

8-2012

# The Effects of Parental Reading and Teaching on Kindergarten Children's School Readiness

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The Effects of Parental Reading and Teaching on Kindergarten Children's  
School Readiness

by

Erin Marie Dawson

August, 2012

A thesis submitted to the  
Department of Education and Human Development of the  
State University of New York College at Brockport  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Education


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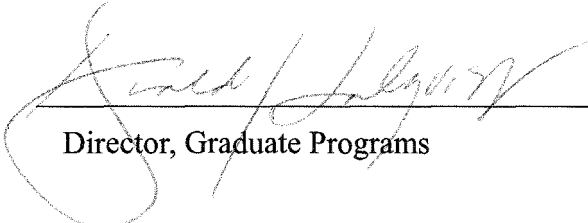
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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*I use stories and apply them to life. If it is about a little boy who does not share his toys, we stop and talk about it, explain the importance of sharing, discuss what God teaches us about sharing, and talk about the last time they did not share and what they could have done differently. A lot of times I ask him to predict what happens next, or what the next word will be (Melissa).*

### **Problem Statement**

Children enter school with a wide variety of experiences that will impact their ability to learn and function socially within a classroom (Duku and Janus, 2007). School readiness emphasizes both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. These skills include a child's ability to adapt, ask questions, cooperate with peers, respect people and property, communicate effectively, and possess basic concepts about print, letters, numbers, and counting (Duku and Janus, 2007). School readiness does not happen overnight, but rather starts at birth, and continues until school entry (Duku and Janus, 2007).

Learning begins at birth, which is why parents have often been called their child's first teacher (Britto, Brooks-Gunn and Griffin, 2006). More evidence suggests that early skills are vital to later development. Children who are not exposed to appropriate stimulation will not gain the building blocks needed to be able to perform what will be expected of them at age five (Duku and Janus, 2007). In fact, students

who begin school with lower academic achievement are likely to stay behind their peers throughout their school experience (Cadima, McWilliam and Leal, 2010). It is vital for parents to understand how important their role of reading with and teaching their children before school entry is in preparing their children for a successful school experience (Cadima, et al., 2010).

### **Significance of the Problem**

Adults play a significant role in guiding the cognitive and linguistic development of a young child. Parents usually act as the more knowledgeable other, supporting and extending the child's learning to read, write, and solve problems (Vygotsky, 1934/1978). The role of early parenting and the home environment is vital to the academic, social, and behavioral success of a child. What does a positive home environment look like? Ayoub, et al. (2009) observe that nurturing, warm, and responsive parenting behaviors, paired with a home environment that encourages exploration and learning lead to positive outcomes in several developmental domains for young children. The researchers considered parent contributions over the first five years of life in a low income sample and discovered that positive learning environment and maternal supportiveness were strongly associated with child vocabulary, letter-word knowledge, and emotion regulation (Ayoub, et al., 2009).

There is no doubt that the home learning environment is important, but what if the child is placed in an excellent kindergarten and first grade class? This teacher has

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created an environment that surrounds her students with books and print. She encourages her students to learn and explore, while helping them to feel comfortable enough to make a mistake. She is nurturing, loving, and responsive. Are that teacher and her classroom enough to compensate for a child who comes from a home that lacks particular elements mentioned above? Conner, Hindman, Morrison, and Son (2005) researched effects on first graders' vocabulary and early reading. The researchers considered teacher qualifications, classroom practices, preschool experiences, the home learning environment, and family characteristics. Of those variables, the one that had the greatest impact on children's vocabulary and early reading scores by the end of first grade was the home learning environment. It is then important to examine parental reading and teaching patterns within the home learning environment that may or may not improve a child's readiness for school (Conner, et al., 2005).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify parental reading and teaching patterns, as well as investigate the impact these parental reading and teaching patterns may or may not have on the children's school readiness. I worked with a focus group of three parents who have children in a rural kindergarten classroom. The following research questions were addressed. First, what patterns of parental reading and teaching can be identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school? Second, what are the associations between parental reading and teaching



patterns and the child's school readiness? My goal was to identify parental reading and teaching patterns that may or may not have helped children in their preparedness for school and readiness to read.

### **Study Approach**

In this qualitative study, I employed parent interviews as well as naturalistic observation (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) to collect my data. Parents were interviewed to determine how often they read with their children, what play consists of in their home, and what they perceive their interactions with their children during reading and play to be like. They also were observed reading a story with their child and playing a game with their child. The data from the interviews and observations was analyzed to look for patterns in parental reading and teaching, and the impact these patterns may or may not have on the children's literacy school readiness skills, such as concepts about print, letter recognition, and basic sight word knowledge. The children's knowledge of concepts about print was analyzed using the Concepts of Print Assessment (Clay, 2000). Student's letter recognition was assessed using the Letter Recognition Assessment (Fountas and Pinnell, 2008).

