

1-1-2011

Parents' Impact on Their Young Children's Literacy Achievement

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2012

Abstract

Parents' Impact on Their Young Children's Literacy Achievement

by

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M.A., Walden University, 2004

B.S., University of Cincinnati, 1988

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

Walden University

December 2012

Abstract

Many children enter formal schooling with a propensity toward literacy success while others lack foundational skills that adequately support literacy achievement. Researchers acknowledge if certain skills are not present upon entrance into formal schooling, literacy success can be affected. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine first-grade students' home literacy experiences prior to receiving formal reading instruction in a one suburban public school. Bruner's theory of scaffolding, which suggests that parents and teachers support children in the learning process, and Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development provided the conceptual framework for this study. The research questions focused on literacy events parents used at home with their preschool-age children. Twelve parents of first grade students were interviewed for their perspectives on literacy experiences with their children at home. Data were examined for common themes using a typological analysis to determine types of parent-child interactions that promote children's positive attitudes and academic success in reading. The data revealed that parents, who view themselves as their children's primary teachers and provide literacy instruction to their children prior to entering school, have children who are high achieving readers. A recommendation is that the target school district provides parent education programs to equip parents of preschool-age children with skills that promote success in literacy. Positive social change might occur when district teachers partner with parents to create home learning environments to improve children's literacy academic achievement.

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Dedication

I humbly dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Mike, my sons, Chase, Taylor, and Cameron, to my parents, Howard and Trish, and to my aunt, Cindy. They never stopped believing in me and encouraging me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee: Dr. Pamela Warrick and Dr. Nan Adams for allowing me the opportunity to learn I could accomplish so great a task. I would also like to thank Dr. Mary Howe for her help and encouragement throughout the final phase of this journey.

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Section 1: Introduction to Study

Introduction

Three areas researchers have determined as potential stumbling blocks to children's reading success include a lack of knowledge of the alphabetic principle, a lack of transference of comprehension of spoken words to written words, and a lack of motivation to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Conversely, when students enter schools with these foundational literacy skills, reading difficulties are greatly reduced (Snow et al., 1998). The alphabetic principle is the correlation of the written word to the spoken word (Snow et al., 1998); comprehension is the understanding of the written word, which is the fundamental aim of reading (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2007); and motivation toward reading occurs when reading is connected to positive social interactions (Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007). When children begin formal schooling armed with these skills, they are less likely to struggle with reading. Research evidence suggested that the literacy instruction parents provide their children impacts their reading skills (National Reading Acquisition Panel, 2007). Preschool-aged children with strong oral language and emergent literacy skills demonstrate consistent advantages in language and academic performance as they progress through their formal schooling (Debaryshe & Gorecki, 2007; Snow et al., 1998). Though researchers and policy makers in the United States tend to focus on classroom interventions to improve students' literacy success, recent research has shown that the home environment is the more reliable predictor of children's language development and that high-quality preschool paired with effective family supports is the most effective way to promote academic success (Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Ereky-Stevens, & Crook, 2008).

In this study, I examined family-provided literacy supports that may impact students' literacy achievement. Specifically, I examined the activities that both male and female students had engaged in with their parents before they entered formal schooling. AIMSweb (<http://www.aimsweb.com>) is a nationally normed web based assessment and data management reporting system. The student group included those whose AIMSweb benchmark results indicated that they entered school performing at a Tier 1 level: no remedial instruction needed. I compared this information to information from students who scored within the median range and Tier 3 students for whom remedial instruction was required. Research evidence suggests that the skill sets with which young children begin kindergarten can impact their success as they continue in their education pursuits (Missall et al., 2007) and that the primary teachers before formal schooling begins are typically children's parents. The activities in which parents engage with their children play an important role in their children's literacy achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Students are reading less, and they are reading less well (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Currently, school districts strive to improve staff development, they utilize research-based instructional materials and teaching methodologies, and they monitor progress to be sure what they are doing yields the desired results. However, many students from the Midwest fail to achieve at the appropriate levels. This problem impacts individual communities and the United States as a whole because societal success leans largely upon the ability of people to read with comprehension and adequately convey meaning through the written word. There are many possible factors contributing to this problem, among which are home environments that do little to

provide the foundation of literacy promotion such as appropriate reading materials and engaging conversations, a lack of interest in or negative attitude toward reading, and the failure of schools to equip and encourage parents before their children enter school doors as kindergarteners. If students are lacking foundational literacy skills at the beginning of their first formal year in the school system, intensive and expensive interventions are often required in order to bring their skills to the appropriate level. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by gleaning information from successful first grade children as well as students who are receiving remedial interventions and the parents of both groups regarding literacy activities they had engaged in with their children. I explored the impact of those activities on the first grade students' literacy success in the classroom.

In *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*, Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) indicated that the more elements of good parenting, good teaching, and good schooling that children encounter increases their chances of reaching their potentials as readers (p. 117). In a nation with a sliding measure of *good* when it comes to parenting, teaching, and schooling, it must be made clear what it takes to grow a nation of readers.

Background of the Problem

In the fall of 2006, I assessed the reading levels of 176 fifth and sixth grade students. One of the questions that students were asked in this assessment was: "Who reads with you?" Those who indicated that a parent read with them not only enjoyed reading but also excelled in reading. Indeed, not one of those students needed reading intervention services. The information gleaned from these interviews indicated that

activities students engaged in with their parents may have promoted children's reading success. The question then arose regarding what educators can do to encourage parents to engage in literacy activities with their children, even before they enter kindergarten.

Many parent training programs, promoted by educators, have been shown to positively impact children's literacy success (Morrow, 2006; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Saracho, 2008; Sylva, Scott, Totsika, & Ereky-Stevens, 2008). Inspiring parents to promote their children's literacy development and equipping parents with plentiful, effective literacy activities may be positively influenced by school leaders. There have been many programs aimed toward equipping and inspiring parents to take a teaching role in their children's literacy development. One such program was the Family Fluency Program (Morrow, Kuhn, & Schwanenflugel, 2006). This program involved the provision of reading materials and three workshops designed to (a) heighten parents' awareness about the importance of fluency skills, (b) describe the program, and (c) discuss activities parents could engage in with their children. At the conclusion of the program, 45.5% of the parents in the treatment group read to or with their children five times a week as compared to the 9.4% of parents who did so in the control group (Morrow et al, 2006).

Another study was designed to assist fathers of 5-year-old children in the promotion of their literacy development (Saracho, 2008). The fathers volunteered to participate in an intervention program which included a 3-hour literacy workshop twice a week for 5 months. The fathers were encouraged to interject their personal styles and interests in the literacy activities they chose to engage with their children. The researchers found that fathers can greatly contribute to their children's literacy development and that the bond that resulted from engaging in the activities made the activities mutually

beneficial. Further, another researcher stated that children learn through observation and active participation, along with “spontaneous play, heartfelt laughter, stimulating talk, intense interest, and genuine enthusiasm” (Jalongo, 2002, p. 31). These kinds of learning opportunities are often found within the home, specifically when the child interacts with a parent.

If students do not learn how to read well, the implications are dire. Increasing attention has been devoted to the development of children’s literacy skills because of the poor reading achievement scores demonstrated by children across the United States. In 2001, 37% to 40% of fourth graders were found to be reading below grade level (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In addition, a 2003 report found that up to 38% of fourth graders could not read well enough to comprehend simple children’s books. Reading difficulties have been identified as one of the most common and unremitting of childhood disorders (Hindson et al., 2005). According to Hindson et al. (2005), up to 40% of all children, even children who present no indication of health or learning problems, experience difficulties in learning how to read.

It is important that children are prepared for success in school. Schools today, with ever increasing academic expectations, strive to adequately prepare students for the work force, also with ever increasing demands. When students are ill-equipped to meet societal demands, gaps between social classes increase. Therefore, parents must become serious about positively impacting their children’s literacy lives, and educators must inspire and equip them to do so. Most academic skills lean on a strong foundation of reading skills.

Reading acquisition is a complex, multidimensional process (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009). It involves more than decoding words using grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Readers, to be effective, must also recognize words rapidly and accurately with the end goal being intact comprehension (Ouellette, 2006). Reading also involves oral language skills which require knowledge of words, both expressive and receptive vocabulary, knowledge of grammar, and conceptual knowledge.

Unlike language acquisition, learning to read largely depends on afforded opportunities and instruction (Kaplan & Walpole, 2005). Learning to read is a lengthy process that begins early in life, according to Snow et al. (1998), and the whole process depends on positive motivation and the literacy-based experiences that occur throughout the lifetime of the child. Whether or not children are at risk for reading difficulties is inextricably linked to instructional opportunities afforded to them (VanDerHeyden, Snyder, Broussard, & Ramsdell, 2008). It is, then, less about the children's abilities and more about the guidance they have received.

Good instruction offered during formal schooling settings can transcend children's vulnerability for failure when it comes to literacy success, but it can be costly (Conner, Slominski, & Slominski, 2006). Children are often serviced through the school systems when they fail to read at basic levels by fourth grade. Children who are likely to struggle with reading during the early years of formal schooling are those who enter with inadequate literacy knowledge (Snow et al., 1998). One study for Chicago Child-Parent Centers showed, "For every dollar spent on preschool intervention, society realized a \$7.14 return in saved educational and societal costs from reduced grade referral to special education, reduced grade retention, and reduced juvenile delinquency" (Conner,

Slominski, & Slominski, 2006, p. 666). Parent-provided preschool interventions may be an economically advantageous way to avoid financial expenditures to our society by preventing learning difficulties before they occur.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 inspired improved accountability of schools regarding equitable achievement and outcomes for all students, even those students who may be from families who are considered at risk. Chatterji (2006) identified four indicators that a family may be at risk: low maternal education, welfare dependent or poverty status, having one parent, and having parents whose native language is not English. But the problem of lower reading skills is not only a concern for at risk families. Adams (1990) estimated that one in three children will experience difficulty when it comes to learning to read.

Currently, U.S. schools must improve early literacy development. Rashid, Morris, and Sevcik (2005) found that children who are exposed frequently to books at an early age become aware of words, sounds, and the meanings conveyed in those words and sounds. This knowledge is the foundation upon which readers are grown. Although most families are aware of the importance of strong reading skills, few families encourage even basic activities such as storybook reading or sharing bedtime stories (Robinson, Larsen, & Haupt, 1995).

All reading activities are not equally educative, and some parents may be unclear about how to best promote their children's literacy skills. Parents' personal beliefs (White, 2000) about literacy attainment, with reliance on their own literacy experiences, may not be the most desired guides in promoting reading, as those experiences may not have been adequately effective. When parents make decisions about literacy activities,

they engage with their children based on beliefs that are not examined with a look to current research; even parents with noteworthy intentions may fail to support well the literacy development of their children.

This study was important for educators and families who have a desire to recognize the role of parents in the promotion of their children's literacy education. The study identified particular literacy activities that parents engaged in with their children that appear to promote children's positive attitudes and academic success in the area of literacy attainment. With this information, educators and policy makers will be armed with information that may prevent reading difficulties in young children.

Conceptual Framework

This study relied on the theories of Bruner (1990) who indicated that children learn new concepts based on what they have come to know through life experiences, and that caregivers support their children by creating and sustaining home environments conducive to learning. The caregivers, who know the approximate levels of understanding of their children, translate new information and support the children as needed in order for the learning of new concepts. Bruner also stated that people learn language by its use, and children's principle linguistic interests center on human interaction. This theory is foundational when considering the important role parents play in the literacy acquisition of their children. There are numerous studies indicating the relationship between parent-child language activities and literacy achievement in the formal schooling setting (Baker, Scher, & Mackler 1997; Bingham, 2007; Haney & Hill, 2004; Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006; Spiegel, 1992; Weigel, Martin, &

Bennett, 2006). This study is based on the research that indicates parents contribute to the literacy success of their children.

Along with Bruner, Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) considers the support offered by parents who know their children's approximate skill levels and scaffold accordingly to promote children's success and positive attitudes around those skills. When parents are cognizant of what supports they need to provide their emerging readers in order for their children to be successful, the parents are operating within the child's ZPD. This type of support is important in building the foundation for literacy skills (Vygotsky, 1978).

This case study, with a constructivist approach, recognizes absolute reality as unknowable. Individuals' perspectives are constructions of their own realities; therefore, multiple realities exist because people experience the world from their own vantage points (Hatch, 2002).

Nature of the Study

This case study employing descriptive statistics took place in a suburb of Ohio. According to STDBonline, nearly 40% of the residents have a bachelor's degree or above, and the median household income is just under \$88,000 (<http://www.stdb.com>). The majority of the population is Euro-American. Other significantly represented ethnicities include African Americans and, recently, immigrants from Mexico. Many families consist of transient professionals who are employed by one of two large businesses. The local school district is among the largest school districts in Ohio, with a student population of over 18,000. The school has been rated an *excellent* district many

years running and has a 90% college attendance rate, and yet the school struggles to evidence adequate yearly progress with all students in the area of reading.

Early Childhood School, a school serving preschool through first grade in 2008, offered reading intervention services to approximately 25% of the first grade students. In one first grade classroom of 25 students, seven were served by reading intervention specialists, and this number did not include the six students who were English language learners (ELLs) who were reading at or below the level of the students receiving reading intervention. Fifty-two percent of these students did not enter first grade equipped with the basic skills shown to support academic success in the public education classroom. As educators strive to improve the levels of literacy, research indicates that the parents of the students may be an untapped resource as they, unlike professional educators, are available to their children even before they enter formal schooling.

Some children enter the kindergarten classroom equipped with experiences that have positioned them for success. These students have extended vocabularies built from shared storybook reading, real life experiences, and thoughtful conversations with the adults who live in their homes. They have noticed words and letters on pages and have begun understanding the code of reading and writing. They have sung songs, played rhyming games, and read favorite books over and over again so that the beloved texts are nearly memorized, page by page. They understand that writing is used to convey messages for a variety of purposes and that command of this skill will enrich their lives. All of these activities are likely to have been carried out with a loving, encouraging parent. The affective quality of these types of parent-child interactions coincide with children's motivations and attitudes toward reading (Bingham, 2007). Enjoyable literacy

experiences that focus on entertainment and pleasure positively influence children's attitudes toward reading, and children's positive attitudes toward reading impact the desire of parents to engage in literacy activities with their children (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). It is a circle of gratification and a step toward a love for literacy.

Some children, however, enter kindergarten classrooms with limited life experiences, limited experiences with books, and limited vocabularies. Children from disadvantaged environments may have no knowledge of how books work because they have never seen one (Forrest, 2004). Though the parents may value education, their approach is entrenched in the idea that reading is something one must work at in order to be successful in life. It is likely that these parents do not often read for pleasure themselves. If anything, they serve a limited diet of phonics based books to their children, along with workbooks and flashcards that will do little to inspire their children to read or write on their own. The children may spend time writing the letters of the alphabet or lists of words, tasks parents remember doing in school; and though the parents may not have enjoyed their educational experience, they believe what they experienced was the way it should be done (Lambert et al., 2002). Baker et al. (1997) stated, "Formal instruction from parents may be counterproductive if it makes learning to read seem like work rather than play," (p. 79) and these types of activities often seem more like work and may reduce learning engagement (Bierman et al., 2008). Students in this environment are not inclined to engage in reading activities on their own, and studies have shown that time spent reading correlates to reading success (Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007).

Perhaps state-mandated preschool or even optional public preschools funded by the state, where professional educators are called upon to save students with their know-

how in classroom situations, are not the answer. After all, approximately two-thirds of 4-year olds in the United States currently participate in early education programs, and the quality of the language and literacy instruction in these programs tends to be low (Justice et al., 2007). Perhaps education leaders should consider investing in family literacy programs that train parents so that they might begin to take ownership in their children's literacy lives and offer their children literacy support that has been shown to foster academic success. Parents continually model literacy skills, and they demonstrate their attitudes about reading, writing, speaking, and listening before their young children every day, whether that is their intention or not and whether it is beneficial or not. It is the aim of this study to impact social change by revealing what parents are doing that may promote literacy competencies in their children.

Parents must be a primary resource in whom teachers invest. Bloom (1981) stated, "It has been found that programs which help parents to provide support and encouragement for their children in addition to the early childhood education in the schools have been especially effective" (p. 90). This point has long been known, and yet schools invest so little in the parents, children's first teachers (Bingham, 2007). Little has been done to remedy the situation, and the literacy education of many children continues to be imperiled.

Researchers have made clear the steps that need to be taken in the area of literacy education. They have illustrated, with extant data, how to improve student performance effectively by improving the home environment and the interactions between parents and their children, and yet salient questions about implementation remain. Not enough is being done to improve student performance through the equipping of parents of preschool

children, thereby ensuring that fewer students struggle in the area of reading when they enter formal schooling. Few steps are being taken by educators and policy makers in response to the plentiful available research.

When observing trends in students' learning, researchers consider the time children spend in the classroom as well as the time they spend at home. A study by McCoach et al. (2006) stated that "differences among schools may be largely a function of the differences among their students prior to school entry and that the widening of the achievement gap may result from differential growth rates during non-instructional periods" (p. 24) such as summer recesses. They stated that family literacy programs for low-socio-economic status (SES) children are essential and that the widening of the literacy gap during noninstructional periods may be because of differences in family literacy practices. They went on to state, "If educators hope to close the reading achievement gap, they should consider concentrating their efforts on non-instructional periods" (p. 26).

Educators must consider whether parents who have low income and low education are capable of equipping their children for success. Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, and Weiss (2006) stated that "family involvement in school among low-income families may be most likely to improve the achievement of children who are at exceptional risk for academic failure because of both low income and low parent education" (p. 661). This study supports the idea that family educational involvement may help to improve students' academic achievement regardless of income and education levels of parents. Dearing et al. (2006) also noted, "Although there was an achievement gap in average literacy performance between children of more and less educated mothers

if family involvement levels were low, this gap was nonexistent if family involvement levels were high” (p. 661). High levels of family involvement during the elementary years also appear to promote high school graduation. This information is encouraging as educators strive to elevate students’ levels of achievement.

This case study employing descriptive statistics sought to explain parents’ impact on their students’ literacy achievements as indicated on the nationally normed AIMSweb assessments, as well as literacy artifacts in students’ cumulative literacy files. With permission from the school, I compared data from both male and female first grade students of varied performance levels (high, median, and low). I also interviewed the students’ parents to provide insight regarding particular activities they did or did not engage in prior to their children’s entrance into kindergarten. This portion of the study provides information as to what parents of high achieving students did that may have promoted their children’s success.

I used qualitative analysis to determine if high achieving students had parents who provided literacy supports as discussed in current research (such as storybook reading and the provision of literacy artifacts) in their children’s preschool years and if children of lower performance did not receive such supports. I present this data to the community as well as educational policy-makers to convey the importance of equipping and inspiring the parents of preschoolers to take the lead in their children’s literacy lives. More information regarding the study may be found in Section 3.

Research Questions

In order to address the focus of this study, I developed the following research questions:

1. What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?
2. What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?
3. How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy?

Purpose of the Study

The education community has long known the influence parents have on their children in the area of reading and literacy. Eighteen years ago, at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Spiegel (1992) stated that "Reviews of research, studies of early readers, and investigations of emergent literacy uniformly conclude that parents' beliefs, aspirations, and actions affect their children's growth into and embracing of literacy" (p. 2). Numerous educators and researchers have made countless directives, giving clear direction as to how parents can contribute to their children's reading success, and yet it remains unclear what educators are doing about the issue. Many parents are not getting the message in such a way that inspires action. If most parents value education and want to do what is beneficial for their children, perhaps they are taking an ineffective approach. In the book *Doing What Matters*, Kilts (2007) asserted that members of an organization must be provided an understanding of what has to be done, and they must have the belief and conviction that they have all the tools necessary to be successful. Perhaps this is true when it comes to educators inspiring and equipping parents to elevate their children's literacy achievement.

Parents may not fully understand how to help their children, and they may go about it in a negative way that is nonproductive. Baker, Scher, and Mackler (1997) wrote, “When the socio-emotional climate is positive, children are more interested in reading and more likely to view it as enjoyable” (p. 69). The benefit of enjoyment is a logical path toward excellence. If students enjoy reading, it is plausible that they will read more often. If they read more often, their reading skills will likely improve as a result of the increased practice (Baker et al., 1997). However, the National Reading Panel (2006) stated, “The ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergartners who received systematic beginning phonics instruction,” (p.2) and there may be a tendency to move away from the joyful coming together of parent and child around a good story. Parents may be trying to get their children “hooked on phonics” at the expense of snuggling up for the reading of a beloved book. Educators are failing to effectively convey the idea that “the instructional and affective quality of joint book reading are associated with children’s development of early literacy skills” (Bingham, 2007, p. 24).

However, there is more to literacy acquisition than just the reading of the story. There is a difference between a parent who engages a child in a story and one who is just reading the words. The conversations about the story, the observation of the pictures, the inflection of the voice, the noticing of the letters and the sounds they make, the fonts and words, the predictions about what may appear on the next pages, and so many more things encourage splendid literacy moments. Speaking for professional teachers of reading, Schone (1983) wrote, “We go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often, we cannot say what it is that we know... Our knowing is ordinarily tacit (p. 49).

As a result, parents are generally left to their own, often limited, ideas about promoting literacy with their children. Often the children are not performing to their full potential in the area of literacy.

Schools often send newsletters home to the students' families, providing suggested activities and making known curricular topics along with important dates; however, these messages have not evidenced impact upon families who are not already reading together. As educators acknowledge the potential resource in the parents, those who may have the greatest impact on their children's literacy success, I focused on discovering what parent-promoted literacy events Early Childhood School parents have utilized that have positively impacted their children's literacy achievement. Conner, Slominski, and Slominski (2006) noted that the success of teaching strategies within the classroom may depend on the reading skills with which the children entered the classroom. Even students within the same school district have widely varied preschool literacy experiences (Conner et al., 2006), and it is little wonder that educators find it increasingly difficult to meet students' literacy needs. One-size-fits-all curriculums, designed to help all students including poorly faring students, especially fall short, and the achievement gap continues to grow.

Definition of Terms

Alphabetic principle: The alphabetic principle is the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words (Snow et al., 1998).

Comprehension: Reading comprehension is a complex, active cognitive process where there is intentional and thoughtful interaction between the text and the reader.

Vocabulary development plays an important role in comprehension (National Institute of

Child Health & Human Development, 2007). The purpose of reading is comprehension or understanding.

Dialogic reading: Dialogic reading is an interaction between the reader and the individuals being read to around the book being read. It is reading *with* children rather than *to* them. Readers and children engage in conversation about the content and context of the story in such a way that connects reading with positive social interactions (Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2007).

Emergent literacy: The emergent literacy perspective is one that considers everything that comes before conventional reading as an important developmental contribution to the act of learning to read (Teal & Salzby, 1986).

Matthew Effect: The Matthew Effect, the rich-get-richer phenomenon, is often observed in children who have a firm grasp of the correlation between the letters and sounds in words as they connect to reading. These children begin to recognize more words, reading them becomes more automatic, and comprehension increases. Because these experiences are often rewarding, the child enjoys engaging in such activities over and over again. The more the child engages in literacy activities, the more the child's skills improve and enjoyment of such activities increases (Adams, 1990; NAEYC, 1998).

Phonemes: The smallest units of spoken language are phonemes. Phonemes do not refer to letters and how they correspond with their associated sounds (phonics), but instead the sounds themselves. When children are taught to manipulate sounds in speech, they are often more successful in school than children who have not engaged in such activities. This skill is often referred to as phonemic awareness (NRP, 2007).

Phonics: Phonics is grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Phonemes are the sounds in words and graphemes are the letters associated with those sounds (Foulin, 2005).

Shared book reading: Shared book reading is engaging the children in the reading of text rather than simply reading the words to them. It involves interaction with the children. For example, the children answer questions posed during the reading of stories, using their own words (Bernhard et al., 2008).

Scope and Delimitations

This research study took place in an early childhood school in Ohio. I examined parents' influence on their children's literacy success. I chose this study because intensive and expensive interventions are often necessary for students who are identified as behind so that they might achieve at the same levels as students who show competency in literacy. In order to alleviate the gap between students who are achieving and those who are not, I examined the practices of parents of high achieving students and parents whose children require intervention services from their school. I compared the practices of these parents to current, relevant research on the topic. The study consisted of collecting AIMSweb data, artifacts, archival data, and interviews with students' parents.

Assumptions

In this research study, I assumed the important role parents play in the building of their children's literacy foundations. Research has long demonstrated parental impact on academic success and has more recently demonstrated that positive literacy events promoted within the home can even offset known deterrents to literacy success such as

socioeconomic status. I assumed that home activities, before formal schooling begins, impact students' literacy skills.

I assumed that the volunteer participants provided data that reflect honest, representative responses. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to different populations.

Limitations

This research study was one investigation of the impact of parents upon their children's literacy skills upon entry into formal schooling. The study took place in a single early childhood school where I serve as a first grade teacher. I employed a purposeful sampling strategy of a homogeneous group. Findings may not be applicable to the myriad settings in which children may be educated. All findings are my interpretations and were influenced by my background experiences as a classroom teacher and a reading intervention specialist. The inability to control for children's cognitive abilities, the external variables that are not within my control, and the inability to determine that the findings are a direct result of the hypothesized cause are all limitations of this study.

Significance of the Study

This study provides information regarding parents' influences on their children's literacy skills upon entry into the first grade classroom. It makes known particular literacy activities and the frequency of the occurrence of those activities that have taken place in students' homes that may have positively influenced high achieving students' skills in the first grade. This study thereby reveals what may be missing in homes where

students' skills fall below grade level expectations. I compared the results of the local study to the literature findings on a national level in order to determine consistency.

Implications for Social Change

Early intervention, before formal schooling begins, is most effective (Snow, 1998) when it comes to literacy instruction. It is possible for entering kindergarten students who are identified as behind to achieve as typically developing students, though effective interventions are often intensive and expensive. In order to alleviate the need for interventions altogether, the promotion of literacy engagements between parent and child before commencement of formal schooling may be instrumental in impacting students' literacy success.

The aim of this study was to influence change in the community wherein the study took place. When education policy makers invest in the enthusing and equipping of parents to engage in frequent, affective literacy events with their children, positive impact on students' success in the area of literacy may be achieved. Armed with data from this study, local educators may begin to encourage parents of the local preschool children to engage in specific kinds of literacy events, with particular frequency, in order to promote their children's literacy success upon entry into the formal classroom setting.

Summary

In this section, I made a case for the investigation of a group of students and their parents regarding the influence of the parents' promotion of literacy before their children entered formal, full day schooling. This section provided an introduction to this case study, and the statement of the problem regarding low literacy achievement in the U.S. I provided the background of the problem, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the

study which addressed the varied background experiences of children entering formal schooling. The research questions were provided, along with the purpose of the study, and the definition of literacy terms. The scope and delimitations, the assumptions, and the limitations were provided along with the significance of the study. Implications for social change, which include enthusing and equipping of parents to engage in frequent, affective literacy events with their children, were also addressed.

This study provided detailed information that may encourage the schools in close proximity to the research site to consider an, as of yet, untapped resource: the parents of the students served in education classrooms. In the next section, I review relevant, scholarly literature regarding literacy attainment and how parents of young children may influence their young children's achievement. In Section 3, I describe the methodology of the study in more detail. In Section 4, I address the findings of the study that reveal parent promoted literacy events positively impacted their children's literacy achievement. Section 5, I will include the interpretations of the study findings, including possible implications. I will also discuss possible topics for further investigation and the impact for social change which involves parents assuming the role as their children's first teachers.

Section 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I will discuss the role of parents and the impact they have on their children's literacy lives as well as particular literacy activities that may positively impact student success. This review of the current literature as well as longstanding, seminal literature provided the foundation for this qualitative research study. My aim as the researcher was to demonstrate the long, virtually uncontested data that have been accepted and yet not adequately acted upon by educators or policy makers in Ohio or national educational policies.

