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# Involvement Matters

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Involvement Matters

Sarah Zink

The College at Brockport State University of New York

A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Education.

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### Abstract

This project examines how parents' past educational experiences affect how they help their children at home with literacy. To conduct this study, I sent home open-ended surveys to parents in my second grade classroom that pertain to parents' knowledge, beliefs, and how they contribute to their current involvement with their children's literacy activities at home. Along with the survey, I interviewed second grade students with open-ended questions to uncover their perception of interactions and involvement of their parents at home. Analysis uncovered common themes across the data. Previous literature shows that there is a connection between parent involvement and student's achievement; however, literature is limited to parents' past experiences and their involvement.

## **Introduction**

When I asked Arthur one day why he was continuously not completing or returning his homework, he shared with me, “My mom said I didn’t have to do it.” At that point in my first year as a teacher, I realized that this particular parent was not going to be as involved and helpful as I had hoped. Arthur continued to make excuses for why his homework wasn’t finished, “We had to go to the store”, “I had to have dinner.” Arthur needs the support of both his parents and myself as his teacher to become successful. It was at this point that I knew I needed to do something more. I had other students in the class that were also showing signs of little to no academic support at home. This made me wonder if parents were engaging in academic activities with their children at home, more specifically with literacy. I also began to question if the lack of involvement with literacy activities was a result of parents’ past literacy experiences. After reaching out to Arthur’s parent, I quickly learned that she was a single mother raising three children while going to school. She was simply overwhelmed and relying on the help of his after school center to help him academically after school. With open communication and collaboration, we were able to alter his assignments, provide support to her, and ultimately fix the existing problem there once was. Arthur now returns his homework routinely; finished and with confidence.

## **Research Problem**

At this time of intensified attention and pressure on the future of United States education policy, it is critical to understand the importance of those who play a vital role in our students’

achievement. Parental involvement plays one of the most essential roles in promoting a child's achievement, yet is a problematic area in our society.

With the implementation of Common Core in 2013, it is our mission as educators to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life. Research on the topic suggests that students whose parents/caregivers take an active role in their child's schooling (no matter their income or background), are more likely to attend school regularly, have higher grades, and continue their education beyond high school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; OECD, 2012). Improving parental involvement is a major concern of policymakers in education worldwide. For example, the notable *No Child Left Behind Act*, includes providing parents opportunities to participate in the education of their children (US Department of Education, 2001). In effect as of 2004, the National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education (NIPIE), lobbied a law that requires every Title I school to have a written parent involvement plan in place (US Department of Education, 2001).

Expectations are put in place for schools to have parent involvement. However, there is no requirement that schools collect or track data regarding their efforts to involve and engage parents within their school. This is a problem in our education policy. Student performance in elementary and secondary schools is without a doubt shaped by the quality of the teaching staff and most importantly, the climate for learning within and outside schools. Once children enter the school system, the research overwhelmingly indicates that continued parental involvement in children's learning leads to improved student achievement (Jasinski, 2012).

Preparing students to be college and career ready involves giving students opportunities and exposing them to a variety of different texts. Students require this exposure in order to learn new information, travel, access food, understand bills, communicate, and most importantly, to

interact with the world around them. In order to provide these experiences for students, they need to be exposed to reading on a regular basis in variety of ways. As a teacher in the classroom, I can provide only so many opportunities for this type of learning and exposure. I then depend on the support and encouragement of families at home. Parents need to be involved at home, participating in literacy activities to ensure and inspire successful readers and learners.

Parental involvement can be seen in a number of ways. Involvement can be identified in Six Types: basic obligations of families, basic obligations of schools, involvement at school, involvement in learning activities at home, involvement in decision making, and collaboration and exchange with community organizations (Nathans & Revelle, 2013).

The first two forms of involvement; basic obligations of families as well as and school, go hand in hand. First, a parent needs to be effective at basic parenting skills of health and safety. When this occurs, the home conditions can then support learning. The basic obligation of schools entails consistent and clear communication between the school and parents (Nathans & Revelle, 2013). Communication can be seen through many different methods such as phone calls, emails, parent-teacher conferences, written communication, newsletters, blogs, etc.

Although all forms are essential and require parents to be involved in some way or another, involvement in learning activities at home is a major area of concern. Nathans & Revelle (2013), define this involvement as follows: “Teachers guide parents in monitoring and assisting/ participating in learning activities at home. Teachers must share how to monitor and assist with homework, as well as develop home activities involving parents that are coordinated with curriculum” (p. 165). This requires the collaboration and efforts of both parents and teachers to provide their students and children with positive opportunities. When teachers make parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interactions with

their children at home. In addition, parents feel more positive about their abilities to assist their children. Parents also value teachers as more effective.