### **Rationale**

The impact parents have on their children before they enter school is evident through my role as a first grade teacher and intriguing as a new mother. In my classroom, I had many involved parents and many absent parents. In my home, as I

read to my new baby, I can already see her engagement in the story. Sometimes, she is alert, her eyes glued to the pictures, cooing noises coming from her mouth as if she wants to make a connection to a character. Other times, a good book is all she needs to settle her down for a nap. Because of this, I have a desire to take a deeper look at how parental reading and teaching patterns impact children's literacy readiness as they enter school.

### **Definition of Terms**

*School readiness* emphasizes both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. These skills include a child's ability to adapt, ask questions, cooperate with peers, respect people and property, communicate effectively, and possess basic concepts about print, letters, numbers, and counting (Duku and Janus, 2007).

### **Summary**

Children who are not exposed to appropriate stimulation will not gain the building blocks needed to be able to perform what will be expected of them at age five (Duku and Janus, 2007). This study serves as an opportunity to learn more about the impact parental reading and teaching patterns may or may not have on a kindergarten child's early learning outcomes.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This study is an investigation into the impact of parental reading and teaching on kindergarten children's school readiness, focusing specifically on their readiness to read. The following research questions were addressed: what patterns of parental reading and teaching can be identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school, and what are the associations between parental reading and teaching patterns and the child's school readiness? This literature review will outline several studies that capture the importance of the following topics: the home environment, parent involvement in literacy development, and school readiness and later achievement.

### **The Home Environment**

Children's home environments may be compromised by the stress mothers carry when faced with poverty, crowded living conditions, mental health, and parenting. This stress may influence the way mothers respond to their children, as well as the likelihood that they can provide a stable and supportive environment conducive to helping their children develop school readiness skills (Farver, et al., 2006).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) studied two groups of premature babies, both born to mothers with extremely low socioeconomic status (SES). The premature babies in the control group received standard pediatric care appropriate for babies with low birth weight. The experimental group of premature babies was given special visual, tactile, and kinesthetic stimulation from the nurses that closely matched conditions for

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normal newborns living in good homes. The nurses rocked, talked to, patted, and bottle fed in the nursing position so the babies could look at their faces. When the babies in the experimental group were well enough to be discharged from the hospital, mothers were given extra support through having regular contact with a social worker over the course of two years. These babies gained weight more rapidly and by age one, on average, had an IQ that was ten points higher than babies in the control group. These babies also made such gains that they neared normal levels of development, which was a remarkable achievement for a low-birth-weight sample from a deprived socio-economic background (Bronfenbrenner).

Years later, Farver, et al. (2006) sought to examine the home environment's impact on two school readiness skills: oral language and social functioning. Like Bronfenbrenner, Farver, et al. observed a low income sample of mothers. They found that family size and SES are factors that potentially limit a child's overall development. However, within this same sample, they also discovered that parental involvement and encouragement of literacy-related activities, as well as a low level of mother's perceived parenting stress levels were directly associated with their preschoolers' receptive vocabulary and social functioning. Similar to Bronfenbrenner's findings, Farver, et al.'s findings illustrate how parents, by being proactive in their efforts within their homes, and altering aspects of the home environment that are within their capability to change, can be instrumental in their child's success, and ultimately, their child's preparation for school (Farver, et al., 2006).

What does a positive home environment look like? In their study, Ayoub, et al. (2009) observed that nurturing, warm, and responsive parenting behaviors, paired with a home environment that encourages exploration and learning lead to positive outcomes in several developmental domains for young children. The researchers examined parent contributions over the first five years of life in a low income sample and discovered that positive learning environment and maternal supportiveness were strongly associated with child vocabulary, letter-word knowledge, and emotion regulation. Conversely, parenting stress and depressive parenting symptoms were associated with behavior problems (Ayoub, et al.).

There is no doubt that the home learning environment is important, but what if the child is placed in an excellent kindergarten and first grade class? What if they are surrounded with books and are encouraged to learn and explore? What if they have a nurturing, loving, warm, and responsive teacher? Conner, Hindman, Morrison, and Son (2005) researched effects on first graders' vocabulary and early reading. The researchers considered several teacher qualifications, including years of experience, years of education, and elementary education credential. Researchers also observed classroom practices, honing in on the teachers' warmth and responsivity, classroom management, and time spent on academic activities. Preschool experiences and family characteristics, including SES, were also considered. Students whose teachers spent more time in academic activities and were warm and responsive to students' needs demonstrated stronger vocabulary and decoding skills by the end of first grade. However, the variables that had the greatest impact on children's vocabulary and

early reading scores by the end of first grade were the home learning environment and family SES (Conner, et al., 2005).

Many studies have coupled a child's early development with his or her home environment. The many facets of the home environment, including teaching behaviors, sensitivity, story-book availability, the presence of stimulating experiences, and the absence of parental stress and depression are all vital in creating an atmosphere conducive to a child's early development of school readiness skills (Ayoub, et al. 2009).