This review has been organized around three topics of influence regarding children's literacy attainment. First, Spiegel's (1992) study that identified 11 categories of parental influence on student's literacy success served as an organizational guide. Each topic will be explored providing relevant information gleaned from current and seminal books, journal articles, and research studies that fit within each category. Next, I explore the importance of early intervention, when it comes to literacy attainment. Finally, I define and examine five literacy skills associated with academic success.

I selected literature for this review when it addressed parental contributions to their children's literacy success, the focus of this study. I searched the key words and phrases within the Education Resource Information Center and the Academic Premier databases. The key words I used included: *parents, literacy, children, family, and reading*. I also used peer recommendations, university provided materials, and collegiate libraries for additional resources.

In this study, I sought to evidence that parents must be an integral part of their children's literacy lives to ensure that children have experiences that support academic

success. Educators may be cognizant of their own importance in the role of growing readers, writers, speakers, and listeners; however, it seems that policy makers, parents, and educators do not fully recognize the role parents play in children's acquisition of skills and attitudes toward literacy. Bingham (2007) noted, "As children's first teachers, parents play an important role in building children's early literacy skills before they enter formal schooling" (p. 24). Further, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) recommended that, in the pursuit of promoting school success, educators should strive to understand and encourage reading and writing skills in young children who have not yet entered formal schooling.

For more than a quarter of a century, researchers have known the important role parents play in a student's academic achievement. In 1981, Bloom stated, "It is the adults in the home who serve to stimulate the child's intellectual development, and it is the adults in the home who determine the basic preparation of the child for later learning in the school" (p. 77). In 1990, Adams stated, "We are left with the conclusion that the likelihood that a child will succeed in the first grade depends, most of all, on how much she or he has already learned before getting there" (p. 8). According to researchers, students' reading success largely depends on the literacy experiences provided by their own families. Children's background experiences, even those not directly related to literacy, impact students' literacy skills such as comprehension. With life experiences, children are equipped to better understand the text they read (Arya, Wilson, & Martens, 2009).

Equipping Parents to Promote Literacy

In 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a research report entitled *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence*. This report collected and organized data in order to discern the status of Americans and their facility in the area of reading. In short, the report revealed that Americans are reading less often, and as a result they are reading with less skill. The implications of lower achievement in reading, according to the NEA (2007), are far reaching. Poor reading skills carry negative social, economic, and civic implications for individuals. In turn, a nation of such individuals suffers similar consequences (NEA, 2007).

Educators must begin addressing community needs that are not yet being met by state or national public systems, offering alternative early intervention opportunities for preschool children by equipping parents to support their children as they learn to read. Glasser (1998) stated, “Everything that exists in the world that is the result of human effort was created by someone who was frustrated with status quo” (p. 90). If frustration is the key, teachers in this study’s school are ready to bring something new into the world of education. In order to effect change in this suburban area, educators must make clear the impact parent and home-promoted literacy events have upon their preschool children’s performance in the area of literacy. When educators know specific, effective literacy activities parents can use with their children, as well as how often those activities should occur within the home, teachers will become more helpful in educating parents about ways they may positively impact their children’s literacy success.

Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret (2007) investigated why one particular elementary school was so successful in producing high reading and writing achievement

in their students. Several of the teachers stated that the majority of their students entered their school with “good experiences during the preschool years that prepared them well for formal schooling” (p. 226). They noted that because so few students were ill-prepared, the school resources allotted for remediation for students who required services were readily available. The teachers indicated that extensive book reading and verbal interaction were common in the homes of the majority of their students, and yet many schools serve children with far different circumstances.

Influences on Students’ Literacy Performance

Researchers, such as those from the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2006), continue to provide plentiful information regarding the role parents play in their children’s reading lives, citing specific parental contributions that positively impact children and their propensity toward learning to read. In fact, these researchers have identified many factors that have proven to positively impact students’ attitudes and competencies with literacy skills. When educators successfully impart to parents that the time invested in encouraging a love for reading pays off in academic success as well as emotional well-being for parents and children, schools will have far fewer remedial readers.

Curenton and Justice (2008) indicated that perceived maternal beliefs significantly correlated to their children’s preliteracy skills. Spiegel (1992) stated that parents’ beliefs, even beyond the time children spend reading books, predicts children’s success. When parents’ beliefs are based on what research shows to be true, children’s literacy success may be beneficially impacted. Spiegel (1992) noted:

Research indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to

succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together; (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, And effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher; (6) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life; (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; (10) serve as role models as readers themselves; (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. (p. 1)

When parents of young children adopt these beliefs and engage in these identified activities of successful readers, even before formal schooling, the literacy achievement of their children may be improved.

Educators need to share the vision of families supporting their children's literacy growth and support families as they come to adopt the beliefs and actions that will positively impact their children's success in the classroom. Schools need to work with parents to help them understand their role as parents of emergent readers and to vividly demonstrate the benefits of their efforts. Structured experiences encouraging parents and children to learn principles of literacy alongside one another, within a nurturing and supportive environment, have been shown to benefit both parents and their children (Cook-Cottone, 2004). When educators share the magic of participating in a child's growth in the areas of reading and writing with the parents in their communities, perhaps

the parents will grow to love their role as teacher in their own homes. Children's reading experiences with their parents, indeed, provide the foundation upon which teachers build (The United Kingdom Literacy Association, 2006). The aim must be to equip parents to build stronger foundations with their children.

Parents' High Aspirations for Their Children

Most parents want their children to be successful in life. Parents who demonstrate their aspirations through the provision of a home environment that promotes language and literacy development, however, yield strong results. Specifically, according to Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005), "parents who are responsive, sensitive, and accepting of a child's behavior, and who provide structure, organization, and a positive general emotional climate at home, along with stimulating toys and interactions facilitate children's language and early literacy development" (p. 347). In this study, the overall responsiveness of the parents and the home environment they provided, likely imparted as a result of the aspirations they hold for their children, contributed greatly to children's early language and literacy development.

High Expectations

Howes et al. (2008) stated that experiences within early childhood classrooms should be intentional in their approach to supporting children's achievement. It is not enough for educators and parents to have high aspirations for children, but those aspirations must be met with intentional efforts to act on them. Chorzempa and Graham (2006) identified particular adult-directed activities such as frequently initiating explicit teaching interactions; providing scaffolding and feedback as needed; and enjoying positive relationships with warm, responsive interactions as those that are associated with

stronger academic outcomes. These types of activities are often associated with high expectations.

Parents' approaches to literacy promotion and their perceived beliefs as demonstrated by the importance they place upon it impact their children's levels of literacy achievement (Weigel et al., 2006). Parents' high expectations for their children regarding academic and reading success are essential. Parents must maintain a sensitivity regarding their children's competencies and their interests (Aram, 2006). The high expectations with no consideration of students' present skill sets and interests will not positively influence their reading proficiency and may have the opposite effect. In addition, high aspirations with low expectations do not yield positive results. Finally, the children whose parents value the act of reading but not the process through which their children come to be readers may not fare as well in school (Lynch et al., 2006).

Reading for Enjoyment

Though parents may feel they do not know how to teach their children to read and that they must follow a program or a workbook in order to best serve their children's needs, research indicates that engaging literacy instruction within the context of real reading and real writing, while keeping in mind the developmental skill sets of the child, are much more effective in meeting children's academic needs (Craig, 2006; Knopf & Brown, 2009). Baker, Scher, and Mackler (1997) noted, "When the socioemotional climate is positive, children are more interested in reading and more likely to view it as enjoyable" (p. 69). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 1998) stated, "Young children especially need to be engaged in experiences that make academic content meaningful" (p. 20), and the National Research Council

(NRC; 1998) later stated that motivation is crucial. Income-related differences tend to influence the entertainment domain when it comes to reading. According to Baker et al. (1997), middle-income families tend to view literacy as a source of entertainment to a greater degree than low-income families.

Lynch et al. (2006) stated, “Knowing parents’ beliefs about literacy may be an important key to understanding the variety of activities in which parents engage with their young children” (p. 1). If parents employ an attitude conveying that reading is an enjoyable activity through which they may connect with their children, the effect is much different from that of parents who convey that reading is a drudgery one must endure to promote their child’s success. Baker et al. (1997) similarly wrote, “Formal instruction from parents may be counterproductive if it makes learning to read seem like work rather than play” (p. 79).

In 1938, Dewey stated,

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be equated to each other. For some experiences are miseducative. Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. (p. 25)

Each child enters Ohio schools at approximately 5 years of age; however, those 5 years may represent vastly varied experiences that will impact students’ success in formal education classrooms.

Many children come to enjoy favorite books. The repeated readings of those favorite stories have been shown to be beneficial, even in the improvement of students’

vocabulary. Though many children dislike interruptions during the initial story book reading, reading stories with word explanations on the second or third reading has been shown to be quite beneficial (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

Investment of Time, Money, and Effort

When parents invest their resources in their children, literacy skills are improved. Weak literacy skills and failure to read proficiently are most common among nonwhite children, children from low-income homes, and children with limited proficiency in English (Snow et al., 1998). Gettinger and Stoiber (2007) went on to state that children in these circumstances are often raised in homes that fail to provide sufficient materials or print related experiences that promote the acquisition of literacy skills. In their study that considered high-quality literacy-rich environments, they noted that “children’s literacy skills and behaviors are strongly influenced by features of the environment, including the arrangement of learning centers, availability of materials for reading and writing, and displays of print around the room” (p. 205). Though this study was directed toward the classroom environment, children certainly benefit from such environments within their homes. Furthermore, these materials do not have to be expensive. In one study, flyers from grocery stores, pads of paper produced as advertisements, and pencils were considered literacy promoting artifacts if they were easily accessible to the children (Spiegel, 1992).

Gettinger and Stoiber (2007) emphasized that instruction must be responsive to children’s developmental needs. The time, money, and effort invested will not be of benefit when not developmentally appropriate for the children. Another contributor to reading acquisition, according to Merlo, Bowman, and Barnett (2007), is nurturance.

According to the study, children who benefit from the investment of time, money, and effort benefit more if the items are offered with parental nurturance.

Ownership of Responsibility

Pullman (2005) noted, “True education flowers at the point when delight falls in love with responsibility. If you love something, you want to look after it” (p. 4). Those words may be directed to parents.

Nearly two-thirds of the 4-year-olds in the United States participate in some type of early education program where the overall quality of instruction has been shown to be low. It should not be surprising, then, that schools in the United States continue to have a great number of students who struggle in the area of reading (Justice et al., 2007). Parents must own the responsibility of investing in their children’s literacy lives because what is currently being done to meet their children’s literacy needs is not enough. Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, and Pianta (2009) wrote, “Children who enter kindergarten with relatively under-developed language and literacy skills are more likely than their higher achieving peers to exhibit difficulties in both immediate and long-term reading development (p. 52). Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to singlehandedly meet the diverse needs represented in their classrooms.

Because parents may not feel as if they know how to best support their children, teachers must learn to be more effective in communicating their passion for literacy, and they must share the numerous benefits of parents living literacy-filled lives with their children. They must convince parents of their children’s need for them to become an integral part of their literacy education and equip them to do so effectively, along with the encouragement and freedom to learn alongside their children. It is no longer acceptable

for parents to leave the teaching to the teachers. Parents must assume ownership of their role as the primary educators.

Connection with Schools

Hughes and Kwok (2007) conducted a study that indicated that the benefits of greater achievement for early elementary students occurred when the relationships between parents and teachers were supportive. Feiler and Logan (2007) stated it another way: “Putting the child at the centre of activities where schools and parents work together can result in very positive outcomes for children’s literacy learning” (p. 166).

Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) added substance to the importance of parental involvement in their children’s schools when they investigated the sources of motivation for parents’ involvement. The researchers found that “home based involvement was predicted by perceptions of specific child invitations, self-efficacy beliefs, and self-perceived time and energy for involvement” (p. 540). The same came into play regarding school based involvement, but the teacher’s invitation, rather than the child’s, was pertinent. They found that parent involvement is largely a social decision and that schools’ meaningful invitations may, indeed, contribute to parental involvement with their children’s schools (Green et al., 2007).

Reutzell, Fawson, and Smith (2006) moved beyond the idea of parent involvement as being recognized by positive relationships and attending school functions. They stated that strong links between home and school, in and of themselves, are not enough. They made a case for the need to help parents understand the ways their children are learning in school and demonstrated the benefits of parent involvement programs through which parents are trained to support school efforts in providing literacy support with their

children. This area is worthy of further investigation and supports my passion for equipping parents.

Provision of Literacy Artifacts

Parents' influence does not only encompass the time spent reading books together. The home environment they help to create impacts the literacy events that take place in the lives of children as well (Morrow et al., 2006). Culatta et al. (2007) noted in their study that interesting materials draw and hold children's attention. They indicated, for example, that sensory materials, art or cooking projects, and story reenactments with props are effective ways to engage children in literacy promoting activities. Though it may be difficult for teachers with large numbers of students to manage these types of activities in the classroom, children will benefit when parents, who often have more suitable conditions (e.g., working one-on-one) can make these types of engaging interactions a priority.

Many times learners, children and adults alike, who struggle in the area of reading spend the bulk of their time with workbook or software exercises that focus on teaching basic skills. This approach, however, according to Rodrigo et al. (2007), is not productive. People learn to read by reading. What they need is authentic materials to read such as books, magazines, and newspapers that they can read with good accuracy. Rodrigo et al. stated that readers should know 98% of the words in the texts they read and that they should read as much as possible. An abundance of books of the appropriate reading level should be available and should be promoted in appealing ways. One effective way to feature books is to read them aloud in an expressive manner. Even the

displaying of books can make them more appealing to potential readers. Simply having books on hand may not be enough.

Items including books, writing materials, newspapers, magazines, even junk mail can support literacy growth (Spiegel, 1992). Other types of artifacts may include songs, poems, and materials to learn the alphabet, according to Sylva et al. (2008). These materials need to be readily accessible to the children in order for them to contribute to children's literacy success.

Reading with Children

There are particular literacy events that have a positive influence on children's literacy skills when they occur in the home, such as storybook reading (Bingham, 2007). In *The Reading Zone*, Atwell (2007) noted that "the single most predictor of academic success is the amount of time children spend reading books, more important even than economic or social status" (p. 130). Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinial (2005) demonstrated a correlation in the frequency of reading and the children's enjoyment of reading, as well as their language and literacy development. Additionally, Adams (1990) stated that reading aloud to children is the most important activity for building knowledge and skills needed for reading.

When discussing the *multiplier effect*, Colven (2008) suggested that when someone shows notable competency in something, the environment will be improved, and the improved environment further enhances the level of competence. Colven (2008) also noted that minimal deliberate practice will likely improve skill levels and therefore make it possible to do more practice. The increased time spent practicing further increases skill sets. Colven (2008) considered a lingering question about what triggers the

multiplier effect that begins with just some small advantage that catalyzes and begins a cycle of increased motivation and performance. It is possible that there are genetic propensities toward outstanding performance, but it is also plausible that praise or simply beginning practice earlier will generate more praise and practice, and the multiplier effect could begin a cycle of continually improving performance. However, praise used as a controlling reward rather than positive informational feedback does not promote motivation or support students' growth toward autonomy (Johnston, 2012; Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Parents may not feel equipped to teach their children, and though they can learn what teachers do through effective parent workshop opportunities, one study showed that extra explicit instruction with young readers actually showed a drop in reading abilities and that simply providing scaffolding while reading student-selected trade books with children was more effective in raising students' literacy skills (Block, Cleveland, & Reed, 2004). Parents, who know well their children's interests and abilities, are in an optimal position for this type of instruction that simply involves snuggling up and enjoying books together.

Howes et al. (2008) found that academic gains were not a result of the programs investigated in their study, but were in fact a result of the higher quality teacher-child relationships. These researchers stated that the sense of acceptance and security as well as active involvement promoted children's engagement and cooperation in literacy activities. In addition, Chorzemp and Slominski (2006) noted that warmer, more responsive teacher-child interactions often lead to stronger literacy skills, and it seems plausible that this type of interaction would come naturally for supportive parents. The

researchers stated that rich, meaning-focused literacy experiences, such as reading stories in their homes with their parents, contribute to children's language growth.

That is not to say that parents should not strive to teach their children any literacy skills while reading together. In fact, Justice et al. (2009) found that print-referencing while reading was an effective way to bring children's attention to the print. This activity means that the reader (parent) uses "verbal and non-verbal techniques to heighten children's attention to, and interest in, print within a storybook" (p. 68). This technique, the authors suggested, is one that parents might easily adopt.

Parents as Role Models

Children learn through daily experiences with written language and the watching of others using it effectively (Merlow, Bowman, & Barnett, 2007). Research has shown that parents' command of literacy may impact the literacy skills of their children (Snow et al., 1998). Engaging children in literacy activities may actually improve parents' literacy skills and thereby aid in the literacy attainment of their children. Regardless of their skill levels, the more parents engage in literacy activities themselves, both with their children and on their own, the better their children perform in the area of reading (Weigel et al., 2006).

Educators and leaders within communities, whose high aim it is to inspire parents to take action in promoting literacy in the lives of their children, might acknowledge the unique contributions of both the mother and the father. Though mothers tend to afford more nurturance to their children (Merlow et al., 2007), one study showed that fathers tended to participate with a playful, companionable approach (Saracho, 2008). Children benefit from the contribution of both parents and the varied approaches. Because mothers

and fathers contribute differently, parents must be cognizant of what aspects of literacy engagement may be missing in families with only one parent, they should and intervene accordingly. The approach parents take in promoting reading experiences together with their children is of little value if time is not set aside to do so.

Enemoser and Schneider (2007) investigated the effects of television viewing on children and found that watching television caused lower reading achievement in elementary school children. The same study indicated that children who were read to watched less television. Although the authors noted that short viewing times of educational television were beneficial, watching entertainment television was not. Parents who want to support their children's literacy development may need to demonstrate what readers do: They often turn off the television and open up books.

Universities offer reading clinics to school-aged children where the instruction is provided by preservice teachers. These services provide an often overlooked contribution to the communities they serve, according to Sargent, Hill, and Morrison (2006). The parents reported that the clinics provided valuable assistance to parents and the community at large; however, the authors extended that sentiment by stating that if parents observed entire teaching sessions, they could be supported to an even greater extent. This type of family literacy support should be considered as a way to maximize parents' contributions as role models for their children.

The Importance of Early Intervention

The optimal age for phonics instruction is at the age when parents--not schools--are in the primary position for instruction (NAEYC, 1998), and the optimal time for reading intervention is during the preschool years should reading difficulties be observed

(Missal et al., 2007). One study by Gettinger and Stoiber (2007) stated, “Many young children face significant challenges in learning to read because they lack essential early literacy skills when they begin school” (p. 198). In fact, children who are poor readers at the end of elementary school are most often those who fail to develop early literacy skill during preschool and kindergarten.

Haney and Hill (2004) emphasized that children’s literacy skills are under construction long before they enter formal schooling situations. The researchers stated that becoming literate is a process that begins very early in children’s lives, and they investigated particular activities that enhance children’s acquisition of literacy skills. They found that the family, children’s first learning environment, positively influences their children’s reading success, especially when parents directly teach literacy skills such as the identification of letters and letter sounds. Print referencing, calling attention to print with techniques including verbal and nonverbal referencing, may increase young readers’ knowledge and interest when it comes to print (Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009). Also, word writing was found to be a significant contributor to literacy skills, as the process of writing allows children to increase their knowledge about decoding words and other print knowledge (Haney & Hill, 2004). Parent-child interactions that include cognitive stimulation and emotional support, in these and other literacy skills, likely strengthen the impact of educational programs, and attention should be given to influencing parenting (Bierman et al., 2008; Darling, 2008).

Beyond writing, Hay and Fielding-Barnsley (2007) recognized children’s language development as a key predictor in the development of their reading skills. Language delays impair dialogue during book reading and actually seemed to negatively

impact the efforts parents made in identifying words or letters in the books they read. This omission of dialogic reading alone would negatively impact children's success due to the lack of language enrichment and the lack of affective associations associated with shared book reading. It is through the use of language exchanges that children become aware of syntax (language rules) and semantics (word meaning), each contributing to children's literacy achievement.

Specific Literacy Skills Associated with Academic Success

Pinnell (2008), with the Literacy Collaborative, presented a report identifying five areas identified as critical for effective reading instruction. These included phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Following is an explanation of each area as well as ways parents and teachers may support children's growth in each.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemes are the small units of sounds in words. Pinnell (2008) explained, "Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with discrete sounds in spoken words" (p. 1). DeBaryshe and Gorecki (2007) showed that preschoolers' phonemic awareness skills grew at a greater rate when the children's parents completed more home literacy activities and that, in fact, "Children who enter school with high phonemic awareness usually learn to read and write well, regardless of the literacy instruction method to which they are exposed" (p. 95). Yet, in general, Hindson et al. (2005) found that the majority of preschool children have negligible levels of phonemic awareness, even preschoolers who were not considered at risk. Perhaps parents are

unaware of the need to encourage the development of phonemic awareness skills and the ways in which phonemic awareness may be heightened.

Crim et al. (2008) stated that when teachers are knowledgeable about language structure and phonological awareness, they are better equipped to have a positive impact on children's literacy development. While that point is important, the study indicated that teachers' lack of familiarity with the identified terms indicated lack of knowledge about the skill. Neither teachers nor parents must have a firm grasp of all of the technical terms for language nuances in order to support students as they grow.

Activities such as phonemic segmentation, common practice in many early childhood classrooms, may sound complicated to parents and teachers (Crim et al., 2008); however, both parents and teachers can easily and naturally support their children's phonological awareness by having their children engage in basic activities such as recognizing and generating rhyming words in poems and songs, clapping syllables in words, and finding items within their homes using letter-sound clues (Craig, 2006). Beginning with rhyming words and then moving toward smaller units of sound and finally to individual units of sound is recommended. Phonemic and phonological instruction may be strictly oral, or it may include concrete associations with the sounds.

Phonics

Phonics instruction involves teaching children the relationships between letters (graphemes) and individual sounds (phonemes), and teaching them that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words (Pinnell, 2008). Phonics instruction typically begins with simple words and letter sound associations and then progresses to more complex patterns. This instruction may be

provided with a systematic approach or with an incidental or opportunistic approach that addresses the phonics rules when they are encountered within the context of authentic reading and writing.

Foulin (2005) indicated that “learning about letter sounds and letter names may serve as a supportive framework for the development of phonemic sensitivity” (p. 145). In fact, this study identified letter recognition as well as letter naming speed as “strongly related to reading achievement” (p. 147). Foulin also acknowledged that letter names can be bypassed without interfering with letter-sound correspondences; however, this approach is not recommended because knowing letter names may provide clues as to the sounds associated with the letters and help early writers in their attempts at print.

When children participate in rhyming activities, blend sounds to form words, segment sounds that constitute words, identify words with the same initial, medial, and final sounds, and learn that letters represent the sounds in words, they are learning important literacy skills. Dally noted, “Early efficiency and accuracy in retrieving phonological codes from memory and combining isolated sounds assists children in identifying words” (p. 430). Lane et al. (2001) stated that parents may help their children gain facility with phonological awareness skills though their study focused on paraprofessionals. Books with rhymes, songs, and rhythm encourage children’s development in the area of phonological awareness (Dwyer & Neuman, 2008).

How well children identified letters and decoded words in kindergarten was more important to their subsequent competence in understanding what they read than were comprehension skills. This finding supports the bottom-up theory of reading acquisition (Dally, 2006). This theory postulates that the greatest hurdle for beginning readers in

comprehending text is the decoding or identification of the individual words within the text (Dally, 2006, p. 430).

Phonics study, according to Roberts and Meiring (2006), does not need to be taught within the context of literature to be effective. In fact, the study showed that phonics study with decontextualized words proved to be more effective. This point may indicate that parents, as they assist children in writing words utilizing what the students know about sounds and the letters that correspond with those sounds, may feel confident that the assistance they offer can be just as helpful as what teachers offer in a classroom setting.

Vocabulary

The expression and comprehension of written or oral communication strongly relies upon vocabulary. Pinnell (2008) explained, “Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively, and applies to speaking, listening, reading, and writing” (p. 2). Hindson et al. (2005) identified expressive vocabulary as a major predictor of reading success before formal schooling begins. In fact, the speech of 30-month-old children and their pronunciations of consonant sounds were strongly predictive of struggles with reading. Reading difficulties predate formal reading instruction, and therefore supports from parents are tremendously important. Block, Cleveland, and Reed (2004) stated that instruction of word meanings in context is more effective than no-context instruction of word meanings. This point also supports the stance that interactions should be meaningful exchanges relating to the children’s own lives and not simply naming items on picture cards. Vocabulary learned through common

verbal interactions, such as meal time, support children's reading success (Merlo, Bowman, & Barnett, 2007; Snow & Beals, 2006).

Listening to stories, including informational texts, is one way to expose children to vocabulary. The words used in books are different from the words used in everyday conversation, and children benefit from being exposed to the varied vocabulary words, not just in the hearing of them, but in the discussion of them as well (NAEYC, 1998). Neither parents nor teachers must be able to produce a dictionary definition for each word discussed; however, examination of the surrounding sentences, observation of the pictures, and noticing the place the word holds within the sentence may give clues as to the meaning of the word.

There are two categories of vocabulary to consider. Expressive vocabulary is the vocabulary from which words are generated and used within conversation and perhaps in writing (Ouellette, 2006). *Receptive vocabulary* includes words that may be read or heard and understood, but would not be generated from the person's own working vocabulary (Ouellette, 2006). Both contribute to word recognition through phonology and semantic representation. Ouellette noted, "Reading involves decoding, visual word recognition, and comprehension, and oral vocabulary includes breadth and depth of knowledge" (p. 564). Both are important for literacy teaching.

Unfortunately, according to Wasik, Bond, and Hindman (2006), students from low-income families generally have fewer opportunities to learn new vocabulary, due to fewer books and fewer conversations. Their families may also place low value on literacy. The researchers stated, however, that when students demonstrate low vocabulary skills, even if the low skills are a result of living in poverty, the skills can be improved

with appropriate opportunities to learn. The researchers demonstrated the effectiveness of teachers' training and the benefits of the training to the students from low income families.

Comprehension

Comprehension is the understanding of the written word. It is relating a text to what an individual knows while assimilating new knowledge. Comprehension is making sense of text (Goodman, 2003; Pinnell, 2008). Real reading is comprehension (NAEYC, 1998). It is not the calling out of words, but the understanding of the message conveyed by the words that one is reading. According to the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2007), there are three main components to comprehension. First, it is a cognitive process that strongly leans on knowledge of word meanings. Second, it is an active process that involves an exchange between the author of the text as well as the reader of the text. Third, it is important that strategies for thinking about and understanding text are taught explicitly. When teaching children, adults should explain what they are teaching, model their thinking processes, encourage student inquiry, and keep students engaged. In essence, the NRP emphasized that adults should teach children to approach reading as a problem solving activity that requires thinking strategically.

Fluency

Comprehension requires promoting fluency. Pinnell (2008) explained, "Fluency is the ability to read a text quickly and accurately" (p. 2). Similarly, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) noted that fluent readers decode words quickly and with accuracy. Schreiber (1991) stated that fluent readers read with prosody—that is, they use the appropriate pitch, pace, phrasing, and expression as they read text. Morrow et al. (2006) investigated a fluency

program where parents were trained to support their children by engaging in fluency building activities such as reading the same stories multiple times with varied formats. Sometimes the children echo-read the story (repeating lines after the adult), sometimes they choral-read the story (read together with the adult), and sometimes they read the story with a partner. This area was important to target because when children can read fluently, their comprehension improves. These fluency promoting strategies are easily demonstrated for parents and yield beneficial results to children. When the reading of texts is laborious and the words are read inaccurately, it is difficult to glean the author's intended meaning, and without meaning, there is no purpose for reading. Students should read texts, independently, that they can read fluently and with understanding. Ouellette (2006) described reading as an activity that "involves more than decoding reliant on mapping grapheme-phoneme correspondences: Skilled readers must also recognize words rapidly and accurately, and the end goal of reading is intact comprehension" (p. 554).

