titled Pre-K Parent Project, centered on emergent literacy development. All parents whose children were enrolled by May 26, 2000 were offered the opportunity to participate in meetings throughout the summer months (2000) at their neighborhood elementary school.

The parent meetings took place June 1, 15, 29, July 6, 20, and August 3, 2000 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.. The meetings were scheduled in the evening hours with the intent of including those parents with full-time jobs. The teacher-researcher engaged the group in open-ended discussions of literacy as it occurs in children ages 3-5. The general schedule used for workshops is outlined below:

6:00-6:20 Network with other parents & check out books

6:20-6:50 Presentation of topic

6:50-7:20 Project work in small groups

7:20-7:40 Small groups share their project findings/experiences

7:40-7:50 Open question/discussion time

7:50-8:00 Clean-up, pick-up children from childcare area

Workshop session topics included developmental stages of reading, development of oral language, stages of writing development, storybook reading interaction strategies, and information about the newest research on brain development. Workshops were quite flexible in order to conform to parents' interests, needs, and questions. In order to further allow participants to explore areas of personal interest, parent resource books centered on early literacy were available for checkout to participants, and time was built into the schedule to encourage parents to check-out books.

VI. DATA COLLECTION

There is a need in these studies to keep literacy within the logic of the everyday lives of people; to avoid cutting these skills off from the conditions which affect them in direct and indirect ways; to shun needless abstraction and reductionist models; in short to stay as close as possible to real cases, individual examples, in order to gain the strength of evidence that comes with being able to examine specific cases in great depth and complexity. (Szwed, 1977, p. 15 as quoted in Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Great amounts of consideration were given to creating a set of data collection tools which could gain access to the home environment without intrusion. Several data collection tools were provided in addition to journals in an effort to meet the needs of parents who might feel uncomfortable writing (Van Manen, 1990, and Glesne, 1999). Families were offered alternate avenues for capturing home literacy events including, home-video recording, audio-recording, and photography, in an effort to ensure an adequate comfort level for each individual household. However, all of the participants chose the handwritten journal and initial interview as the means of data collection in their homes.

The Parent Interview

Participants were asked to attend an interview with the teacher-researcher before the onset of the parent project workshops. Glesne (1999) points out that interviews are one of the most common qualitative data gathering techniques. The parent interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were scheduled between May 27 and 31. Interview sessions were conducted using the following guiding list of open-ended questions:

1. What is a normal weekday routine for you and your child?
2. What do you and your child enjoy doing together?
3. What do you like most about being a parent?
4. How do you view your role this year as a preschool or kindergarten parent?
5. What are your questions about early literacy?

These questions were adapted from *A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents* by Edwards, Pleasants, and Franklin (1999).

Micro tape recorders were utilized to capture a complete record of the interviews, and handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. Both the notes and audio records were used in the data analysis.

Home Learning Journals

Journals were used as an "unobtrusive" method of gathering information about the daily literacy interactions and events that took place within the homes of participants (Glesne, 1999). Van Manen (1990) discusses the nature of data collection in human science research. He states, "the most straightforward way to go about our research is to ask selected individuals to write their experiences down." (p. 63) In order to tap this "straightforward" method of gathering descriptive narratives, parents were encouraged to record home learning events through the use of a handwritten journal. Parents were provided with a notebook and a supply of

notebook paper to use as their journal. A short description of the event was entered into the journal as soon as possible after its occurrence.

Journal entries were collected from June 1 to August 3 at the scheduled parent workshops, photocopied, and returned at the close of each Pre-Kindergarten Parent Project meeting. The parents ultimately had possession of the original journal entry in order to instill a feeling of ownership, because it was crucial to the quality and validity of entries that parents saw the usefulness of keeping a learning journal and became personally invested in the project. For parents, a journal is a record of their child's development; a type of scrapbook to preserve the early years of the child's life (Williams & Lundsteen, 1997). In addition, the learning event journal served to heighten parents' awareness of teachable moments present in the home environment as well as providing a window into the home for research purposes.