What about parents who don't feel comfortable or confident helping their children? Is there a reason? The parent's previous educational experiences, especially with literacy, could strongly impact how they interact with their children academically.

### **Purpose for the Study**

If a student sees that their parents don't find education an importance or stress it at home, what is that teaching their child? In order for a child to be successful, they require the support of both their parents and teacher collectively. The purpose of this study is to find how parents' past educational experiences impact how they help their child at home. I believe that parental involvement in education is essential for students to be successful in the present and most importantly in the future.

One of the most critical learning opportunities in primary education is reading. Students are exposed to reading at an early age and are quickly expected to use that knowledge and function in everyday life. As soon as students begin school at the young age of six, they are held to high standards and rigorous work to become successful readers. Through this study, I answered the following research question: How do parents'/guardians' educational experiences impact their involvement in their child's literacy development?

By looking at parents' prior experiences through a survey and an interview with their child, I uncovered how experiences have influenced their engagement at home, specifically with literacy. With this information, I hope to better support my classroom families with literacy knowledge and activities that they can implement to help their child become a life-long learner.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to academic achievement (Cotton, 2001). The research also shows that the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be (Cotton, 2001). Educators frequently point out the critical role of the home and family environment in determining children's school success. Summers and Summer (2014) define family involvement in three ways: families understanding of their role, the families belief that they have the knowledge and tools necessary, and the school and child's willingness to have family participation. The collaborative effort makes learning more concrete and instills the importance of education across all settings.

### **Families' Understanding of their Role**

Literacy development is one of the most important and vital aspects of a child's education. A child's first teacher is his or her parent. One of the first things children learn from their parents is how to speak, followed by eventually how to read. Once a student enters school, a teacher implements strategies and literacy practices to help the child continue reading and become a life long learner. Children must utilize their existing knowledge and experiences to take on the task of learning to read, which for most children begins with the introduction of formal instruction when they enter school. Learning to read is related to children's phonological awareness to their knowledge of letters, functions of print, and to their language skills. It is expected some of these skills are acquired through specific experiences at home (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

As a result of research, it is highly encouraged to promote parent involvement from the time children first enter school (or preschool if they attend). Parents can be taught that simple activities such as modeling reading behavior through reading to their children, increase children's interest in learning. Researchers have reported that parent-child interactions, specifically responsive parenting practices, are important influences on a child's academic development (Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010).

Involvement doesn't need to be just helping children with their homework, but can also relate to conversations in the car, the grocery store, while the parent is cooking, or reading a book before bed. Researchers have also found that if parents receive phone calls, read and sign written communications from the school, and even attend and participate during parent teacher conferences, there is greater achievement than would be the case with no parent involvement at all (Cotton, 2001). Children at a young age are exposed to two types of literacy experiences at home: informal and formal literacy activities (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Informal literacy activities are those where the purpose is the message, not necessarily the print. An example of this could be a parent reading a bedtime story. The attention of the parent and child is on the story through the print and illustrations. A discussion may occur where the parent expands on the meaning or a child asks questions. On the other hand, formal literacy activities are those when parent and child primarily focus on the print. An example of this could be talking about letters or by providing the name and the sound of specific letters as the reading occurs. Engagement between a parent and child should not stop once a child learns to read because the support and interaction provided by family members can benefit all children no matter what their reading ability may be for long-term.

**Families' Beliefs about Necessary Knowledge and Tools**

Parents have an immense influence on their children's education for several reasons, but most importantly because they are their child's first teacher (Baker, 2013). As children are developing in the first couple of years, they absorb everything surrounding them. Therefore, what they learn from their parents in the first couple years of their lives will impact children for the rest of their lives. It is important that children learn how to be excited about learning from an early age. Parents are the ones who need to instill this excitement in their children and demonstrate literacy throughout their daily life.

The education that children receive is a reflection on the education that their parents received when they were children. Research shows that the literacy of their parents strongly affects the education of their children. Teale (1986) found in his studies that children experience literacy primarily as a social process during their preschool years. Parents strongly affect this social learning process because they are the biggest influence at this early stage in their child's life. It is imperative that parents let their child know that reading can be a pleasurable experience. In addition, it is important that they emphasize that reading is fun, and that you read for a plethora of reasons. Parents need to be accepting of literacy by having books visible throughout the home, mentioning books that may be reading, mention interesting stories that they have read in the newspaper or an article they came across on social media. Ideally, instilling that their child understands the importance of reading and the value it holds. This is true in writing as well. Writing does not need to be modeled by a written essay; a letter, email, or thank you note to a friend can show modeled writing. Children are constantly watching everything adults do; therefore, adults need to continuously model literacy skills in a positive way to promote the

strong benefits of reading and writing. Early parent involvement in home literacy is a predictor of later success for children (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2013).

