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# Parent Involvement and Literacy Achievement: A Case Study

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Parent Involvement and Literacy Achievement: A Case Study

by

Jessica Martorana

May 2015

A thesis 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 Master of Science in Education

## **Abstract**

The purpose of my research is to explore, through observing students at work during literacy lessons and analyzing the responses of distributed parent, teacher and student surveys, how parent involvement affects literacy achievement. The data collected was analyzed and used to determine the impact parent involvement has on a child's literacy achievement; and what parts of literacy are affected by parent involvement (i.e. reading, writing, fluency, comprehension...).

The methods used to collect data for my research will be anecdotal notes, observations, teacher surveys, parent surveys and student interviews from three student participants over a six-week period.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This story begins on a rainy Monday in mid-April. I'm conferring with students about the reading they have conducted over Spring break. This particular student is a ten-year-old Caucasian male, who, for the purposes of my study, I will refer to as Cooper. I begin the discussion by asking him to tell me about what activities he enjoyed with his family over break. Below is an excerpt of our discussion.

**Copper:** My mom and my sister and me went to Carowinds [a local amusement park]. At first I was scared, but then I had a lot of fun, y'know? We rode all the big ones.

Jessica: I'm glad you had fun! Let's take a look at your reading log. (When looking at the student's reading log, it's clear that he read for many hours over the break. He completed a total of three books at his level. )

**Copper:** Well, I ran out of room, because we had so many days off. So I wrote some more on the back, okay? Don't forget to check there.

**Jessica:** Wow! You definitely read a lot over break. Tell me about your favorite book that you read."

"My mom and my sister picked some books to read with me. They like to talk about what I read, y'know? It's kind of annoying, but...I really liked *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. It's about this boy, well, this kid, he writes to this author he likes and he writes back and stuff. It's funny but also sad, and it seems really real, y'know?"

"Tell me about what you talked about with your mom and big sister. Did you talk about the sad parts or the funny parts?"

"We talked about each part as I read...Like after every few chapters they asked me about what had happened and helped me think about the big idea...the...umm...theme...and

stuff. I liked to talk about the character, because he starts off really young and kind of...dumb...sorry, but he is...and then he kinda grows up, and he gets to be a lot smarter about the world and his dad and stuff.”

“It seems like you really enjoyed this book, Copper. Whose idea was it to talk so much about your book and read so many books over break?”

“Well...it was homework to read thirty minutes...but my mom really wants me to keep growing in those reading levels, so...she kind of made me read more...but I liked it, too, I guess...And I liked talking about the books ‘cuz it helped me understand them more and think about what they were all about...”

After this brief conference, it became quite clear that Copper’s family is invested in his literacy progress. Copper discussed how his mom pushed him to read for sustained periods of time and focused on comprehension of each book that he read. While Copper’s answers didn’t dig into the meat of his story, it was clear that he had a better understanding of the character and the events that had occurred in *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. Based on Copper’s responses, it appeared that if his mother and sister had not been engaging him in conversations about his texts, he likely would not have read beyond the assigned thirty minutes. Because he had his mom and sister at home to push him, he was able to read for longer periods of time and practice reading strategies as he read.

This discussion also helped me to see how important family engagement in literacy activities truly is for students. It made me curious about how parent involvement affects a child’s literacy achievement.

## **Problem Statement**

Trends in literacy education focus on the importance of teaching strategies and programs implemented in the classroom. However, students enter the classroom with a wealth of background knowledge and experiential learning from the various environments in which they have social interactions before instruction even begins. Much of this acquisition of knowledge and experiential learning begins at home. As teachers and educators, it is important that we become more cognizant of the role that parents play in a child's literacy learning and achievement. Casey Dexter and Ann Stacks (2014) conducted a study in order to examine correlations between parenting and child development. With 28 participants and their families, Dexter and Stacks were able to determine several specific parental strategies that positively impact a child's early literacy achievement. The research demonstrated a high correlation between higher quality parenting on the reading quality of children. Dexter and Stacks also suggest parents' shared reading quality to be predictive of children's language quality. In this study, implications for educators and teachers are suggested. Teachers and educators can benefit from knowing the potential importance of these specific parenting practices and high-quality parent-child interactions in language acquisition development and literacy learning and development.

This study, along with many others, provides important insight into the correlation between parent involvement and a child's learning. Further investigation is needed in order to recognize the possibility of causation between varying levels of parent involvement and a student's literacy achievement based on a variety of assessments. My study is designed in order to examine this possible causation.