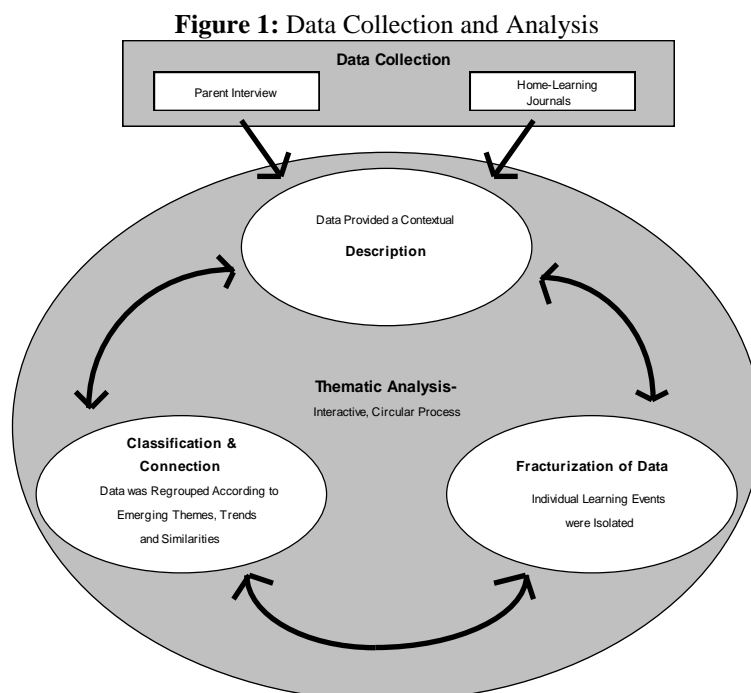
VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Both data sources (journals and interview notes) were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis began as soon as the first interview sessions were complete and was ongoing throughout the study. All pieces of data were analyzed using a categorizing strategy known as thematic analysis (Maxwell, 1996; Strauss, 1987). Using thematic analysis, data is fractured, in this case separated into individual learning events, and then rearranged into categories that facilitate the analysis of data. Categories, or themes, were developed as they emerged from the aforementioned interactions with the data and relationships that connect events were sought out (Maxwell, 1996). The process of analysis followed Dey's (1993) description of a circular process involving description, classification, and connection (see figure 1, p. 22). These processes do not occur in a strictly linear fashion, but as an interactive process in which the data's revelations lead the researcher's search for meaning.

The first step was the process of description, which involves setting forth in words information about the context of the action, intentions of those involved, and the process within which the action is embedded (Dey, 1993, Denzin, 1978). This definition of rich description will encompass all those elements of parent-child home literacy interactions which make them unique, authentic, and powerful as literacy events in young children's lives. These descriptions were extracted from the interviews and parent journals.

Secondly, data was fractured or separated into individual, isolated learning events. The researcher made decisions based on where each learning event began and where it ended in journals and then isolated that event by physically cutting it away from the body of text.

Lastly, data was regrouped according to emerging themes, otherwise referred to as categories. This process allows the researcher to examine the data for trends, similarities, and differences. Categories emerged from the participants' discussion and descriptions of the literacy events in their homes (Maxwell, 1996). Using the groups of data that result from classification and connection the researcher looked for major themes that emerged from the literacy events within the home environment.



In addition, the researcher kept memos to help think through the growing data field. These memos often take the form of a research journal that captures the thought process of the qualitative researchers as she processes data. Analytic memos aid in developing and recording reflective thoughts as they occur (Glesne, 1998). These memos often capture important connections of concepts, new questions, and insights into data before they are lost to the researcher's memory.

Validity

In order to address issues of validity, the study used triangulation, member checking, peer reviews, and a prolonged engagement with the subjects as described in Glesne (1999). Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data. The journals and interviews, when compared and contrasted lend trustworthiness to the data. Triangulation also allows the researcher to create a richer description of the object of study which leads to greater reliability of the study as a whole.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed peer review as "enlisting an outsider to 'audit' fieldwork notes and subsequent analysis and interpretations" (as cited in Glesne, 1999, p. 152). Hubbard and Power (1999) also speak of seeking outside input as an "audit check" (p. 120). This procedure removes subjectivity from the work of qualitative research. The researcher discussed her interpretations and conclusions from the data sources with other educators, both elementary teachers and university professors. The researcher also shared the final draft document of the research with individuals outside the field of education to confirm the validity of her insights regarding the study.

Member checking involves sharing analytic memos and data analysis with participants as well as asking research subjects for clarification when necessary (Glesne, 1999). The intent of member checking is to insure correct representation of participants' ideas and thoughts. Participants were given opportunity to examine interview notes and review the teacher-researcher's conclusions concerning the emerging themes of home literacy interactions. Participants' feedback was considered carefully as essential input before drafting the written study.

Another factor in the validity of this study was the researcher's prolonged engagement with the research studies. Although the study only spanned one summer, the participants had a prior relationship with the researcher as their child's teacher. According to Corrine Glesne (1999) this type of relationship develops trust between the study participants and the researcher thus encouraging openness and honesty. Henry (1999) refers to this prolonged engagement between participants and researcher as a particular strength of teacher-research. She cites anthropologist, James Clifford (1986) as saying, "Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways" (p. 9).

VIII. FINDINGS

The study centered on literacy learning in the home environment of young children, 3 to 5 years of age. The central research question explored how literacy interactions are woven into the daily home lives of young children.