By promoting literacy development, parents are immediately helping their child gain motivation. Motivation can be modeled through enjoying a book or being excited about learning new information. Motivation is varied in that it is the “values, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding reading” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 177). A motivated reader simply reads because he or she enjoys reading. Children’s reading motivation can be increased if family members are actively involved in reading to them at home, engaging them in reading activities, and listening to them when they read aloud. Students are also more motivated when they can interact with another person about the text (Law, 2010).

### **Child’s Willingness for Family Participation**

Effective parental involvement in education requires a working partnership and collaboration among parents, teachers, and administrators. When families, teachers, and children work together as equal partners they are able to create meaningful learning opportunities at school and at home (Summers & Summers, 2014). Many schools actively encourage parents to increase their involvement in their children’s education within the school community.

Parental involvement can include a variety of different activities and can be seen in many ways. Just to name a few that are important: attendance at open house/ meet-and-greet, a scheduled meeting with a teacher (parent-teacher conferences), school events (assemblies, concerts, PTA events); or acting as a volunteer or committee member within the school. It is my goal to find out what holds parents back from becoming more active and involved in their child’s education. Many parents are inadequately involved in their child’s education because they feel that teaching is better left to the experts or because they do not feel understood (Graves &

Wright, 2011). With that, I want to find specific ways that we can use the partnership among parents, teachers, and school staff to better support one another and to provide the best for our students.

There are programs that aim to increase parent involvement while educating parents at the same time. A study conducted by Sukhram and Hsu (2012) partnered with the local library and volunteer teachers to assist parents in helping their children read. The program ran once a week at the local library where student and parents were able to select books and then read with one another. With the help of professionals, the parents were taught how to practice different strategies, through and answering questions and addressing questions. Participants revealed that they learned how to select age-appropriate and engaging books and how to better gauge children interests. Strategies and skills they could use to help their children in literacy, such as questions to ask or how to help if they were struggling were addressed. This cost-effective program had positive outcomes and families looked forward to attending the program. A program such as this could also be realistic within the school library. This would not only build parent involvement, but also build community and school relationships.

Programs such as this would benefit any and all students, particularly disadvantaged students and families. It is important to provide opportunities and experiences for all students and families no matter of their socioeconomic status, background knowledge, or academic performance. Disadvantaged students are ones who benefit the most from parent participation and involvement. At the school level, it is important to make a special effort to engage the involvement of parents of disadvantaged students. Continued emphasis that parents are partners with the school and their involvement is needed as well as valued by both the staff and their child needs to occur (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

Research has demonstrated that the most successful parent involvement efforts are those which offer parents a variety of roles in a well-organized and long-lasting program (Cotton, 2001). When parents are able to choose from a range of activities accommodating different schedules, preferences, and capabilities, they are more likely to be dedicated to getting help. As part of the planning process, teachers and administrators will need to work together to address specific areas of concern for involving and informing parents.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between parent involvement and achievement are correlated as well as the effects of parent involvement on student outcomes other than academic achievement. In Davis's (2003) study many students reported "good" teachers were those who expressed concern over both the social and intellectual lives of the students in school. These include: attitude toward school or towards particular subject areas, self-concept, classroom behavior, time spent on homework, expectations for one's future, absenteeism, motivation, and retention. Overall, parental involvement shapes the child extrinsically and intrinsically for the rest of their lives. Parent involvement in the earliest of ages has the most profound impact and is the framework for that child. Before educators begin to perceive and make judgments that parents are not involved, they must consider the multiple factors that impact their involvement. As a classroom teacher it is their obligation to continue to emphasize that parents are partners of the school and that their involvement is needed and strongly valued by teachers, administrators, and most importantly students

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of this research study was to focus on the educational experiences of parents/guardians and find out how those experiences impact their involvement with literacy activities in their home with their child.

### **Participants**

This study included participants from a self-selected convenience sample of parents and students from my 205-2016 integrated second grade class. Information regarding the study went home to all 24 students and their families. A total of 10 consent forms were received back and participated in the study. Participants were not asked their ages, however parents are over 25 years old and students range from 7-8 years old. Parents are all literate, as they are all able to read, write and speak in the native English language.