## **Significance of Problem**

Parent involvement in a child's literacy learning and development is important because it may provide pertinent information regarding best literacy practices and approaches to incorporate into literacy instruction that is student-centered, culturally sensitive and responsive, promotes diversity and which effectively addresses the needs of individual student learners. Teachers may become more aware of the impact parents have on a student's literacy achievement, and therefore be able to reach out to parents to establish a trusting relationship, access information from the parent regarding the student, increase parent involvement in school activities; thus strengthening the home-school connection.

If such research is not conducted, elementary school teachers may not be aware of the correlation between parent involvement and literacy achievement at the fourth-grade level, or may lack the resources to effectively establish trusting relationships with parents and increase parent involvement in school activities.

## **Purpose**

My study will provide insight on the impact of parent involvement on student's literacy achievement. Additionally, it will allow me as the researcher, current and future teachers and educators to develop a greater understanding and knowledge on the impact of parent involvement in order to better accommodate (and effectively address the needs of) individual student learners. Furthermore, it is my hope that my study of parent involvement might prove to be more informative to other teachers at my school who are struggling to determine how parents are involved in their child's literacy learning and development outside of the classroom environment, and who are unsure of the benefits of increasing parent involvement in classroom and school wide activities. My research questions are as follows:

- What impact does parent involvement have on a child's literacy achievement?
- What parts of literacy are affected by parent involvement (reading, writing, fluency, comprehension...)?

## **Rationale**

As a teacher in a Title I school in an urban district, I struggle to determine the impact of parent involvement. Many barriers to parent involvement exist; therefore it is necessary for teachers to develop an understanding of how much (if any) impact parent involvement in educational activities has on each child's learning. Like many teachers at my school, I question:

How does parent involvement influence a child's literacy achievement?

How important is parent involvement in a child's literacy achievement?

How can I reach out to involve parents for whom various barriers exist to becoming involved?

## **Definition of Terms**

*Title I* is a federally funded program that allocates monetary funding to schools and districts with high numbers or percentages of children who live in poverty. The program's purpose is to allow all students ample opportunity to obtain a quality education and score proficient or above on achievement assessments.

*Literacy* is defined in a variety of different ways by many different researchers and educators.

When the term literacy is used in this study, it is meant to refer to reading, writing, word study and vocabulary practices and assessments within an elementary classroom.

## **Summary**

Working in a Title I school, I often find a wide range of parent involvement. I struggle to find positive and effective ways in which to increase parent involvement and continue to foster positive relationships with students' families. I wish to study more about parent involvement to see how it may impact my students' literacy learning and achievement, not just their achievement in reading but also their achievement in other areas of literacy learning such as writing and word study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

A variety of research exists on parent and family involvement in early childhood years and its significance to children's literacy learning and development, yet far less research has been conducted regarding the importance of parent involvement throughout upper elementary years. My personal experience in a Title I school has shown that parent involvement is seldom visible in an upper elementary classroom. The following section will detail the research on which this study is based, and also reveal gaps in the research which my study regarding parent involvement and literacy achievement in fourth grade is designed to help fill. Specifically, this section will focus on the importance of family involvement, barriers to family involvement, the balanced literacy approach, and Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System

### **The Importance of Family Involvement**

Research on family involvement dates back over fifty years, beginning with the war on poverty. Parent involvement in education has been a part of many national programs and continues to be a prevalent concern of educators and administrators today. One study that illustrates the importance of family involvement in schools was conducted by researchers Fantuzzo and Gadsden, et. al. (2013). Their study of dimensions of parent involvement demonstrated the importance of family involvement in each child's literacy learning as well as social-emotional well-being. The researchers created and assessed a survey in order to reliably and validly measure parent involvement. The findings indicated high correlation between family involvement both in school and community activities with student well-being including social, emotional and academic development.

Researchers Wessels and Trainin (2014), examined the importance of family involvement among Latino families. Their study specifically focused on Dual Language Learners and introduced a program called the Family Literacy Program to support this particular subset of the population. The findings of the study demonstrated that parent involvement inclusive of creating a family reading routine, and utilizing specific bilingual materials in order to assist this specific population had a significant impact on the young children's literacy learning and development. In the study's implications, Wessels and Trainin suggest maintaining home language skills, building a collection of bilingual books and resources, providing bilingual materials for families and modeling reading skills with families. These implications are specific ways that teachers can build family relationships and therefore encourage family involvement in school and literacy activities.

Furthermore, the ethnographic study "A Preliminary Investigation of the Relationship Between Parenting, Parent-Child Shared Reading Practices, and Child Development in Low-Income Families" conducted by Dexter and Stacks (2014) discussed parenting and parent involvement in low-income families. The study included twenty-eight parent-child pairs (14 male students and 14 female students with 25 mothers and 3 fathers). The student participants ranged in age from 8 months to 36 months. The researchers collected data through home visits and analyzed the data with coding and videotapes. The findings of this study indicated a strong correlation between shared reading quality and children's receptive language. The results of this study also suggested that educators can benefit from understanding the importance of specific high-quality parent interactions to facilitate language development.