This chapter reports the findings of the qualitative data analysis on both the parent interviews and the home-learning journals. All participants in the study kept a "home-learning journal" from May until August, and seven of the eight parents attended an initial interview. All data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique which allows the researcher to pull data sources into distinctive pieces, in this case individual learning events, then reassemble the data according to the emerging themes (Maxwell, 1996; Strauss, 1987). Categories, or themes, were developed as they emerged from the aforementioned interactions with the data, and relationships that connect events were sought out (Maxwell, 1996).

Major findings resulted in the identification of several major themes. The overarching themes present in the early literacy interactions within the home environment of the participants were reading, writing, oral communication, skill-based activities, technology, and the use of community resources.

Interview Findings

Participants were asked to attend an interview with the teacher before the onset of the parent project workshops. The interviews served to build a foundational idea of the home environment within which to frame the later journal entries. Please note that Mr. Parks did not participate in the interview segment of the study; thus seven mothers were interviewed.

Question #1: What is a normal weekday routine for you and your child?

Six of the seven mothers participating in interviews mentioned reading as a bedtime ritual. Only Mrs. Green did not share any literacy rituals that are a part of her family's routine. The six who had a set reading time just

before bed also shared a common number of “stories” saying that they allowed the child to choose two to four books each evening.

Mrs. Williams mentioned that they have a family game night one night each week where they play board games. She also said that the girls say bedtime prayers each night.

Mrs. Nash also has a reading time in the morning with both boys, and a special time set aside when Kyle comes home from school when she and Michael listen to Kyle’s verbal account of his school day.

Mrs. Redding spoke of bedtime as “family time.” The family listens to their father verbally tell a story, then they all read several books as a family before going to bed.

Mrs. Hansen and Susan have a morning storytime while Marcus is at school, and another quiet reading time after lunch.

Question #2: What do you and your child enjoy doing together?

The following list was compiled from all seven mothers’ replies to this question.

read	cook	basketball
play ball	walking	arts and crafts
fly kites	swinging	play with legos
puzzles	play with race cars	play in the pool
play games (board games)		

Mothers talked mostly about outside play citing playing ball (catch), flying kites, playing in the pool, basketball, and swinging. Only two participants mentioned reading, while three listed cooking as a favorite activity to do with her young child.

Question #3: What do you like most about being a parent?

The answers these seven mothers offered for this question speaks to their emotions as parents. It reveals their values and their feelings of responsibility as parents. The answers to this question were so powerful that it was quite difficult to take any part out of context to compile any sort of summary. As a result, the complete texts of the mothers’ answers are listed below.

Those moments when they catch on to something new...I think. Like when you see them light up. When they were little, the first words and they say that word for like two weeks. They say it for everything, and then all of a sudden they realize that there’s another word for it. And then as they get older, the things that they learn get bigger and bigger. (Mrs. Smith)

Being around them. You don’t know what life was before. It is rewarding to see them grow attached to you, and it’s a nice feeling when they’re happy to see you when you pick them up from school and all. (Mrs. Williams)

Everything! The love, the temper tantrums, all of it! (Mrs. Watson)

Your life starts all over. Priorities, goals, and values change. The responsibility, the fun. Every year things change. (Mrs. Nash)

Wow! That changes daily. What we teach them. It’s fun to build leaders that are compassionate. Kisses with Oreo cookie faces. You just feel like you’re doing something worthwhile. (Mrs. Redding)

Watching them grow...the hugs and kisses. Sharing in their pride and accomplishments. (Mrs. Hansen)

Watching him sleep. His smile. His giggles. (Mrs. Green)

Question #4: How do you view your role this year as a preschool or kindergarten parent?

Parents spoke of wanting to support school by encouraging their children, reading more, and coming into the classroom to volunteer. Katie’s mother was concerned about helping her learn to write because she is left-handed, and both parents are right-handed. Mrs. Redding felt like school was much too “compartmentalized” in children’s lives and said that she wanted to know every detail of her children’s school day.

Question #5: What are your questions about early literacy?