The second grade classroom is located in a suburban elementary school, which is located in upstate Western New York. The elementary school is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school with approximately 900 students. The school services both general and special education students through a variety of different special education programs. This specific elementary school is one of eleven elementary schools within this large school district. My integrated classroom that I used for this study consists of a total of 24 students, 11 of the 24 students have an Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

### **Positionality as the Teacher-Researcher**

I am a 24-year-old, Caucasian, graduate student attending the College at Brockport where I am pursuing a Masters degree in Literacy and Human Development. I completed my

undergraduate degree of Inclusive Childhood Education (grades 1-9) with a concentration in Psychology at Nazareth College. I am certified by the state of New York to teach general and special education students from grades one through nine. Previous to becoming a Second Grade General Education Teacher, I was a teaching assistant in the same school district in the 8:1:1 program for two years. Through these two years I had the opportunity to work with a variety of different age levels and diverse students with a range of challenging needs. I am currently in my first year of teaching where I am co-teaching a group of 24 students, with 11 whom are classified as special education students.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

My research question is: How do parents' educational experiences impact their involvement in their child's literacy development?

To conduct this study I sent home open-ended paper surveys to parents in my second grade classroom. These questions pertained to parents' prior educational experiences and how they contribute to their current involvement in their child's literacy activities at home. Along with the survey, I conducted interviews with open-ended questions to students to uncover what they perceive about the interactions and involvement of their parents. I used both data sources to compile, compare, and find common themes.

### **Parent Survey**

The survey questions are aimed to help me understand the background of the parents and their educational experiences. The questions are open-ended for parents to answer however they see best fit and are comfortable with sharing. I gave parents four days to complete and return the survey.

When coming up with the questions, I strategically grouped the survey in three specific sections. The first section was composed to see how often their child participates in literacy activities, what literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening, etc.), and who participates in these activities with the child (mom, dad, sibling, etc.). The second section focused on the parents' prior experiences. The third, and final section, focused on the desired literacy outcome that each parent has for his or her child.

### Parent Survey Questions

1. How would you define literacy?
2. How many adults and children live in your home?
3. When and how often do you read to or with your children?
4. What kind(s) of literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) do you or another family member participate in with your child at home? *Literacy activities can take any many forms such as books, newspaper, computer, TV, iPad, etc.*
5. How often do you or another family member participate in literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) at home?
6. What was your experience with reading and writing growing up (who, when, how often)?
7. What kinds of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening) activities did you participate in growing up?
8. What was your experience with literacy while in school (positive and/or negative)? Please give some examples.
9. When you were a child did you think you were a good reader? Writer? Why or why not?
10. What are your goals for child's literacy learning?

11. What could your child's school or teacher do to better support you?

### **Student Interview**

The interview questions were aimed to help me understand the amount of support and involvement my students think their parents provide. I conducted the interviews one to one to ensure their full attention and I scribed their responses. Students were asked a series of 12 open-ended questions regarding the support they receive at home in the areas of literacy. The student interviews were conducted within the school day during morning work when students would not be missing prime academic time. The interview took no more than twenty minutes and students were reminded before and during the interview that they can pass/skip questions if they are unsure or do not want to answer. Also, at any time the student could say they don't want to be a part of the interview anymore. Student's responses were scribed but kept anonymous and confidential. During the interview, I allowed time for additional questions depending on how students responded to the questions.

As with the parent survey I wrote the interview questions into three sections. The first section was intended to see who engages with them at home. The next section was to see the types of literacy activities they engage in at home. The last, and final, section of the interview was to see how the students viewed their parents as literacy experts.

### **Student Interview Questions**

1. What does literacy mean?
2. Who lives with you at home?
3. How often do you read at home?
4. Do you read to someone or does someone read to you?

5. Do you practice writing at home? How and with who?
6. Do you practice speaking at home? How and with who?
7. Do you practice listening at home? How and with who?
8. How often do you read and or write at home?
9. Do your parents like to read and write? Why?
10. Who do you like to help you the most with your homework? Why?
11. Do you think your parents are a good reader and writer? Why or why not?
12. What would you want your parents to know about school?

### **Procedures**

Since I have a standing relationship with the parents and interact with them on a regular basis I am aware that transportation and more importantly, time can be a factor in meeting with them. As a result, I sent home consent forms to all 24 of my students and their families. With the return of the consent forms I then randomly selected 10 as my participants for my study. Parent surveys were sent home with specific directions to be returned within four days. I reminded parents that their participation was voluntary and they could stop the interview at any time.

With the 10 returned parent consent forms I asked parents to consent to their child's participation as well. I read the consent form out loud and answered any questions the 10 students had regarding the study then had them sign their consent form.

The interviews were conducted within the school building at a time that did not affect the students' academics (such as when other students were completing morning work). Before the interview took place, I reminded the students that their responses and participation in this study are to help me learn and help their parents. I also reminded them that they could stop or pass a question at any point. Once they agreed, I asked them the interview questions and scribed the

conversation. The interviews were conducted within a four-week time frame. This time period allowed me time to transcribe the information and to analyze their responses.