As these studies all suggested, parent involvement is an important component of a child's development. This development includes not only academic development, but also language,

social and emotional development. Teachers and educators must become aware of the importance of parent involvement and strive to overcome any barriers that may inhibit such positive impacts on a child's life and learning. Further research is necessary in order to determine the full impact of parent involvement on fourth grade students' literacy achievement in particular.

### **Barriers to Parent Involvement**

Williams and Sanchez (2013) and Bellibas and Gumus (2013) examined potential barriers to parent involvement, and identified ways in which these barriers can be decreased or avoided. These studies were conducted in a predominantly African-American high school in an inner-city in the Midwest. Because many parents, (especially those in inner-cities), experience socio-economic barriers, it is essential for educators to recognize the existence in order to better assist parents in increasing their involvement. The results of both studies indicated that low socio-economic status is a significant determinate of lower parent involvement. This may be due to parents working late shifts, single parent households and the fact that basic needs take precedence over involvement. Each of these aspects creates a barrier to parent involvement. Teachers and educators should become aware of these possible barriers in order to find ways to overcome them and reach out to these families to assist them in becoming more involved in their child's learning.

The previously mentioned study by Fantuzzo and Gadsden et. al (2013) demonstrated a potential barrier to parent involvement. As the researchers wrote, "language status may operate as an obstacle to supporting classroom learning at the home." The cultural and language barriers are factors that virtually every teacher will encounter at some point in their teaching career.

Large numbers of immigrants are entering the United States with a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers and educators must be aware of these potential barriers and make every attempt to overcome them in an effective manner. Some possibilities include utilizing translators, sending home parent information in multiple languages and employing English as a Second Language Coordinator in the school system to educate each teacher about the variety of cultural backgrounds present in a school classroom.

### **Balanced Literacy Approach**

For decades, debate has existed regarding the most effective literacy practices and approaches to use to facilitate literacy learning within schools. At this time, the balanced literacy approach is used within the fourth-grade classroom in which my research study was conducted, and it will be utilized for my research regarding the impact of parent involvement on their children's literacy achievement. Because this is the mandated program used in this school, it is imperative to understand the research around this particular literacy program.

Researchers Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013) examined the balanced literacy framework as well as teachers' beliefs about its implementation. The article states that balanced literacy is "a philosophical perspective that seeks to combine, or balance, skill-based and meaning-based instruction" (2). The article goes on to discuss many ideals of balanced literacy which included differentiated instruction, interactive writing and shared reading. However, these ideals are not always easily identifiable when examining a balanced literacy program in action. Bingham and Hall-Kenyon's results demonstrated the need for a balanced approach to literacy instruction and also discussed teachers' positive beliefs about utilizing such an approach in the classroom.

Further research, conducted by Bitter, O'Day, Gubbins and Socias (2009) explored instructional practices in a balanced literacy approach. This study was conducted in nine schools throughout the San Diego area. The majority of these schools were located in high-poverty areas and had large percentages of English Language Learners. The researchers, through their study, determined a high focus on comprehension, strong use of higher-level questions and valuable discussion about text. The research also demonstrated students' active engagement in both reading and writing during a balanced literacy approach. In addition, the results of the research demonstrated the importance and value of utilizing a balanced literacy approach in the classroom in order to increase both student engagement and achievement.

Based on these two research articles, the conclusion may be drawn that the balanced literacy approach is a valuable approach towards effective reading and writing instruction within schools. Students are observed to be more actively engaged, higher-level questions and thinking are being utilized, and teachers view the program as a positive addition to the classroom. This knowledge is valuable to my research of parent involvement and fourth-graders' literacy achievement because of the use of balanced literacy in the classroom.

### **Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System**

Another program that is utilized in the fourth-grade classroom in which my study about parent involvement and literacy achievement is being conducted is the benchmark assessment system created by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. According to their website, the benchmark assessment system (BAS) is based on a gradient of text difficulty developed over the past twenty years to establish grade level expectations. Texts are leveled using a reliable process which analyzes ten characteristics: genre, text structure, content, themes and ideas, language features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, word difficulty, illustrations, and print features. In order to

determine the effectiveness, reliability and validity of this program which is mandated in the fourth-grade classroom, research has been gathered.