Possible Social Change Implications

Montessori (1972) stated that children, especially at the ages of 4 to 6, make greater progress than adults in their learning because they are in a creative period (p. 257). However, educators must get creative when it comes to effectively promoting literacy achievement. Educators must pursue knowledge and effect change in literacy promotion even when it does not come easily. Administrators and teachers have been successful in maintaining the status quo. There has been very little risk-taking, and many have become comfortable doing what has always been done, even though the results have been less than satisfactory. Collins (2001) stated, "success is fueled by creativity, imagination, bold moves into uncharted waters and visionary zeal" (p. 121). Collins also

stated, “Creative magic begins to wane as some of the most innovative people leave, disgusted by the burgeoning bureaucracy and hierarchy. . . The cancer of mediocrity begins to grow in earnest” (p. 121). Perhaps that is where many educators are today; and yet there are those who are willing and, in fact, eager to begin the work of reading current research, engaging in challenging discussions with colleagues, and making the necessary changes in order to be a most effective educator for the good of each student and for the good of society in general.

Missall et al. (2007) stated, “It is increasingly recognized that preschool and kindergarten are opportune times to promote literacy development and to screen and intervene at the first signs of reading difficulties” (p. 11). The authors stated:

Children do not enter kindergarten as blank slates; there are large differences in acquired educational skills, opportunities, and experiences before children ever cross the doors of our nation’s schools. The preschool years are a time of tremendous growth and provide an incredible opportunity for education, assessment, and early intervention. However, amending the typical K-12 education perspective to include preschool requires a significant paradigm shift.(p. 14)

As researchers identify what it is that parents of high performing kindergarten students do that supports a strong literacy foundation in this community, educators may begin to encourage and equip all parents through the promotion of programs targeting such goals, and educators will be a part of the solution to the current conundrum (NEA, 2007). It is possible that the next national research report will show a significant *increase* in time spent reading and *improved* reading skills. The United States, then, might benefit from

social, economic, and civic improvements as a result of educators finding a way to make a difference for good in the literacy lives of students, through the long overlooked resource: students' parents.

Early literacy skills (e.g., phonological awareness, vocabulary, expressive and receptive language, and alphabetic principles) typically develop in children within the years before formal schooling begins. If a child is not equipped with the necessary skills for literacy success upon entering school, it is not until there is a significant gap that formal intervention processes typically begin. This gap is rarely closed (McDowell, 2007; Missall et al., 2007, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005).

Parent education and training can successfully help promote their children's literacy success (Bierman et al., 2008). One such program is Morrow, Kuhn, and Schwanenflugel's (2006) Family Fluency Program. This program produced positive results in improving children's fluency as a result of training parents and asking them to work with their children on a regular basis.

Promoting high quality, at-home literacy experiences could be a key in closing the gap between strong and struggling readers. By increasing opportunities that promote literacy, it may be possible to reduce the number of struggling readers. This mixed-methods research study demonstrated the impact parents have had on their high performing children's literacy skills and provides the rationale for the educational leaders in this community to invest, not just in intervention services when problems arise, but in the preventative measure of equipping and enthusing parents of preschoolers to adeptly take the lead in their children's literacy lives.

Researchers have made clear the steps that need to be taken to promote literacy education in the home. They have illustrated how to improve student performance effectively by improving the home environment and the interactions between parents and their children. The salient considerations to literacy gains must include educators responding to the research findings and beginning the task of equipping parents of preschool children so that fewer students struggle in the area of reading. Review of the literature leads not to a new question to research but to a question of implementation.

Students must not be imperiled due to the lack of literacy experiences. Marilyn Adams (1990) stated, “Ways must be found to compensate for differences in preschool literacy preparation to ensure success with literacy instruction” (p. 8). Reading skills are foundational to children’s academic success, and therefore there is a need to adjust current practices with regard to early childhood literacy. The ultimate aim of this study is to inspire social change. When parents are equipped with strategies research has shown to be effective in promoting literacy with their preschool children, fewer children will enter school lacking the skills they need to be successful in school (Haney & Hill, 2004). The present study will be added to the current literature and will impact the field of education as a whole when fewer students require formal intervention services as struggling readers.

The problem addressed in this study has been framed in the literature. The research design and approach for this study were selected, utilizing methodology literature, in order to best address the purpose of the study while keeping in mind what it is that I wish to learn (Creswell, 2007, Hatch 2002). I chose the qualitative research strategy for this study. Within a case study, both the objective quantitative descriptive

statistic data; and the subjective qualitative data may be used in a single research investigation (Creswell, 2003). The benefit of utilizing this method is the extension of the knowledge gained from empirical observations (AIMSweb assessment and students' literacy records) through the more open-ended data gained through interviews. Statistical data, alone, may leave the reader asking why particular results were achieved. The themes gathered through more open-ended data collection from individuals' experiences such as interviews will provide a look at the "lived experiences" of real people in their worlds (Hatch, 2002), however they may leave the reader seeking statistical data to demonstrate the achievement level of the ones being interviewed in relation to their peers. Employing statistic data within the qualitative case study in will enable me to explore and explain (Creswell, 2003) what impact parent promoted literacy events may have on their children's literacy achievement.

Section 3: Research Design

Introduction and Research Method

This case study, involving parents of 12 first grade children, endeavored to evidence the impact of literacy activities initiated by parents while their children are in their early childhood years. Students' literacy skills were assessed by the school district. Data were accessed using the archival data within students' school records which include the AIMSweb Early Literacy Skills assessment, a tool used to provide a benchmark implemented in order to rank or "tier" students according to their literacy needs.

This study identified four first grade students; two girls and two boys who were high performing students identified as tier one; they have required no remedial intervention. This study also identified four first grade students; two girls and two boys who were identified as tier three; they required remedial intervention from intervention specialists within the school setting. Four additional first grade students, two boys and two girls, were identified as students who are performing between the two previously identified groups; a median group. The parents of the four identified high performing students, the four students from the median group, and the four low performing first grade students were interviewed in an effort to determine the types and frequency of occurrence of literacy activities that had taken place within their homes until the time of the interview. The reported activities were compared to the best practices, as reported by the current literature, and were also be compared to students' literacy skills at the time of assessment. Ultimately, the aim of the study was to provide evidence that

convinces educators and policy makers to invest in a long ignored instructional resource: students' parents.

A case study is a qualitative approach in which the researcher investigates a case, utilizing multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). In this case study, activities were coded, the frequency recorded, and a conclusion was made about the impact parents' literacy-promoting interactions likely had upon the literacy skills of the students as demonstrated by the AIMSweb assessment. Information about the study will be provided to all of the children's parents as well as the staff of Early Childhood School.

Many students are well equipped for academic success upon entry into formal schooling. Each activity parents engage in with their children, before the first day of school, impacts their child's classroom experience as well as the level of proficiency with which their children will perform academic tasks. Educators must be about the business of equipping and inspiring parents of future kindergarten students to provide the strong literacy foundation children need in order to ensure success in kindergarten and to reduce the number of children with low performance in the area of literacy.

This study was conducted in order to demonstrate if and how the literacy activities encouraged by parents within the home environments of their preschool children impacted those children's attitudes and success in the area of literacy, even in this suburban community in the mid-west. The aim of this study was for educators within the designated community to be armed with the local and relevant data needed to inspire the necessary changes that include enthusing and equipping parents to provide a solid literacy foundation that will promote the academic success of their children. Research has

long pointed to the importance of the literacy foundation provided by parents within the context they provide in their home environment, yet policy makers in education continue to invest almost exclusively in the professional development of their teachers and in the provision of research-based interventions for students after deficits are evidenced, rather than taking an early intervention approach and possibly preventing the deficit in the first place. A governor of the state in which this study was being conducted delivered the 2009 State of the State address where he proposed lengthening the state's school year, requiring full-day kindergarten, and redesigning teacher education programs. Regrettably, he charged the schools with the task of improving the existing problems rather than focusing any attention on or directing any assistance to the parents who, when engaging in activities promoting literacy success, may eliminate the problem all together. This section includes the research design, strategies and procedures that were employed throughout the study, information regarding data analysis instrumentation and information, and will address issues around quality and validity.

Research Questions

In order to address the focus of this study, I developed the following research questions:

1. What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?
2. What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?
3. How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy?

There is evidence of influence of parent-promoted literacy events upon students' literacy achievement. Each research question in this case study, utilizing descriptive statistics and interview responses for data collection, was designed to generate a better understanding of parent-promoted literacy events and students' literacy achievement,

Setting and Sample

In this study, I employed purposeful sampling, utilizing the maximum variation approach, (Creswell, 2007). Twelve first grade students were identified in order to document variations and diversity as well common patterns when it comes to home literacy practices. Four parents of first grade students who are high performers in the area of literacy, four parents of first grade students who scored in the median range, and four parents of first grade students who have or who are receiving intervention services due to low performance in the area of literacy were interviewed. Each grouping of children, selected according to AIMSweb data, included both two boys and two girls. Because the criteria for the differentiation of the participants were determined ahead of time, this sampling method is appropriate for the study. The sample number represents an adequate number of students from which to identify themes and to conduct cross-case theme analysis (Creswell, 2007). The participants of this sample included two African-American parents, one Hispanic parent and the other nine participants were white. All parents were middle-class adults, and they volunteered for the study. The criteria included participating parents with at least one child who was enrolled as a first grade student in the Early Childhood School from the fall of 2010. All participants served on a voluntary basis and signed consent forms were obtained.

I am a first grade teacher in the district and school where the study was conducted. This school from which the respondents were solicited is one of four early childhood schools within the district. The principal of the Early Childhood School aided in the selection of study participants, though her name did not appear on any of the study documents. The participants included, utilizing AIMSweb data regarding literacy achievement: two first grade boys and two first grade girls at the highest levels of achievement (tier 1), two first grade boys and two first grade girls at the median levels of achievement, and two first grade boys and two first grade girls performing at the lowest levels of academic achievement (tier 3). Four times the size of the intended sample (12) were contacted in order to insure the ability to gain the sample needed for this study. The principal mailed the consent forms, which I prepared, to the 48 potential participants (16 high scoring, 16 low scoring and 16 median scoring), and she was the only observer of student records up to this point, thereby minimizing the risk of breach of record confidentiality. No information regarding levels of student performance was revealed to me at that time. No study information mentioned the principal's role, as no participant was to have felt pressure to participate in a study that may have resulted due to the role of the principal in their children's educational experience.

As the researcher, I received sealed envelopes containing parental consent forms, from the potential parent participants, as they were returned to the school. I collected consent forms until I had 12 consenting parents who had children performing at each of the three designated levels required for this study. The consent forms provided my background information and described this study (Appendix A). They explained that the study was investigating parental influences on their children's literacy achievement, and

served as an invitation for each of them to participate. They informed the parents that they, should they have agreed to participate, may be asked to participate in an audio taped interview and to allow me to observe their child's school records. The parents were invited to conduct the interviews in a public, mutually agreed upon venue such as the local library, at a time when both parties were available.

The observation of the students' records was to take place in the school conference rooms of each of the four 2-6 elementary buildings where the children attend. I availed myself to answer any questions and provided my e-mail address and phone number in order to facilitate open communication. The school principal informed me of the range of high performing, the low performing, and the most median performing student's scores so that I could choose, for my study, the students demonstrating the maximum variation in literacy scores. This variation was decided upon in order to help me to determine the impact of parent participation in literacy promotion on students' literacy achievement. Twelve participants agreeing to the constructs of the study were selected.

I used the selected study participants' contact information and made arrangements with each parent for the interviews. I began investigating students' literacy records, including AIMS web data as well as archival data and artifacts that provided information about students' proficiency and attitudes with literacy. I contacted potential participants who were not selected and thanked them for their interest and willingness to participate in my study. I explained that I may contact them, should a selected participant not follow through with the study requirements, and that I would inform them when the study results are shared with the families of the Early Childhood School students.

Research Method

This is a single instrumental case study as I am interested in an issue concerning parents' impact on their children's literacy achievement, and I selected a single case to illustrate that issue (Creswell, 2007). This single case does mean that generalizations may be questionable, however I selected a case that directly addresses the research questions.

This case study, utilizing descriptive statistics for data collection, served to investigate the impact of identified parents on their children's literacy success. Though it is only one case, much may be learned when exploring a single case (Merriam, 1998). This study investigated the bounded system of parents and their children who were formally first grade students attending Early Childhood School. The collected data may inspire a change in the allocation of resources toward the investment in the parents and the environments they create, as it is the parents who provide the foundation of their children's literacy skills.

Context of the Study

A case study is an effective approach when the researcher has clearly identified cases and the aim is providing in depth understanding of them. The data collection is extensive in this type of study and utilizes many sources of information often including documents, archival records, artifacts, and interviews (Creswell, 2007).

In the first portion of the study, I gathered archival data and artifacts from the identified students' cumulative records that include (a) students' nationally normed scores from the AIMSweb Early Literacy Skills assessment that were used to determine students' achievement levels and to determine intervention groups, (b) grade cards that include teachers' assessments and comments regarding students' command of literacy

skills, (c) individualized reading assessment/reading level data (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010), (d) documentation of progress regarding what students know about print, (e) sight word knowledge records, (f) phonemic awareness records, (g) interventions implemented by the classroom teacher, (h) writing samples; and (i) intervention records for students who have worked with reading intervention specialists for remedial instruction. Information gathered from students' academic cumulative folders were analyzed in an effort to identify patterns and themes when it comes to students' literacy attainment. This analysis took place in the schools' conference rooms, so that no items were removed from the school premises. Each document utilized within this study was linked directly to what research demonstrates as impactful in student's literacy achievement.

The AIMSweb data collected from the students when they were kindergarteners, in the fall of 2009, includes letter naming fluency and letter sound fluency. The reading intervention specialists and other qualified staff, such as administrators, gathered both the kindergarten and first grade benchmark data. The first grade data, collected in the fall of 2010, included letter naming fluency, letter sound fluency, phoneme segmentation, and nonsense word fluency. The kindergarten data was of utmost import as it is data from before school interventions began, however, the first grade and even second grade data are important in that the progress or lack of progress may be seen over an extended period of time. A more detailed description of the AIMSweb instrument may be found in the instrumentation and materials section.

The parents of the four higher performing first grade children, the four first grade children performing near the median, and the four lower performing first grade children, according to AIMSweb literacy data, were interviewed in an effort to understand the

possible connections between literacy achievement and parent-promoted literacy activities. To establish a positive researcher-participant relationship, I contacted each parent with a phone call and allowed the parents an opportunity for clarification and to become comfortable with me. The parents were asked to meet me at a mutually agreed upon, public venue such as the local public library. At meeting places including venues such as McDonalds, public libraries, and a local coffee shop, each parent was interviewed for nearly one hour. The interviews were audio recorded so that they could be transcribed by me, in my personal office, as quickly as possible after the interview. Data were analyzed, and patterns and themes were identified. I then explored any surprising results regarding the at-home literacy activities engaged in by students who scored very high or very low on the AIMSweb assessment.

Instrumentation and Materials

AIMSweb is a nationally recognized benchmark and progress monitoring system. This system employs direct, frequent, and continuous student assessment, depending on each student's level of achievement. All students in the program are assessed three times a year as a universal screening. Data from this information are used for the monitoring of general education students' progress and to determine if Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has been achieved. Indicators of student performance, relative to year-end goals, based on the probability of passing state tests, are used to tier students into three general groups. Students who are not performing at benchmark levels are identified as "at-risk." These students receive intensive instruction targeting identified areas of difficulty. Progress monitoring is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction implemented with the express purpose of increasing student achievement. Pearson's AIMSweb has the

highest predictive validity and reliability from the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI). This study will utilize the Early Literacy Skills probe. This probe assesses students' knowledge of (a) initial sounds, (b) letter naming fluency, (c) letter sound fluency, (d) phoneme segmentation, and (5) nonsense word fluency. Each of these impacts students' literacy achievement.

The AIMSweb data were juxtaposed with archival records and artifacts as well as parent interviews. I analyzed the data in an effort to determine the influences of literacy activities promoted by parents within the home settings of the higher performing students as well as the lower performing students, according to scores on the AIMSweb assessment. Students' competencies regarding literacy activities within the classroom setting, as determined by the educators' notations in students' literacy folders, were compared to parent-initiated literacy events, the frequency of those events, and parents' comments regarding the literacy promotion they provided with their children. AIMSweb, the benchmark and progress monitoring system described earlier, was administered by reading intervention teachers, in the first weeks of school, in order to determine the reading levels of all participating kindergarten students. These archival data were obtained from students' literacy cumulative records.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important in this study and the results must be consistent with the data collected. This means that similar results would likely occur if the same study were to be implemented with others in a similar people group (Merriam, 2002). Internal validity asks how one's findings compare with reality (Merriam, 2002). Because this study was framed utilizing the constructivist paradigm, which assumes that

varied individual perspectives prevent absolute reality from being knowable, it was acknowledged that I, as well as all participants in the study, made meaning from our own perspectives, therefore a broad generalization beyond the parameters set by this study was not appropriate.

Pearson's AIMSweb has the highest predictive validity and reliability from the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI). Merriam (2002) acknowledges that human behavior is never static and that establishing reliability can be problematic in social sciences, but that the more important aim is to determine whether the results are consistent with the data that have been collected. In this study, I intended to demonstrate, with numerical data, that when parents promoted literacy events with their children, the children's reading proficiency improved. When looking at the collected data, the aim is that others would concur with my findings. Because I am the primary instrument of data collection, reliability may be improved with training and practice (Merriam, 2002). Reliability is also improved with the equal representation of both girls and boys at each academic level (high, middle, low) of proficiency. A more detailed look at data collection tools and their reliability and validity may be found in the instrumentation section of this document.

Even extant data must be valid and reliable. Strategies used in this study, to ensure consistency and reliability, include triangulation. Triangulation utilizes multiple methods of data collection and analysis in order to justify themes and promote validity of study findings (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Utilizing varied methods for the collection of data can be viewed as a reliable way to obtain information that fairly reveals the realities as understood by study participants (Merriam, 2002).

Data Analysis

Data were collected to address the research questions. Qualitative analysis was used, as this systematic investigation of gathered data likely leads to credible results. Qualitative analysis leans on the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants in the study. In this way thick, rich descriptions may be generated. The reader, as a result, will find the information confirmable, credible, dependable, and transferable. A systematic search for meaning was employed as I organized data from interviews as well as artifact data. This study utilized typological analysis (Hatch, 2002) while searching for patterns and identifying overarching themes. In typological analysis the researcher divides what is observed in interview and artifact data into groups or categories. These categories, or frames of analysis, aid the researcher by determining the parameters around which the data will be investigated. This approach is useful in the study because I designed the questions with particular topics in mind, that will be addressed in the data, and divisions may be made ahead of time rather than strictly awaiting the emergence of unknown categories. Because the goal of the study was to capture a focused set of information and study questions were selected to reveal that information, fairly consistent parameters for responses were the result. The responses provided much evidence revealing the study participants' ideas and engagement in activities that Spiegel (1992) identified as promoting successful readers.

I used the qualitative approach when I interviewed the parents of four higher performing students, four students with median scores, and four lower performing students to further investigate home literacy activities and parents' behaviors. Following,

I will present themes and subthemes utilizing quotations from the study participants. Any contrary information revealed in the study will be discussed to further control for quality.

Analysis involved coding, categorizing, and comparing data according to typology, the reduction of data in search of patterns, data display, and the interpretation of what it is that could be gleaned (Hatch, 2002). As themes were identified and it became clear that the patterns were supported by the data, explanations and generalizations were then made and excerpts were used to support the generalizations. An in-depth review of students' literacy records, including work samples, teachers' comments, etc. enhanced the data that had been collected from the parent interviews.

Even as findings were written, data analysis progressed and interpretations began to emerge. Data that did not appear to support my findings were considered. If no explanation could have been made, the findings would have changed (Hatch, 2002). Throughout this process the theory that results is grounded in data. The researcher, in qualitative analysis, is considered the primary instrument, as it is the researcher who raises the questions and the researcher's bias is acknowledged from the onset of the investigation (Creswell, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical protection of all participants was of paramount consideration in this research project. All potential participants received an introductory letter and an explanation of the study, as well as the expectations. Parents, who signed consent and confidentiality forms which allowed me to access their student's records and to interview them for the study, sent them to the Early Childhood School in sealed envelopes addressed in my care. My name, e-mail address, and phone number were provided to the

parents, should they have had any questions about participation. Parent response forms were delivered to the Early Childhood School office, in the provided pre-addressed, stamped envelope, by hand or through the U.S. postal service. I was permitted access our collected mail during the summer months as school was in recess. The forms had been submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), with strict adherence to the prescribed guidelines that have been put into place in order to protect each research participant. The request for IRB approval as well as the IRB approval number may be found in the appendix of this document.

The purpose of the study and my role and responsibilities were shared with each participant through the initial letter requesting consent which was mailed to all potential participants. When the actual study participants were selected, rapport with each participant was readily established. I reviewed and clarified my role and responsibilities via the phone call that was made to schedule the parent interview meeting time and place. A clear delineation of timelines and what participants might expect was conveyed in a manner that established a relationship built on concern and consideration. I had not had any personal relationship with the parents or students in this study.

I did have limited knowledge of two students who participated in the due to my role as an educator within the school where the study was being conducted. Some parents had limited knowledge about me, as I am also the owner of a local business that was expressly created to promote literacy in our community. This business, which hosts book clubs, writers' groups, tutoring, a lending library, and many other literacy-focused events for all ages, appeared to positively influence at least two of my participants. They knew about my interest in promoting literacy in the families of our community from

informational talks I had presented in another venue. There were no study participants with whom I have had a relationship that might be a threat to the participants or the validity of this study.

My role as an educator and literacy specialist in the school and community may have impacted the data collection. Parents' ideas about what they believed to be the "best" responses to questions, when posed by an expert in the field, may have swayed them from the truth to a glamorized version of actual practice within their homes. As I met each parent, I tried to put them at ease, stating that I am a parent of three children, and I acknowledged the challenges of being a working parent and the time constraints within which parents must work to raise readers. I clarified that the study was voluntary, stated potential risks as well as benefits, and reinforced that the protection of all participants and their privacy would be of utmost import and would be strictly upheld.

Summary

The findings of this study will be used to promote the investment of educational stakeholders in the equipping and inspiring of parents to take the lead in their children's literacy lives. The data gathered, to some degree, indicate the types of activities and the frequency of those activities that commonly occur in the homes of children who demonstrate high performance on the AIMSweb literacy assessment. When educators share specific literacy activities that occur in the homes of high performing early childhood students as well as the frequency of occurrence of those activities, teachers can inform parents with specific information about how they can promote their children's reading success. Educators may begin holding informational gatherings to teach parents how to engage in the literacy activities, and thereby ameliorate educational success.

When children enter formal schooling equipped to succeed, remediation is needed less, as children perform at satisfactory levels. When parents are equipped to help their children, even when children are out of the classroom, their literacy skills may continue to improve. In this way, the achievement gap may be reduced.

Section 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of literacy activities initiated by parents while their children were in their early childhood years. The study was conducted in Ohio. Three research questions were used to investigate (a) what influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement; (b) what parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development; (c) how parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy. This section will begin with a thorough description of the process by which participants were selected, and data were generated, gathered and recorded. The systems used for keeping track of data will be described as well as the procedures through which the emerging understandings and findings were gleaned. The section will conclude with the themes that were generated by the data and align with the research questions.

Participant Selection

Upon receiving approval from the Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB#: 07-01-11-0019527), study participants were purposefully selected, utilizing the maximum variation approach (Creswell, 2007). The principal of Early Childhood School mailed 48 consent forms which I had prepared to the 48 potential participants. This number, which represents 16 high scoring, 16 low scoring and 16 median scoring children, produced a sufficient number of parents who fit the parameters of the study. No study information mailed to potential participants mentioned the principal's role, as no participant was to have felt coerced to participate in the study. The principal had sole responsibility for the student records, thereby minimizing the risk of breach of record

confidentiality. No information regarding levels of student performance was revealed to me at that time.

The forms were mailed on July 7, 2011, and I began weekly visits to the post office to collect consent forms mailed from potential study participants. As I received the signed consent forms, I viewed student records and then contacted parents to arrange interview dates. I reviewed unobtrusive data in the principals' office at four elementary building sites. I utilized the nationally normed AIMSweb assessment scores to determine which of the potential participants would be included in the study. The Early Childhood School principal gave me general numerical guidelines for use in determining what would determine high scoring, median scoring, and low scoring students.

In all, I received consent from 15 parents. Because I needed only 12 participants, I called each participant who was not chosen for the study, thanked them for agreeing to participate, and explained that I already had the desired number of participants. I explained that in the event that someone needed to withdraw, I would be happy to contact them in the future. Each one agreed to an interview should I need an additional participant, and I explained that the results of my study would be shared through the Parent Teachers Associations in our School District. I phoned the 12 selected parents, and arranged a date for an interview.

Demographic data regarding the study participants' children, who were beginning first grade, are presented in Table 1. The AIMSweb score averages from September, 2010 are also shown in Table 1. These data will be further explained in Table 2.

Table 1

Demographics of Children of Parent Participants

Student	9/10 AIMSweb avg.
1/f	64.75 high
2/f	59.5
3/m	56
4/m	53.75
5/f	52.75 median
6/f	52.5
7/m	46.25
8/m	38.5
9/m	31 low
10/f	24
11/f	15.25
12/m	9.75

For this study, AIMSweb scores were used to determine which students were high achieving, median achieving, and low achieving students. The AIMSweb score averages were determined utilizing the following assessment components: (1) letter naming fluency (LNF), (2) letter sound fluency (LSF), (3) phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF), and (4) nonsense word fluency (NWF). In the AIMSweb assessment, the students have one minute for each segment in which they must identify letters by name (LNF), generate sounds for provided letters (LSF), separate stated words into phonemes (PSF), and decode nonsense words (NWF). The number of correct responses produced by the children, within the allotted 60 seconds, is recorded to determine the students' scores. The students' data numerically represent the knowledge the children were able to demonstrate on one day at the beginning of their first grade school year. No student in

this study repeated first grade, and all students participated in Early Childhood School's half day kindergarten program. Though the data are considered by the school a "snapshot" of the skills of the children, the scores were averaged for each student and were used at Early Childhood School to determine to whom intervention services would be provided. All students in the low achieving student group for this study were provided remedial intervention services by the school district.

Table 2 provides the AIMSweb scores for each student represented in this study. This table also indicates students' gender and their scores on each of the individual assessments. The scores are organized from the highest achieving student to the lowest achieving student.

The scores of median achieving students are not significantly lower than those of the high achieving students. The highest two median achieving students' scores are, in fact, less than two points below the scores of the higher achieving students. The AIMSweb scores demonstrate typical variations however as the assessment consists of students' verbal responses to literacy tasks, within a one minute time span. Because the time allotment is short, the variance in scores is also small. These data represent median achieving students who are considered "at grade level" expectations or above. No remedial instruction was required for these students.