### **Parent Involvement in Literacy Development**

Parental involvement has been linked to several positive outcomes for children, including academic skills, positive attitudes and social competence (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). Research has also shown, within an emergent literacy perspective, that a variety of literacy skills attained before school entrance play an important role on reading performance during a child's elementary-school years (Cadima, et al., 2010).

Eppe, Farver, Lonigan, and Xu (2006) researched the impact of having parents involved in literacy related activities and the quality of the home environment (measured by the mother's parenting stress) on two school readiness skills: children's social functioning and oral language. During this exploratory study, low socioeconomic status (SES) Latino mothers of 122 preschoolers completed questionnaires about their home environment, family demographics, and their perceived parenting stress. The preschoolers' teachers rated the students' social functioning, and the researchers assessed children's oral language using the Peabody

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Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised. The researchers discovered that parents who were involved and encouraged literacy related activities, as well as mothers with low parenting stress had children with elevated scores in social functioning and oral language development. Shared storybook reading not only led to improvements in oral vocabulary, but it also seems reasonable to argue that the storybook reading sessions taught basic social skills, such as taking turns, self-expression, and self-regulation (Epepe, et al., 2006).

Senechal, et al. (1998) examined the relationship between parent-child storybook reading as well as direct instruction by parents in reading-related activities to oral language, written language, and literacy outcomes in a group of 168 middle class kindergarten and first graders. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire on parent-child activities and story book reading. Children were tested using oral and written language measures, and their word identification abilities were tested as well. Findings from this study reveal positive relations between story-book exposure and vocabulary and other oral language measures, such as phoneme awareness, in kindergarten children and first graders. The results of Senechal, et al.'s study reflect the findings of several other studies which reveal parent reading helps to build early language skills.

Senechal and LeFevre (2002) extended the previous study by looking at the importance of parent storybook reading during a five-year longitudinal study. Researchers examined the importance of parent storybook reading and teaching as well as the relationship between early literacy experiences and reading acquisition.

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The study also questioned the long-term influence of early home literacy experiences on reading achievement by measuring students' achievement at the end of grade three. Of the 110 Canadian children who began the study, 93 were followed until grade one and 66 were followed until the end of grade three. Researchers found that parent storybook reading was directly related to children's receptive language development and parent teaching was directly related to children's early literacy skills. This pattern held for the children in grade one, and over time into grade three (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

These studies reveal that the path to school readiness and fluent reading are grounded in different aspects of children's early experiences (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Home literacy experiences, including parental reading of storybooks as well as parental teaching are both connected to the development of early skills and ultimately to reading acquisition (Senechal, et al., 1998).

### **School Readiness and Later Achievement**

School readiness is a multidimensional concept. Cognitive development, language development, physical development, social/emotional development, and approaches to learning are all included in the broad concept of school readiness (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). Some of these skills include adaptability, cooperation with peers, respect for people and property, flexibility, ability to ask questions, independence, effective communication, knowledge of letters and numbers, counting, and reading. Although children may enter school with a variety of these skills, their overall success depends on how they are able to use them in the course of learning (Duku & Janus,



2007).

Children's academic development begins before they enter school, and their skills at school entry are highly predictive of their overall academic performance. Particularly, preschool children's language skills, knowledge about print, and vocabulary are skills that predict later literacy development and academic success (Arnold et al., 1999). In their study, Arnold et al. worked with 74 preschool boys and 14 teachers at a day care where children were at high risk for developing behavioral and academic problems. Pre-literacy skills were measured with four tests that covered various early skills that predict later academic success. Behavior problems were assessed using classroom observations and teacher ratings. Children who exhibited more aggressive and disruptive behaviors had poorer pre-literacy development. Also, children who displayed higher levels of aggressive behavior showed lower levels of engagement in learning activities. Arnold et al.'s findings illustrate how children who have difficulty controlling negative emotions, paying attention, and getting along with other children do poorer in school than their peers.

There is no doubt that the early years of children's school experiences are the building blocks for their future success. In their study, Duncan, et al. (2007) researched the link between school readiness skills and later school achievement. The authors honed in on three important school readiness skills: academic achievement, attention, and socioemotional skills. Surprisingly enough, the researchers discovered that early math skills, such as knowledge of numbers and ordinality were the greatest predictors of later academic achievement. Other consistent, but less powerful

predictors of later achievement were early reading and language skills and attention skills (Duncan, et al., 2007).

Babchishin, Kohen, Pagani, & Romano, (2010) sought to replicate and extend the findings of the prior study. Three years later, this group of researchers still found that math and early reading skills were instrumental in predicting children's later achievement. However, in the latter study, researchers found the predictive power of reading skills to be very comparable to that of math skills. In contrast to the previous study, these researchers found more significant connections between socioemotional behaviors in kindergarten and their relationship to children's later achievement in third grade. Specific behaviors such as greater social skills and less hyperactivity/impulsivity predicted better reading and math skills. Babchishin, et al. also discovered that well developed kindergarten math skills revealed less physical aggression, less anxiety and depression, less hyperactivity and impulsivity, and better attention when children reached grade three (Babchishin, et al.).