The first line of research regarding this assessment system was conducted by Hoffman, Roser and Salas (2001). The researchers studied the effectiveness of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System by demonstrating its ability to predict student performance. The results indicate a positive correlation. The study stated that the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is able to predict student performance. The Benchmark provides a snapshot of the student's abilities as well as exposes areas that need improvement. This allows teachers to plan individualized literacy instruction as well as small group instruction. However, the researchers go on to mention that "teachers fail their students if they attend only to the levels of text" (4). This statement reminds educators that utilizing only the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System as a sole literacy program assessment tool could be detrimental to student learning and growth.

### **Summary**

Parent involvement and literacy are two important aspects in a child's learning. Research has been conducted for approximately fifty years regarding both of these aspects of a child's academic career. It is vital for teachers and educators to remember how important parent involvement is as well as the importance of using a high quality literacy program. By paying close attention to both the aforementioned factors and how they impact the student's literacy learning, development and achievement daily, further information can be gathered to determine what impact parent involvement has on literacy learning. Additionally, this information may be used to make further goals regarding improving family involvement in school-related activities such as homework, conferences and extra-curricular events. I will also utilize the data I collect

during my observation and assessment of fourth graders to improve on literacy instruction, assessment and parent involvement.

## **Chapter Three: Study Design**

### **Introduction**

My study was intended to explore how parent involvement impacts literacy achievement at the fourth-grade level. In this chapter, I will discuss the research questions, participants and data collection methods I used in my study. I will also discuss the ways I analyzed the data and will describe certain limitations my study consequently has.

### **Research Questions**

I planned my methods and procedures in an effort to answer how parents participate in their child's education and if a parent's participation and involvement in school activities impact a child's literacy achievement.

### **Participants and Context**

I conducted my study in my fourth-grade public school classroom in which the balanced literacy approach is used to facilitate literacy learning. The school is located in an urban area of Charlotte, North Carolina. My class is comprised of seventeen students: 9 female students and 8 male students, ages nine through twelve. The school's population consists of a diverse group of children including Hispanic, African American and Caucasian children. Of the seventeen students in my class, 100% qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. The elementary school is categorized as a Title I school which means that federal funds are utilized to support the high percentage of children who are disadvantaged.

Of these seventeen students, three students and their families were randomly and blindly selected to participate in the case study. This random and blind selection was completed by placing each student's name inside of a cup. I then randomly selected three students and distributed surveys to those three families. Pending completion of the surveys, these students and their families became the participants of the study.

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

I graduated from The College at Fredonia, State University of New York with teaching certifications in childhood education grades first through sixth, students with disabilities grades first through sixth, and middle school English grades seven through nine. Upon completion of my degree, I accepted a position as a teacher's aide in the three-year-old classroom at Bates-Rich Beginnings Daycare Center in Fairport, New York. I worked full time at Bates Rich for two and a half years, and was accepted into the Literacy Education B-12 program at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. In October of 2014, I was offered and accepted a position at an elementary school outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. This site is the location of my study. Literacy, including both reading and writing, are key aspects of life from as early as infancy and all the way through adulthood. As an educator, I work diligently to provide ample opportunities for students to increase and improve their literacy skills. Such opportunities include providing a wide array of reading materials such as poetry, fiction and non-fiction; conferencing with students individually; working with groups of students to improve word study and vocabulary techniques; and writing in an array of settings and genres. Literacy is a lifelong pursuit, and I hope to provide my students with this love as they continue to grow and prosper.

## **Procedures**

My research study was conducted over a period of six weeks, during February and March 2015. The study was implemented during the English Language Arts block that occurs daily for eighty minutes in my fourth grade classroom. The English Language Arts block includes a mini lesson, independent reading, guided reading groups, strategy groups, writer's workshop, word study practice and vocabulary practice.

In order to explore these questions, I randomly selected a group of seventeen fourth-grade children and their parents to participate in data collection. The students will be attending school at the same urban district outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. Ages of the children will range nine to twelve-years-old.

I used weekly anecdotal notes collected during the English Language Arts block in order to collect data. The anecdotal notes were coded in order to determine trends in the data which is collected. Furthermore, two formal assessments were used to measure literacy achievement and growth: the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System and the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in Reading.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

During the course of my study, I used the several data collection methods as detailed in the following sections. The data will be collected using both formal and informal assessments including parent surveys, teacher surveys, anecdotal notes, the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment system (BAS) and the computer-based MAP (Measures of Academic Progress)

Reading assessment. These methods have given aid in providing insight into my students' parent involvement and literacy achievement.