Table 2

AIMSweb Scores Fall 2010-2011 School Year

Student	LNF	LSF	PSF	NWF	AVG	
1/f	70	52	67	70	64.75	high
2/f	69	36	52	81	59.5	
3/m	56	45	49	74	56	
4/m	48	40	30	97	53.75	
5/f	65	54	42	50	52.75	median
6/f	70	46	52	51	52.5	
7/m	48	46	55	36	46.25	
8/m	43	36	49	26	38.5	
9/m	44	17	47	16	31	low
10/f	33	12	36	15	24	
11/f	42	12	4	3	15.25	
12/m	22	8	3	6	9.75	

Presentation and Analysis of Data

I conducted parent interviews in students' homes, a coffee shop, at a popular fast food restaurant, and even a football field during a practice. All interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. The briefest interview lasted just over 30 minutes and most were near or slightly more than one hour. Most interviews took place in the evening, so I was able to transcribe the majority of the interviews, using the Microsoft Word program, immediately after I met with each parent. Hatch (2002) recommends this step, as the interview details are fresh on the researcher's mind.

Next, I read through each interview, one at a time, to get a sense of the whole (Creswell, 2007). I then re-read each interview, one at a time, and began marking the transcripts according to typologies (Hatch, 2002). I used Spiegel's (1992) 11 identified categories of parental influence on student's literacy success to indicate the type of parent support offered, by the parent, to the child. In my record keeping, I adopted the numbers Spiegel (1992) used in her work, as noted:

Research indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together; (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher; (6) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life; (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; (10) serve as role models as readers themselves; (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. (p.1)

I used Spiegel's (1992) findings to determine what particular parent-encouraged literacy events appeared to impact literacy achievement of the children in this study. In the parent interview, I asked questions addressing each of Spiegel's (1992) eleven identified items. I then coded transcripts according to those same, identified items. I read each transcript, and when the parent mentioned, for example, reading with their child, I

wrote the numeral that corresponded with Spiegel's (1992) listed items in the margin of the transcript. Some transcripts had many numerals in the margins, while others had few, depending on the information provided by the parent in the interview.

Many responses had overlapping codes. For example, one parent stated in the interview, "My kids know that I like to read, and I read to them, like bedtime stories." This statement was coded with a nine (read to their children often) and a 10 (serve as role models themselves).

Spiegel (1992) indicated what parents of successful readers do with their children, however, some of the listed items are not specific actions, but instead are beliefs or attitudes. I coded transcripts: (1) when a parent mentioned that activity directly, (2) when the rationale for activity indicated could be supposed, (3) when the activity was likely a result of a listed attitude or belief and/or (4) was a method that imparted the literacy-promoting action or belief.

When all transcripts were coded, I reviewed them again to ensure that I still agreed with the initial coding decisions. Some modifications were made based on my knowledge of the interview sessions however the decisions regarding codes were minimally adjusted. An example of a code adjustment included the transcripts from a parent who spoke very little English. Because I so often felt the need, during the interview, to clarify what I was hearing, there was much repetition. I felt the repetition, when coded, skewed the data, so I eliminated any codes that were an obvious repetition of a particular identified category.

Following this step, I then read all of the coded lines according to typology. For example, I read all 12 interviews noting only the codes where parents indicated (1) they

want their children to succeed. I used cross-case and within case analysis among the patterns identified (Hatch, 2002) and began noting poignant excerpts that I felt would best convey the actions and attitudes of the participants in this study.

Each participant's coded transcripts which included my initial observations, the hand-written notes I recorded during the interview, and hand-written notations regarding data retrieved from student records viewed in cumulative files were filed in individual file folders identified utilizing an alphanumeric code. Students' cumulative files (including literacy data folders) contained, but were not limited to, items such as grade cards, AIMSweb score sheets, and kindergarten literacy assessment record sheets. All files for this study were maintained in one large file/binder. All written and audio recordings were stored in my home in a locked, personal file. No names, only alphanumeric codes, were associated with the recordings to maintain participants' confidentiality. Raw data will be stored for five years, on my password-protected computer. After the five years have passed, the data will be destroyed.

This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?
2. What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?
3. How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy?

As I analyzed the codes from the interviews, according to students' literacy achievement, three themes emerged addressing how parent-promoted literacy events

impact the students' achievement in the area of literacy. The overarching themes include: (1) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact students' literacy achievement (Research Question 1), (2) Parent-encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development (Research Question 2), Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when the parents: (a) Desire Success for Their Children, (b) Provide Positive Literacy Role Models, and (c) Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teachers (Research Question 3). Each theme will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

Each finding is presented and explained in this section. The findings are organized by Research Questions, and by Spiegel's list of activities in which parents of successful readers engage (1992). A brief summary of how the findings of this study are consistent with current literature is also included.

Finding 1

Parent-promoted literacy events positively impacted students' literacy achievement.

Research Question 1: What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?

Spiegel (1992) asserted it is not what parents have as resources or what they are but what they do in their homes that most impacts children's literacy development. This study examined whether parents of high achieving readers appear to embrace any or all of Spiegel's (1992) 11 listed items when it comes to their children's literacy development.

I created a tally chart to help organize my coding system and to reduce the data. I listed all of Spiegel's 11 items, leaving a space for tally marks beneath each item, and I

made a copy of that sheet for each parent I interviewed. I then reviewed each coded transcript, and when I located a numeral recorded in the margin, I made a tally mark under the appropriate item number on the tally sheet. For example, the highest achieving student according to the AIMSweb achievement data (identified as student 1/f) earned one tally mark from the parent interview under “want success for kids,” one tally mark under “impart importance of education,” and eight tally marks under “impart love for reading.” All students’ tallies were counted. After many reviews of each transcript, to ensure accuracy, I recorded brief summaries, striving to withhold judgments (Hatch, 2002).

I created a chart (Table 3) so I could view the data I had collected. I used a star to indicate students earning 4-7 tallies and the pound sign to indicate eight or more tallies. The top four students on the chart represent the highest achieving students, the middle group represents the median achieving students, and the final group represents the lower achieving students, according to the averaged AIMSweb data from September, 2010. I used the alpha-numeric code which included the gender of each participant. When the table was completed, I noted the variations in parents’ participation in their children’s literacy experiences. The higher achieving students scored a total of 33 symbols (Table 3) which indicates that parents identified a particular parent-promoted literacy activity that coincided with Spiegel’s (1992) list of what parents of successful readers do with their children. Twenty-three symbols were used to denote the literacy events promoted by median achieving students’ parents, and only 11 symbols were used to evidence parent-promoted literacy events for low achieving students.

Table 3

Typological Coding: Spiegel's Listed Items Indicated in Parent Interviews by Frequency

	Want success for kids	Impart import. of ed.	Impart love for reading	Enjoy and invest	See self as child's 1 st teach	Informed re: school/ lit. lives	Believe impact child	Prov. lit artifacts in home	Parents read to kids	Parents read/role models	Provide effective lit. inst.
Sdnt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1/f			#	*	*	*	*	*			#
2/f		*	*	*	#	*	*	*	*	*	
3/m	*		#	#	*	*	#	*	*		#
4/m	#	#		#	#		#	#	*		#
5/f	*	#	*			#	*	*		*	#
6/f						#		*	*	*	*
7/m		*	*			#	*	#			
8/m	*	*	#	*			*	#			
9/m	*			*				*	*		*
10/f			*								
11/f								#			
12/m		*	*					*			#

Note. * = 4-7 codes; # = 8 or more codes within transcript

This method afforded me an opportunity to view each area at a glance and to make generalizations regarding parent-promoted literacy events and how they appeared to impact students' literacy achievement. For example, I noted that all high achieving students' parents indicated they see themselves as their children's first teacher. Not one code was awarded in this category for the median or low achieving students. I also noted that two or fewer codes were awarded in each of the three achievement levels for parents assuming the role of reading role models and parents wanting success for their children.

Table 4

Typological Frequency Coding Results- Raw Data

	Want success for kids	Impart import. of ed.	Impart love for reading	Enjoy and invest	See self as child's 1 st teach	Informed re: school/ lit. lives	Believe impact child	Prov. lit artifacts in home	Parents read to kids	Parents read/role models	Provide effective lit. inst.	code
Sdnt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	total
1/f	1	2	8	6	4	4	4	6	3	2	8	48
2/f	3	5	4	6	9	4	4	5	6	4	3	53
3/m	6	3	8	8	6	4	12	5	6	2	9	69
4/m	8	8	0	9	10	1	9	8	6	3	19	81
<i>f total</i>	4	7	12	12	13	8	8	11	9	6	11	101
<i>m total</i>	14	11	8	17	16	5	21	13	12	5	28	150
totals	18	18	20	29	29	13	29	24	21	11	39	251
5/f	6	8	5	3	2	9	6	5	2	5	9	60
6/f	1	2	2	3	0	10	1	7	5	7	7	45
7/m	1	7	6	3	1	9	7	8	1	2	3	48
8/m	4	4	8	5	0	3	5	12	2	3	2	48
<i>f total</i>	7	10	7	6	2	19	7	12	7	12	16	105
<i>m total</i>	5	11	14	8	1	12	12	20	3	5	5	96
totals	12	21	21	14	3	31	19	32	10	17	21	201
9/m	4	0	3	4	0	3	2	5	4	3	4	32
10/f	2	2	5	2	0	0	2	3	3	2	3	24
11/f	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	8	2	1	2	21
12/m	1	4	2	2	0	2	2	5	1	2	9	33
<i>f total</i>	4	3	6	3	0	3	2	11	5	3	5	48
<i>m total</i>	5	4	5	6	0	5	4	10	5	5	13	62
totals	9	7	11	9	0	8	6	21	10	8	18	110

Table 4 provides the raw data regarding typology codes. This table provides a more in depth examination of the codes according to reading achievement levels. Though the numbers of codes indicate the influence of parent promoted literacy events, more detailed data will be presented in Finding 2 that contain parents' comments regarding their literacy interactions with their children.

The median achieving students' parent comments had higher frequencies than the high achieving students' parent comments in the following categories: (2) impart a sense

of importance of education and have high expectations for their children (+3 codes), (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together (+1 code), (6) being informed about their children's school/literacy lives (+18 codes), (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive, (+8 codes), and (10) serve as role models as readers themselves (+6 codes). These data will be explored, in more depth, in section five.

As I further examined the data, I noted that Spiegel's (1992) list of 11 items could be organized into three overarching themes. Three of the 11 items involve parents desiring success for their children, four of the items involve parents' provision of effective literacy role models, and four items involve parents' consideration of themselves as their children's first teachers. Each of Spiegel's (1992) cited items appears impactful when it comes to children's literacy achievement, yet when themes were created, one theme, parents view themselves as their children's first teacher, had higher overall frequencies than the others, and it was the only theme where high achieving students earned more codes median achieving students.

Theme 1: Parents of high achieving readers desire success for their children. When I reduced Spiegel's (1992) list into themes, three items fit into the first overarching theme. Research indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; and (6) know what is going on at school and in their child's literacy life. I arrived at this decision because each item involved parents' desires regarding their children's formal education.

Theme 2: Parents of high achieving readers provide positive literacy role models. Four items from Spiegel's (1992) list fall under the second overarching theme. Research indicates that parents of successful readers: (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together, (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; and (10) serve as role models as readers themselves. I arrived at this decision because these items involve parents' roles regarding general literacy promotion, within their own homes, sans the intentional focus on teaching the child.

Theme 3: Parents of high achieving readers consider themselves their children's first teachers. Four items from Spiegel's (1992) list fall under the third theme. Research indicates that parents of successful readers: (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher; (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. I arrived at this decision because all of these items involve parents' intentional efforts in supporting their children's literacy skills.

Finding 2

Parent encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development.

I will provide interview data, specific to each of the three themes, to demonstrate that parent encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, impact students' literacy achievement. The data in each section will be described beginning with the highest

achieving students' parent responses and progressing to the lowest achieving students' parent responses. Additionally, I provide the typological frequency coding results data with the addressed areas of discussion highlighted in bold type.

Research Question 2: What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?

Spiegel (1992) listed 11 family-provided supports that parents of high achieving readers afford their children. The listed supports were organized into three themes in order to observe frequencies according to levels of reading achievement. The three themes: (1) Parents of successful readers desire success for their children, (2) Parents of successful readers provide positive literacy role models, and (3) Parents of successful readers consider themselves their children's first teachers are compared by groupings of high, median, and low achieving readers' parents responses.

Desire Success

Items from Spiegel's (1992) list that involve parental desire for their children's success include: (1) desire success for their children; (2) impart importance of education and have high expectations; and (6) know what is going on at school and in their children's literacy lives. Table 5 shows median achieving students earned 64 total codes in this category, while the high achieving students earned only 49 total codes. The high achieving students earned more than double the codes as low achieving students who earned 24 coded responses. The range from the high achieving to the low achieving students' code earnings is 25. The range from the median achieving to the low achieving students' code earnings is 40.

Table 5

Typological Frequency Coding Results- Raw Data

	Want success for kids	Impart import. of ed.	Impart love for reading	Enjoy and invest	See self as child's 1 st teach	Informed re: school/ lit. lives	Believe impact child	Prov. lit artifacts in home	Parents read to kids	Parents read/role models	Provide effective lit. inst.	code
Sdnt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	total
1/f	1	2	8	6	4	4	4	6	3	2	8	48
2/f	3	5	4	6	9	4	4	5	6	4	3	53
3/m	6	3	8	8	6	4	12	5	6	2	9	69
4/m	8	8	0	9	10	1	9	8	6	3	19	81
<i>f total</i>	4	7	12	12	13	8	8	11	9	6	11	101
<i>m total</i>	14	11	8	17	16	5	21	13	12	5	28	150
totals	18	18	20	29	29	13	29	24	21	11	39	251
5/f	6	8	5	3	2	9	6	5	2	5	9	60
6/f	1	2	2	3	0	10	1	7	5	7	7	45
7/m	1	7	6	3	1	9	7	8	1	2	3	48
8/m	4	4	8	5	0	3	5	12	2	3	2	48
<i>f total</i>	7	10	7	6	2	19	7	12	7	12	16	105
<i>m total</i>	5	11	14	8	1	12	12	20	3	5	5	96
totals	12	21	21	14	3	31	19	32	10	17	21	201
9/m	4	0	3	4	0	3	2	5	4	3	4	32
10/f	2	2	5	2	0	0	2	3	3	2	3	24
11/f	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	8	2	1	2	21
12/m	1	4	2	2	0	2	2	5	1	2	9	33
<i>f total</i>	4	3	6	3	0	3	2	11	5	3	5	48
<i>m total</i>	5	4	5	6	0	5	4	10	5	5	13	62
totals	9	7	11	9	0	8	6	21	10	8	18	110

Spiegel (1992) noted that parents of successful readers want their children to succeed. Every parent in this study indicated, at least once, that they want their children to succeed. Following are excerpts from parent interview transcripts categorized according to Spiegel's (1992) listed items corresponding with parents' desire for success for their children.

Parents of successful readers desire success for their children. (#1)

The highest achieving student's (1/f) parent did not mention her desire for her

child to succeed often, but she stated,

I think they know they have to succeed; they know they have expectations. And they have to live up to those. It's just a priority. It's a priority in the family... You want your children to be successful in life in general, and in order to do that, to me, the education is the foundation. And reading is the basic foundation in that.

The same parent indicated that, beyond her desire for her child's success, she also desires enjoyment for her child.

I would say that [I want her to] process information easily and enjoy it, because I've always enjoyed reading, and I would like her to enjoy it. I know that getting into college there's so much to go through, and I want her to be able to enjoy it and not be challenged by just doing the basics and not being able to grasp the material. It just makes life so much easier.

The parent of the highest median achieving student (5/f) acknowledged the importance of reading indicating that reading success will help her child achieve her desired life goals.

So for me, it's, whatever she chooses to do in life- or what any child chooses to do- they have to be a good reader. And I just think it enhances so much of your life...So, for me, it's just- We know how critical it is as a skill. As a society we know that now, and so we just need to just make sure we do everything we can to promote that.

Parents of successful readers impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children. (#2)

Eleven of the 12 parents in this study, regardless of the child's performance, indicated, at least once, that they impart a sense of importance of education and have high

expectations for their children. The parent who did not indicate a desire for her son's success was the parent of a low achieving child (9/m). A parent of a high achieving student stated,

It's not just any one thing. But I do think it happens at home, and I think that it takes a lot of time. It's not just like, Oh we're gonna sit here for ten minutes, and read a book. That doesn't work. It's the full gamut of... you know, you see stuff on the road, "Oh, look, that's..." You know, "What does that say?" It's just those small interactions that create the whole experience.

Another parent of a high achieving student (4/m) stated that she demonstrates high expectations for her children in everyday interactions.

I basically I told them, if you want to use the computer or search for the sites you want to go to, you're going to have to type it in yourself.

The mother of a median achieving student (5/fm) indicated the importance of modeling; being an example for her children.

Well, it has to be important to you and you have to make it important to them. It's by reading yourself and them seeing that, or reading *to* them. Making it a part of everything you do.

It was also mentioned by one parent (7/m) that there is no single, fool-proof way to demonstrate the importance of education. She said,

Kids are different. I don't think that what works for one will always work for another. But I think that if kids know that reading is important to you, and it's important in your house... without kind of harping on it.

A parent of another median achieving student (8/m) indicated the use of a child's goals for the future to promote the importance of education.

The big thing is being a pilot. And we tell him that a pilot has to read a lot in order to be able to do his job. I think that helps him... Flying a plane is really cool, but you have to know how to do that and that's written. So, looking forward, into the future, saying "This is something you need to be able to do."

Parents of successful readers know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life. (#6)

A total of 62 codes represented parents' awareness of school activities and children's literacy experiences. High scoring students' parents earned 13 codes. The low achieving students earned only 8 codes. The bulk of the codes (41) fell in the median achieving student group. Parents of high achieving students often received the code for being aware of their child's literacy life yet they did not often mention what was happening in school. One high achieving student's (1/f) mother mentioned specific wording used by her child's teacher to describe word parts. The utilization of this term indicates that the parent is aware of at least a portion of what is occurring at school when it comes to phonics instruction.

She would always say "hunks and chunks" [referring to common letter combinations within words]. [The teacher] is very good at giving her that. I never would have put that word to it. It's very effective.

The same parent also mentioned the impact of her daughter's teacher on her daughter's enjoyment of particular books. The parents' knowledge of books shared within the

classroom indicates that the parent was aware of what was happening in her daughter's classroom.

I think that is how [my daughter] started *Junie B. Jones*. In fact, [her son], he was in preschool and I had to pick him up, and she would have to be sent down (to the office) to be a car rider before she (the teacher) read the book, and she asked me, she came down, like, the second day crying, saying "I'm missing the story." And so I had to wait ten or fifteen minutes at the end of the (day) ...waiting for her.

When asked about her daughter's (2/f) school, one mother indicated that her daughter's reading life is richer due to the impact of the school. She said,

I think it's been good so far, in her school, with the homework and everything. There's still the nighttime reading that we do, that's not gonna [sic] change. And introducing her to other things. You know, she doesn't normally read non-fiction, but because she was exposed to it, she is aware of it. She likes it, and she can seek that out sometimes. So, I think school has broadened her horizons beyond her bookshelf here at home. And I don't think it's been too much or too little. It's been a good balance there.

The same parent described how they fulfilled school homework expectations in first grade. Rather than allowing her child to complete her weekly homework assignments in one sitting, the mother, believing the daily practice would be more beneficial, spread the activity throughout the week.

Well, when she comes home, I always look-we get out the folder, and we see what she has. It's a little different this year, we haven't gotten in a real good routine yet. School just started, and it's like a daily homework slip this year,

whereas [her previous teacher] gave a weekly packet and you could work on it throughout the week. So we would work on her packet throughout the week, and there was always a poem to read, to practice with, and we'd read that every day and do her spelling words, and um, just keep it every day. Sometimes she'd want to do it all on Monday night, but I'd try to space it out just so we touch on it every day so it's fresh in her mind.

A median achieving student (5/f) has homework assignments which the parent acknowledged as important. She ensures that her daughter is maintaining work assigned by the school. She said,

And now [my daughter's] in second grade. Read 20 minutes a night is her assignment each night. So obviously, that's important. The first few days, she was giving me grief about it, and I said "That's your assignment. That's what your teacher said. This is what's important." And she loves to do it. It's just her trying to be difficult. It's a mother daughter thing.

The same parent (5/f) also indicated the assistance the school has provided in helping her to better promote literacy at home. She thought literacy was simply reading a book. Her daughter's preschool teachers showed her that finger following words on the board, finishing open-ended sentences, and talking about the pictures is literacy. She described the school as "very instrumental" when promoting literacy.

I wouldn't have known any of that prior to kids. I was a working person, (and) then everything shifted. [A teacher] would, you know, be doing puppets with them, and I was like, "Literacy... What? But you get it, because you watch your little ones go from this to this, and you think, "Oh my gosh, that's it." So it was

crucial to me in understanding what was going on with the kids and being able to watch the growth that those preschool teachers bring out of those kids. It wasn't just mine. I mean, I watched other kids who at the beginning of the year didn't say anything, and by the end of the year I'm having conversations with them.

Another median achieving student's (6/f) mother stated that her daughter's school influenced how she promoted literacy with her daughter. She stated that she discovered her daughter was a good reader by volunteering in her kindergarten classroom and noticing the skill variances between the students in the class. As a result of her volunteer experience she also began paying attention to the levels indicated on some of the books available to her. She began guiding her daughter toward books that were at her reading level. She said,

I volunteered in [daughter's] kindergarten class a lot... So that was like, "Oh wow! My daughter's a really good reader. Okay." And then you sort of like learn the whole lingo like "This is a level a, b, c, d..." So then...I knew that she was reading at an "L" or whatever, and then I could go and find appropriate books for her. But I think that, had I not volunteered in the classroom, I wouldn't have had that extra knowledge. And I don't know that I would have encouraged her so much.

The lowest median achieving student's (8/m) parent was asked who typically instigates the reading she does with her child. This parent indicated that her son needs to be encouraged and incentives are used. She answered,

It's usually me following up what was asked of him in school. If it's supposed to be 20 minutes, we set the timer, and we do it. But it's not without a little bit of push that we need, and there's some incentive behind it.

The parent of a low achieving student (9/m) indicated that she is aware of the expectations regarding her child's school homework expectations. She also indicated that she has her child complete the assignment in two separate sittings rather than all at one time. She said,

We usually try to do homework right after school. He gets a little bit of a break. He gets a half hour break or so, has a snack, you know, unwinds. And then we start. We section it off. He does it for like 10 minutes. And then we take a break. And another 10 minutes.

When I inquired who chooses the books her son reads, the same parent stated that she allows her son to choose, but that even that selection is impacted by a classroom teacher. She said,

I kind of give him a choice, I guess, 'cause [his first grade teacher], last year, gave us a book list; a reading list. I'm not sure what level it goes to, but I've just been picking books off of that. I knew what he ended up at at the end of the year. This summer we worked at that level.

Another parent of a low achieving student (11/f) indicated a strong tie to what the school is doing with her child. She indicated that she would not do anything that would go against what the school promoted for her daughter.

I would never stray off the... I'll follow what their reading is at school. I was completely wrong [once] because when they started reading they (the children)

actually use the pictures in the booklets, and I thought that was cheating. I was like, “No, we’re gonna cover the picture up. You have to sound out each word. Until they actually get the hang of it, they need that picture. So, I was telling her, “You’re cheating.” [Her child’s teacher] set me straight.

Provide Positive Literacy Role Models

I considered parents’ provision of a positive literacy role model which include, from Spiegel’s (1992) list: (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together; (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children’s materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; and (10) serve as role models as readers themselves. When considering parents’ provision of positive literacy role models for their children, Table 6 shows high-achieving students' code totals equaled 76. Median achieving students earned 80 codes, and low achieving students earned 53 codes in all. In this area, providing positive literacy role models, the median achieving students, again, earned more codes than the high achieving students, and the low achieving students’ code earnings were less than the higher achieving groups. The range in scores was less than 30.

Table 6

Typological Frequency Coding Results- Raw Data

	Want success for kids	Impart import. of ed.	Impart love for reading	Enjoy and invest	See self as child's 1 st teach	Informed re: school/ lit. lives	Believe impact child	Prov. lit artifacts in home	Parents read to kids	Parents read/role models	Provide effective lit. inst.	total
Sdnt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	codes
1/f	1	2	8	6	4	4	4	6	3	2	8	48
2/f	3	5	4	6	9	4	4	5	6	4	3	53
3/m	6	3	8	8	6	4	12	5	6	2	9	69
4/m	8	8	0	9	10	1	9	8	6	3	19	81
<i>f total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>150</i>
totals	18	18	20	29	29	13	29	24	21	11	39	251
5/f	6	8	5	3	2	9	6	5	2	5	9	60
6/f	1	2	2	3	0	10	1	7	5	7	7	45
7/m	1	7	6	3	1	9	7	8	1	2	3	48
8/m	4	4	8	5	0	3	5	12	2	3	2	48
<i>f total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>96</i>
totals	12	21	21	14	3	31	19	32	10	17	21	201
9/m	4	0	3	4	0	3	2	5	4	3	4	32
10/f	2	2	5	2	0	0	2	3	3	2	3	24
11/f	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	8	2	1	2	21
12/m	1	4	2	2	0	2	2	5	1	2	9	33
<i>f total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>62</i>
totals	9	7	11	9	0	8	6	21	10	8	18	110

Spiegel (1992) noted that parents of successful readers provide positive literacy role models. Every parent in this study indicated, at least once, that they provide their children with a positive literacy role model. Following are excerpts from parent interview transcripts, categorized by each of Spiegel's (1992) listed items of what parents of successful readers do with their children.

Parents of successful readers impart a love for reading and they value reading together. (#3)

Imparting a love for reading and reading together was evidenced for students of all three levels of achievement in this study. The median achieving students earned one more code (21) than high achieving students (20), and nearly doubled the code totals of low achieving students (11). Parents of high and median achieving readers provided specific information often referencing specific book titles and/or characters when discussing their children's reading. One parent (1/f) said,

You know what I've done with her... She loves like, I would find a series, like, in first grade she loved Junie B. Jones, and we- I think it's fun to hear her read, of course so she can be practicing, but also to get me to read to her so she can relax and enjoy it, the expression and stuff, so I would read a chapter and we would do it every night, and it would depend on how late we got her to bed, I'd read a chapter, she'd read a chapter, so we'd kind of rotate. We'd read like four chapters. We spent a good amount of time, and it wasn't too much, and she looked forward to it.

When a parent of a low achieving student (12/m) spoke of books her child enjoyed, no titles or authors were discussed. While the higher achieving student's parent gave an example of one series she enjoyed with her daughter, the lower achieving student's parent recalled one book, and she never actually mentioned reading it together. She said,

He loved to pick out books. He really did. He had this huge dinosaur book. He loved that one. And he would sit there...He'd carry it around growling. And so we would talk about the different dinosaurs. And, you know, he'd tell me the

Tyrannosaurus Rex was one of the biggest dinosaurs there was. I would explain that they're no longer around. No, we can't really go find one in the back yard. Many parents spoke of nighttime routines as being an enjoyable time for reading with their children. One parent of a median achieving student (5/f) said,

We love to read together at night. That's always been kind of a nice go-to-bed activity.

A parent of a lower achieving (9/m) student said the same thing, but she emphasized that her son loves when *she* reads. Though there is indication of a love for reading together, there is no evidence of parent scaffolding as the child attempts to read portions of the story on his own. The parent does all of the reading, and the child enjoys the story. There is no indication of print referencing, which involves the use of verbal and nonverbal techniques to encourage children's attendance to the words on the page utilizing methods such as tracking under words with fingers, or stating, "That word says---" (Justice, 2009).

It is a part of our daily routine; a part of our nighttime routine, and it always has been. Ever since he was an infant, I would sit there and read to him, in the evenings, and then we'd do the rest of our evening chores, I guess. Um, but we always have done it. Every single day. And we continue to do it. Um, he enjoys when I read. Yes. Yes. And he's really into.... He just discovered the Boxcar Children, and I just remembered that from when I was younger, and he's just loved it. He's like, "One more chapter, please. One more chapter, please."