After transcribing all data from both parents and students I compared the parents responses to each other to look for commonalities and differences. I also compared students' responses and look for commonalities among them as well. In conclusion, I also compared and looked for commonalities between both the parents' and students' data through constant comparison. "The constant comparative method is used by the researcher to develop concepts from the data by coding and analyzing at the same time" (Kolb, 2012, p. 83).

### **Trustworthiness**

The possible risks for subjects included minimal risk of time. In order to minimize time spent by parents, surveys were given a four day due date. Interviews with students were kept to no more than 20 minutes. There was no reward given to participants, however benefits included becoming more aware and acknowledging interactions between parents and children.

All parental surveys were kept anonymous by not including their name or information that would indicate who the participant was on the form. The process in which they filled out the survey was kept private by being completed where they feel most comfortable and when they feel best fits within their daily life. The same goes for the student interviews. Interviews were conducted within the classroom where students feel safe and comfortable. Students' names were not tracked when documenting the conversation in order to remain anonymous. Results will be reported through comparison categorizing to find trends/themes. All data were kept in a locked filing cabinet within the researcher's home. All data collections will be kept for a minimum of three years and will then be properly destroyed.

**Summary**

This study was conducted in a suburban elementary school, which is located in upstate New York through a surveying of parents and interviewing of students. There were 10 parents and 10 students that participated. Since the parents and student were current members of my classroom, I needed to stay objective as a teacher and researcher as the data collected will benefit my beliefs of understandings regarding parental involvement.

**Data Analysis****Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore how parents' past educational experiences influence how they help their child at home with literacy. This is an important study because parents are a student's first teacher and play a vital role in a student's literacy learning at home. My study reveals both positive and negative experiences that have shaped the parents of my students. The findings from my study show that the different experiences parents faced in their past education play a role in how they work with their child and the goals they have for their child's education.

In this section I will present my analysis in order to answer my research question. I will start this chapter by recounting the parent surveys by analyzing their replies. Next, I will recount the student interviews by analyzing their responses. Lastly, I compare the parent and student responses to one another and looked for commonalities to uncover any themes that may exist.

## Findings

The survey questions for parents were separated into three organized sections. The first section was composed of how often their child participates in literacy activities, what literacy activities (reading, writing, speaking, listening, etc.), and who participates in these activities with the child (mom, dad, sibling, etc.). The second section focused on the parents' prior experiences. The third, and final section focused on the literacy outcomes that parents desire for their children. When looking through the sections I looked for patterns that were predominant among all the responses. I primarily looked at the responses from the second section (parents' past experiences) and how it contributed to their responses in the first section (child's participation in literacy).

The interview questions for students were also separated in three organized sections. The first section was intended to see who engages with them at home. The next section was to see the types of literacy activities they engage in at home. The last part, of the interview was to see how the students viewed their parents as literacy experts.

## Parent Findings

Of all 10 adults who were surveyed, all but two live in a two-parent home. Half of the families have two children, while the other half of the families have only one child. When looking at how parents defined literacy, all families indicated literacy as encompassing reading and writing. Only three additional parents stated comprehension in addition to reading and writing such as:

1. How would you define literacy?

The ability to understand readings and writings.

Literacy can be defined as “The ability to listen, speak, read, write, and think” (Cooper, Kiger, 2009, p. 510). Parents recorded a wide variety of different literacy activities they participate in including reading, conversation, computer, iPad, video games, and listening to music. When asked how often they participate in specific literacy activities that were provided (reading, writing, speaking and listening) results varied. All participants responded that they read, speak, and listen on a daily basis with their child; however, results varied in the specific area of writing. Two families responded that they write with their children on a daily basis, while other families responded “3x a week”, “4-5 days a week”, or even “sometimes”.

All participants discussed in the second section of their survey on how they had some sort of experience with reading and writing when they were growing up. Responses ranged in depth from “we participated in some type of literacy on a daily basis” to “I read books and magazines daily. I wrote in a journal almost every day and the rest of my writing was for homework, letters, etc.” Many of the adults related their experiences when growing up to homework and work that was required. Only two participants spoke about experiences that they completed for their own enjoyment, which happened to be writing in journals. Of these two, they were also the few who only write with their child a select few times per week, even though they enjoyed writing as a child.

When asked how they rate their past experiences with literacy in school, all participants said they had positive experiences. One responded:

8. What was your experience with literacy while in school (positive and/or negative)? Please give some examples.

growing up literacy was a bit hard for me. we spoke English and Spanish in the house hold and made it a bit difficult for me. But having to go to school and learning made it a bit easier.