### **Parent Surveys**

Parent surveys were distributed to assess the varying levels of parent involvement, the ways in which parents choose to become involved in their child's school, and the amount of time the parent spends reading with their child. This questionnaire contains seven open-ended response questions designed to gain insight into each parent's level of involvement in their child's school and literacy activities. The survey was distributed once to each of the seventeen students and their parents. I have created this survey because it touches on the various aspects of parent involvement and will assist in determining the variety of ways in which parents may be involved in their child's literacy learning.

### **Teacher Surveys**

Teacher surveys were distributed to assess the teacher's experience with each child's parents. This survey was distributed in regards to the three selected students who represent a sample of the class. The teacher surveys were given to these students' current fourth-grade teacher, past fourth-grade teacher who relocated to a leadership role in November of the current school year, and any other teachers that the child comes in contact with for at least two hours each week (such as the Exceptional Child teacher or English as a Second Language teacher) as applicable. I have created these surveys in order to gain a better understanding of how teachers perceive each child's parents involvement in school activities and literacy-related activities. The survey contains a total of five open-ended questions designed to gain insight on the teacher-parent relationship.

## **Anecdotal Notes**

Anecdotal notes were utilized to record my observations during the English Language Arts block which contains reader's workshop, writer's workshop, vocabulary and word study. This way, I have had the opportunity to record behaviors and attitudes I have experienced, as well as evidence of learning and achievement.

## **Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System**

The elementary school in which the research regarding parent involvement and literacy achievement is being conducted utilizes the benchmark system created by Fountas and Pinnell. This benchmark system is a leveled reading program in which students are assessed using a running record, fluency rubric and comprehension rubric. The students are assessed at least once a quarter, in order to determine which level of books is appropriate for independent reading. I have utilized this assessment data as one piece of evidence of each participant's literacy achievement.

## **MAP Reading**

The school district in which my research is being conducted utilizes a computer-based reading assessment called the MAP test. This cross-grade examination is administered three times yearly (in the fall, winter and spring), and asks questions to gather information on student knowledge and understanding of vocabulary, fiction and non-fiction text. I have utilized this assessment data as a second piece of evidence of each participant's literacy achievement.

### *Data Analysis*

Upon collecting the three family surveys as well as the teachers' surveys, I used this information to determine if and how each set of parents was involved in their child's literacy achievement. I also analyzed the data between these two points to ensure that it was honest and as unbiased as possible. I then met individually to conference with each student. I analyzed this data and compared the teacher and parent interviews to the student conferences to determine meaningful variances in parent involvement. Shortly thereafter, I collected data points from the Fountas and Pinnell B.A.S and the M.A.P in reading. I analyzed these data points alongside anecdotal notes collected over a six week period in order to find meaningful themes and correlations regarding each student's literacy growth and achievement.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a key component to a research study. Without trustworthiness, a study is no longer reliable or valid. Trustworthiness includes key components such as credibility and dependability.

Credibility is one criteria of trustworthiness. This criteria ensures that the research conducted is valid, meaning the study is truly testing what is intended. For this study, the purpose is to gather information regarding parent involvement and literacy development. Credibility is being ensured by triangulating data. Multiple pieces of research are being conducted regarding both aspects that are being studied. This will work to create more valid data. The triangulation of parent involvement data comes from a parent survey, conferences with students, and multiple teacher surveys. Because this information is being gathered from multiple sources, it is less likely to be skewed in any way. The triangulation of literacy achievement data is being gathered through the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, Fountas and Pinnell

Benchmark Assessment System and anecdotal notes throughout the literacy block. Because data is being collected from multiple aspects of literacy, it will show a more thorough picture of literacy growth.

Credibility is also being boosted by the blind and random selection of participants. This random approach negates charges of researcher bias. This blind and random selection also provides the greatest possibility that the representative sample reflects the larger group and that any outside influences are distributed evenly throughout the relatively small sample size. Another key piece of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability addresses the issue of reliability, meaning that if the study were repeated with the same context, method and participants, similar results would be achieved. In order to ensure dependability and reliability, I have utilized multiple instruments which could be repeated by a researcher for similar results. For example, the MAP test could be repeated with reliability because it is a technology-based exam without the bias of teacher grading. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments are being conducted exactly as instructed. These results will be analyzed by a second teacher in order to ensure they are dependable and reliable. Throughout the study, I have reflected on the data that has been gathered and make any necessary changes in order to ensure the results collected have no bias and could be repeated.

Without trustworthiness, a study cannot be fully appreciated. In order to guarantee reliability and validity, a number of steps have been implemented. Both credibility and dependability will be an important piece of data collection, analysis and reflection.

### **Limitations**

My study includes some limitations. The data collection took place over a six week period of time, and this short length may prove to be a limitation because it will not show any long-term changes of parent involvement or literacy achievement.