Aiyer, Grimm, Grissmer, Murrah, and Steele (2010) also extended Duncan, et al.'s work. They too examined school readiness skills that would have the greatest influence on later achievement. They extended Duncan, et al.'s work by not only researching the impact of early reading skills, math skills, and socioemotional behaviors on later achievement, but motor skills and general knowledge of the social and physical world as well. Aiyer, et al. (2010) found that fine motor skills are also an excellent predictor of later achievement. They also discovered that students' knowledge of the social and physical world was the strongest predictor of later

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science and reading achievement as well as later math achievement. They hypothesized that strong skills in general knowledge upon kindergarten entry supported children's comprehension of texts when reading shifted from procedural in early elementary school, to more comprehension focused in the intermediate grades. The researchers found that together, fine motor skills, general knowledge, and attention skills are much better predictors for future achievement in math, science, and reading, than reading and math alone (Aiyer, et al., 2010).

The findings from Arnold, et al. (1999), Duncan, et al. (2007), Babchishin, et al. (2010), and Aiyer, et al. (2010) indicate a reciprocal relationship between school readiness skills, childhood behavior, and achievement. Children who had better developed attention and social skills in kindergarten continued to have the same behaviors in later grades. On the other hand, children who possessed negative behaviors, such as physical aggression, hyperactivity, impulsivity, or depression continued to have the same behaviors in later grades. Even though all three studies seemed to find varying school readiness skills that predicted future achievement most accurately, they all seemed to highlight the importance of early math, reading, and attention skills on a child's later achievement.

### Summary

Children's early learning results are related to the success they may or may not experience throughout their school years (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). In conclusion, the results of the variety of research outlined in this literature review reveal how vital the home environment and parental involvement in literacy-related activities are to the

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development of children's school readiness skills as well as how important children's school readiness skills are to their later achievement.

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to identify parental reading and teaching patterns as well as investigate the impact these parental reading and teaching patterns have on children's school readiness. My data was collected in an effort to answer the following research questions. First, what patterns of parental reading and teaching can be identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school? Second, what are the associations between parental reading and teaching patterns and the child's school readiness? In this chapter I discuss the study participants, procedures, data collection and analysis methods, as well as any limitations this study may have.

#### **Participants and Context**

I conducted this study with a focus group of three caucasian women, each in their early thirties. Pseudonyms have been used for the participants in this study. Each family consists of a working father and a stay at home mother. Jackie and her husband are expecting their fourth child. Jackie's husband is a teacher, and she was a teacher as well until their first child was born. Their son, Bradan, is five years old and attends kindergarten in a rural school district in western New York. Melissa's husband works for a small company, and they receive Women Infants and Children (WIC) assistance from New York State. They have three children. Their oldest son, Adam, is five years old and also attends kindergarten in a rural school in western New York. Meghan's husband is a police officer. They have four children and their oldest daughter, Grace,

is five years old and also attends kindergarten in a rural school in western New York. This convenience sample of mothers was chosen based on their availability and willingness to be observed reading and working with their children in their own homes.

### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I have been teaching for four years, two years in fourth grade, and two in first grade. Currently, I am taking a maternity leave to spend the year raising my baby girl. I graduated from SUNY Brockport with a degree in Childhood Education, and I have been working on my master's degree in childhood literacy for four years at Brockport.

Reading and writing are my passion. I always show that enthusiasm to my students, and work to get them equally as excited about literacy. During writers' workshop, I would spend time writing when my students would write, and share during author's chair periodically so that they could hear my writing. During readers' workshop, I would work hard to provide book choices that would interest, engage, and hook my students on reading. As excited as I was to engage my students in reading and writing, I am even more excited to impart that excitement to my daughter. At two months old, she already enjoys being read to. It is wonderful as a mother to see her engage in books at such a young age.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

In this qualitative study, I employed parent interviews as well as naturalistic observation (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) to collect my data.

### *Parent Interviews*

Each set of parents was interviewed using the following questions:

How often do you read to your child? How would you describe your interaction with your child during this time?

When you play with your child, what do you do?

What interactions do you have with your child when putting a puzzle together or playing game with your child?

### *Anecdotal Records*

Parents were also observed reading a story with their children as well as playing games with their children. While observing, I recorded anecdotal notes that I analyzed to look for patterns in parental reading and teaching, and then coded. While observing the read aloud, I looked for ways the parents engaged their children in the stories. Did they ask questions and have their children make predictions as they read? Did they read with expression, making the book come to life? Did they share any of the reading with the children? Did they make any connections, or ask the children to make connections as they read? While observing the parents and children playing the

games, I looked for the amount of support given to the children. Were directions explained explicitly? Did parents model how to play before beginning the game? Did they offer strategies?