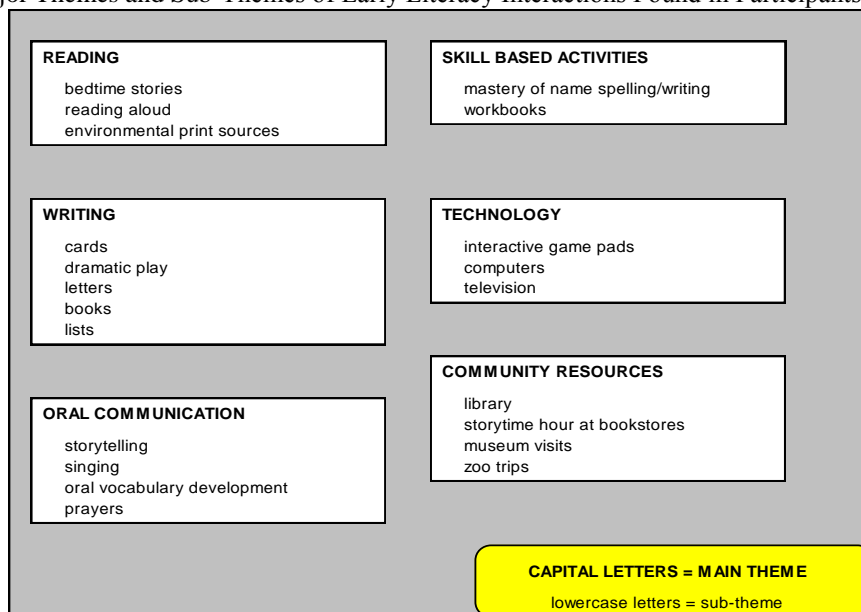
These seven mothers had many questions about early literacy. Mrs. Redding wondered what was the earliest age that one should begin teaching their child sound/letter coordination, and she was concerned about whether she should teach her child capital letters first, or both capital and lower case together. Mrs. Smith wanted to know how to overcome Caleb’s insecurities about reading. She remarked that he was very discouraged that his older sister could read, and his immediate response when asked to read something was “I can’t read.” Mrs. Watson wanted ideas for teaching Cody how to write his name and suggestions for working on letter recognition. Mrs. Williams’ powerful question was simply, “When are they supposed to start reading?” Mrs. Nash wanted to know how to find the line between encouragement and pushing Kyle to read. She wanted, above all, for Kyle to feel comfortable with reading. Lastly, Mrs. Green expressed her interest in finding out

what books were the best to read to her four-year-old son. She also desired more ideas for fun ways to make him want to read.

Journal Findings

The parents' journals revealed many literacy learning experiences in the participants' homes. These experiences could be separated into six main themes including reading, writing, skill-based learning, oral communication, technology, and community resources (see figure 2).

Figure 2 : Major Themes and Sub-Themes of Early Literacy Interactions Found in Participants' Journal Entries



Reading

Journal entries revealed that reading events occurred in every participant's home. Whether reading occurred incidentally or was a planned interaction, every participant journal contained one or more entry describing a reading event. Far more entries were centered around reading events than any other theme. Numerous entries pointed out children's propensity to reading aloud to someone or something. Mrs. Hansen recorded several instances of Susan's read-aloud rehearsals. In one entry, the child read to a favorite stuffed animal, Pluto.

At bedtime, read *The Lady with the Crocodile Purse* to Pluto about 10 times. (6/15/00)

Another entry showcases Susan reading to family pets.

At evening time, she sat in the back of the truck reading books to the three dogs. The dogs loved the stories. (6/19/00)

Mrs. Smith recorded many instances in which Caleb read to a family member, including the following excerpt which describes the child sharing a book which was written by his class at school:

He showed his Aunt Donna his Pre-K book that the classes had published. He helped her read the book. (6/18/00)

The entries also revealed a theme of children reading aloud to siblings. The following examples are a sample of entries that evidence this theme:

I came home informing the boys that I had checked out two books. I promised to read them at bedtime. When bedtime came around I asked Kyle to get the books and wait for me on the couch. Not too long after, I heard him telling Michael, "Oh, I know these books, I can read these books without Mama." He did, too. He knew both stories, and proceeded to open the books and tell the story on each page to Michael. I don't know why I never noticed before, but standing in the doorway watching, I noticed *Cody is in the floor with Lisa, reading the pictures of some books we have just read.* (Mrs. Watson, 6/4/00).

Much of the children's literature in the home tended to center around popular characters from cartoons, movies, or toys. Mrs. Hansen recorded both Arthur and Winnie the Pooh books. Mrs. Williams mentioned Barbie and Cinderella books, and Mrs. Smith's children often choose Bearnstain Bear or Barbie books.

Parent journals also allowed some insight as to the physical home environment. Many parents mentioned bedtime stories and wrote about them as a routine. Mrs. Hansen spoke of a "book area" which is set up in Susan's room. Mrs. Smith and her children tended to read in a "rocker" in the living room.

During one particularly powerful entry, Mrs. Nash revealed an instance of frustration with the process of bedtime stories. She wrote:

Reading books has become a chore. We can't decide on a book, who turns the pages, who sits where, it drives me crazy. Sometimes it's just easier to put them to bed without reading. (6/14/00)

Parents also recorded children reading from a variety of print sources including books, magazines, environmental print, religious information, menus, recipes, and instructions.