The data collection methods I have chosen also include some limitations. The parent and teacher surveys may include biases of parents and teachers. Therefore, these instruments may not be reliable and valid. Furthermore, the anecdotal notes may inherently have some bias as well when taking into consideration different perspectives presented in responding to the survey instruments regarding parent involvement and literacy learning.

Both the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark system and the MAP Reading assessment are scored quantitatively, and therefore may be less specific regarding a student's strengths and needs. However, these assessments have provided an effective way for analyzing a student's growth and making comparisons to other participants within the study.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

In this chapter I present the findings from the data collection including anecdotal notes, surveys and interviews based on the data analysis.

### **Cooper**

Cooper is a ten-year-old Caucasian male who lives at home with his mother and older sister. He is described as a bright, lively and well-liked child. This is Cooper's first year at his current school, he recently moved from Florida, and he started in October.

### ***Parent Interview***

Cooper's parent interview was completed by his mother. At this time, Cooper's father is not in the picture. Cooper's mother indicated that she spends approximately 30 to 45 minutes each night reading together. She also indicated that she discusses Cooper's academic achievement at school daily and checks his homework for completion each night. At the time of the survey, Cooper's mother had spoken with his teacher three times throughout the school year. Cooper offered similar insight in his student interview. He indicated that he and his mother read a chosen book each night. Sometimes Cooper reads aloud, and sometimes Cooper's mom reads aloud to him. He also told me that his mom and sister both ask questions about what he is reading to improve his comprehension. When asked about how his mother checks his homework, Cooper indicated that his mom makes sure to sign his reading log each night and looks over his math homework to be sure that he shows his work. Both of Cooper's teachers corroborated what his mother had indicated. Cooper's teacher from August until the end of October indicated that she had conferenced early in the fall with Cooper's mother and sister, and that she also spoke with Cooper's mother once over the phone. Cooper's teacher from October to the present indicated meeting with Cooper's mom once in person and had spoken two to three times via e-mail. At the

beginning of the year, Cooper's teacher indicated his inconsistency with homework. She indicated that on average Cooper turned in a completed reading log three out of five times and inconsistently turned in math homework. His current teacher indicated that Cooper turned a corner in his homework completion, and typically turns in both math homework and a completed reading log daily.

### ***Literacy achievement***

Cooper's literacy achievement was better understood by utilizing three pieces of data: his MAP score, his BAS as well as anecdotal notes. Unfortunately, due to Cooper's late arrival to his current school, he was unable to take the fall 2014 MAP assessment. However, he was able to take the winter and spring MAP scores. In reading, Cooper scored a 207. This score indicates that he met his growth goal of seven points from his winter MAP score. Cooper's score was three points below the fourth-grade norm. Based on these scores, Cooper placed in the strategic level. This indicates that he needs significant assistance in order to reach a score which ensures his success in college and/or the post-secondary job force.

Cooper is currently reading at a level R, according to the Fountas and Pinnel Benchmark Assessment System. This reading level is considered slightly below grade-level expectation of S. This score indicates his need for further literacy instruction, especially focusing on comprehension and decoding strategies.

Lastly, anecdotal notes were collected during reader's workshop, word study, vocabulary and writer's workshop. These anecdotal notes indicated that Cooper benefits a great deal from discussing what he is reading, which is demonstrated in his making sense of what he is reading through discussions, especially within collaborative book clubs. However, Cooper often has difficulty maintaining his attention on one book. He often jumps from one book to another, and

strongly prefers reading non-fiction and informational texts. During word study and vocabulary, Cooper is often inattentive. He has difficulty maintaining on task behavior and was often seen chatting with peers or staring out the window. Cooper is a strong writer, especially when writing something that he has a great deal of background knowledge in. Cooper enjoys writing imaginative stories as well as researching and writing informational texts.

Based on the data that was collected over the six week period, Cooper is reading and achieving below grade level expectations in spite of his mother's involvement in school-related and literacy-related experiences. Therefore, the data does not indicate a correlation between parent involvement and literacy achievement.

### **Lilo**

Lilo is a ten-year-old African American female. She lives with her mother and five siblings, two younger brothers, one younger sister and one older brother. This is Lilo's first year at her current school. Lilo is described by her teachers as a spirited, active and at times antsy student. Lilo is currently in the McKinney-Vinto program which services students who are considered homeless or displaced.