The children's school readiness skills were assessed using the following early literacy assessments: Concepts of Print Assessment (Clay, 2000), Letter Recognition Assessment (Fountas and Pinnell, 2008). The children's knowledge of concepts about print was analyzed using the Concepts of Print Assessment. Students' letter recognition was assessed using the Letter Recognition Assessment.

The data from the interviews and observations was then analyzed to look for patterns in parental reading and teaching, and the impact these patterns had or did not have on the children's literacy school readiness skills, such as concepts about print, letter recognition, and basic sight word knowledge.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

The validity of this study was verified through persistent observation, triangulation, and referential adequacy. Each mother was observed four times, and interviewed one time over the course of this six week study. All sources of data gathered during the parent interviews, observations of parents reading and playing with their children, and child performance on the three assessments was triangulated to identify parental reading and teaching patterns and validate the effects these patterns might or might not have had on the children's school readiness. Terminology



used in the results of this study was drawn directly from the language used by the parent and child participants.

### **Procedures**

This study was conducted over a period of six weeks. Each mother was interviewed once, and observed a total of four times. Each mother was observed reading a story with her child twice, and was observed playing a game with her child two times as well. For the first read aloud and game observation, the mothers read stories they were familiar with, and played familiar games with their child. During the second read aloud and game observation, the mothers read aloud *Little Rabbit and the Night Mare* by Kate and M. Sarah Klise, and played *Mega Bloks Memory Builder*, a story and a game which I brought. Both the mother and the child were unfamiliar with the story and the game.

Week 1 – Each mother was observed reading a book of her choice with her child.

Week 2 – Each mother was observed playing a game of her choice with her child.

Week 3 – Mothers were interviewed using the same questions.

Week 4 – Each mother was observed reading *Little Rabbit and the Night Mare*, by Kate and M. Sarah Klise to her child.

Week 5 – Each mother was observed playing *Mega Bloks Memory Builder* with her child.

Week 6 – The children were assessed using the Concepts of Print Assessment (Clay, 2000) and the Letter Recognition Assessment (Fountas and Pinnell, 2008).

### **Limitations**

Initial limitations of this study include a small, self selected sample. Although participants' personalities vary, their class and race are the same, and they do not represent a diverse population. Also, parents may be inclined to alter their behavior during read alouds and play with their children when being observed. This study was also six weeks long, and more data could have been collected over a longer period of time.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to identify parental reading and teaching patterns as well as investigate the impact these parental reading and teaching patterns may or may not have on the children's school readiness. Data was collected through the use of interviews and naturalistic observation, in which I observed the mother and child reading a story together as well as playing a game within the family's own home.

The following research questions were addressed. First, what patterns of parental reading and teaching can be identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school? Second, what are the associations between parental reading and teaching patterns and the children's school readiness? In order to provide triangulation for these questions, I followed three procedures. First, I observed mothers reading and playing a game with their children. During these observations I took anecdotal records that I later coded and analyzed. Second, mothers were interviewed, and recurring reading and teaching patterns were discovered. Third, the children were assessed using Marie Clay's (2002) Concepts of Print Assessment and Fountas and Pinnell's (2008) Letter Recognition Assessment.

### *Parental Reading Patterns*

During this study, I observed mothers reading to their children. During my first observation, each mother read a book of her choice. For my second observation,

each mother read a book which I had selected. The book was unfamiliar to the mother and the child. These observations were coded and analyzed based on prompts given by the mother to the child before, during, and after the story. The behavior of the mother was analyzed to determine whether she was a story reader, simply reading the story aloud to her child, or whether she took a shared reading approach with her child, asking and answering various questions. Pseudonyms were used for each participant.

**Table 1: Read Alouds**

	Jackie	Melissa	Meghan
Prompts to make a connection	2	5	4
Prompts to answer a question based on the text/picture	14	13	6
Prompts to fill in the blank	5	1	0
Prompts to make a prediction	4	3	0

While Jackie read to Braden, they were cuddled on the couch together. The environment was very calming and cozy. Based on my observations, Jackie applied a shared reading approach with her son Braden. She paused to ask and answer questions based on the text and the picture, e.g. “What do you notice about the snow balls?” Jackie also held a rich discussion with her child before, during, and after the read aloud, pausing to ask him to make connections and predictions. (“What do you

think the mouse wants to do with his popcorn?") She also shared some of the actual reading with her child, leaving out words such as popcorn, snowman, and carrot that the child could fill in based on the picture.

During the read aloud Braden was engaged and participating in the story. He eagerly asked questions ("Why does he do all the hard work?"), made observations ("The ornaments are very pretty. Look at all the glitter on them!"), and answered prompts given by Jackie.

While Melissa read to Adam, they were curled up on a cozy chair. The environment was very welcoming and safe. Based on my observations, Melissa also used a shared reading approach. She paused to ask and answer questions based on the text and the picture, e.g. "How can you tell she is scared?" Melissa had rich discussion with Adam before, during, and after the read aloud, which included connections from the story to "Papa waking up before the sun," and the house they had built with Lincoln Logs earlier that day.