Another parent of a lower, median achieving student (8/m) voiced similar issues when she stated,

Yeah, the routine is just to cuddle in and read. Sometimes it's dad. Sometimes it's mom. I know at that time of the day, it would be frustrating for him to try to read. 'Cause we've tried that. I noticed that there's been some aggravation and frustration, and that's the last thing I want... to be aggravated for one, and then be riled up because he's not happy.

Another parent of a low achieving student (11/f) said,

Oh! We love bedtime stories at night. And I like having them pick out sight words or star words. And rhyming, too.

The higher achieving students' parents often shared the actual reading of the story. The parent and the child took turns reading the words on the pages of the books they enjoyed. These parents also spoke of a general aspiration for a love of reading. For example, one parent (2/f) said,

Well, I always wanted her to enjoy reading. That's my aspiration, that she enjoys it and uses it how she wants to. What she wants to read, and when she wants to read, and just does it because she wants to and because she enjoys it. Not because she has to, or it's something to dread or feel like it's a chore. I mean, of course she'll have assignments, and things like that, but outside of that, I want her to have a reading life.

Another parent (7/m) said it this way:

I would hope that I'm teaching them to love reading. I would hope that that's how I impact them. That it's an enjoyment, and that books have great stories in them, whether it's fiction or non-fiction. I think you'll always learn something when you read a book.

One parent stated that she wanted her daughter (6/f) to love reading, yet she did emphasize a focus on her child's comprehension of the story when she stated,

I guess I just really want my kids to love reading and just so they would have good reading comprehension, so they would be able to read and then understand without me having to go back and say, "This is what they meant," and they're so clueless, you know? Um, yeah, just that she would love reading. 'Cause I'm a reader, so I like to talk about books with my kids.

Parents of successful readers provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive. (#8)

Provision for literacy artifacts within the home is evidenced among all achievement groups. The highest achieving students earned 24 codes, the median achieving students earned 40, and the lowest achieving students earned 21 codes; only three fewer than the highest achieving students. When the mother of the highest achieving student (1/f) was asked about the number of books available for her daughter's use, she said,

Maybe 200. We would always do the Scholastic. With her older siblings. She has so many more choices now, it's like she starts out . . . She already has the whole series to read. It's just different than with the older . . . We do cooking, baking. She loves to write. Look at this art thing here (noting supply drawers). This is her spot (indicating the dining room table).

She went on to say,

I think it was just something we always did. I mean art stuff- we always had stuff around, we always write cards or thank-yous or things like that. We have

workbooks. She likes to do a lot of cards for her friends so she has like, the stencils, scissors so she can make pretty... you know, to make it kind of fun. And I don't say go write. She'll come, and get a piece of paper and just start writing.

One parent of a high achieving student (2/f) said,

Well, there are a lot of books, and pads and pads of paper, because she is a prolific writer. And there's pencils, markers, paints, crayons, stamps, stickers, I mean, poster board. I mean, she has a plethora of writing and reading stuff.

She indicated how others' reading in the home impact her daughter's reading life, when she said,

... I read like classic literature. [Her husband] reads biographies, things like that. I read the Sunday newspaper, though it takes me a week to read. I read when the baby naps. And [her husband] reads a lot on his phone, and she reads a lot on the internet, too. I get magazines, and she likes to look at the magazines too. We have mostly books, magazines, the paper...

When I asked what some of the favorite books were, this parent named specific titles. This familiarity with the books may indicate that it is not merely the ownership of the books that is impactful, but, instead, the interaction with them that promotes literacy success (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997).

Well, for her, right now, it's the Pinkalicious series. And Misery Moo books. (Clicketty Clacketty), and Duck for President. When she was younger, she had a big Mercer Mayer obsession with the Little Critter books. I think we must have bought most every Little Critter book out there, and there's a lot. And she had a Dr. Seuss phase.

This same parent stated,

Yeah. The library. And sometimes I'd just go buy a little variety, and she'd just have one that becomes a favorite. And she likes the characters, so she wants more of the characters.

Another parent of a high achieving student (3/m) stated,

One hundred plus, books, and we always have paper; handwriting paper we practice with. We keep a lot of crayons, markers, scissors... He's really into airplanes. He likes to make paper airplanes. He uses a lot of copy paper for that kind of thing.

This parent named specific books her son enjoys reading. She also mentioned that either she or her husband reads the same books as their children.

Yeah. They've got books at home, books they've read a million times. Their favorite series right now is the one with the little boy and his brother; Diary of the Wimpy Kid. They've got all of those. They're definitely for boys. My husband read it. Usually, one of us reads whatever book they're reading.

The mother of the highest median student (5/f) said

She has, literally, probably 150 books in her room. And we read. Her father and I read. He always has a stack of books on his nightstand, and I have books on mine. I probably do not read in front of them as much, as maybe I should, but, typically when I'm with them, and they're 7, 5, and 1, they don't want to watch me read. So, I'm engaged with them, and doing things with them, and that kind of stuff, but I think they know it's important because we read to them. We have books available for them.

She explained how they promoted reading and writing.

We did Lori Berkner, and even stuff on Nick Jr. and the kids love Dora and some of the characters and singing their songs. I mean, that's all literacy.

Another parent of a median achieving student (6/f) said,

She would seriously read like eight books a day. So, like, some of 'em, I don't even know what she read. My aunt goes to half price books and she buys her tons of books. And she just reads them so quick.

She also said,

We have a playroom in our house, and we have an art table, so pretty much have like loads of paper and like all kinds of art (supplies). I mean, like my daughter, she has always loved art, like, she's an art lover, so she will draw and then she'll write a story to go along with it. She'll draw and she'll turn it into a card.

Markers, colored pencils, paint, watercolors, pretty much anything you, want we pretty much have.

One parent of a median achieving boy (7/m) described her family's pursuit of reading material, saying,

We definitely go to the library. Probably twice a month. And we pick out books. I let them choose whatever's interesting to them. We used to go to the bookstore a lot, but that's kind of gotten out of our... Because they wanted me to always buy them something, so that's why I stopped. But we used to do that a lot. But they had tables... That's why I guess we kind of focus more on the library now. We can't afford to buy books... We have tons of books.

Another parent of the lowest median achieving boy (8/m) mentioned the library as a resource for books within the home, and she specifically mentioned the library-promoted summer reading program. This parent emphasized rewards for reading.

When we go to the toy section of the store, he says, "I want that," and I say, "Okay, then you need to do your reading. It's incentives. If it's a big thing, and it's not a special holiday or something coming up, I say, "Okay, then we need to go... For example, the library was really great this summer and they had the reading program, and they had the balloons, if you read 15-20 minutes you got to... And he would... I'd say "Here's what you have to do... And now, some of your prizes can be..." And we'd go to the store and say, "Okay, if that's the one you want, then we have to get going."

A parent of a low achieving student (9/m) said,

We go to the library. He did the reading program, and he did get a sign, "Super Star lives here." He was real proud of that. We went like twice a week, and he would see me check out books as well. They got to check out 2-3 books at a time.

When asked, specifically, about what types of reading/writing materials are available for his use, the same parent said,

Library books... We have magazines. He gets the Lego magazine, the Boy Scout magazine. Most of those are always available. Yeah. We have magazines all over the place at home. We ordered a lot of books from Scholastic so a lot of those are laying [sic] around. And I have the Dr. Seuss books from when I was little.

When asked if the excitement was sustained, she said,

Not too long. I think he gets frustrated with it or bored with it. And he's kind of done with it.

The parent of another low achieving student (10/f) indicated that her daughter, whose first language is not English, goes to the library sometimes. Another parent of a low achieving student (11/f) listed literacy-promoting resources available to her daughter within their home.

We do a lot of the booklets that she kept, you know, they come home during the year... We have a library at home of those books ("Keep Books"), because it's handy for her to brush up. We have those. We also have some workbooks. I purchased first grade, second grade workbooks. Oh yeah. They have a desk in their room. They have flashcards with the alphabet. We have writing tablets with the large spacing. Pencils, crayons, all that good stuff...

The parent of the lowest scoring student in this study (12/m) said,

He's got a whole bunch of books that my aunt gave to us. We used to go to the library, but, unfortunately her (indicating a child sitting with us) mom took some books out and lost them, and now I'm paying down the fees. So, I wasn't quite thrilled about that. That was one thing we used to do, 'cause that was a free activity. And, I mean, we have construction paper. He has pencils and markers and... Magazines, I tried some newspapers- He likes the kids' ones they get from school (Scholastic News).

Parents of successful readers read to their children often. (#9)

According to Spiegel (1992), parents of successful readers read to their children often (9). This study indicates that the high achieving students are read with more often

than lower achieving students. High achieving students' parents mentioned reading with their children more than twice as many times (21) as median (10) and low achieving students (10). When comparing males to females, only the median achieving students displayed a range greater than three (7), indicating that the median achieving girls (5f/6f) earned 12 coded responses, were read to twice as often as the median achieving boys (7m/8m) who earned five coded responses.

Parents were asked how many times they read to their child. These data were organized in a chart according to students' achievement levels (Table 7). The parent interviews were conducted before the commencement of school, and many parents declared that the number of times they read with their children that week was not the typical number of times they read per week. The data indicate that high achieving students were read with an average of 3.6 days. The median scoring group was read with 2.75 days, and the low achieving students were read with 2.25 days.

Table 7

Frequency of Parent reading to/with Student

<u>Number of times student was read to last week:</u>		
1/f	3	
2/f	3	high achieving students
3/m	5	
4/m	3	
3.6 average # days read to, per week		
<i>average per week for f = 3</i>		
<i>average per week for m = 4</i>		
<hr/>		
5/f	5	
6/f	4	median achieving students
7/m	0	
8/m	2	
2.75 average # days read to, per week		
<i>average per week for f = 4.5</i>		
<i>average per week for m = 1</i>		
<hr/>		
9/m	5	
10/f	2	low achieving students
11/f	2	
12/m	0	
2.25 - average number of days read to, per week		
<i>average per week for f = 2</i>		
<i>average per week for m = 2.5</i>		
<hr/>		

The parents of female students stated they read with their daughters for an average of 3.17 times the week prior to their interview. The parents of male students stated they read with their sons for an average of 2.5 days during the same week. Parents of female students were read to more often than boys. In both the high and median achieving student categories, the top achievers are female students. In the low achieving student category, the highest achieving student was read to five times; more than the total for all other three participants together, who were read to for a total of 4 times.

Thus far in the study, this is the singular area where the highest achieving students earned more codes than the median achieving students. Although all parents indicated, at least once, that they read to their children, the number of times that activity was mentioned decreased from 21 to 10 codes, from the highest achieving to the median achieving students. The low achieving students also earned 10 codes referring to their parents reading with them. The parent of the highest achieving student in this study (1/f) said,

You know, I have read to her... I've always... My mom always read to us a lot, and we always have bookshelves in their room, and a place where they can read, and it's always well, I have four kids, it's a nice quality time together, and I think they all really- it's like special time. Especially when I read to them. [My daughter] is five years younger than her next oldest sibling and so it's always been like time that we have together. And we read pretty much every day... when she was really little her older siblings were still in school, and it was just her and I, and we just carried books everywhere. We read all the time so she knows.

Another parent of a high achieving student (2/f) said,

Well, we usually have nighttime, bedtime reading. She'll always want to read the book. Of course, when she was younger it was me who would start it. She always has books picked out that she wants to read. She gets her library books from school, and she wants to read them. So, she mostly instigates reading now, 'cause it's part of a ritual; her routine.

Another parent of a high achieving student (3/m) mentioned the fact that they have read with their children from a young age and that enjoyment is a part of their reading.

We read a lot to them when they were younger, starting maybe when they were two. And certain books they like, we read it over and over, and then they just knew it. They didn't know how to read, but they just memorized the story. So, they enjoyed that, so we're working on that with the last child.

The same parent indicated the regularity of their reading together.

At night. Not every night... Well, 4-5 evenings, [I] just read to them..., right before they go to bed.

When I asked if it was connected to homework, she indicated that the selected reading is separate from school work.

The parent of another high achieving student (4/m) indicated that she did not read with them as much anymore when she said,

I read to them. Like when they were younger; babies, I would point to each word. That's what my mother did with me. I learned how to read early. So, point to each word, say it slowly, and then we discuss the picture. Now they're pretty much on their own. I'll give suggestions, you know, "Check this out..."

I probed to learn whether this parent reads to them anymore. She said,

Yeah. Right now, we're slowly going through the Bible... Yes, about every other day we do it.

The parent of a median achieving student (6/f) made it clear that she continues to read to her children.

Well, occasionally, now, since she's such a good reader, I'll let her read the book, but normally I'll read the book, because, my son likes it better when I read, and like, you know, like, you get the inflection right, whatever. So, anyway, but, yeah, always together. Yeah, and like, even from when she was like a baby. We've always read the same book, I mean like, even now, she, like, reads chapter books and stuff, but we still read like a traditional, bedtime storybook. Like a picture book.

The parent of the lowest median achieving student (8/m) said of reading with her child, It makes me stop. The dishes aren't going to wash themselves. You know, you get caught up in that, but knowing it's an important thing... And sometimes he just wants me to read. He'll say, "Mommy, I want you to read today." And that's fine. I'll do that. I asked his teacher, "What do we need to do to keep him on this level." Twenty minutes in the morning. Twenty minutes in the evening. Sometimes it happened, sometimes it wouldn't. But when there was that big incentive, then he would, "Mom, I want to read again. I want to read again." Eventually we want him to read just because of the story's captivation.

In response to a probing question about being aware of the time spent reading, she replied,

We have the timer in the other room. And he'll say, "Mommy, is it time yet?" And I'll say, "No, you've got a few more minutes." Sometimes he will keep going if he knows the end of the chapter's coming. If we're at a scene when the time goes off, then we have to finish. He'll say that to me occasionally. (I don't want to stop.) And it's mostly the Magic Tree House stories.

Another parent of a low achieving student (9/m) said,

Um, we usually do it. One night might be a movie night, 'cause we don't watch TV during the week. One night we might be at a friend's house. So typically, five days, but Sundays... We always read on Sundays. So, Sunday through Thursday. We might read on a Friday night or Saturday if we're home, but on an average, I guess, five days a week... Um, I typically do, and like I said, it's part of our routine. We do it in the evening.

Table 4 indicates that parents of successful readers mentioned reading to their children more often than parents of children low achieving students. When asked how many times they had read to the children the week prior to their interview, the parents of high achieving students read to their children more days in that week. Parents of median and low achieving students earned ten codes each while parents of high achieving students earned 21 codes.

The parent of the lowest median achieving student (8/m) indicated a reliance on the use of incentives to urge her son toward reading. She stated that she took her son to a store to select a desired toy. The child would read for an allotted number of minutes in order to earn the purchase of the toy. The use of incentives to promote reading has been considered counterproductive related to educators' goals for students. Some studies revealed that children who read for extrinsic reasons have poorer reading skills than children with fewer extrinsic motivations (Kohn, 2010 & Becker, et al., 2010).

Parents of successful readers serve as role models as readers themselves. (#10)

Though research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers serve as role models for their children, this study does not appear to support this premise based

on the marked codes. Only three students' parents referred to themselves as readers during their interviews. In fact, the parent of the highest scoring student (1/f) in this study did not regard herself a reader. She said,

I take my role really seriously as a wife and mother, and I feel like this isn't the best time for me to read. It's almost like, it would be selfish. I did read. I just had surgery and I couldn't do anything for like 6 weeks. So I read three books. It was so great 'cause I laid on the couch. I couldn't do anything. My mom was here. I would just say, "I can't do anything. I'm reading." I read... I love history, so I read Ghost Soldiers. I read the girl with the Dragon Tattoo, and then the second one. It was really good!

She went on to say that though she does not read often, she does enjoy reading and considers it a treat.

Another parent of a high achieving reader (3/m) indicated that she considered herself a reader. When asked what kind of reading she does, she said she likes inspirational reading and romance if she is able to fit it into her schedule. She also mentioned self-help books.

The parent of a median achieving student (5/f) indicated that she and her daughter had recently spent some time reading alongside one another.

Today, just before we came here, [my daughter] was doing her 20 minutes of reading, and she was turning the TV off, which was obviously appropriate, but [her] brother [was] watching it, and he's not doing his assignment now, so [I said] 'I'm reading in the dining room. Why don't you come in here with me?' So, we

sat next to each other in the dining room and read. So that was kind of fun. Like, hey, we can just do this, close to each other, and it was a shared activity.

This same parent described her own childhood reading habits, and she went on to describe the reading habits of others in her family.

Well, I would have never read a pleasure book growing up. If it wasn't a textbook, I didn't read it, 'cause that was required reading, and all I wanted to do was what I had to do. It honestly took a long time to adjust to that. Now I like a quick thriller, mystery type of book. A "who done it" kind of thing. Right now, faith books are kind of big for us. A lot of - just kind of... inspirational writing. My husband loves to read thrillers. She (her daughter) likes Junie B Jones, Ramona, A-Z mysteries, Ivy and Bean... Large Beverly Cleary books.

A parent of a median achieving student (6/f) indicated that she enjoys using her Kindle, and that her children know she likes to read. I asked a probing question about her husband's reading habits, and she said,

He's not really a reader, per se. I mean reads, like, magazines. And he does read, like he's doing a Bible study, so he's reading the book that he has to read for homework. But he's not like me. I'm more the reader...I pretty much only read fiction, although I do read magazines... unless you count the internet. I read a ton of blogs. Oh, and so does my husband. He, like, reads more books than I do, and he's like, "I read this thing today..." He's always, "I read this on the internet..." I'm like, "Oh, yeah."

The parent of the lowest median achieving boy (8/m) indicated that her husband reads quite a bit, and that she reads on occasion.

Parents of all of the low achieving students mentioned reading themselves. One parent (9/m) mentioned her love for reading as a child and that her son does not have that love for reading she had experienced. She mentioned that her children see her check books out of the library, for herself.

Oh, gosh, I used to love to read when I was growing up. I just wish they'd pick up the same love for reading as I have. He's been a little bit of a struggle. If he doesn't have to be told to do something, he'll do it. But if I ask him to sit down and do his reading, he kind of fights with it... And he would see me check out books as well. They got to check out 2-3 books at a time.

The parent of a low achieving child (10/f) indicated that she receives magazines in the mail, and that her daughter sees her mother reading them.

I asked the parent of a low achieving female student (11/f) to describe the types of reading materials that she and other family members enjoyed. The parent stated that she read information on Facebook, her cellular phone, email, the paper, and magazines. She indicated that she did not read as much as she would like because she would fall asleep.

The lowest achieving student (12/m) in this study mentioned that she reads. She did not give detail as to the kinds of reading she does, but she stated that her children observe her reading.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature on this topic. Adams (1990) stated that reading aloud to children is the most important activity for building knowledge and skills needed for reading. Researchers also indicated that the more parents

engage in literacy activities themselves, both with their children and on their own, regardless of their skill levels, the better their children perform in the area of reading (Weigel, et al., 2006).

Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teacher

Finally, in the third category, I considered parents' roles as their children's first teacher and included four of the 11 coded items from Spiegel's (1992) list: Parents of successful readers (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher; (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; and (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings.

Within this theme, the high achieving students' total codes earned was 126. Median achieving students earned 57 total codes, and low achieving students earned only 33 coded responses in all. The high achieving students' codes more than doubled those of median achieving students (126-57) codes, and they nearly tripled the number of codes for low achieving students (126-33).

Table 8

Typological Frequency Coding Results- Raw Data

	Want success for kids	Impart import. of ed.	Impart love for reading	Enjoy and invest	See self as child's 1 st teach	Informed re: school/ lit. lives	Believe impact child	Prov. lit artifacts in home	Parents read to kids	Parents read/role models	Provide effective lit. inst.	code
Sdnt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	total
1/f	1	2	8	6	4	4	4	6	3	2	8	48
2/f	3	5	4	6	9	4	4	5	6	4	3	53
3/m	6	3	8	8	6	4	12	5	6	2	9	69
4/m	8	8	0	9	10	1	9	8	6	3	19	81
<i>f total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>150</i>
totals	18	18	20	29	29	13	29	24	21	11	39	251
5/f	6	8	5	3	2	9	6	5	2	5	9	60
6/f	1	2	2	3	0	10	1	7	5	7	7	45
7/m	1	7	6	3	1	9	7	8	1	2	3	48
8/m	4	4	8	5	0	3	5	12	2	3	2	48
<i>f total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>96</i>
totals	12	21	21	14	3	31	19	32	10	17	21	201
9/m	4	0	3	4	0	3	2	5	4	3	4	32
10/f	2	2	5	2	0	0	2	3	3	2	3	24
11/f	2	1	1	1	0	3	0	8	2	1	2	21
12/m	1	4	2	2	0	2	2	5	1	2	9	33
<i>f total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>m total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>62</i>
totals	9	7	11	9	0	8	6	21	10	8	18	110

Following are excerpts from parent interview transcripts categorized by each of Spiegel's (1992) listed items indicating what parents of successful readers do with their children. The following excerpts support the theme: Parents of successful readers view themselves as their children's first teachers.

Parents of successful readers like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy (#4)

This is the first of Spiegel's (1992) list of parents' actions and beliefs for which there was a difference between high achieving students and the median and low achieving students based on parent responses. Every high achieving student's parent indicated six or more times (an average of 7.35), that they enjoy their children and that they invest in them. Median achieving students' parents averaged 3.5 codes with three students earning three codes and one earning 5 codes. The low achieving students' code average was 2.35 with a range of one to four codes.

These data do not indicate that low achieving students' parents do not value and invest in their children; rather they suggest that those parents of high achieving students demonstrate their high regard for their children differently when it comes to nurturing literacy. Following are excerpts from parent interview transcripts, categorized by each of Spiegel's (1992) listed items of what parents of successful readers do with their children when it comes to parents of high achieving readers considering themselves their children's first teachers.

The parent of the highest achieving student (1/f) described the reading she does with her daughter as "nice, quality time" that they all enjoy. She said,

We read pretty much every day. When she was really little, her older siblings were still in school, and it was just her and I, and we just carried books everywhere. We read all the time so she knows- I think it's just the time. I'm with my kids all the time. I always talk to them like, I don't baby talk them. We talk about everything, and we treat them respectfully, and we treat them like- not

equals, because obviously that's not good, but we- they have an opinion, and they're heard.

Another parent of a high scoring student (2/f) mentioned visiting museums.

Well, library trips, and museum trips. And she will go to museums. We go to Chicago once a year to go to museums there. She'll read the plaques and signs. If she's interested, she'll read it. And interactive museums are good for that too.

A parent of the highest median achieving student (5/f) indicated varied, specific interactions; ways she has invested in her daughter with both time and tangible articles that promote literacy. This excerpt was coded for both the fourth (enjoy and invest) and eighth (provide literacy artifacts) of Spiegel's (1992) listed items. I feel it is important to recognize that these two listed items are closely related because a parent who provides literacy artifacts often does so to nurture literacy. This parent spoke of instances demonstrating the connection between herself and her child, while mentioning the enjoyment she receives from such interactions. She spoke of inviting her child to join her and for them to read together. She said,

(to her daughter) "Why don't you come in here with me?" So, we sat next to each other in the dining room and read. So that was kind of fun. Like, hey, we can just do this, close to each other, and it was a shared activity.

She went on to describe the activities in which she engaged with her daughter over the summer break. She emphasized the idea that she promoted educational activities her daughter would enjoy as a result of the love her daughter has for dramatic play.

I would give them an assignment to do. For [my daughter], being in first grade, and knowing how to read quite well, I would laminate a sheet of paper, and I

would write her instructions on it, and I would give her three or four assignments. She loves having things she can check off a list. So I just do things that- She loves it when you put it in the context of dramatic play type of thing.

The parent of a high achieving student (3/m) described how she invests her family's resources when she mentioned purchasing games her child can play on the computer and the many containers of books they have all around their house. The parent of the lowest median achieving student (8/m) mentioned choosing books her son was excited about and books that would interest him. She searches for books according to her child's interests.

When we got our list, I think it was last summer and this summer, I went through, and I tried to find, at the library, the books on the list that they recommended reading. If I would hear of a book at school, like Mo Willems, he was really excited about those... He's not going to read Pinkilicious. So I would just go through and just try to find subject appropriate, and gender appropriate books that he would like. I take his lead, too, sometimes. I try to get a couple of books when it's got his interest.

The parent of the highest scoring, low achieving student (9/m) indicated investment in her son when she mentioned specific materials she provides for him at home.

Library books. We have magazines. He gets the Lego magazine, the Boy Scout magazine. Most of those are always available. Yeah. We have magazines all over the place at home. We ordered a lot of books from Scholastic so a lot of those are laying [sic] around. And I have the Dr. Seuss books from when I was little.

She also mentioned the initial excitement her son expressed because she purchased a desk for his use and placed it in his bedroom. Inside the desk she put blank books that were similar to the ones her son's first grade teacher had provided throughout the school year. She also supplied markers and pencils for him to enjoy. When I asked a probing question regarding the duration of interest when it comes to writing, she stated that it did not last long. He gets frustrated or bored and then he is no longer interested.

Another parent of a lower scoring student (10/fm) smiled when she mentioned that she provides her daughter with family photographs. The photographs are then used to create original books about their family.

Parents of successful readers believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher. (#5)

Only the top scoring students' parents earned four or more codes for the parent is the child's first teacher (Spiegel, 1992). None of the parents of median or low achieving students stated that they viewed themselves as their child's first teacher. Every parent of high scoring students had four to ten coded statements indicating that they see their role as their children's first teacher. Median achieving students had no more than two codes, and two students had no codes in this category.

One parent (1/f) passionately stated,

I think it is, I mean, I think it's my job. And that's what, you know, with the beginning of the year, I can't tell you how many moms are like, I didn't get the teacher I want, I'm not going to waste a year-I get so... You can't tell people that they lack a perspective. One teacher, for a whole class, it has nothing to do with your kid as a reader, or with anything else. I think, no matter what teacher you

have, my parents didn't care what teachers we had, you do your best, you get an A, you figure it out, you know, and so I think it's my primary (job).

She went on to say,

I don't think it's... I really can't say that it would have anything to do with the teachers. Because I feel like, I volunteered every Tuesday and Thursday in [my daughter's] class, a lot of times what [her teacher] wanted me to do was just sit out in the hall and go through their 100 words, and you see such a variety of kids, and she (the teacher) was doing the same for all the kids. You know? She really focused on all the kids and all their needs, so I think it's got to be what happens at home.

When I asked her if she thought parents had to be good readers to positively impact their children's success, she said,

I don't know what a "good" reader is, but if you can read, you can read. If it's something that frustrates you, and you're not real good at it, I don't think you'd be real willing to do it a whole lot. You know, you might think your kids would judge you, you'd feel a little lower. But my mom wasn't a good reader. She always said she has to read real slow [sic]. She can't multi process. Like if she's reading, she can't have any noise. She says she can't process everything. She still read (to me).

When I asked her if she felt her mom's reading to her made a difference in her life she said,

I think it must have. All four of us are doing well. We all read, and you know... So she had to have something to do with it, I think. I give her credit. I think it's just the priority, and the time. Really. I mean if it doesn't take money, and it doesn't take being a great reader, I think it just takes commitment and effort.

Another high achieving student's (2/f) mother stated,

Well, I think my role is the main role. Um, I take responsibility for her academic success. I mean I definitely think the teachers do a wonderful job. Obviously, I don't home school. I think, since she was a baby, I've been interested in helping her learn, and they want to learn, and just helping her go on her way, and with the baby, now, too, you can tell when they're curious about something. I like to try to encourage that. So, I think that parents are the first teachers.