### ***Parent Involvement***

Lilo's mother filled out her parent survey, indicating that on average she spends a half an hour to an hour each night reading with Lilo. She also wrote that she discusses achievement with her child once a week and she supports her child's learning by "staying on her." Furthermore, Lilo's mother indicated that she has spoken to her child's teacher once in person and once through email and phone. Unfortunately, the information provided by Lilo's mother does not match information provided by Lilo's teachers. Based on both teacher surveys, neither of Lilo's teachers has spoken to Lilo's mother either in person or via email or phone. One teacher wrote

“Her mother did not come in for a conference despite numerous attempts.” When speaking with Lilo, she indicated that her mother often checks her homework and reads with her at night, although no evidence of this was seen by either teacher.

### ***Literacy Achievement***

A triangulation of Lilo’s MAP scores, Fountas and Pinnel BAS and anecdotal notes was used to understand Lilo’s literacy achievement. On the Measures of Academic Achievement test, Lilo scored a 192, marking her year-long growth at 10 points. This growth was two more points than was expected for her this school year. While Lilo showed over a year’s worth of growth, Lilo is still reading dramatically below grade level expectations of a score of 207 at the end of the year. Lilo’s score also places her within the intensive range. This range indicates that Lilo needs an excessive amount of instruction in order to make growth that indicates that she will be successful in college or in the work force.

Based on Lilo’s Fountas and Pinnel BAS assessment, she is currently reading at a level N, which is considered far below grade level expectations of S at this time of the fourth grade year. Lilo has participated in the Read to Achieve program that allows her to receive forty-five extra minutes of reading instruction four days a week, but it has not significantly increased her growth throughout the school year.

Anecdotal notes were also collected on Lilo for six weeks. These anecdotal notes allowed me to draw the conclusion that Lilo is consistently off task during the reader’s workshop block. She was often seen wandering around the classroom, flipping pages without actually reading, or switching from one book to another. This lack of engagement was discussed with Lilo on many occasions, but was often met with resistance and disrespect. On the contrary, Lilo was seen to be

fully engaged in writer's workshop and word study. During both of these periods, Lilo was enthusiastic and eager to share her thoughts with peers.

Because the data regarding parent involvement was inconsistent between parent, student and teacher surveys, it was very difficult to draw a conclusion about the causality Lilo experienced. Unfortunately, this inconsistent data did not indicate any connection between literacy achievement and parent involvement.

## **Jaq**

Jaq is a ten-year-old African American fourth-grader who lives at home with his mother, father, older brother, and two older sisters. Jaq is described by his teachers as a respectful, athletic and a motivated student. This is Jaq's first year at his current school, and he has attended many different schools throughout his elementary years.

### ***Parent Involvement***

Jaq's mother, who completed the survey, indicated that she spends approximately thirty minutes reading with Jaq each night. She also wrote that she speaks daily with Jaq about his school achievement and she offers assistance with homework when Jaq asks for help. Jaq offered similar insight when he was spoken to. He told me that his mom often helps him after school, and that she reads with him almost every night. His classroom teachers have seen something slightly different. In terms of Jaq's reading log, it is often returned unsigned. Furthermore, Jaq has difficulty submitting completed homework, typically turning in both math and word study about 50% of the time. Jaq's teachers and his mother have spoken multiple times, however only via email. Despite many attempts to contact Jaq's mother for a conference, she did not attend either in the fall or in the winter.

### ***Literacy Achievement***

In order to better understand Jaq's literacy achievement, I studied his MAP and BAS scores along with collecting anecdotal notes about his learning during the literacy block. Jaq scored a 191 on his Spring MAP test, showing that his score dropped seven points this academic school year. Jaq was expected to make ten points of growth this year, therefore he fell short of his goal. Jaq's score places him within the intensive range. This range indicates that Jaq needs a significant amount of individualized attention in order to foster his growth in literacy skills and ensure his success in college or a job of his choice.

Jaq's BAS score indicates that he is currently reading at a level O which is considered drastically below grade level expectation of S at this time of the school year. Based on this data, Jaq is in need of additional instructional strategies to expedite his growth.

Data was collected during Jaq's reader's workshop and literacy block in the form of anecdotal notes. These anecdotal notes indicate a lack of engagement during the entirety of the literacy block. Jaq was consistently observed engaged in off task behavior including leaving his seat, flipping pages without reading, and not working on comprehension strategies. When Jaq was involved in cooperative book clubs, he was seen to be highly engaged. Jaq seems to thrive on discussion of what he's reading, as this builds his comprehension and decoding skills.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

This chapter will examine the conclusion of the findings of my study. The chapter includes implications, limitations and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to provide insight on the impact of parent involvement on student's literacy achievement. The data collected and analyzed throughout my study was inconclusive of determining the influence parent involvement has on a student's literacy development. The results of my study showed that parent involvement in a child's literacy at home can have a positive effect on students on an individual basis. However, this data is not conclusive when comparing and contrasting all three participants.