Like Braden, Adam was eagerly involved in the story. He asked questions, made observations ("Mom is a hard worker isn't she?!") as well as answered prompts his mother asked.

While Meghan read to Grace, they were curled up on the couch together. The environment was very calming and cozy. Based on my observations, Meghan is considered a story reader. During the read aloud there was very little discussion

before, during, or after the story. Although Grace seemed engaged, there was no way for me to measure that she understood what was happening in the text.

The use of strategic prompting while reading aloud encouraged Adam and Braden to use higher level thinking when reading a story with their mothers. The boys were making predictions, connections, and inferences based on the text and the illustrations. This higher level thinking will benefit the children as they enter school.

#### *Parental Teaching Patterns*

Mothers were also observed playing games with their children. During the first observation, mothers were observed playing familiar games of their choice. During the second observation, I selected the game, *Mega Bloks Memory Builder*. The mother's behavior was coded and analyzed based on the level of support given to her child before and during the game. The mother's behavior was analyzed based on how she gave directions/answered questions, provided strategy, and praised her child. Each child was eager to play a game with his/her mother.

**Table 2: Game playing**

	Jackie	Melissa	Meghan
Gives directions	13	6	3
Gives praise	2	2	2
Connects to math, reading, etc.	6	1	5
Gives strategy	4	4	4

Jackie is a mother who provides a high level of support to her child while playing the games. She patiently gave and repeated directions. Braden was having a difficult time remembering to place his card in the discard pile. Jackie said, “Remember to put your card in the discard pile” numerous times, and when appropriate, provided strategies for winning such as “I drew a blue cat, but I don’t need a blue cat. You need a blue cat, so I hope you remember where it is!” Jackie also used *Candy Land* as an opportunity to review colors with Braden.

Melissa is a mother who provides a high level of support to her child while playing the games. She provided strategies, and patiently gave and repeated directions, specifically about playing the game honestly. (“It is cheating to lift up more than one. Only lift up one at a time.”) She also made a connection to counting when the game was over by having Adam count his matches, and then hers as well. Adam learned the games very quickly, so he required less direction giving, but more prompts to play the game honestly.

Meghan is a mother who provides a high level of support to her child while

playing the games. She provided Grace with strategies (“You need a blue cow, so now you only need to pick from the blue blocks.”), gave directions, and when completing a game of memory, used counting and one to one correspondence to determine the winner of the game, and how much she won by. Gracie eagerly played the games with her mother. She listened to strategies her mom gave her, which helped her to win the game.

Each mother gave her child the support he/she required to be successful. Braden required more direction giving than Gracie and Adam to be successful. Each mother also gave adequate strategies while playing to help her child understand how to win the game. Jackie and Meghan connected other subject areas, such as math, to the game being played. Each mother praised her child upon completion of the game as well as during the game at appropriate times.

The children were given adequate directions for playing prior to beginning the game. During the game they were provided with strategies to aid in their understanding of how to win the game. Upon completion of the game, all three children received praise for doing good work. Each child required a different level of support, but was given that support by a mother who knew her child.

The children in this study were all engaged while learning and playing games because they were given support prior to playing and during the game. This support included adequate directions for playing prior to beginning the game, strategies for winning the game while playing, and upon completion of the game, praise for doing



good work. Each child required a different level of support, but was given that support by a mother who knew her child.

School readiness is a multidimensional concept (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). Some school readiness skills include adaptability, cooperation with peers, respect for people and property, flexibility, ability to ask questions, independence, effective communication, knowledge of letters and numbers, counting, reading. Children may enter school with a variety of these skills, but it is how they are able to use them in the course of learning that is important to their overall success (Duku & Janus, 2007). Beginning to use skills such as the ability to take turns, follow directions, and self-regulate behavior while playing games at home will help children routinely use these skills to school.

#### *Assessment Results*

**Table 3: Assessment Results**

Child	Concepts of Print Kindergarten Assessment	Letter Recognition Assessment Upper Case Letters Lower Case Letters
Braden	10(4)	11(3) 15(3)
Adam	10(4)	15(3) 18(4)
Grace	9(3)	11(3) 14(3)

*Quantitative Research Suggests the Children are at the Appropriate Developmental Level*

The quantitative research collected supports the qualitative research, which has shown the children are ready for school. The scores given to the children are all a reflection of January/February expectations for kindergarten students. A score of 3 indicates the child is meeting standards, and a score of 4 indicates the child is exceeding standards. The children are all on level or above level in terms of letter recognition and concepts of print. Since the children are in Kindergarten, these results cannot be isolated to the parents' influence. Still, based on the interviews, each child is read to at home on a daily basis. The score of each child on the Concepts of Print Assessment aligns with the data as well as the interviews. The children were all familiar with print concepts, such as where to start reading, distinguishing between letters and words, and return sweep.