Another parent of a high achieving student (3/m) had homeschooled an older child (not the one represented in this study). She mentioned specific things she did to ensure her child's success; indicating that she felt it was her duty to take the lead in her child's academic life. She did not rely on the schools or the teachers to inform her about what she should be doing for her children. She said,

As far as I can remember, I home schooled my son, so I kept some of the stuff, and I went back and I made sure he (the student in this study) was where he was supposed to be in sounding out words. Even in preschool, I was really worried about that because he wasn't speaking that much. I made sure I was helping him with ABEKA. It's a little advanced for kids. It has these basic phonic books. It starts off with kindergarten, and it shows you how to sound things out. I used that

with (my son) in the summer. Just trying to get him started. So he could be comfortable and relaxed.

The last high achieving student's parent (4/m) made clear her perspective when she said, Basically, before I even had kids, I always had the mindset, "I'm the main teacher." I see those 18 year olds struggling to read a kindergarten book, and the mother's sitting there accusing the school that somebody's--- ugh. I'm like "What about you?"

The same mother stated,

I'm the main... I've always had the mindset that these are my children. I'm going to teach them, mainly, you know, whatever it takes.

When I asked a probing question regarding whether she felt equipped to teach her child, she simply smiled and said, "No." I asked her another probing question regarding how she decided what to do with her children, and she said,

I drew on my knowledge of my mother, read to them...see in them what worked when I was a kid. Some of those shows did work. Sesame Street worked, and so did Electric Company, back then. Also pointing to each word. Also, sometimes stopping to explain what the word meant. Like, "This is 'the', and you're going see this word for the rest of your life. Read to them while they're young, reading around them.

Later in the interview she declared,

I also don't have the mindset that there's a limit... If they can learn extra stuff, give it to them. I taught both of them integers. They can grasp it. It freaked their teachers out.

Though this parent does not home school the child (4/m) in this study, she indicated that her home environment promotes academic success. She stated that they have many art supplies, writing tools including a dictionary and thesaurus, books, and more. She emphasized the importance of curiosity, and she described some ways she tries to teach her children to discover answers to their own questions when she said,

And they ask a lot of questions. We encourage them to ask whatever question, even if it sounds stupid. We tell them that we don't have all the answers, we don't know everything. We'll look it up, research it, we'll figure it out. So they know that both of their parents are still learning.

I asked a probing question regarding rewarding her children for the reading they do, and she said,

No, it's just part of who we are. I really don't focus on reading. We give them the materials they want, but we really don't ... The only thing I really focus on would be like religious/philosophical, life in general, how it actually operates...

Though there were few codes in this category for the median achieving students, one parent (7/m) said,

I think that's my job. If they can't read, that's a parent's fault. And if it's something else...If there's some sort of problem, I think that falls 100 percent on me.

Parents of successful readers believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development. (#7)

When considering parents' beliefs about their impact on their children's literacy development, the high achieving students earned most codes indicating that they believe

they impact their child's literacy development. The median achieving students' parents indicated that they believe they impact their children's success, but there were fewer references earning codes, to indicate such a connection. Not one of the low achieving students received four or more codes in that category. There were only six codes within those transcripts in all, which may indicate that the parents of low achieving students do not believe they can impact their children's literacy success.

One high achieving parent (1/f) indicated that the attention and feedback she provides her child impacts her daughter's achievement.

I would say she does like the attention. She's a very attention oriented person, and I would say that she thrives on my feedback. It's one way to impress and kind of show me that she stands out. There's a lot of competition with all of the kids.

That's probably the main thing.

She also acknowledged that she provides literacy experiences in which her children (1/f) find comfort. She stated that though her daughter is a reader, the son prefers his mother to do the reading rather than his sister. The parent confirmed that she impacts the reading experiences of her children.

When I read to her brother, she'll want to read to him, but he wants to read with me. I think they like the way I read stories. Like, I went to their preschool class and read a few times. It's like you have them memorized and you read them with the same rhythm, and I think they like, they find comfort in that.

Another parent indicated that she believes the reading model her husband and she provided their children (3/m) impacted their literacy success.

I know with the first one, we did a lot of reading with her, and we see how she excelled in school. The second one, my husband and I don't remember how much reading we did with her. We were comparing that to the second set of kids, so we just can't remember. But he does okay. So we're trying to make sure with the last one, to make sure we read as much as we did with the first one. ...that seemed to help the first one excel in school. She did really good [sic] in school.

I asked what she attributed to her son's (3/m) success, and she said,

We read a lot to them when they were younger, starting maybe when they were two. And certain books they like, we read it over and over, and then they just knew it. They didn't know how to read, but they just memorized the story. So, they enjoyed that, so we're working on that with the last child.

She went on to explain that her son's speech development was delayed when compared to his siblings. When her son did well in school, regardless of his speech delay, she attributed his success to all of the time they spent reading with their son.

When he excelled, I was like, wow, all that reading really helped. At first, when he was in preschool, he could barely talk the first year. The second year, he was getting better, but they actually thought [he] had a speech problem. Actually, [he] was more shy than anything, so when he finally came out, he got better in kindergarten, and he really excelled in first grade. I think what helped with that was us reading to him a lot. He would talk at home, but at school he was different. I was like, 'Wow. He can read.'

She also indicated that she intervened when her child did not grasp a concept right away. If a concept appeared to be a struggle for her child, she would address it at home to ensure that her son was successful.

I bought those letters for the fridge. And when [my son] was in preschool.... A lot of that stuff I duplicated. Like the alphabet with the writing of it and have the picture of it. I would duplicate that and have him do it over and over, especially the letters he couldn't remember. It helped with recognition of upper and lower case letters.

The same parent (3/m) provided opportunities for her son to practice some academic skills before she believed they would be formally introduced in his classroom setting. She provided this instruction based on the experiences of her older children. Her desire was for her youngest child to feel a sense of confidence in the classroom setting.

The only thing I will do, if he's ready to go to the next one, I try to get him prepared for it. I say, "Okay, I know in second grade they go into multiplication, so I'll give him just basic stuff, so when they get it, he'll say, "Okay." I fill in gaps if she's not getting it. I'll ask teachers for suggestions. Even if they're doing well, I still like to check in."

Another parent of a high achieving student (4/m) appeared to be uninformed about her child's schooling when I asked if she felt her son had received strong phonics instruction. This parent stated that she did not know if he had or not. She believed that she had already provided phonics instruction prior to his entrance in school. She went on to say that her husband and she have impacted their children's literacy development by making decisions regarding their children's interests and abilities. She indicated that their

decision for her to stay home with her children impacted the children's achievement. It afforded her extended time to purposefully engage with her children in ways that promoted academic success. She stated,

Staying home with the kids until they go to school full-time. For some reason, me being there, reading with them, having them on my lap, or having the TV on educational stuff, or playing board games...staying home with them was the key.

When I asked her a probing question regarding her why she believed her decision to stay home was so impactful, she said,

Flexibility, what I wanted, whenever I wanted. We're going to go to the museum, children's museum, the other one in Columbus...Also that one on one attention.

A parent of a median achieving student (7/m) acknowledged the impact of her husband's death on her children's reading achievement. She had indicated that her older son was more successful with reading and in school in general. When I asked a probing question regarding how the death of her husband impacted her younger son's reading she said,

I think, probably, more of it has to do with [my husband's] death. Because I stopped [reading with them at bedtime] right at that time, which was probably important for [my youngest son]. Now, I'm like, okay, I need to get back to it. Honestly, that's what I think.

She went on to say,

I think, combined with the fact that I haven't done as much "Here, you read to me." That was one thing we would do as we would read, I'd say, "Well, you read a sentence and I'll read a sentence. " And you point out words that you know on

the page.” And I definitely have not done that nearly as much with [my younger son] as I did with [my older son].

The parent of the lowest scoring, median achieving student (8/m) noted the impact of the time she spent sitting alongside her son and listening to him read.

We’ll go to a comfy couch. Say in the summer time, turn the TV off, and then sit on a comfortable couch where we can cuddle and be together. And I would be there with him. I wouldn’t say, “Okay, you read...” Because sometimes I’d see him get the book, but then if I would listen I would see him not pronounce the word right, skip it, maybe get the gist, but then I would want him to sound out the words. He did much better when we would sit together, and that’s how we mostly did it. I wouldn’t be there if I had to run up and answer the door, get the phone, something where my attention would be away from him.

When I asked for clarification about the kinds of guidance she provided as well as the benefits she felt came with the listening to her son read, she said,

I try to keep it brief. And if there’s [sic] a couple of things he missed, I try to hit on the biggest one. And I would then give him the answer and go ahead. But if it was one word where there was [sic] a lot of those rules that he applied, then I would go back and help him break it down. But there are some words that don’t follow any of the rules, and I would point those out to him, and I would tell him, “You were told that this and this makes this, but in this word it doesn’t. You just have to know some of these words. So it’s also kind of that. But then, the next thing I would do, I would have him read a page, and then go back and just say, “Tell me what, kinda’ happened. Quick gist. What happened in this page?” If

there's a thought that continues to the next page, I'd let the thought end, and then say, "Can you tell me what just happened?" That way I like for him to comprehend, not just read the words."

A parent of the lowest achieving student (12/m) in this study indicated that she feels it is important to be an active role model in her son's reading life, however she did not mention any specific activities in which she had engaged with him regarding reading. She mentioned some input regarding mathematics, and she also indicated that she was in contact with her son's teachers. However there was no notation of anything she did to promote his reading achievement. She stated,

I think it's very important for a parent to impact their child's reading development. You can't just send them to school, and expect them to sit there all day, and not come home and not showing interest. So many parents don't. They don't have a clue what their kids are doing. No idea. Keeping abreast of the curriculum... Last year I got one of the mathematic books. I was in constant touch with [his teachers]. Actually both of them are amazing. I would ask, where is he kind of showing a little bit less development? Where is he showing his greater development? Start with his best development, boost his ego, and go over to something that's a little bit more difficult. But making it fun.

Parents of successful readers provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. (#11)

The idea of "effective" instruction refers to the cooperative construction of meaning between parent and child, according to the child's abilities and needs for which

the parents' adjust the demands on his or her child, accordingly (Spiegel, 1992). This is commonly referred to, in education, as "scaffolding" (Teal & Sulzby, 1986).

The parents' comments in this study were coded if opportunities for instruction were referenced as well as when specific parent-child instruction was indicated. The parent of the highest achieving student in this study (1/fm) said,

We go to Chicago once a year to go to museums there. She'll read the plaques and signs if she's interested, she'll read it. And interactive museums are good for that too. Really, she started reading cereal boxes, things like that. At the store she'll say, "Let's see how much sugar this has..." So, I think everything is kind of an opportunity.

She also said,

There are times that are new to her emotions. Just helping her to express herself... Instead of, if she's upset, and I ask what's wrong, and she says I don't know, I think that means I don't know how to say what's wrong, instead of, really, "I don't know." Just helping her get in touch with expressing herself, and also helping herself appropriately. I think, sometimes, when her little friends come over, that comes up a lot. You know- what's appropriate, and what's not. To me that's literacy related because it's her language and how to use it.

At times, the parent of this high achieving student (1/f) did not really enjoy particular interactions with her child, but engaged in them because she recognized their importance.

She said,

I read *The Cat in the Hat*, and *One Fish Two Fish*, both of those long books, every day twice a day for like months, and I was so sick of it. I would try to read them really fast.

Another parent of a high achieving student (3/m) said,

And I have to brainstorm with him to get him to think about... We just did that recently. I'll ask him, "What do you like about the book?" or "What happened in the book?" or things like main character. We read most of the book and make a list of the main characters, so he would understand. Stuff like that.

I asked a probing question regarding whether she does a lot of talking when they read together, and she responded,

Yes, the ones I read to them. Yeah. I kind of just show them that, point to the pictures in the book, you know, what's going on, sometimes they'll get so distracted with the next page, so I point to what's going on and who's doing it.

Right now he's reading *Mouse Soup*. I chose that. It's a book I had from my teenagers. I did choose a book I thought he would like, but it was too difficult, so that's when I went to the *Mouse Soup*. So I let him choose. I had three out. He chose *Mouse Soup* because the other two had girls on them.

This parent adjusted the book choices to match her son's reading level. She ensured attention within the story by directing her son's focus to the important elements of the story. She also considered her son's interests when providing books for him to read. Finally, she allowed him to choose what he liked best; a book that interested him.

Another parent of a high achieving student (4/m) said,

When they were younger we usually kept it (the TV) on PBS. I think the internet was a big draw for them. Also playing children's games on the computer. Using letter magnets on the refrigerator. Spelling out words, certain shows did help. My younger son was having trouble with phonics, and I went on Netflix and got the old Electric Company. He got magic e. As soon as he heard that song, he got it.

She also said,

I wanted to be sure they knew how to pronounce [words] properly. We didn't do baby words. There was no "socky" or "nana"- No. No baby talk. Just over enunciation. They spoke in plain English. People were shocked at that. I don't know why. I was like, "Talk to them ..."

Additionally, she said,

I read to them, but I don't just read. We also analyze what we've read. I'll stop and say, "Do you see they symbolism here?"

The parent of the highest achieving median scoring student (5/fm) said,

I think one of the things... I've always been a fan of not talking down to the kids. Like not dumbing the language for them. So, I'll say, "Sit in your seat properly." And my friends' kids will look at me and say, "What is properly?" But, you know, use words – and she'll say, "What does that mean?" But I mean she's been able to say, 'cornucopia' from a very young age at Thanksgiving time. I use the words, and she's always been capable of saying them back. At home we always talk to them in accurate terms.

The parent of the lowest scoring, median achieving student (8/m) said,

I try to keep it brief. And if there's a couple of things he missed, I try to hit on the biggest one. And I would then, give him the answer and go ahead. But if it was one word where there was a lot of those rules that he applied, then I would go back and help him break it down, but there are some words that don't follow any of the rules, and I would point those out to him, and I would tell him, "You were told that this and this makes this, but in this word doesn't. You just have to know some of these words. So it's also kind of, that.

As I was making notations, throughout the data collection and data analysis process, the mere indication of "literacy interactions" earned a code. Though lower achieving students' parent comments earned codes for mentioning parent-promoted literacy instruction, they differ from the kinds of interactions promoted by parents of high achieving students. One parent said (12/m),

We did puzzles. He's been in daycare ever since he was 18 mos. It's Montessori, and they started it there. I did do flashcards. I did them when he was young, too. And I did do flashcards last year, too. I took the first grade wall words and made them into flashcards. And we did play matching games. I wrote the words out twice, and turned them upside down and we played a Go Fish kind of game. I did that in kindergarten as well. Kindergarten and first grade.

Another parent, who mentioned that she was learning to speak English, indicated that she writes words on a whiteboard for her daughter (10/f) to practice. She mentioned specific words like:

The name of the family. The teacher, papa, mama... sisters...

The mother of the lowest achieving female student (11/f) in this study said,

I let them know it's important. When we drive down the road, we do the letters on a sign. "W" is a letter, and whenever they see that we pass a sign that says "West Chester"... "W" is on that one. You know. It's important. I make sure that they know that.

Finally, the parent of the lowest achieving student (12/m) described using flashcards, sometimes making her own, for letters, shapes, and numbers. She described having fun with workbooks and making words together.

We read at least once or twice a day. And not even just at home, but anytime we were out. If it was a busy day, if we'd gone out to dinner, lots of times I would take the menus and point letters, and I'd show him one letter, and then we would see how many times we could find that letter. I try not to do them exactly in order because he knew his ABC's in order. From the song of course. But mixing it up a little bit... gave him a little variety.

The same parent said,

One of the things we learned to do was... Basically, (his teacher) said his timing was weird. So we would practice rhythm. And I remember they started a series on poetry and I would have him point out the rhyming words. I mean, for the most part, he can sound out most any words. And I don't... I never really baby talked to him. I always used full sentences. You know, I never would say "Want wa-wa?" You know, I would say "Do you want some water? Would you like some water?" It helps him a lot with his speech development.

Haney and Hill (2004) found that the family positively influences their children's reading success. When parents directly teach literacy skills such as the identification of letters and letter sounds, children's success is promoted. The findings of this study, when considering the importance of parents assuming the role of their children's first teacher, are consistent with the literature.

Finding 3-

Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when the parents (a) Desire Success for Their Children, (b) Provide Positive Literacy Role Models, and (c) Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teachers

Research Question 3: How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy?

As I considered each of these three themes, I compared the high achieving students with the median and low achieving students. Using descriptive statistics in order to create a numerical summary, I compared the high achieving students' parents' coded responses to the median and low achieving students' parents' coded responses. It was my aim was to determine what it is that parents of high achieving students do with their children to promote academic success.

Table 9 provides the basic descriptive statistics for the three groups (high achieving students, median achieving students, and low achieving students) within the three generalized themes regarding parents' influence upon their children's literacy achievement. Each theme will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

Theme 1: Parents of high achieving readers desire success for their children. Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; and (6) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life.

Theme 2: Parents of high achieving readers provide positive literacy role models. Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together, (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; and (10) serve as role models as readers themselves.

Theme 3: Parents of high achieving readers consider themselves their children's first teachers. Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher: (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; and (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings.

Note that even the lowest (min) of the high achieving students' scores, in all areas, is at or above the highest (max) scores of the low achieving students. Though the standard deviation is high, Parents as Students' First Teacher has a mean of 31.75. The lowest number of codes for parents of high achieving students (22) is greater than the highest number of codes for the low achieving students (13).

The coding results (Table 9) indicate that parents of high achieving students earned codes for each of Spiegel's (1992) identified categories. Parents of high achieving students earned codes indicating a desire for success for their children (12.25 for items 1, 2, 6) as well as providing positive literacy role models (19.0 for items 3, 8, 9, 10). The code averages for high achieving students, however, were slightly lower than those of the median group when it comes to their desire for success for their children (16.0 for items 1, 2, 6) and the provision of positive literacy role models (21.25 mean for items 3, 8, 9, 10).

Parents of low achieving students demonstrated the desire for success for their children (6.0 for items 1, 2, 6), provided positive literacy role models (12.75 for items 3, 8, 9, 10), and served as their children's first teachers (8.25 for items 3, 8, 9, 10). They earned fewer codes, in all three measures, than both the high and median achieving students.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for High, Median, and Low Achieving Students*High Achieving Students: ($N=4$)

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>
Parent's Desire for Success	12.25	4.11	7.00	17.00
Provision of Pos. Lit. Role Model	19.00	1.63	17.00	21.00
Parent as Student's First Teacher	31.75	11.76	22.00	47.00
Total Codes	63.00	15.11	48.00	81.00

Median Achieving Students: ($N=4$)

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>
Parent's Desire for Success	16.00	5.29	11.00	23.00
Provision of Pos. Lit. Role Model	21.25	4.92	17.00	25.00
Parent as Student's First Teacher	15.25	4.43	11.00	20.00
Total Codes	52.50	6.65	45.00	60.00

Low Achieving Students: ($N=4$)

<u>Measures</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>
Parent's Desire for Success	6.00	1.41	4.00	7.00
Provision of Pos. Lit. Role Model	12.75	.50	12.00	13.00
Parent as Student's First Teacher	8.25	4.27	3.00	13.00
Total Codes	27.00	5.92	21.00	33.00

Though median achieving students' code totals are greater than the high achieving students in two of the three categories (Parent's Desire for Student Success & Provision of Positive Literacy Role Model), the high achieving students' codes are more than double those of the median students' codes under "Parent as Student's First Teacher." The total codes for high achieving students (81) is greater than the total codes for median achieving students (60). Both the high and median code totals were greater than those of low achieving students. Within this category, the mean for high achieving students is 31.75 while the mean for median achieving students is 15.25, and the mean for low achieving students is 8.25 codes.

The data gathered in this study are similar to the findings in the literature. Though all three themes were represented in the coding for students at the high, median, and low levels of literacy achievement, the theme that appears to be particularly influential is the “Parents as First Teachers” theme. This is the only theme where the high achieving students earned a greater number of codes than the median achieving students. The four items from Spiegel’s (1992) list included in this theme include: Parents of the most successful readers: (a) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy (4); (b) believe in the adage that the parent is the child’s first teacher (5); (c) believe they can have an impact on their child’s literacy development (7); and (d) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings (11). Another area that appears particularly impactful is: parents of successful readers read to their children often (9). It could be argued that parents reading to their children could have been included in the “Parents as First Teachers” theme. This topic will be explored, in greater detail, in section five.

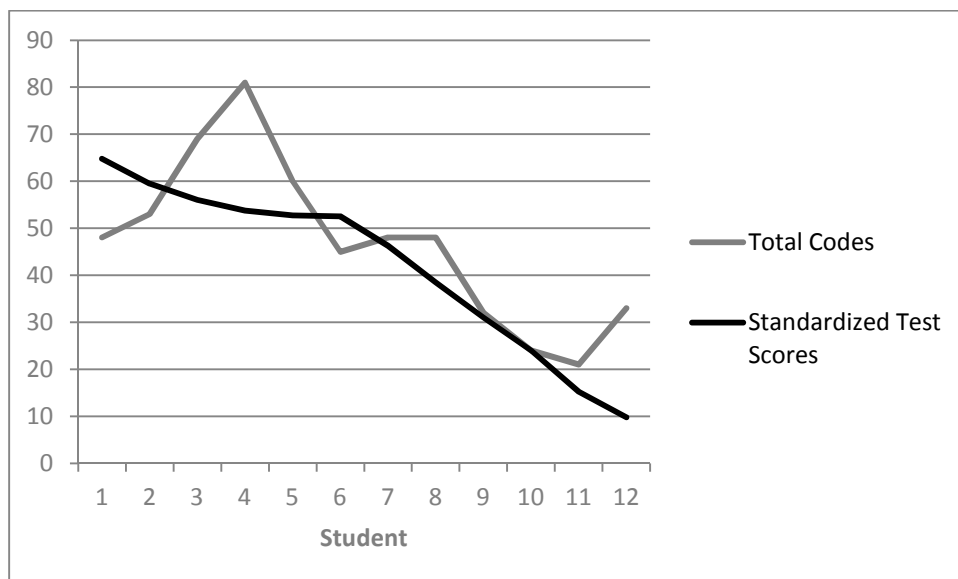
After I created the numerical chart indicating students’ codes with raw data (Table 4), I ranked students in order, from highest achieving (1/f) to lowest achieving (12/m), according to the gathered AIMSweb score averages. I created a comparative line indicating the total number of codes from parent interviews. The following table (Table 10) shows the AIMSweb score averages and the total number of codes by student ranking.

As a group, parents of students in the higher achieving student groups engage in more parent-initiated activities or demonstrated the attitudes noted by Spiegel (1992)

with their children more often than did parents of low achieving students. The lowest achieving of the high achieving students (4/m) had more codes (81) than the other high achieving students (48, 53, 69). Similarly, the lowest achieving student (12/m) earned more codes (33) than all of the other students in the low achieving student group (32, 24, 21).

Table 10

Student AIMSweb Scores charted with Frequency of Coded Responses of Parent Initiated Literacy Activities



Parent-promoted literacy events do impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy. Based on evidence in Table 3, the impact may result from attitudes and activities that Spiegel (1992) identified in her investigation of what it is that parents of successful readers do.

The typological coding results (Table 4) indicate that parents of high achieving students in this study matched each of Spiegel's (1992) identified categories. Parents of high achieving students demonstrated the desire for success for their children (49 total

codes for items 1, 2 6) as well as provided positive literacy role models (76 total codes for items 3, 8, 9, 10). The code totals for high achieving students were slightly lower than the code totals for the median group for parents' desire for success for their children (64 codes) and the provision of positive literacy role models (80 codes). The parents of low achieving students matched all of the identified categories. Only one of Spiegel's (1992) categories, "Parents see themselves as the first teacher" (5) earned no codes by any of the low achieving students (5), and within the theme "Parents Consider Themselves Their Children's first Teacher" (4, 5, 7, 11), low achieving students earned only 33 codes, while median achieving students earned 57 total codes, and high achieving students earned 126 total codes.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases within a study ensure validity (Merriam, 2002). In this study, there were cases that challenged my expectations. My expectation was that high achieving students would earn the most codes in all categories, median achieving students would earn slightly fewer, and low achieving students would earn fewest. I believed the code earnings would be graduated according to the AIMSweb scores. Some students code earnings exceeded the number I would have expected when I considered the students' AIMSweb scores. For example, student 3/f- earned 69 total codes, while lower achieving student 4/m earned 82 total codes. My expectations were challenged because the lower achieving student earned a greater number of codes.

In the same way, the lowest achieving student received more codes than I had expected. I had believed low achieving students' parents would not have engaged with their children, within Spiegel's (1992) listed activities, as often as the higher achieving

students. This student did have a parent who promoted many literacy activities with him however they were activities that may be appropriate for younger children. Parents' estimations of their children's literacy knowledge may play an important role when it comes to children's knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) identified the "zone of proximal development" wherein the parent recognizes what types of activities are at the appropriate level for the child to process adequately. Korat (2011) identified parents' estimations of their children's literacy knowledge as a potentially vital one, and went on to indicate that mothers may have an overoptimistic view of their children's functioning. This parent in the study may not be cognizant of what is expected of a student his age. She, therefore, may be overoptimistic about what her child can do compare to his grade level peers.

Parent interviews varied in length. While many parents spoke at length, others were more succinct in their responses. It is feasible that those who were more verbose earned more codes because their more lengthy responses afforded increased opportunity to earn codes. The non-confirming data do not negate the study findings.

Evidence of Quality

Following is a discussion describing how this study followed procedures to assure accuracy of the presented data. Validity and reliability is important in this study and the results must be consistent with the data collected. This means that similar results would likely occur if the same study were to be replicated with others in a similar people group (Merriam, 2002). Internal validity asks how one's findings compare with reality (Merriam, 2002). Because this study is framed utilizing the constructivist paradigm, which assumes that varied individual perspectives prevent absolute reality from being

knowable, it is acknowledged that I, as well as all of the participants in the study, have made meaning from our own perspectives and a broad generalization beyond the parameters set by this study may not be appropriate.

As the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, I acknowledge that I brought bias to the study. I made every effort to present the data accurately. I wrote imagining the study participants were looking over my shoulder as I did so (Creswell, 2003).

I also recognized that the reliability of my study would be improved with training and practice (Merriam, 2002). In effort to be prepared, I engaged in a practice interview, with a friend, so that I might address any arising issues. Reliability is also improved with the equal representation of both girls and boys at each academic stage (high, middle, low) of proficiency. As I received signed consent forms from potential participants, I chose only students who would afford the study an equal representation of boys and girls at each of the three academic stages.

I used member-checking when I provided study participants with the preliminary study findings to allow them the opportunity to determine whether they feel my findings are in keeping with their views. In the final stages of this study, I provided parents with a general analysis of my study including the answers to my three research questions: (1) Parent-promoted literacy events have positively impacted students' literacy achievement; (2) Parent-encouraged literacy events such as reading together impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development; and (3) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when: (1) Parents of high achieving readers desire success for their children; (2) provide positive role models for

their children; and (3) consider themselves their child's first teachers. To date, eight participants have responded, and all who have responded feel my findings are in keeping with their responses (Creswell, 2003).

The utilization of detailed description, which Creswell (2003) referred to as "rich, thick description," was also employed in this study. This validation strategy allows the reader to determine whether the study settings are comparable and whether the study findings may be transferred to another setting.

I recognize the small variance in the lower scoring, high achieving students' scores and the highest and second highest median achieving student's scores (1.0-1.5). Because the study is mainly concerned with what it is that the parents of high achieving students do with their children as compared with the parents of the low achieving students, I did not acknowledge the scores as detrimental to the study findings.