### **Implications for Teachers**

Based on data collection and analysis, implications can be made for teachers. It is imperative that teachers work diligently to build a strong home connection as early and as frequently as possible. Parents are a child's first teacher. By creating a strong connection between parents and teachers, the child is more likely to understand the importance of literacy in all aspects of his or her life. Teachers must continue to reach out to parents in various ways: phone calls, emails, notes, and in person. Parents often encounter many barriers in being involved in their child's literacy and school life. It is important for teachers to work diligently to understand these barriers and be flexible in meeting different needs, expectations and time tables that parents have. Lastly, teachers must fully embrace the importance of family involvement and foster this as much as possible. This connection may impact the student a great deal.

## **Implications for Parents**

Throughout the course of this study, it quickly became apparent that parents play a large role in a child's literacy learning, even in the upper elementary grades. Parents should understand the importance of parent involvement and participate in school related events as frequently as possible. Schools often have multiple ways of becoming involved, whether it is through Parent Teacher Association, volunteering in the child's classroom, grading spelling tests, or attending special events, each aspect of participation is effective in building a positive home-school relationship. By fostering this relationship, parents can show students that school is an important part of their lives. This will reflect upon the child and instill their understanding of the importance of school as well. In order to continually foster this relationship, parents should involve themselves in school events as early and as frequently as possible.

Another way parents can become involved in their child's school life is to contact the child's teacher as early as possible with any concerns that they may have. This will further foster positive communication. Lastly, parents should positively model good reading strategies and habits at home. Parents may not realize the importance of reading alongside their child: modeling how important reading can be in one's daily life. This will help students understand the importance of literacy through not only childhood but also into adulthood.

## **Limitations and Future Recommendations**

Throughout conducting this research, many limitations were uncovered. One main limitation of this research is the limited amount of time it was conducted under. The six-week time period made it difficult to realistically pinpoint any significant literacy growth. If this study were repeated or continued, a much larger time period would yield more reliable and valid results. I would like to conduct this case study as a longitudinal study, spanning many school

years. This amount of data would allow further data collection regarding each student's growth throughout many years. This would also reduce the impact of particular teaching styles and instructional methods. The longer time period would create more reliable and valid results which could be duplicated and may indicate causality.

Furthermore, the limited experience with parents hindered the understanding of how and to what extent parents were involved in school-related and literacy-related activities with their children. Ideally, if this study were to be repeated or continued, further analysis into the parent-child relationship and their activities could provide more insight. Some ideas for future studies would be to conduct home visits, have weekly conferences via the phone or in person, and diligently keep track of parent contributions to the student's learning over a longer stretch of time. If this study were repeated in another classroom, under different circumstances and/or within a different context, the study would most likely yield different results.

### **Final Thoughts**

In the completion of my study, I would like to reflect back at my initial questions which asked about the impact of parent involvement on literacy achievement and what parts of literacy are affected by parent involvement.

Although my research did not answer my original research question, my study did uncover information regarding parent involvement and the importance of building strong parent-teacher relationships. Parent-teacher relationships are important. These relationships foster a strong understanding of the importance of literacy learning and development for students throughout both childhood and adulthood. Through effective communication and parent-teacher collaboration, parents and teachers can create a united effort in order to best address the needs of students and foster literacy growth and achievement.



## Appendices

### Family Survey

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Because you indicated your desire to participate in the research study regarding parent involvement's effect on a child's literacy achievement, please answer the following eight questions. If you need more space, please continue your answer to the back of this page.

1. On average, how many minutes do you and your child spend reading together each night?
2. How many times this academic school year have you participated in school activities? Please note which school activities you have participated in.
3. How many times this academic school year have you spoken with your child's teacher (either in person, via email, on the telephone or through notes in your child's agenda)?
4. Is your child's academic achievement important to you? Explain.
5. On average, how often do you and your child discuss his/her achievement at school?
6. When you and your child spend time together, what literacy activities do you enjoy doing?
7. How do you support your child's learning at home?
8. On average, how many times a week do you assist your child with vocabulary or word study homework?

## **Teacher Survey**

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many times this academic school year have you spoken with this child's parent (either in person, on the telephone or via e-mail)?

2. How many times per week does this child's parent sign and return his/her agenda and reading log?

3. Have you seen evidence that this child's parents check his/her homework for completeness and accuracy? Explain.

4. How many times this academic school year have you spoken with this child's parents regarding grades the child has received?

5. How many times this academic school year have you seen this student's parents (either at school events, conferences, volunteering in the classroom, etc.)?

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