Another had a positive experience because of the enjoyment of being challenged:

8. What was your experience with literacy while in school (positive and/or negative)? Please give some examples.

positive. I enjoyed the challenge of spelling quizzes

However, there was one response that stood out:

8. What was your experience with literacy while in school (positive and/or negative)? Please give some examples.

Literacy was a positive experience for me all around. I looked forward to reading and learning about different things. I wrote a lot of short story books for fun too.

Even though she struggled overall, she had a positive experience.

Research over past decades demonstrates that regardless of family socioeconomic status, home literacy practices have a strong correlation with literacy and language development of children before and after the onset of literacy instruction (Wei & Zhou, 2012). As a result of the language barrier this participant had, she was not a confident student and often was more reserved. She wrote about how she would never participate or volunteer to read out loud because she was embarrassed she could not pronounce the words correctly. She recognized this at a young age and therefore wants more for her child. “My goal for my children is to read as much as they can so they can learn as much words as they can and be able to have that confidence that they should have.”

This participant was the only parent that said the school could better support her by showing her the specific strategy used in school so she can replicate it at home. All other parents stated the support they were receiving was plenty and if they needed more they would seek it.

From the parent findings, it was evident that their past experiences have played a role in how they convey the importance of education to their children. The surveys showed that they have expectations for their children to receive the same, if not better educational instruction and experiences than they did. Parents that hold high educational aspirations for their children convey those aspirations to their children, as well as a belief that they are attainable (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2013).

### **Student Findings**

Emergent literacy reflects the integrated knowledge about reading, writing, and language that is gained prior to formal literacy and reading instruction (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2013). When the second grade students were asked if they knew what the term literacy was, all gave a concerning look and had no knowledge as to what I meant. Only one student said she recognized the term but “can’t remember what it means.” After I gave the definition the students became more comfortable with the questions to follow. Students are used to hearing “Reading and Writing” as opposed to “Literacy” within their daily schedule.

Students have a different perspective of why literacy skills are important for them to practice compared to their parents. Responses included “to help your brain grow”, “to help you when you grow up”, “so you have stuff to do.” Eight of the ten responses were ways in which the use of literacy skills can positively support them intrinsically. Two students discussed that literacy skills were important to their family and to make their parents happy. Of the ten students interviewed, only three were able to come up with an explanation for why they read and write at home. All other students were unsure and could not formulate a response as to why they did those activities at home. These responses showed me that some students found literacy activities

important for their future while others saw it as a chore and something they had to do. Children don't always recognize the importance their education has on them in the present and the future.

Reading at home for these students consisted of reading alone or with somebody (mostly mom), in their bedroom or somewhere that is comfortable and quiet. Two interviews were surprising when they responded, "I don't read a lot" or "flipping through the pages". These two students had parents that responded that their child reads on a daily basis. This made me question if this information is accurate, and if the parent is actually reading with them or the reading is unsupervised so it is not really taking place.

Results for who the child likes to help them the most varied between mom (largest results), dad, grandma and brother. The participant who responded grandma said she choose grandma because "she's usually over and helps me fix my work". The other participant who responded with brother explained that she liked his help "because he has done a lot of it—not really my parents because they learned something way different". These two participants sought help, understanding, and trust in two different ways compared to the others who responded with mom and or dad.

The last part of the interview that was conducted asked students how they perceived their parents as readers and writers. Every participant was quick to say that their parents were good readers and writers. However, the reasoning why was harder for them to justify. Three students discussed how their parents have gone to school for a long time, went to college, or are still in college for their reasoning. Only three students mentioned actually seeing their parents partake in literacy activities such as reading, writing, working on the computer, etc. Two students were unsure why their parents were good readers and writers. Out of all the students interviewed only one said that she would want her parents to "know everything I do in math so they can help me."

This student recognized that math was an area in school she struggled and didn't feel she could get help at home because she knew her parents were unfamiliar with how she was being taught in school.

### **Parent and Child Findings**

The findings of both the parent surveys and student interviews led me to see that there is a disconnect between parents and their child. Parents documented that they were working on the numerous literacy skills at home on a regular basis, whereas the children stated that they rarely work on those skills at home. However, this disconnect led me back to the student finding that the majority of students were not aware of the term literacy and the many different forms it takes. Of all the parents who said they had positive experiences, their children said they read to themselves and notice their parents taking part in reading and writing. However, the one finding that stood out was the parent who stated that her childhood was difficult. Her child was the only student who said he reads with his parent and also mentioned when asked if his parents like to read and write he responded, "yes, she never read before and now she likes it." This finding shows that parents' educational experiences do influence their involvement. This parent clearly has used her past educational experiences to positively promote and help her son.

### **Summary**

This study helped to answer my question: How do parents' educational experiences impact how they help their child with literacy at home?