*Congruence between parental reading and teaching patterns*

While reading to their children, these three mothers all preferred to be snuggled up on the couch. They all viewed reading as a time to bond with and teach their children. While reading, the children snuggled up on the couch with their mothers. While preparing to play the game, they anxiously set it up on the comfortable living room floor. A warm glow from a candle or a fireplace was always present. The homes were not spotless and silent, but there was a sense of comfort. The mothers I observed knew their children, and created an environment at home that

made the children feel safe, cared for, and loved. Because of this, great conversations occurred while reading stories together. The children were eager to ask and answer questions as they read and played games because there was no fear of rejection for giving a “wrong” answer. The children apparently felt comfortable as they learned.

Each mother read with expression. Jackie and Melissa took a shared reading approach with their children, welcoming discussion, questions, and interaction. They prompted their children to make connections to their own experiences and encouraged them to attend to both the illustrations and the story. They asked questions that encouraged higher level thinking while reading, including: “What time of year is it? How do you know?” “Do you have any good ideas for his report?” and “Where is the report in the picture? How did you know it was the report?” These prompts encouraged the children to use what they knew, their own imaginations, and what they remembered from the story to interact with their mothers. Meghan was more of a story reader. During each read aloud there was not much discussion before, during, or after the story.

During the game observations, I noticed each mother providing a high level of support to her child. Each mother gave explicit directions before playing the game, and reminders during the game. A strength of each mother was providing strategies while playing. Melissa especially focused on the importance of playing honestly, while Jackie and Meghan focused more on strategies for winning. During the two games of Memory, Jackie and Meghan provided the following strategies: “Flip over a

card we haven't flipped over yet.” “You need a blue cow, so now you only need to pick from the blue blocks.” “I got a blue cat, but I don't need a blue cat. You need a blue cat, so remember where that is.”

### *Conclusion*

Patterns of parental reading and teaching that were identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school were creating a comfortable and safe home environment, reading with children on a daily basis, using strategic prompting to engage the children in the reading and encourage them to make predictions, connections, and inferences, and providing support (adequate directions, strategies, and praise) while playing games. Associations between parental reading and teaching patterns and the child's school readiness were difficult to identify due to the fact that the children are already in kindergarten. Observations and assessments were used to glean the impact parental reading and teaching had on the children's school readiness. Both the observations and assessments showed the children at or above the appropriate developmental level.

Each mother revealed a desire to make reading a time of bonding as well as learning. Although each parent interacted differently with her child, some things remained the same. The mothers all created a warm and nurturing environment while reading and playing a game. While reading, two of the three mothers interacted with their children by prompting them to answer questions based on the text and illustrations, make connections, make predictions, and fill in words. While playing

the games, each mother taught her child strategies to be successful, provided adequate support through direction giving, and provided praise for success. Based on both the observations and assessments, the children are prepared to enter school.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

My study examined the following research questions. First, what patterns of parental reading and teaching can be identified among families of children entering kindergarten in a rural school? Second, what are the associations between parental reading and teaching patterns and the child's school readiness? My goal was to identify parental reading and teaching patterns that may or may not have helped children in their preparedness for school and readiness to read. Results from observations, interviews, and testing gave light to patterns of parental reading and teaching, as well as associations between these patterns and children's school readiness. Creating a home environment that was safe and comfortable, effective prompting while reading, support during game playing, and reading to children on a daily basis were found to contribute to children's school readiness.

### **Conclusions**

#### *A Warm and Nurturing Environment Fosters Comfort and Conversation While Learning*

During each observation, I noticed one thing that united each family. Each mother created an environment that her child felt safe and comfortable in. The role of early parenting and the home environment is vital to the academic, social, and behavioral success of a child (Ayoub, et al., 2009). Teachers, researchers, and parents alike have agreed that the home environment is the origin of many experiences that may intensify the development of oral and written language (Senechal, et al., 1998).

Many studies have coupled a child's early development with his or her home environment. The many facets of the home environment, including teaching behaviors, sensitivity, story-book availability, the presence of stimulating experiences, and the absence of parental stress and depression are all vital in creating an atmosphere conducive to a child's early development of school readiness skills (Ayoub, et al. 2009).

#### *Shared Reading Benefits Children's School Readiness*

The use of strategic prompting during shared reading encouraged two of the children to use higher level thinking when reading a story with their mothers. The children were using the text, as well as the illustrations to make predictions, connections, and inferences.

Senechal, et al. (1998) examined the relationship between parent-child storybook reading and found parent reading helps to build early language skills, such as vocabulary development and phoneme awareness in kindergarten and first grade children (Senechal, et al.). Studies have also revealed that shared storybook reading not only leads to improvements in oral vocabulary, but it also seems reasonable to argue that the storybook reading sessions teach basic social skills, such as taking turns, self-expression, and self-regulation (Epepe, et al., 2006).