One entry illustrated child-initiated reading and the use of magazines as a medium for literacy acquisition. Mrs. Smith writes about this encounter:

Caleb saw the Nickelodeon magazine at the check-out stand and asked for it. He and Cassie said they would read it together, so I got it for them. Caleb looked at it all the way home and all through lunch. He asked Cassie what a lot of the words were and "what does this page say?" (7/20/00)

Michael sitting perfectly still. Kyle had his undivided attention. (Mrs. Nash, 6/1/00)

Cody is in the floor with Lisa, reading the pictures of some books we have just read. (Mrs. Watson, 6/4/00)

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Both Mrs. Green and Mrs. Smith told of instances in which environmental print was a literacy tool.

This past weekend, we drove to my parent's house. Friday night on the way down, Caleb had us read every sign. Coming home yesterday, he picked out all the road signs himself that said "Exit", all the other signs he had us read to him. (Mrs. Smith, 6/5/00)

"No Diving was painted all around the pool. Caleb wanted to know what the letters said. Then every time someone dove into the pool, he came over to me and said, "Mom, do you think they can read the words that say 'No Diving'?" (Mrs. Smith, 7/31/00)

About 2:30 pm, we went to town to run errands. I stopped to get gas at the Conoco on the way into town. Caleb said, "Mom, I think that sign says Icee's are on sale. I want a blue one!" I bought both he and Cassie a "blue" Icee. (Mrs. Smith, 8/1/00)

We had KFC for supper and Tyler said, "Look, it's KHD." (Mrs. Green, 6-4-00)

We were reading Dr. Seuss' ABC. We were on Big M, little m and Tyler said, "Look mom, those are on m-e-m's (that's how he says m&m's). I thought that was pretty cool to recognize the lower case m. Usually he can only do upper case. (Mrs. Green, 6/6/00)

Reading religious print also played a part in the Smith home. Caleb attended Vacation Bible School at his church, reading memory verses and his Bible during the course of the event.

Two participants recorded instances in which children used menus as a print source.

Caleb was at Chili's with us last night for supper. Looking at the menu, he said, "I want the hot dog." He then pointed to the menu item. I asked him how he knew they had hot dogs and he replied, "Gee mom, there's a picture of a hot dog next to the words!" (Mrs. Smith, 6/27/00)

We played restaurant together with pretend menus (his idea). He ordered food and drinks. I played dumb so he would have to show me what the boxes on the pantry shelf said. Very fun. (Mrs. Redding, 6/6/00)

Mrs. Green recorded several instances of cooking with Tyler and following written recipes, while Mrs. Smith drew a list of chores for Caleb using pictures and words.

Writing

Children wrote in participating homes for a variety of reasons. Parents reported writing in dramatic play, cards, letters, notes, book-making, meal menus, and lists. Instances where children wrote to communicate a message were mainly concentrated in the areas of cards, letters, notes, and lists. Mr. Parks had two entries in

which Donna wrote “good morning” cards for her baby sister, Lilly, several instances of letter writing to her grandparents, and one entry which spoke of a list for an upcoming Fourth of July picnic. The following excerpts are from Mr. Park’s journal:

Wrote two letters to Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma’s said, “How is Iowa?” Grandpa’s said, “What do you want for your birthday?” (6/14/00)

Wrote great grandma a birthday letter. She asked about her garden. (7/7/00)

When Donna got back, she had made a large list of things we need for a picnic. Blanket, potato chips, sandwiches, and pudding. (7/3/00)

Mrs. Smith reported two instances of card writing:

Caleb picked out his own card for father’s day and signed it. Then on the front of the envelope, he wrote “For Daddy” by copying off of the card his sister wrote on. (6/18/00)

Yesterday afternoon Caleb and Cassie wrote “thank you” cards for their birthday gifts. Caleb wrote “Thank You” on a few cards with his name, then he asked me to write the words and he wrote his name on the bottom, but he made sure he wrote on his two best friends’ cards himself. (7/12/00)

Mrs. Hansen also had one journal entry concerning letter-writing. She facilitated Susan’s writing process with dictation.

“Wrote” letter to Grandma. Susan told Mom what she wanted to say and Mom wrote it out. Susan signed her name and drew a picture. “Wrote” another letter to her cousins in Texas (7/2/00).

Mrs. Green cited two notes Tyler wrote to her. One note said, “Mom, when are we getting a new fish ?” The other note is explained in the following entry:

Today when I got home for lunch, I had a note waiting form me from Tyler. It said WASH RUG (he spilled milk on it) for his “U” he draws a picture of “you” (a person). (see Appendix B, 6/22/00)

As we saw menus in the reading theme, they are also present in the writing area.

Mr. Parks wrote about Donna’s menu creation.