All of the parents who were surveyed try to ensure that their child is read to at least three times a week. They are able to do this because of other family members that can also provide support. Another reason they are able to meet this need is with the use of technology (iPad). All parents had positive educational experiences therefore try to replicate those positive literacy

experiences they had growing up with their own children. The parent who had more of a struggle as a child used her experiences to provide more for her children. These parents do not want their children to experience the same negativity that they did so they try to provide more experiences. Either way, all parents have high expectations for their children and want them to become successful learners who are confident and able to apply their knowledge.

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to find an answer to my research question regarding parents' involvement with literacy activities at home. My research question was: How do parents' educational experiences impact how they help their child with literacy at home?

In this section I will discuss the conclusion of my findings from this study. Through my findings I will discuss how parents' prior educational experiences influence their involvement in their child's literacy engagement at home. I will also discuss how the findings have been meaningful to me as a teacher as well as recommendations I have for future research along with my final thoughts.

All but one of the parents who were surveyed shared that they had positive literacy experiences growing up. All had positive experiences for different reasons. In addition, the literacy experiences that these parents experienced were due to high interest and the enjoyment of being challenged. Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) state that "students who are confident in their skills but do not feel challenged are also more likely to experience lower levels of engagement" (p. 29). These students are less likely to be engaged than their peers with similar

skills who do feel challenged. “Some educationists consider engaging disengaged pupils to be one of the biggest challenges facing educators, between 25% and 66% of students are considered to be disengaged” (Taylor, Parsons, 2011, p.6).

The one parent who shared that she had a difficult experience was a result of a language barrier. She did not have educational support at home therefore did not have any form of literacy experiences outside of the school environment. “Students with limited English proficiency often experience limited academic achievement and experience frustration as they continue to struggle with the acquisition of the academic English skills necessary to succeed in school” (Olvera, 2015, p. 80). Instead, her teachers provided the literacy experiences that helped create a positive literacy experience that she would later draw on with her own children. Teachers have the ability to influence the quality of students’ experiences by instilling motivation to learn by providing and addressing children’s needs (Davis, 2003, p. 208). This shows the ever-lasting impact and influence a teacher can have on their students.

The analysis of student interviews indicated that not one second grade student participant knew, or had been exposed, to the term literacy. “Research indicates that a significant number of children enter primary school with insufficient vocabulary knowledge” (St. John, Vance, 2014, p.255). When the definition was provided for students they fully understood the meaning of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The students were then able to share their experiences and observations of literacy within their home. The students in general spoke upon reading more heavily than the other aspects of literacy. Both groups of participants shared valuable information.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

### **Using Parents as a Resource for Teachers**

Of all the parents in my study each and every one was engaging their child in literacy activities in some form or another. However, I am aware that there are parents in my classroom that are not engaging their children in these same ways. If parents are not engaging their children in literacy activities at home, especially at the early childhood age, that means these children are getting limited exposure to literacy when coming to school. This immediately puts children at a disadvantage. There can be many different reasons why a child may not be engaged in literacy activities at home. It is not because the parents don't care or value education. Instead, it may be due to the parents having limited resources at home. If parents are able to comfortably share this information it then gives the teacher an idea of areas that child might need more support. It is essential to establish relationships with parents in which they can share this information to better the education for their child.

Using a parent as a resource will allow the teacher to use that knowledge to create an individualized education that meets the needs of their child. Identifying which children are and are not engaging in literacy activities at home will help the teacher modify and adapt instruction to fit the needs of the students. The teacher will no longer have to guess, make assumptions, or take time to assess which children have limited exposure. Teachers can now use extra time to teach and provide the extra support to ensure the student can learn and pass on literacy experiences later in life.

Home family literacy interactions can help deepen my understanding of families' funds of knowledge and cultural practices. Learning about families' literacy experiences and interactions within the home will allow for me to interact with the children, their parents and family in various non-school related contexts as well. Within this collaborative relationship,

continuous learning about funds of knowledge will be challenged and embraced as part of the experience. Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, and Drury (2012) argue that benefits of collaborative partnerships take considerable time, space and support in order for teachers to appreciate and understand children and family funds of knowledge and blur the boundaries between home and school. By blurring this line students will become more comfortable and confident learners. As a teacher I can use this knowledge to make their learning engaging based on the knowledge I gain.

### **Sharing Between Teachers and Parents**

Surveying parents about their past educational experiences has many positive benefits for teachers by providing a lot of answers regarding engagement at home. This new gained knowledge can also be beneficial for children. As discussed above, teachers can alter their teaching to meet the needs of these children by providing individualized instruction. In addition, by creating these relationships with parents about their engagement with literacy activities, teachers will be able to identify literacy areas that many need to be strengthened. Keeping a line of communication between teacher and parent creates a learning community which can be defined as: “a group of people who come together to learn with and from each other and then seek to act on what they learn” (Summer & Summers, 2014, p.9). Open communication from both parties is vital for students to be successful.