*Providing Sufficient Support While Teaching Encourages Engagement*

The children in this study were all engaged while learning and playing games because they were given support prior to playing and during the game. Each mother provided explicit directions, strategies for winning, and praise as a tool to encourage a successful outcome for her child.

One recent study found that a positive learning environment coupled with maternal supportiveness were strongly associated with child vocabulary, letter-word knowledge, and emotion regulation (Ayoub, et al., 2009). Home literacy experiences, including parental reading of storybooks as well as parental teaching are both connected to the development of early skills and ultimately to reading acquisition (Senechal, et al., 1998).

**Implications for Student Learning**

Learning begins at birth, which is why parents have often been called their children's first teachers (Britto, et al., 2006). In this study, I examined the impact parental reading and teaching had on children's school readiness. Through observation, I found that creating a warm, nurturing, and comfortable environment encouraged conversation and interaction while reading and playing a game. Because this environment was created, the children felt safe to ask and answer questions. This environment that was created in these three homes should be the same environment that is created within the classroom. Teachers who create a safe and nurturing atmosphere will have students who are willing to ask and answer questions that will



help them learn and grow. They will have students who feel comfortable taking risks.

Effective prompting while reading with children can truly help them comprehend and connect to books in a deeper way, as was evident in my observations. Effective prompting not only comes from knowledge of the text, but also knowledge of the child. Because these mothers truly knew their children, they were able to ask questions, draw on prior knowledge, and help them make connections to the story being read aloud. Likewise, educators should make getting to know their students a priority. Establishing a relationship with students not only helps them feel safe and comfortable, but it also helps teachers choose books that align with the students' interests as well as give effective prompts while reading. Providing effective prompts encourages children to use higher level thinking and make predictions and connections that allow them to relate to and understand the text on a deeper level.

During observations, it was evident that the mothers knew they had to provide enough support to help their children be successful while playing a game. They were careful not to provide too much support, which may have caused the children to become dependent on their help. The key to this was again, knowing their children. Each mother knew how much direction giving, guidance, and strategy help her child needed and provided that so her child would have success in learning and playing a new game. Likewise, educators within their classrooms must provide adequate support when teaching their students concepts. The teacher must know her students

and their individual needs as learners. Like the mothers, teachers must provide enough support and strategies to help her students experience success for themselves while reading and learning.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

#### *Warm and Nurturing Environment*

Before completing this study I knew how important it was to create a classroom environment that not only fostered learning, but also helped my students feel safe. I now have a deeper understanding of how important it is to have the home, the first environment children are exposed to, be a safe, warm, and nurturing place. Teachers can create that for their students, but it is the parents who have the first chance to impact their children.

I will work hard to create an atmosphere where my children feel safe, loved, and important. I will teach them the importance of literacy and learning in an environment where there is risk taking because there is no fear of a wrong answer. I will love them, nurture them, and care for them so that I lay a firm foundation that they will be able to stand on when they go to school.

#### *Effective Prompting*

While observing two of the three mothers read with their children, I noticed the benefits of using effective prompting. I will use effective prompting with my children at home and my future students in order to help them make personal

connections to a story, make predictions, and notice features within the text they may not have noticed. By using effective prompting, I will be able to encourage my children to use higher level thinking while reading and discussing books. Effective prompting also promotes conversation, which will help me assess their understanding of the text.

### *Sufficient Support While Teaching*

While observing the mothers in my study teaching their children how to play games, I recognized the importance of providing just the right amount of support. I will give my children and future students sufficient direction and support when teaching them new concepts. Providing adequate support at first exposure to a new game or idea will prevent my children and future students from becoming frustrated, and will allow them to be successful. Giving praise will show my affirmation of a job well done.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study could be extended in a variety of ways. A larger, more diverse sample would be beneficial. Also, future research could be done with a longitudinal sample observed from birth to kindergarten entry. This would be beneficial for a variety of reasons. Studying parental reading and teaching patterns from birth to kindergarten entry could give researchers a more complete picture of strategies that may or may not foster school readiness from birth.

Another extension of this study would involve examining two samples. One sample of care givers would be story readers (read the story aloud without stopping to prompt and check for comprehension) and the other sample would be shared readers (caregivers who share the reading with the child, as well as stop to prompt and check for comprehension). The children's test results could be analyzed to determine whether there was a difference in school readiness between the two samples.

### **Final Thoughts**

Some evidence suggests that early skills are vital to later development. Children who are not exposed to appropriate stimulation will not gain the building blocks needed to be able to perform what will be expected of them at age five (Duku and Janus, 2007). In their study, Ayoub, et al. (2009) observed that nurturing, warm, and responsive parenting behaviors, paired with a home environment that encourages exploration and learning lead to positive outcomes in several developmental domains for young children. This study took a glimpse into the lives of three mothers and their children entering kindergarten. The findings confirm the knowledge that involved, nurturing parents, who encourage and read with their children, impact their children's readiness to learn.

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