Made a menu for lunch, drew the food and then labeled each, ex: macaroni & cheese (wrote using the box). (6/7/00)

Mr. Parks also recorded Donna’s activity writing a book.

Wrote a book 5 pages long. Drew pictures and then labeled them, fishing, flowers, snowball fight. To spell fight, she found the word in Hop on Pop (by Dr. Seuss). (6/7/00)

There were many entries that discussed dramatic play in the home environment. Mrs. Green captured a moment when Tyler was emulating his father as they both sat at the kitchen table “paying bills.” Mrs. Hansen also provided bank envelopes because Susan “liked to pay bills at home.” Mr. Parks wrote about a project Donna was working on (inspired by a children’s book titled Potato). She made a list of things she would need to build a “cat trap.” The next day, when she had failed to trap a cat, she made a sign that said “free cat food” with an arrow pointing to the entrance of her trap.

Mrs. Smith recorded an instance when Caleb created “treasure maps” and the whole family went on a treasure hunt to find his baseball.

Oral Communication

The verbal interactions about which parents wrote were classified into four main categories: storytelling, singing, and vocabulary development. Oral storytelling occurred in three of the homes. Mrs. Redding wrote of “round robin story telling” while driving with her children. Each family member added a segment to the story as they took turns creating a fictional narrative. Mrs. Hansen recorded two entries centering around Susan’s recounting of her day to her father when he arrived home from work. She also captured this moment:

Drove to California to visit great-grandparents. Susan listened to stories about their childhood in Oklahoma. Susan told them stories about how she likes to play. (6/7/00)

Caleb had a similar experience after a trip to an amusement park.

Saturday morning, the first one up was Caleb. He couldn’t wait to tell Ma-ma and Pa-pa all about his day. (7/17/00)

Parents also captured vocabulary development as their young children tried to assimilate new words into their current understanding. Mrs. Smith wrote about Caleb’s misunderstanding of the term “wedding shower.”

Yesterday afternoon, my mom, Cassie, and I were getting ready for my niece’s wedding shower when Caleb asked, “Does everyone at the party shower together?” I told him that shower meant we “shower” her with gifts or that everyone would bring a gift. Caleb then replied, “So does anyone use soap?” (7/5/00)

She also wrote the following entry:

While watching the 10 o’clock news, they showed a picture of the fires in Colorado. Caleb said, “I think that is a wildfire, but where have I learned that word?” I told him probably from the news, that there had been several

this summer. He said, “No, I don’t think so, I think it was from somewhere else, but I can’t remember.” (7/27/00)

Kyle surprised Mrs. Nash as they were reading one night with a new word he’d learned.

Kyle has really started using more words to express himself. Michael picked out the same book he always picks out. Kyle looks at his decision and says, “I’m not very fond of that book, Michael. Would you please choose another one?” I don’t know where he heard the word fond. (7/18/00)

Three mothers also wrote of children singing songs. Mrs. Williams told of the importance she acknowledges in learning and singing songs.

I’ve noticed that Katie sings a lot. This has helped her vocabulary. It has helped her pronounce words a lot more clearly. (7/13/00)

Mrs. Smith recorded two instances of night time prayers, and Mr. Parks wrote of Donna teaching her mother some Choctaw words she’d learned.

Skill-Based Activities

Skill-based activities isolate literacy skills breaking down the process into small segments such as letter identification, letter-sound identification, and letter formation. These activities center around mastery of each isolated skill. The following are excerpts of entries which center on skill-based activities:

We work on spelling his name by reciting. He gets it correct. (Mrs. Watson, 6/11/00)

She asked to work in her workbooks. She did Blue’s Clues words. A workbook page on letters, and two pages on one with numbers. (Mrs. Hansen, 7/4/00)

Technology

The use of technology as a literacy acquisition tool was common in the homes of participants. Interactive game pads were present in both the Nash and Hansen homes. These are self-contained computerized games which can be purchased for a variety of isolated skill-based tasks. Mrs. Hansen recorded two such interactions with technology in detail.

Afternoon, played with *Leap Frog Pad*. Susan likes the music games and finding the state games. She also loves playing the body part game and learning the bone song. (6/18/00)

After dinner played *Sega Pico-Winnie the Pooh*. Had to trace letters and numbers on it. (7/12/00)

Mrs. Nash wrote about Kyle’s use of a similar electronic game.

Kyle has been playing with his *Phonics Learning Center*. It is amazing how much he picks up on his own. He is spelling a lot of 3 letter words like cat, hat, bat, etc. (6/9/00)

Traditional computer systems were also used as learning tools in four of the homes. The following excerpts were taken from parent journals.