A teacher is known as an expert within the classroom setting. Therefore, they can extend their expertise in other ways and forms. Teachers can provide resources, tips, and tricks that the parents may not be aware of that will help their child develop literacy skills while still allowing the parent to engage in the experience at home. Sharing resources and information should be a shared relationship between the teacher and parent. Parents know their child the best and may

already know what works and what doesn't work. Sharing this knowledge back and forth between school and home is one simple way of ensuring you are meeting the needs of your students.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

Through interviewing parents about their prior experiences, I uncovered ways that the parents are engaging in literacy activities with their children. Parents are engaging because “parents are their children’s first and most influential teacher” (Riley, 1999, p. 6). Parents recognize the importance of teaching their children skills that are necessary for them to be successful in the future. Most children are able to apply those skills to learn literacy skills in school and others struggle. The reasoning behind this is associated with the difference between home and school learning. If students are learning the necessary skills to be successful in the future at home, then they should be able to learn academic skills while at school. However, sometimes children do not learn the academic skills because of parent involvement being a problematic area in our society. Literacy experiences from home are much different than what is presented at school. Experiences at home are usually fun and relaxing. Many parents that I surveyed mentioned their children using an iPad to engage in literacy experiences. When students come to school they many not think reading a book is fun, if it is not what they experience at home and are held more accountable.

“Students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students’ learning and development” (Epstein, Sanders, 2006, p. 87). In order to close this gap, teachers need to be aware of the many ways that parents are engaging in literacy activities at home. Being aware of learning that occurs at home allows for a teacher to incorporate those into daily instruction while at school. Teachers need to use this knowledge to

connect the two environments. “The two most influential environments in which young children develop are their homes and their early childhood education programs” (Summer & Summer, 2014, p.8). Incorporating those same ways children are learning will help students apply their knowledge and become more confident learners.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

The relationship between teacher and parents are not only beneficial for those two parties, but for the children as well. After conducting my study which involved working with parents and their students I recognized the relationship that was unfolding. The information I received from both parents and students gave a glimpse into their home lives, which to some may be more private than others. By working with these families and sharing past experiences, families were building trust within me. When a relationship has trust more can be achieved. Having this open communication and shared relationship allows for students to be more successful in school and at home. This open communication will keep parents and teachers on the same page. When parents have open communication and are willing to share these stories about their childhood with someone they build trust and “building trust is an important aspect of strong family– school partnerships (Summers, Summers, 2014, p. 9).

I will ensure that in the future I continue to build these relationships early on and maintain the relationship through a variety of different ways. This will ensure that students within my class will be acknowledged at both home and school in order to received the support that is needed. As Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013, p. 167) suggest, “parents and other family members working together with professionals in pursuit of a common goal where the relationship between the family and the professional is based on shared decision-making and responsibility and mutual trust and respect.” The common purpose that both the parent and the

teacher serve is providing for the student.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Participants**

This study was limited to only ten parents who were surveyed about their past educational experiences related to literacy. It was also limited to only ten students who were interviewed about their educational experiences at home. I would recommend that future studies on this topic have a larger number of participants. Having a larger number of participants will help ensure that a wide variety of parents are represented and would produce different results. In addition, I would also recommend interviewing parents instead of an at home survey or in combination. This would allow for more dialogue between the researcher and parent. It would also build more of a relationship, showing interest in their involvement.

This study was focused on parents' past educational experiences and how this affects how they help their child at home with literacy. To go beyond this, one could potentially study to see the effectiveness of the literacy activities that the parents are incorporating at home. Involvement and strategies could be monitored to help teachers and parents effectively work together and help their child/student.

Future researchers could also explore how parents scaffold their interactions and involvement as students become successful or grow in age. This could show if there is a relation to student success in school.

**Final Thoughts**

As I look back to my original thoughts, I realize that a parent's past educational experiences does have a direct impact on how they help their children with literacy at home. This study supported my idea that adults hold on to their educational experiences whether positive or negative. Parents have tried to replicate the same experiences they had with their children. As teachers, we have no control on how much or how little parents engage with their children at home. Studies have clearly shown that engagement is essential for children whether it be reading or as simple as verbal communication. However, teachers do have control on how we are involved in literacy activities in school. It is our responsibility to create positive experiences and memories that our students will keep with them and replicate when they are adults. It is essential to remember in order to create lifelong learners parents and teachers must work together. Due to the importance of early involvement I encourage educators and families to diligently help and promote children for academic success at an early age.

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