An additional strategy employed in this study to ensure consistency and reliability, includes triangulation. Triangulation utilizes multiple methods of data collection and analysis in order to justify themes and promote validity of study findings (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Utilizing varied methods for the collection of data include interviews, normed AIMSweb data, and students' literacy records in their cumulative and literacy folders, is viewed as a reliable way to obtain information that fairly reveals the realities as understood by study participants (Merriam, 2002).

Thick description was also employed to enable readers to may make their own decisions regarding whether the findings in this study are applicable to their own contexts (Creswell, 2003). The aim is for readers to determine transferability of findings as a result of the detailed description utilized within this study. When many characteristics are

shared, readers may determine that the findings of this study may be transferred to another setting.

Summary

Section Four presented the data from 12 interviews conducted with parents of varied literacy achievement according to the AIMSweb Literacy scores. The interview data supply information regarding parent-promoted literacy experiences and beliefs afforded to the children within their home settings. The beliefs and activities were organized according to Spiegel's (1992) findings regarding parents of successful readers. Each typology was investigated and parents' experiences and beliefs were explored. Three themes emerged from the data addressing how parent-promoted literacy events impact the students' achievement in the area of literacy.

The overarching themes include: (a) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact students' literacy achievement (Research Question 1), (b) Parent-encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development (Research Question 2), (c) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when the parents: (a) Desire Success for Their Children, (b) Provide Positive Literacy Role Models, and (c) Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teachers (Research Question 3). Each theme will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

Section 5 will review the results of the research questions addressed in this study. Limitations will be discussed, and recommendations for further research will be offered.

Section 5: Discussion

Introduction

This section begins with a summary that includes the restatement of the research questions, and interpretation of the findings, and the conclusion of the study. This section also includes recommendations for action, implications for social change, as well as implications for future study. In an effort to improve students' literacy achievement, schools often adopt programs, provide training to teaching staff, utilize volunteers, and more. Though there are plentiful research studies acknowledging the impact parents have on their children's education, education policy makers have yet to adequately invest in children's first teachers; their parents.

Summary of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the impact parents have on their children's reading success in order that educators may convey, to parents of young children, what they may do with their children to positively impact their literacy achievement. Perhaps when educators begin informing, enthusing, and equipping parents to do what it is that parents of good readers do, fewer children will enter schools requiring intensive, expensive interventions. When children enter formal schooling equipped with foundational skills, the opportunity for academic success is improved.

Researchers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) have determined potential stumbling blocks that lead to children's reading success, which include a lack of knowledge of the alphabetic principle, a lack of transference of comprehension of spoken words to written words, and a lack of motivation to read. If parents are enthused and equipped to promote alphabetic knowledge with their children, to encourage awareness of written words, and

promote the understanding of the messages they represent, and to engage with their children in such a way as to promote the enjoyment of reading and writing books, perhaps the stumbling blocks could be removed and the need for reading remediation would be minimized. Positive changes can be made when educators acknowledge what parents of successful readers are doing with their children and disseminate the information to parents of young children who will soon be entering formal schooling.

Findings

This study investigated parental impact on children's literacy success upon entrance into formal schooling, began with three research questions. The questions include: (1) What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?, (2) What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?, and (3) How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy? These questions will be used to organize findings in the remainder of this section.

Spiegel (1992) noted that research indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together; (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, And effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher; (6) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life; (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially

children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; (10) serve as role models as readers themselves; (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. (p.1)

I organized Spiegel's (1992) list of 11 items into three overarching themes.

Theme 1: Parents of high achieving readers desire success for their children.

Three items fall under the first theme. Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (1) want their children to succeed; (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; and (6) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life.

Theme 2: Parents of high achieving readers provide positive literacy role models.

Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (3) impart a love for reading and value reading together, (8) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive; (9) read to their children often; and (10) serve as role models as readers themselves.

Theme 3: Parents of high achieving readers consider themselves their children's first teachers. Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (4) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy; (5) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher: (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development; (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings.

Interpretation of Findings

The study findings include (1) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impacted students' literacy achievement, (2) Parent-encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development, and (3) Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when the parents (a) Desire Success for Their Children, (b) Provide Positive Literacy Role Models, and (c) Consider Themselves as Their Children's First Teachers will be further addressed below.

This study relied on the theories of Bruner (1990) who indicated that children learn new concepts based on what they have come to know through their lived experiences, and that their caregivers support their children by creating and sustaining home environments that are conducive to learning. This theory is foundational when considering the important role parents play in the literacy acquisition of their children. There are numerous studies indicating the relationship between parent-child language activities and how they affect literacy achievement in the formal schooling setting (Baker, Scher, & Mackler 1997; Bingham, 2007; Haney, & Hill, 2004; Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006; Spiegel, 1992; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006). This study is based on the research that indicates parents contribute to the literacy success of their children.

Along with Bruner's theory of scaffolding, Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) considered the support offered by parents, who know their children's approximate skill levels, to scaffold accordingly in order to promote their children's success and positive attitudes around those skills. When parents are

cognizant of what supports they need to provide their emerging readers in order for their children to be successful, the parents are operating within the child's ZPD. This type of support is important in building the foundation for literacy skills (Vygotsky, 1978). In contrast, when parents inaccurately measure what their children can or cannot do, they may not be providing helpful support for their children in the area of literacy (Korat, 2011). In order to be aware of their children's abilities, parents must spend time engaging in literacy-focused activities.

Adams (1990) stated that the likelihood of a child succeeding in the first grade depends on what the child has learned before arriving in the classroom setting (p. 8). Early literacy skills (e.g., phonological awareness, vocabulary, expressive and receptive language, alphabetic principles) typically develop in children within the years before formal schooling begins. If a child is not equipped with the necessary skills for literacy success upon school entrance, it is not until there is a significant gap that formal intervention processes typically begin. This gap is rarely closed (McDowell, 2007; Missall, et al., 2007, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005). The findings of this study may serve to begin to close the gap in children's literacy achievement.

Finding 1-

Parent-promoted literacy events positively impacted students' literacy achievement.

Research Question 1: What influence has parent-promoted literacy events had upon students' literacy achievement?

Descriptive data were reported for items that captured parents' perceptions related to Spiegel's (1992) list detailing what parents do to successfully impact their children's literacy performance. I utilized Spiegel's (1992) list of what parents of high achieving

students do with their children to code 12 parent interview transcripts. The coded transcripts revealed that parents of high achieving students referenced, more often than parents of median and low achieving students, the 11 items noted by Spiegel (1992). Parents of high achieving students produced greater numbers of coded statements (251) than median achieving students (194). Parents of low achieving students produced fewer coded statements (110).

High and median achieving students were performing at or above grade level expectations as measured by the AIMSweb assessment. These students needed no remedial intervention from Early Childhood School in the area of literacy. All of the students in the low achieving group did receive remedial intervention from the school's literacy specialists.

Of the 565 total codes earned, 261 codes were for female students and 304 were for male students. Three areas where boys earned 10 or more codes than girls were (1) want their children to succeed, (7) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development, and (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. These three areas where boys earned 10 or more codes than girls were all among high achieving students. The only other area where one gender earned 10 or more codes than the other was (11) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings. In this case, the girls (16) in the median achieving group earned more codes than the boys (5) in the median achieving group.

The results of this study revealed that parents of high and median achieving students do engage in each of the items on Spiegel's (1992) list of what parents of successful readers do with their children. I expected that the high achieving students would earn more codes than the median achieving students, and that the median achieving students would earn more codes than the low achieving students. I did not anticipate that median achieving students would earn more codes in nearly half the areas than high achieving students. Nor did I expect to learn that parents of high achieving students tend to embrace one attitude that separates their children's reading achievement from those of lower achieving students. This means that all of Spiegel's (1992) listed items detailing what parents of successful readers do with their children appear to be impactful. There are some items, however, that appear to separate the high achieving from the median achieving students.

The main area of influence, when analyzing the coded responses, centers around the broad theme: Parents Considering Themselves Their Children's First Teachers, which includes: Parents of successful readers: (a) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy (4); (b) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher (5); (c) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development (7); (d) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings (11). Two additional items from Spiegel's (1992) list were evidenced more by parents of high achieving students than parents of median achieving students. These areas include: parents of successful readers want their children to succeed (1), and parents of successful readers read to their children often (9). These are the only six coded

areas where high achieving students earned more codes than median achieving students. These will be discussed further under the third finding.

In this study, there were many areas where parents of median achieving students produced more coded responses than parents of high achieving students. Median achieving students earned more codes in five of the 11 items on Spiegel's (1992) list of what parents of successful readers do with their children. These five areas include: (a) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children (2); (b) impart a love for reading and value reading together (3); (c) know what's going on at school and in their child's literacy life (6); (d) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive (8); (e) serve as role models as readers themselves (10).

Based on parents of median-achieving students earning more codes than the other two groups, it may be concluded that there are particular parent-promoted literacy activities that produce greater results than others. Engaging in some of the activities with greater frequency may not be enough to raise achievement. There appear to be particular activities and attitudes that are more beneficial than others. The only theme under which high achieving students earned more codes than median achieving students involved parents' consideration of themselves as their children's first teachers. When the parents assume the role of teacher in their children's lives, the children appear to achieve a high level of performance.

Learning to read largely depends on the provided opportunities and offered instruction (Kaplan & Walpole, 2005). It is a lengthy process that begins early in life and depends on positive, motivating literacy experiences that occur throughout the lifetime of

the child (Snow, et al., 1998). The findings of this study are consistent with the literature, as parents in this study have provided varied opportunities for their children and those activities appear to have impacted their children's literacy achievement. It appears to be particularly important for parents to assume the role of their children's first teacher.

Finding 2-

Parent encouraged literacy events, such as reading together, impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development.

Research Question 2: What parent encouraged literacy events, such as storybook reading, appear to impact students' attitudes and proficiency in literacy development?

All of Spiegel's (1992) listed items of what parents of successful readers do with their children appear to be beneficial to students. All parents of children achieving at or above grade level engaged, to a greater degree, in the listed items, than did parents of low achieving students. Literacy events that appear to be particularly influential include parents: (a) reading to their children often (9), (b) spending time, money, and effort to nurture literacy because they like, enjoy, and respect their children (4), and (c) providing effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings (11).

The results of this study reveal that parents of high achieving students read with their children more, invest in their children with their time, money and effort, and they provide their children with effective literacy interactions. One possible explanation for parents engaging in these activities with their children may involve parents' view of themselves as their children's primary teachers.

This finding suggests that parents of median and low achieving students may benefit from being encouraged to intentionally engage in particular literacy-focused activities with their children. Parents' self-efficacy beliefs strongly influence their home-based involvement in their children's education (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007), therefore, it may be beneficial for parents to be explicitly taught effective literacy activities to share with their children. Parents who are strongly motivated to maintain involvement in their children's education, yet do not consider themselves efficacious in their efforts may rely heavily on their children's school (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Affording learning opportunities for all parents will be important because few preschool students' literacy skills are assessed before entering formal schooling. This topic will be explored in greater detail in the third section of Finding 3.

Finding 3-

Parent-promoted literacy events positively impact the achievement of high performing students when the parents (a) Desire Success for Their Children, (b) Provide Positive Literacy Role Models, and (c) Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teachers

Research Question 3: How do parent-promoted literacy events impact the achievement of high performing students in the area of literacy?

Finding three will be addressed according to the three subcategories, below. Each area will address the high performance of students whose parents: (a) desire success for their children, (b) provide positive literacy role models, and (c) consider themselves their children's first teachers.

Desire Success for their children (a)

Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (a) want their children to succeed (1); (b) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children (2); and (c) know what is going on at school and in their child's literacy life (6).

All parents in this study indicated that they want their children to succeed and appear to impart the importance of education as well. The most notable finding in this subcategory involves parents' knowledge of what is going on at school and in their children's literacy lives. Parents of median achieving students earned 31 codes while parents of high achieving students earned only 13. Parents of low achieving students earned eight coded responses. Parents of young children should be cognizant of what is happening within their children's academic institutions, yet they should not depend on those institutions to assume the primary teaching role in their children's lives. It appears that parents who desire high achieving children should assume the role as their children's teacher (Spiegel, 1992).

In the process of gathering data, I noticed a reliance of median achieving students' parents upon the school to direct the literacy events taking place within their homes. Though Spiegel (1992) listed that parents of successful readers know what is going on at school, this study indicates that the highest achieving readers have parents who relied less on the schools and more on their own instruction offered at home. High achieving readers earned codes in this category more for parents knowing what was going on in their children's literacy lives. Median achieving students' parents provided more coded responses that were connected with the school rather than their own literacy based

interactions with their children. These data suggest that being informed about what is happening at school may not supplant the deliberate, active involvement of a parent and the interactions in which they engage outside of the school setting.

For example, a high achieving student's (3/m) parent indicated the regularity of their reading together when she said, "At night. Not every night... Well, 4-5 evenings, [I] just read to them..., right before they go to bed." When I asked if this reading was connected to homework (school driven), she said, "It's separate," A lower achieving student's (11/f) parent indicated a strong reliance on the school when she said, "I would never stray off the... I'll follow what they're reading in school."

Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2006) stated that strong links between home and school, in and of themselves are not enough, and they made a case for the need to help parents understand the ways their children are learning in school. They also demonstrated the benefits of parent involvement programs through which parents are trained to support school efforts in providing literacy support with their children.

A possible explanation for higher achieving students having fewer coded responses than median achieving students is that parents of high achieving students in this study may know how to support their children without training afforded by schools. This study only demonstrates that parents of high achieving students promote their children's reading success. It does not investigate how parents of high achieving students know what to do to promote that success. This may be a topic worthy of further investigation.

Provide Positive Literacy Role Models (b)

Research (Spiegel, 1992) indicates that parents of successful readers: (a) impart a love for reading and value reading together (3), (b) provide literacy artifacts, especially children's materials in their home, often simple and inexpensive (8); (c) read to their children often (9); and (d) serve as role models as readers themselves (10).

When parents impart a love for reading, parents of high achieving students (20) and parents of median achieving students (21) earned nearly the same number of coded responses. Low achieving students earned only 11 coded responses in this category.

If parents employ an attitude conveying that reading is an enjoyable activity through which they may connect with their children, the effect is much different from that of parents who convey that reading is a task one must endure to promote their child's success. Lynch, et al. (2006) stated "Knowing parents' beliefs about literacy may be an important key to understanding the variety of activities in which parents engage with their young children." When parents engage in activities that children perceive as work rather than play, the instruction offered by parents may actually be counterproductive (Baker, et al., 1997, p. 79).

Baker, Scher, and Mackler (1997) stated that children are more likely to be interested in reading and are more likely to enjoy reading when the socioemotional climate is positive. When I asked a probing question regarding who initiated the time spent reading with her child, the lowest median achieving student's (8/m) parent stated, "If it's supposed to be 20 minutes, we set the timer, and we do it. But it's not without a little bit of push that we need, and there's some incentive behind it." Enjoyment is not mentioned by this parent.

A parent of a high achieving student (3/m) mentioned that both parents have read with their children from a young age and that enjoyment is a part of their reading. She said, "...books they liked, we read over and over, and then they just knew it. They didn't know how to read, but they just memorized the story. So, they enjoyed that." This statement indicates that the reading the parent does with her child may be seen as an enjoyable activity.

The results of this study appear to be consistent with the literature. When students enjoy reading, it is likely they will read more often. If they read more often, their reading skills will likely improve as a result of the increased practice (Baker, et al., 1997). Children are more enthusiastic about reading when parents create a positive atmosphere when reading together (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Culatta, 2007, 1997; Hay 2007).

All parents in this study indicated that they provide literacy artifacts for their children. Most participants had at least four codes for that category. High achieving student earned a total of 24 codes, median students earned 32 codes, and low achieving students earned 21 codes. This category had the greatest number of awarded codes for low achieving students.

This study did not evaluate the quality of the literacy artifacts. Because I am a veteran teacher, I was aware of the quality differences in the books mentioned during interviews however I withheld my opinions as I coded parents' responses. One parent of a low achieving student (11/f) mentioned, when addressing the books available to her child, a strong reliance on Keep Books, for example. Keep Books are small, leveled, black and white booklets. They are not known for their captivating stories, and they do not look like books one would purchase at a book store or check out from the library.

This idea of quality literacy artifacts may also impact the next subcategory which investigates parents' reading with their children.

Parents of high achieving students (21) read to their children more often than parents of median and low achieving students (10 each) read to their children. Mentioning titles of well-loved books is a marked difference between high achieving students and low achieving students. Parents of high achieving children referred to loved characters. They discussed repeated readings of favorite books. I also noted the level of engagement between the parents and their children. The higher achieving students' parents discussed their participation in the use of the materials the children had available to them far more often than lower achieving students' parents.

For example, a parent of the lowest achieving student (12/m) when asked about favorite books said, "He had this huge dinosaur book. He loved that one. And he would sit there, he'd carry it around growling." While the parent of the highest achieving reader (1/f) stated, "Well, for her, right now, it's the Pinkalicious series. And Misery Moo books. And Duck for President." The same parent also referenced a Mercer Mayer obsession with the Little Critter books. She said, "I think we must have bought most every Little Critter book out there, and there's a lot."

It appeared that high achieving students' parents engaged in dialogic reading; discussing the big ideas of the story. They shared the reading of the stories with their children, modeling good reading and providing scaffolds so that their children could feel proud of themselves in their reading attempts. In this way, parents of high achieving students also imparted love for reading.

I expected parents of high achieving readers to be avid readers themselves. I believed that parents who read for their own enjoyment and information would likely be more skilled readers and would therefore consider themselves equipped to teach their children to read. The interviews, however, revealed that parents of high achieving students (11) appeared to read, on their own, slightly less frequently than median achieving students (17).

When I viewed the data, I learned that the void of pleasure reading was often an act of parents denying themselves an enjoyable activity in order to devote their time to their children. Parents indicated that their time would be better spent engaging with their children rather than enjoying a book that might cause neglect of their assumed familial duties. When asked, the parent of the highest scoring student (1/f) in this study did not consider herself a reader. She said, "I feel like this isn't the best time for me to read. It's almost like, it would be selfish." As our conversation continued, however, the same parent (1/f) talked about when she had a recent surgery. She said, "My mom was here. I would just say [to the kids], "I can't do anything. I'm reading." She named and provided details and opinions about each of the books she had read during recovery time. Her response indicates that this mother is a reader. I concluded that parents of high achieving readers may not invest as much time in their own adult reading when they have young children, because they are engaging in other activities to promote their children's success.

Consider Themselves Their Children's First Teachers (c)

Four items from Spiegel's (1992) list fall under the third theme. The stance that parents of high achieving students take regarding their role as their child's first teacher appears to be particularly important. Assuming the role of their children's first teachers, the parents of high achieving indicated that they: (a) like, enjoy, and respect their children and are willing to spend time, money, and effort to nurture literacy (4); (b) believe in the adage that the parent is the child's first teacher (5); (c) believe they can have an impact on their child's literacy development (7); (d) provide effective literacy interactions which assist their children in learning how to construct meaning from text and to interact successfully in school settings (11).

From this finding, I conclude that parents of high achieving students view themselves as their children's first teachers. These parents invest in materials, including literacy artifacts, but they also invest their time in order to provide effective literacy instruction at home as well as genuine affective care. It appears, based on the results of this study, parents engage in such events because they enjoy their children and feel the investment is mutually gratifying and rewarding. Parents of high achieving students appeared to be concerned less than parents of children performing in the median group, about the happenings in their children's first grade classrooms. They supported the classroom teacher by following through with the schools' expectations however they did not rely on the school alone for the provision of literacy instruction. They indicated that they saw that as their own responsibility. Parents of high achieving students supported the classroom teachers, but they did not rely on them for the implementation of literacy promotion they provided within their homes.

The findings of this study are consistent with current literature on the topic. The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) stated that in order to make academic learning possible for children, the development of many linguistic and cognitive skills is necessary before they enter elementary school. Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005), stated that “parents who are responsive, sensitive, and accepting of a child’s behavior, and who provide structure, organization, and a positive general emotional climate at home, along with stimulating toys and interactions facilitate children’s language and early literacy development” (p. 347). These statements from the literature appear to coincide with the items addressed by Spiegel (1992), and they appear to position the parents as ones who may impact their children’s literacy development.

Howes et al. (2008) stated that, within early childhood classrooms, educators should be intentional in their approach to supporting children’s achievement. They stated that it is not enough for educators to have high aspirations for children, but those aspirations must be met with intentional efforts to act on them. Consistent with the literature, parents of high achieving students did not merely expect great things from their children, but they were intentional as they assumed the role of their children’s first teacher within their home settings. Parents of median achieving students evidenced a strong reliance on the schools for their literacy interactions with their children, and the data did not support the idea that they assumed the role as their children’s first and most important teacher.

One parent of a high achieving student (3/m), when I asked if her son was in a classroom with a strong phonics approach, said that she was not sure. The instruction he received had not really mattered to her as her son was already a reader when he entered

that classroom setting. She was concerned, primarily with the social aspect of school. She considered the instruction her son received at school as “extra” added to the instruction she provided her son from home.

The only two other areas where high achieving students earned more codes than median achieving students include: (1) want their children to succeed, and (9) read to their children often. It could be argued that these two categories would also fit under the “Parent as First Teacher”. I made the decision to keep (1) want their children to succeed under “Desire Success for their Children” because many of the parent responses referred to their children’s educations. In this way, it paired well with the first theme: Parents of high achieving readers desire success for their children. Also under this theme are: (2) impart a sense of importance of education and have high expectations for their children; and (6) know what’s going on at school and in their child’s literacy life.

I made the decision to keep (9) read to children often under “Provision of Positive Literacy Role Models” because I recognized that reading to children may look different in varied settings. Because I did not observe parents reading to their children, I could not be certain that the reading parents did with their children was comparable. For example, a parent of a high achieving reader (1/f) said, “I’d read a chapter, she’d read a chapter, so we’d kind of rotate. We’d read like four chapters. We spent a good amount of time, and it wasn’t too much, and she looked forward to it...” A parent of a lower achieving student (8/m) in this study said, “Sometimes he just wants me to read. He’ll say, “Mommy, I want you to read today.” And that’s fine. I’ll do that.” Both of these statements were coded for parents reading with their children however the role of the parent differs. The parent of the high achieving student is reading with her child. The parent of the low

achieving student is reading to her child, and it appears that the child did not view reading, himself, as an enjoyable activity.

As conveyed earlier in the study, shared book reading is engaging children in the reading of text rather than simply reading the words to them. It involves interaction with the children. (Bernhard et al., 2008). I could not determine whether the parents took an educative role during the reading, so I placed this category under “Provision of Positive Role Models” rather than “Consider Themselves Their Children’s First Teacher.”

Mothers who inaccurately estimate what their children’s abilities fail to provide appropriate support for their children compared to mothers who make more approximate estimations of what their children can take on (Korat, 2011). It may be due to parents’ lack of knowledge regarding their children’s abilities and grade level expectations, that parents of low achieving students are not providing what I would consider appropriate for their children. As a reading intervention specialist and a classroom teacher of 24 years, I have strong opinions regarding which activities are beneficial in the promotion of reading success and which are not. Those opinions did not impact my coding, but I did note in my research journaling that the high achieving students’ parents focused on higher level skills; skills that stretched their thinking, while low achieving students’ parents focused on knowledge level learning which emphasized memorization utilizing, primarily, flashcards. While higher achieving students were directed toward considering big ideas, the lower achieving students were identifying letters on signs and menus.

Lynch (2006) stated that educators need to consider parents’ beliefs about how children learn to read and write if they want to influence the ways in which parents promote literacy with their children. If educators aim to alleviate, or at least minimize,

the need for literacy intervention, the results of this study provide evidence that the promotion of particular literacy engagements between parent and child, before commencement of formal schooling, may be instrumental in impacting students' literacy success. Importantly, how parents engage in literacy-promoting activities and which activities are most beneficial may be effectively taught to parents. Parents should be equipped to take the lead in their children's literacy lives.

Implications for Social Change

Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, and Hunt (2009) evidenced that techniques, such as reading with a print referencing style, which involves heightening children's attention to the print, are not often used by parents who read with their children. When adults are taught to use this teaching tool, their children's academic progress improved. Shared book reading, conversations, and writing interactions are effective ways parents support their children's literacy achievement, and parents may be taught to effectively utilize these techniques with their children (Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010).

The aim of this study has been to influence change in the community wherein the study has taken place. The United States report entitled "Becoming a Nation of Readers," indicated that the more elements of good parenting, good teaching, and good schooling that children encounter increases their chances of reaching their potentials as readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 117). This study addressed elements of parenting that may increase children's chances of reaching their potentials as readers.

Positive social change includes increasing educators' collegial interactions to create lessons for parental use at home to improve children's literacy success. To provide parents opportunities to learn how they may effectively support their children's literacy

achievement, local educators may begin designing and offering parent education programs. These programs would be designed to teach parents to effectively promote their children's literacy success, even before their students' entrance into the formal classroom setting. The parent education programs would be offered to parents of preschool and kindergarten children who are enrolled in the school district, and the programs could be offered as Parent Teacher Association (PTA) offerings.

Recommendations for Action

The findings from this study suggest that when parents are equipped and enthused participants in their preschool children's literacy learning, their children's literacy achievement increases. Parents who do not evidence particular literacy attitudes or engage in planned literacy activities have children with lower literacy achievement. This study acknowledges that there are specific parent attitudes and parent-promoted events that appear to impact their children's literacy success. A recommendation is that the school district involved in this study host parent education programs designed to equip parents to provide their preschool age children with skills that promote literacy success.

Training offered to parents of preschool children might benefit all community educational stakeholders. It is recommended that professional educators who have sufficient training in early childhood literacy begin designing instructional classes for parents of young children. The aim is to equip parents who may be less efficacious in their own literacy knowledge and to inspire them to engage in literacy-promoting activities with their children.

Parents and educators may benefit from being made aware of the study findings because they may acknowledge and promote the need of parent education. To

disseminate the study findings, I will make a presentation to our Early Childhood School's Parent Teacher Association (P. T. A.) and will contribute information to the P. T. A. newsletter. I have also agreed to share the study findings at kindergarten registration events.

Implications for Future Study

This study makes evident that parents are impactful when it comes to literacy achievement. Low achieving students may meet success with increased frequency and improved quality of parent-promoted literacy interactions with their young children. A mixed-method, longitudinal study that follows parents of preschool children until those children are in intermediate grades may give a more complete picture of parents' impact on their children's literacy achievement. The inclusion of multiple schools representing more diverse family backgrounds would also add to the understanding of parents' contribution to their children's literacy success.

This study demonstrates that parents of high achieving students promote their children's reading success. It does not investigate how parents of high achieving students knew what to do to promote that success. This may be a topic worthy of further investigation. I would recommend a qualitative case study wherein the researcher explores activities parents of high achieving students engage with their children as well as the impetus of those activities.

Other topics for further examination may include: (1) the evaluation of existing programs that could be utilized to teach parents how to best foster strong literacy skills before their children enter formal schooling; and (2) available programming to be made available to parents of preschoolers that serves to equip them to be more effective in their

role as their children's first teachers. I would recommend a quantitative survey study to gather program performance data from present and former participants of existing programs. Gleaned data may be shared with parents of preschool age children who are considering such programming to enhance their children's literacy achievement.

Conclusion of the Study and Researcher's Reflection

In conclusion, parents of children who are among the highest achieving in the area of literacy go beyond wanting their children to succeed, imparting the importance of education, and being informed about their children's school and literacy lives. Parents of the highest achieving students impart a love for reading, provide literacy artifacts in the home, read to their children, and are often readers themselves. However, what separates these parents from the parents of lower achieving students is the stance they take regarding their role in their children's literacy lives. Parents of the highest achieving students see themselves as their children's first teachers. They enjoy their children and invest in materials, including literacy artifacts, but they also invest their time in order to provide effective literacy instruction at home. They engage in such events because they believe they impact their children's literacy development.