Played on “McPuter”. She played *Richard Scarry Busy Town*. (7/17/00)

Tim discovered the computer game that we gave him for Christmas. It has the alphabet, shapes, and numbers. This is when I realized as we went through the alphabet that he doesn’t know we read left to right. We played for quite a while because it has 8 different activities to choose from. (6/8/00)

Kyle loves the computer. He knows more about it than me. He mostly just plays games, but he is actually making words. Or maybe just remembering things that I do like where play and stop buttons are. (6/12/00)

Donna played on the computer. The game was a word game from *Sesame Street*. She was on the computer for several hours. (7/6/00)

Television was also used as a learning tool in some homes. Mr. Parks spoke of “homework” that Donna does as she watches movies. She draws four of the most important scenes from any movie that she watches then she takes it to her parents for a “grade.” The Smith family viewed the popular children’s book *Rainbow Fish* narrated on video as a substitute bedtime story, and the Hansen’s checked out a sing-along video from the library.

Community Resources

Parents reported the use of several community resources. Mrs. Hansen wrote of weekly trips to the public library to attend “storytime” and check-out books. Such events were sponsored by two local bookstores as well. Mrs. Green and Mrs. Smith also utilized storytime events in the community. Families described such events centering around a theme and including a craft experience for children. For instance, one detailed description involved reading the children’s book *Rainbow Fish* and then making a rainbow fish with sequins, crayons, and paper. Mrs. Hansen wrote of another storytime activity at the library.

Went to storytime at the library. The theme was sheep. Made a sheep project. Checked out ten books and one video, a sing-along. (7/7/00)

Data collection spanned an entire summer, and as a consequence, several families recorded family vacations. The Hansen family visited art and children’s museums during their summer vacation.

Went to the state capitol in the morning and looked at state buildings. In the afternoon, visited the children's museum and the art museum. (6/20/00)

The Parks family visited a nearby community zoo.

Went to the zoo and celebrated Ghunda the elephant's 50th birthday. (Mr. Parks, 6/10/00)

IX. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data revealed six major themes which captured important instances of parents' early literacy interactions with their children at home. These themes provided useful information which enabled a rich description of literacy interactions as they are woven into the daily lives of young children. In this next section, conclusions will be discussed and recommendations for further research as well as increased parent-school partnerships will be made. This study explored literacy interactions within the home environment of children three to five years of age. The question researched was:

How are literacy interactions woven into the daily home lives of young children?

Conclusion

This exploratory study supports previous research in the area of early literacy in the home environment. Furthermore, it adds depth and rich descriptions so that we might understand the past research within a narrative context. These parents have gone another step toward supporting those in the educational community who propose that low-income families provide extensive literacy experiences for their children. Although all eight of these families are enrolled in the only Title I school in the community with 67% of the total student population qualifying for the federal free and reduced lunch program, all of them spoke specifically of reading opportunities, rituals, and routines within their homes. Furthermore, they shared interactions in all three areas of early literacy development; reading, writing, and speaking (Strickland & Morrow, 1989).

Past research points repeatedly to literacy learning occurring within an authentic context. In fact, researchers have set a scene of early literacy learning. They propose that many of these interactions occur within a real life setting to accomplish authentic goals (Teale & Sulzby, 1989; Mason & Sinha, 1993; Saracho, 1997) and are frequently embedded in functional household activities such as shopping or writing letters (Teale, 1986). The participants in this study wrote of many such events within their homes.

Caleb's encounters with road signs, "No Diving" signs, reading his memory verses and Bible for Vacation Bible School, reading the menu at a restaurant, and writing thank you cards for his birthday gifts are but a few of the authentic contexts he found for reading and writing. Tyler's note to his mom to wash the rug after he'd spilled milk on it and imitating his father paying the bills are authentic examples of literacy within functional household activities.

It seemed as though Donna's interest in writing was particularly strong. Some of the authentic literacy experiences captured in her father's journal include Donna writing good morning cards to her baby sister, writing letters to grandparents, creating menus for meals, and making a list of things needed for a picnic. Authentic literacy learning offers intrinsic motivation. Children initiate these interactions because they want to be able to use language to achieve real-life goals. In addition, children sustain their efforts to read and write in authentic contexts because of an inner determination and desire.

The eight families represented also relate amazingly to research that identifies four aspects of emergent literacy acquisition that are essential if children are to experience success in literacy. Those four areas are sharing books and stories, emergent writing skills, environmental print awareness, and phonological awareness (Nutbrown & Hannon, 1993; Goswami, 1994; Miller, 1998).

However, of all the supporting research, the most powerful is that which identifies two recurrent themes in parents' approach to literacy learning. The two themes are literacy as a source of entertainment and literacy as a set of skills to be learned (Sonnenschein et al., 1996; Baker et al., 1997). Those two themes are quite clear in the parent interviews and journals of the present study. For instance, Mrs. Watson's literacy questions during the interview were centered around Cody learning to write his name and master letter recognition. She later writes a journal entry that states, "We work on spelling his name by reciting. He gets it correct." (6/11/00) On the other hand, Mrs. Green expressed interest in finding more ideas to make reading fun for Tyler in her interview. Far beyond these examples, the two parental styles of approaching literacy are clear in many of the interview responses and journal entries.

Recommendations

Research

In light of the results and conclusions of this study, recommendations can be suggested for further research and increased parent-school partnerships. Because of the recurrent theme of children reading aloud to siblings, an interesting question emerges concerning the possible effect of the increased read-aloud practice time

those children with siblings experience. More research is needed to compare literacy levels in both single and multiple child households to ascertain any possible cause/effect relationships in this area.

Technology usage also emerged as a major theme of parent journals. The long-range effects of computer availability in the homes of young children, when used as a learning tool, have not been studied because of the recent availability of affordable home computer systems. Research is needed in this area.

Fathers who participated in the Parent Project Workshops were not as likely to keep journals as the mothers who participated, and mothers were more likely to attend meetings than fathers. Three fathers attended evening meetings; however, only one participated in the study. Eight mothers regularly came to workshop meetings, and seven participated in the study. All participants came from dual-parent households. Initially, more research is needed to access the paternal point-of-view of learning in the home environment. Researchers must know how fathers are willing to participate in studies, and which data gathering techniques are preferable to this population. Secondly, more research is needed in the area of the paternal role in the education of a child.

Parent-School Partnerships

As was stated in the introduction, the United States Department of Education Goals 2000 document calls for increased attention to parent-school partnerships in order to further support children's academic work in the home environment (U.S. Congress, 1994). One of the stated purposes for this study included facilitating the development of such partnerships by gaining an understanding of literacy learning within the home environment of young children. By examining the themes of literacy interactions that took place within the homes of the participants in this study, educators gain some insight as to parent's needs. When schools understand parent's needs, they are in a position to assist parents in providing additional quality learning time within the home.

According to the analysis of journal entries which described reading events, many of the books chosen within the home environment are chosen based on popular characters from cartoons, movies, or toys such as Arthur, Winnie the Pooh, Bearstain Bears, Barbie, and Cinderella books. Parents also expressed interest in obtaining information about how to choose children's literature during interviews. This would be an exciting opportunity to educate parents about quality children's literature. Many parents are not aware of literature awards such as the Caldecott and Newberry Medals. Workshops should be offered based on judging illustrations and text as well as offering suggestions for teaching methods used with picture books and picture storybooks.

The data also suggested a large quantity of authentic reading and writing in the home environment. Print sources were often derivatives of purposeful reading such as environmental print, menus, recipes, or instructions. Writing often took place for a practical reason such as creating cards, writing letters and notes, listing needed items, or making a menu for a meal. According to research stated in the introduction, children acquire literacy more successfully when teachers adjust their instruction to the experiences and understandings children bring with them into school from their home environment (Snow et al, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Webster & Feiler, 1998). For this reason, educators need to attempt to mirror the usage of purposeful reading and writing in the classroom. More opportunities to write with a clear, realistic purpose are needed in schools.

As stated above, more research is needed to understand the effects of technology as learning tools. Parents also need more information about choosing and using technology to facilitate their child's development of early literacy concepts. The myriad of computer programs and games is staggering, and the packaging's of these programs often offer a limited description of its merits. Schools might choose to open their computer labs to families so that parents have the opportunity to examine the software chosen by the school. In addition, a Parent-Teacher Association meeting could serve as a time for parents to verbalize their experience with various programs, recommending quality software to one another.

In addition to computer usage in the homes, the data suggested some families used the television effectively as a learning tool. Almost all American households own a television, and there are many quality videotapes which provide virtual field trips, animated versions of classic children's literature, and wildlife education among other themes. Many public television programs are designed to educate children such as The Reading Rainbow sponsored by PBS. Children's home television time could be more productive if families were aware of the video and program options that are beneficial to the learning process. Using television as an educational tool would be another option for a parent education topic that has emerged from the data of this study. Lastly, because many parents utilized various community resources including several local "story time" meetings and visits to museums and zoos, parents would benefit from schools keeping a posting of such events in the surrounding community. School newsletters could also alert parents of regularly occurring events.

The goal of this study was to investigate literacy interactions which are woven into the daily home lives of young children. The data was rich in both depth and context. This study was never meant to provide a portrait of a "normal" low-income family, or to answer all questions about early literacy within the home environment. This data provides a window into which to peer, a summer of literacy interaction captured for educators and researchers to examine, a rich description of the overarching themes of literacy interaction within

the eight participating families and their daily literacy interactions with their children. It is but a start on the road to truly understanding the complexity of learning within the home environment.

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