Useful actions include the equipping and enthusing parents to become their children's most effective first teachers. Education leaders must begin offering programs and/or workshops that teach parents how to best engage with their children so they will be equipped for success upon entrance into formal schooling.

Promoting high quality, at-home literacy experiences could be a key in closing the gap between successful and struggling readers. By increasing opportunities that promote literacy, it may be possible to reduce the number of struggling readers. This case study

aimed to demonstrate the impact parents have on their high performing children's literacy skills and provide the rationale for the educational leaders in this community to invest, not just in intervention services when problems arise, but in the preventative measure of equipping and enthusing parents of preschoolers to adeptly take the lead in their children's literacy lives.

My experience with the research process has been humbling. My preconceived ideas were challenged and were often refuted. The management of the voluminous data was exhausting, and the literature on the topic of parents' impact on early childhood literacy is so plentiful that I often doubted I could fairly represent what is available or that my study had anything to offer the vast world of literacy education. The process of member checking allowed me to hear how the interview process caused many parents to consider anew what they were doing with their children when it comes to literacy. Many parents shared that they adjusted some routines as a result of speaking aloud what they had done in the past and that they are more purposeful in their time reading with their children.

I, too, have been impacted by this study. I am no longer an educator with a few hunches about how parents may impact their children's literacy achievement. I am an expert on the topic. I am an expert who knows that there is always more to learn. The more I know, the more I want to know more.

I began acting on the literature I had been gathering long before I completed this research study. I have begun offering learning opportunities to parents so they may more effectively contribute to their children's literacy success. I have become a passionate advocate for equipping families to effectively promote literacy within their homes in

order to reduce the number of children who are ill-equipped to be successful in the formal classroom. If Americans hope to reduce the achievement gap, I believe we must acknowledge parents as their children's most influential teachers, and we must begin developing them into the most effective teachers they can be.

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Appendix A: Study Introductory Letter

Dear Parent,

My name is Christina Williams, and I am a first grade teacher at Early Childhood School. I am also a doctoral student at Walden University and owner of a local literacy center/coffee shop. I am investigating the impact of activities parents engage in with their children that may promote a strong foundation for children's literacy success upon entrance into kindergarten.

Pending your approval, I would like to access your child's literacy records that are currently on file with your child's school. I will also need to interview one parent, for approximately 30-60 minutes, regarding what was done as a family to promote literacy before your child entered kindergarten. Though the information is very important, the interview will be informal and friendly.

It is my aim to provide parents with information about ways they may most effectively impact their children's literacy achievement therefore I am conducting a research study. I will share what I learn from the study with all participants and other interested parties, but I will do so without revealing participants' identities. I will protect the confidentiality of any information regarding you or your child. No mention of your name or your child's name will be used in the study. Instead, pseudonyms will be used. I will not begin any component of this research study, or access your child's data, until I receive permission from you, the parent.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in a 30-60 minute, audio-recorded interview and your permission to allow my usage of your child's literacy data by signing the parent consent form. The parent interview will be recorded so that I may review our conversation. This form may be returned to me, in a sealed envelope (envelope provided) through the Shawnee Early Childhood School office mail. No other Shawnee staff member will view these documents. Your decision regarding your participation will not be revealed. If I do not receive a consent form from you, your child will not be included in the study.

Your help and participation in this study is deeply appreciated. Though no monetary compensation will be provided, your time and cooperation will help me, an educator, to learn more about ways to best support our parents and students.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at

Sincerely,

Christina A. Williams, First Grade Teacher

Doctoral Student

Walden University

Appendix B: Statement of Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study investigating the impact of parent-initiated reading and writing activities on their children's reading and writing success in the classroom. You were chosen for the study because your child participated in the Shawnee school kindergarten program and participated in all of the literacy assessments required for this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Christina Williams, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Christina is currently serving as a first grade teacher at your child's kindergarten and first grade school. She is also the owner of a local business that promotes literacy in the community.

All consent forms will be collected by the researcher. No other Lakota employee will have knowledge of your participation or lack thereof. The envelopes are addressed to the Shawnee Early Childhood School in order to provide a central collection point for all who agree to participate in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine what it is that parents do, that appears to promote literacy success of children in the classroom.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to:

- sign and forward (to the Early Childhood School office, to my attention) the enclosed, required documents providing your consent to participate in the study
- allow the researcher access to your child's literacy records
- meet the researcher in a mutually agreed upon public place (such as the local library) in order to participate in an interview (approx. 30-60 minutes)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at Early Childhood School or in the Lakota School District will treat you differently if you decide that you will not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop the proceedings at any time. Refusing or discontinuing participation involves no penalty.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Risks associated with this research study will be minimized. The parent interviews will take place in a mutually agreed upon location where you are likely to feel comfortable and will be free to discontinue the session should you choose to do so at anytime throughout the parent interview. Students' records will be observed in a school conference room to maintain confidentiality. Audio recordings of the parents' interviews, as well as the written transcriptions will be maintained by

the researcher, in her secured, personal files, for the required period of time. Pseudonyms will be used in the sharing of the research findings.

Though it is improbable, it is possible that discussions about reading and writing activities that have taken place within your home may bring vulnerable topics to light. If there is or has been an emotional element impacting your child's reading/writing experiences within your home, some portions of the survey and/or interview may be uncomfortable. Again, if you feel stressed during the study, you may stop the proceedings at any time.

Parents will be informed of the researcher's findings through the sharing of a summary document prepared by the researcher and they will thereby become more knowledgeable about what literacy events parents of students who are most successful in the area of literacy (for this study; reading and writing) engaged in that may have impacted their children's success. Parents may learn how to best prepare their young children for strong literacy achievement. Teachers will also be informed about what it is that the parents of our highest achieving students do, that appears to positively influence their children's literacy achievement. This information will be important so that teachers may better direct their parents to engaging in the most beneficial activities.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation provided to research participants.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use any information provided by you or from your child's school records, for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or your child's name or anything else that could identify him or her in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study **07-01-11-0019527** and it expires on **June 15, 2012**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my child's involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Parent

Printed Name of Child

Date of consent

Parent's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

You may hand deliver this statement of consent, or you may mail it to Shawnee Early Childhood School in the addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Early Childhood School
Parent Impact on Children's Literacy Achievement Research Study
c/o Christina A. Williams

Thank you for your consideration for this research study.

Appendix C: Parent Interview

Literacy Activities Promoted Within the Home

Open-ended questions were formed using themes from research. Each interview question is identified with a numeral correlating to Spiegel's (1992) ten identified beliefs and activities promoted by parents of successful readers.

Interview Protocol: First Grade students and parents regarding literacy activities occurring before entrance into first grade

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Briefly describe the project.

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your aspirations for your child as a reader. (1)

F1-desire success for their children

2. How would your child know that reading is important to you? (2)

F2-provide positive literacy role models

3. List and describe reading activities that you particularly enjoy with your child. (3)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

4. Who typically instigates the reading you do, and how does the activity begin? (4)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

5. Describe activities family activities, outside the home, that may promote literacy. (4)

F2-provide positive literacy role models

6. List some other activities that you engage in at home that may promote literacy? (5)

F2-provide positive literacy role models

7. Describe your role when it comes to teaching your child to read well. (6)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

8. In what ways do you believe you impact your child's reading development? (7)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

9. What types of reading/writing materials are available for your child's use?" (8)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

10. "Do you read with your child on a regular basis? Tell about your reading routines. (9)

F3-consider themselves as their children's first teacher

11. How many days, last week, did you read with your student? (9)

F2-provide positive literacy role models

12. Describe the kinds of reading (e.g. F/NF) you and other family members enjoy. (10)

F2-provide positive literacy role models

The researcher thanked the individuals for participating in the study and assured them of confidentiality.

*Numerals in parentheses note which of Spiegel's list of what it is that parents of successful readers do with their children.

F1, F2, and F3 indicate which research finding was addressed by the question asked in the parent interviews.

Appendix D: Confidentiality

Name of Signer: Christina A. Williams

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: The Impact of Parent Initiated Literacy Activities on Children's Literacy Success: A Study of Parents' Impact on Their Children's Literacy Achievement, I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter, or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: Christina A. Williams

Date: 4/10/11

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Letter of Cooperation from a Community Research Partner

Dear Early Childhood School Principal,

It is my aim to conduct a research study, as a part of Walden University's doctoral program, investigating parents' impact on their children's literacy achievement. I would like for you, as the building principal of Shawnee Early Childhood School, to identify 48 potential participants for this study. I will need you to mail consent forms, which I will provide, to all potential study participants. Sixteen forms will be sent to each of the three categories of potential participants; high scoring, median scoring and low scoring first grade students. The range of scores of each level will be revealed to the researcher so that the researcher will be able to identify student participants' achievement level without your knowledge of who consented to the study and who did not. This is done to protect to privacy of the study participants.

The study requires an investigation of each of 12 students' existing literacy records which are regularly maintained by the school, and an interview, conducted by the researcher, with one of each child's consenting parents.

Your help in this portion of the research study is deeply appreciated. All research findings will be made available to you so that you may share them with your staff and school families as you find appropriate.

Your electronic signature is just as valid as your written signature should you agree to conduct this transaction electronically. Electronic Signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Your electronic signature is your typed name as well as your email address. You will be copied on the email containing the document you have signed.

Date 4/22/11

Dear Ms. Researcher,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled The Impact of Parent Initiated Literacy Activities on Children's Literacy Success: A Study of Parents' Impact on Their Children's Literacy Achievement at Shawnee Early Childhood School. As part of this study, when parental consent forms have been collected, I authorize you to 1) access consenting parents' first grade students' literacy records; 2) contact parents in order to arrange and conduct parent interviews and student surveys; 3) and share study results with the Shawnee families and staff. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Contact Information

Appendix F: Two Sample Transcriptions

Student- 4/M, currently in 2nd grade

Elementary School

Parent-

Date- 9/10/11

Location- Local Coffee Shop @ 1:30 pm

(introduction not included)

Describe your aspirations for your child as a reader?

Basically just to be able to read whatever they want when whenever they want... also to read older books, not just what's popular; what's current. Being able to pick up an old book from the 1700s/1800s and be able to read it; to get information they're not going to get from school.

How would your child know that reading is important to you?

He found out at an early age (that) if he wanted to use the computer, he had to figure out how to type his stuff into the search engine, which function-what to click on, what does it say. Also, he sees both his parents reading, he sees his big brother reading (11 yrs old).

List and describe reading activities that you particularly enjoy with your children.

We really don't do any reading activities. I read to them. Like when they were younger; babies, I would point to each word. That's what my mother did with me. I learned how to read early. So, point to each word, say it slowly, and then we discuss the picture. Now they're pretty much on their own. I'll give suggestions, you know, "Check this out..."

Do you read to them, at all, anymore?

Yeah. Right now, we're slowly going through the Bible.

The regular, adult Bible?

Yeah. I don't like any of the children's Bibles.

Who, typically instigates the reading you do, and how does the activity begin?

Um. We just say, "It's time to read."

Do you have a routine?

Yes, about every other day we do it.

Is it at bedtime?

Yeah. Bedtime. We might have to do it sooner, after school. For the most part, they just read on their own. It's like, You want to go to the library or do you want to go to the bookstore? They're on their own, basically.

Would you say they always have a book ready?

Yeah. They've got books at home, books they've read a million times. Their favorite series right now is the (the one with the little boy and his brother) Diary of the Wimpy Kid. They've got all of those. They're definitely for boys. My husband read it. Usually, one of us reads whatever book they're reading.

So you can talk about it?

(Yes)

Did you see the movie?

No, my husband took them.

Describe activities outside the home that may promote literacy.

Reading street signs. What does that say, no parking, what's that letter, what does the RR mean on that sign, reading billboards (see what the word is), reading trucks,

Do they do scouts, music lessons...?

Not right now, no.

What are some other activities that you engage in at home that may promote literacy?

When they were younger we usually kept it (the TV) on PBS. I think the internet was a big draw for them. Also playing children's games on the computer. Using letter magnets on the refrigerator. Spelling out words, certain shows did help. My younger son was having trouble with phonics, and I went on Netflix and got the old Electric Company. He got magic e. As soon as he heard that song, he got it.

How did you know that phonics was important?

Because, my sister and I, we'd read, but a lot of the words we read, we learned what the meaning was, but we didn't learn how to pronounce them properly. So, I wanted to be sure they knew how to pronounce it properly. We didn't do baby words. There was no "socky" or "nana"- No. No baby talk. Just over enunciation. They spoke in plain English. People were shocked at that. I don't know why. I was like, "Talk to them ..."

Did you learn phonetically as a child?

No, we'd just, learn words from my mother reading to us out of those books, and they still make those books, shockingly. We, my siblings and I, just picked it up. I think they stressed phonics more in the first/second grade back when I was a kid.

Do you feel like your kids got a strong phonics background from their schools?

I have no idea, to be honest. They were already on... When they started kindergarten, they were already on second/third grade books.

What did you do?

Basically, before I even had kids, I always had the mindset, "I'm the main teacher." I see those 18 year olds struggling to read a kindergarten book, and the mother's sitting there accusing the school that somebody's--- ugh. I'm like "What about you?" That doesn't make any sense to me. My mother taught me early. I learned how to play board games early. And playing board games does help with learning how to read and with money. I just ignore the age thing. Like, "You're six, but we're gonna learn how to play Monopoly."

So how do you keep your kids engaged? A lot of people say "My boys are active. They don't want to sit down."

They definitely have their personalities. The older one is very quiet, shy. (son, 11) I don't know if it's older parents. I had my first one when I was 29 and my husband was 35. I don't know if that played any role or not. When the first one came along, we were like, "Oh, this is easy." When the second one came along, we were like, "Oh, this one's active."

[eldest son] is to be homeschooled.

Describe your role when it comes to teaching your child to read well.

I'm the main... I've always had the mindset that these are my children. I'm going to teach them, mainly, you know, whatever it takes.

Did you feel equipped? Did you feel like you knew what to do?

No. :)

So what did you do?

I drew on my knowledge of my mother, read to them, see in them what worked when I was a kid. Some of those shows did work. Sesame Street worked, and so did Electric Co. back then, also pointing to each word. Also, sometimes stopping to explain what the word meant. Like, “This is ‘the’, and you’re going to see this word for the rest of your life. Read to them while they’re young, reading around them, being on the computer reading... I basically told them, if you want to use the computer or search for the sites you want to go to, you’re going to have to type it in yourself. Oh. And flashcards for their letters. They both got their letters down at age two.

How did you teach them the sounds?

Just basically ...?... and getting a, e, i, o, u, on the refrigerator with letters. (and numbers, too. ... “this is the thousands place”) Just going through those details.

I also don’t have the mindset that there’s a limit... If they can learn extra stuff, give it to them. I taught both of them integers. They can grasp it. It freaked their teachers out...

In what ways do you believe you impact your child’s reading development?

Reading in front of them. Limiting T.V., Giving them educational toys, Using the refrigerator magnets, numbers and letters, pointing things out- like “These word sounds the same, but they have different meanings.” Not really going into technical details, but just pointing out that fact. They both understand that the English language is very strange. They’ll ask me, “Why is it like this?” I tell them, “They took a bunch of different languages, put them together....

What types of reading/writing materials are available for your child’s use?

They’ve got every single bit of art supplies you could ever ask for. Yes. They have a huge Tote, and if I get any more crayons, I will scream. Those things stink. They have plenty of writing... Also, books. My older son will grab all books and start reading. He’ll say, “What is so interesting about this?”, and he’ll start reading... You know, curiosity. I don’t pressure them to read. My younger son’s got this thing that every day they’re supposed to fill out what they’re reading. I’m like, “This is pointless for me.” He can already read. He can pick up anything and read it. Even if they don’t know the word, they can, pretty much pronounce it correctly. We have a dictionary and thesaurus. And they figure out how to use the one on line. And they ask a lot of questions. We encourage them to ask whatever question, even if it sounds stupid. We tell them that we don’t have all the answers, we don’t know everything. We’ll look it up, research it, we’ll figure it out, so they know that both of their parents are still learning.

Do you reward the kids for so much reading?

No, it’s just part of who we are. I really don’t focus on reading. We give them the materials they want, but we really don’t ... The only thing I really focus on would be like religious/philosophical, life in general, how it actually operates, not what they say, and Math. Cuz math makes the world go round. That’s my expertise.

If I’m working on an assignment with the older one, I make him read out loud. What he’s supposed to be learning/doing it does help. He hates it, but...

The younger one, it takes him a while to warm up to reading out loud, but once he gets going, he’s fine. I don’t do it with him as much.

He’s more a silent reader?

Yeah. He can focus better than his older brother, so I don’t have to do that with him.

I read to them, but I don't just read. We also analyze what we've read. I'll stop and say, "Do you see they symbolism here?"

How did you learn to use this approach?

I don't know.

Tell me about when you were growing up. Were your parents educators?

No. They did want better for their kids, but my mother was good with us with school up to sixth grade. She could spell any word you could give her. But at some point, we were not going to get any help from mom. I don't know, it just ended up like that. I didn't finish college. I went back three times, I just couldn't finish. I guess it's just part of my make-up. My parents were really strict.

Are you, as well?

Not as strict as they were. I am strict, and I explain it to them why I'm strict. "You're young. You need that structure. You need to understand how the world really works, and it's better to get your kicks in the butt now than later. We just point out the world, and they understand that if you don't read, you're not going to be able to understand what's going on, but the older one was reading at 3 ½ and the younger one was 4 ½. He did not go to preschool. The older one went because he did not talk. He just did rudimentary socializing for his age. He ended up going to preschool for a year and a half before kindergarten. The other one, he didn't want to do anything. He didn't want to color. He didn't want to write. He didn't want to draw. So we're like, "Okay, no preschool for you." We could have put him in kindergarten earlier, because of his age, but we were like, "No, he is not interested." So we held back.

How did you promote that interest?

He figured it out on his own.

What inspired him to figure it out?

I guess big brother going to school... Sometimes, kids figure the stuff out on their own, if you give them the right stuff.

How many days, last week, did you read with your son?

Probably three.

Describe the kinds of reading you and other family members enjoy.

Both boys like... Well, my oldest likes computer magazines. PC World, PC magazine. The other one, he'll kind of read what his big brother's reading. Sometimes he'll have a Highlights (50-), so it's borrowed. They've got a lot of his reading stuff is on the computer. How to play games, Younger one is competitive, wants to be the perfect kid.

What is essential in helping kids learn to read? What do parents need to do, from your experience?

Staying home with the kids until they go to school full-time. For some reason, me being there, reading with them, having them on my lap, or having the t.v. on educational stuff, or playing board games (I say, "I had kids so I can play board games."), staying home with them was the key?

What makes you sure that's the key? What did that afford you?

Flexibility, what I wanted whenever I wanted. We're going to go to the museum, children's museum, the other one in Columbus... Also that one on one attention.

Is there anything else you'd say is essential?

They've got the computer, the DVD games to teach them how to do certain things, like play the piano. We try to teach them to teach themselves. Also, the only thing they could do when they were punished was read.

But you don't punish them and say, "Now you have to read for 20 minutes" but you say, you're being punished, and the only fun thing you're allowed to do is read." Is that right?

They usually figured it out. They don't read prolifically like I did as a kid, but compared to most boys, they're way up there.

What about your husband? Is he a reader?

Yes. Every time there were kids around, they would gravitate towards him. And he'd play with them.

Is there anything else that you can think of that might have helped your kids be such good readers?

Starting early.

But not necessarily through preschool?

No, he just went for speech. He could read when he got there.

My sister in law said that, when he was 2, and even though he didn't talk a lot, he spoke in plain English that you wouldn't think a 2 year old would use. One time, there were some kids in the store who were acting rowdy, and he would point it out and say, "Dad. They need supervision."

Student-12/m, currently in 2nd grade

Parent-

Date- 8/22/11

Location-McDonalds- Rt. 747 by student's school

Would you please describe your aspirations for our child as a reader?

I think the most important thing is that he enjoys it. I know growing up I loved reading, but my mom was a teacher (laugh). She was an English teacher, so obviously I had a heads up on that one. But, enjoying and being able to comprehend what he's reading. And being able to reciprocate, and write stuff on his own. Using as much creativity as possible.

How would your child know that reading is important to you?

They see me read. But I like reading with him. I've done that with him since he was a baby. 'Cuz he just loved responding to my voice. 'Cuz he had a lot of hearing problems in the beginning and it delayed him. Yes, you couldn't tell now, could ya? (to Rory) He didn't start really talking until he was three years old. But he had his third set of tubes and adenoids out, and the next day he was literally talking.' Cuz he could finally hear.

What his ENT said was that he wasn't really comprehending... He was hearing, but it was so muffled that he wasn't really comprehending what he was hearing. So when he would try to speak, his speech was very slurred and slow, 'cuz that's how he listened. Which makes sense. So when he started kindergarten, he was definitely, behind, even with as much as I'd worked with him.

You were in preschool for about half the year. (to son)

At [current school]?

No. it was over at [another school]. It's called the Learning Center. For the longest time, I was applying for vouchers, trying to get him into Head Start. But because, even though I was a single, one income family, I was, think I really made less than a dollar too much an hour... And then I finally worked with a really nice... I met a nice, I went over to Local County once we moved there, and they got us into the ELI program. I don't even know if they still have it anymore. It's for kids ages 2-5. So it would carry 'm through until they started kindergarten, which was really helpful and he loved it.

If you would, list and describe reading activities that you particularly enjoy.

Probably one of the first things we started doing was flashcards. (Colors, letters?) And in kindergarten... Letters. Shapes. That's how we did our numbers, also. (to Rory) Do you remember tracing your letters? I have a big workbook for him. - It was so much fun too!- After he'd kind got the grasp of what the letters were, what they stood for- the sounds, that's the time I'd take the flashcards- sometimes I'd make some on my own- we'd take 10 different letters and we'd see how many 2 - 3 letter words we could make putting those together. We read at least once or twice a day. And not even just at home, but anytime we were out. If it was a busy day, if we'd gone out to dinner, lots of times I would take the menus and point letters, and I'd show him one letter, and then we would see how many times we could find that letter. I try not to do them exactly in order because he knew his ABC's in order. From the song of course. But mixing it up a little bit... gave him a little variety.

Nursery rhymes, singing, music, puppets?

We didn't really have any puppets. He had some songs he'd learned at preschool, he taught me, we sung together. –kids moving chair-

Now that [your son]'s beginning to read. Are things different? Do you do still do sight words on flashcards?

Lots of times I like to see how [he] reads, fluency wise, at home. One of the things we learned from –I can't remember who he had last year- (Mrs. Teacher) One of the things we learned to do was... Basically, She said his timing was weird. So we would practice rhythm. And I remember they started a series on poetry and I would have him point out the rhyming words. I mean, for the most part, he can sound out most any words. And I don't... I never really baby talked to him. I always used full sentences. You know, I never would say "Want wa-wa?" You know, I would say "Do you want some water? Would you like some water?" It helps him a lot with his speech development.

So who, typically, instigates the reading that you do? Does [your son] usually say "Mom, let's read." Or do you say "Let's read."

That's usually how it... I mean, I don't want him to say, "Oh! This is... You know I don't want to give it a negative connotation. I usually say, "Come on. Let's look at your homework. Let's see in your bag. Let's see what we're gonna read. If we don't have anything, "Well, do you want to pick one from our stack, too?" My mom was a teacher, and my aunt was a teacher out in [another state], and she sends us stuff all the time, and I used to have sight words, too.

You do check for homework, if there isn't any, then you do something else?

"Let's do something else." There's always something to do...

So thinking back, when he was littler, before school started, did he ever initiate reading or was it always you?

He loved to pick out books. He really did.

Did he have favorites?

He had this huge dinosaur book. He loved that one. And he would sit there, he'd carry it around growling. And so we would talk about the different dinosaurs. And, you know, he'd tell me the tyrannosaurus rex was one of the biggest dinosaurs there was. I would explain that they're no longer around. No, we can't really go find one in the back yard.

(kids talking- dinos at KI, real/robots)

Could you please describe literacy activities, outside the home, that may promote literacy for Rory?

We were, for a while, he was part of cub scouts last year. We didn't get to do a lot of the things. A lot of the things were really expensive. We do... we go to different... like the Children's museum, the aquarium. I get discounted tickets from where I work. I work for Macy's HR services.

Other activities you do at home to promote writing

Oh, we do a little bit, sometimes we write sentences, usually 2-3 sentences usually describing something. Something fun you did today. I try to make it not too broad. If you say, what you did this summer, that's way too broad. He needs more here and now.

Describe your role when it comes to teaching your child to read well. How do you see yourself in that picture?

I definitely see myself as one of the leaders. I mean, maybe it's because I grew up with my mom who was a teacher. When I was in college, that's what I was going for. I used to run writing workshop for mom. She tutored after she retired.

(She won an iPad!- said the son)

At work, 'cause I had some great ideas. Mommy was a celebrity.

I put some programs on there for him. Flashcards...

What about computers. Do you use computers?

I have a couple of games. We've gone, a couple of times, on the websites like Nickelodian and Disney.

Are the kids interested, or not really?

Not as much interested, but he likes to play with my iPad. I have her (young girl, 4 yrs. Old) 6 nights a week. Her mom and I are good friends. We share an apartment.

That helps, doesn't it?

Because of my kidneys, I got sick about 2 ½ years ago. That was some major medical bills. It really allows me to pay things down. In the next four months we will be actually moving down to KY to be with my boyfriend. We have discussed permanent arrangements, so...

In what ways do you believe you impact your child's reading development?

I think it's very important for a parent to impact their child's reading development. You can't just send them to school, and expect them to sit there all day, and not come home and not showing interest. So many parents don't. They don't have a clue what their kids are doing. No idea. Keeping abreast of the curriculum... Last year I got one of the mathematic books. I was in constant touch with Lara and Kevin. Actually both of them are amazing. I would ask, where is he kind of showing a little bit less development? Where is he showing his greater development? Start with his best development, boost his ego, and go over to something that's a little bit more difficult. But, making it fun. And over the summer I have him do some worksheets with me that I created for, just- some mathematic review, just little things, like when we go out, I'll give him some change and see how much do we have, like 4 pennies, 2 nickels, and a dime. How much do we have?

So what types of reading/writing materials are available for his use? Just anything you might have available for him, at home, that is available to him to use.

He's got a whole bunch of books that my aunt gave to us. We used to go to the library, but, unfortunately her (Jasmine's) mom took some books out and lost them and now I'm paying down the fees. So, I wasn't quite thrilled about that. That was one thing we used to do, 'cuz that was a free activity. And, I mean, we have construction paper. He has pencils and markers

And they're readily available for his use?

Sometimes I'll let him get on Facebook with me. He'll write messages to my brother or my sister-in-law. I like to use any reading materials, especially when I'm cooking something, something he can help me with, something to show the process, you know following directions from beginning to end.

Do you read with your child on a regular basis? Tell about your reading routines.

Umm. I don't get home from work until about 6 p.m. so while I get dinner going, I look through what he has. If he has reading material, (kids go to get ice cream)

What kinds of reading materials?

Magazines, I tried some newspapers- He likes the kids' ones they get from school. My boyfriend signed him up for a certain magazine he'll be getting in his own name. There are stories in there, and...

Is there anything else you can think of that you could say really impacted his success in the classroom?

Ummm... I think just a lot of practicing...

Is there anything else you can think of – that I have forgotten to ask?

I try to do with everything to do with grocery shopping, creating the grocery list, just saying, "Rory, how much is this item?" Things you use in real life, also.

Thoughts-

Says the "right" things

School pushes her interactions (homework, teacher suggestions)

Workbook, flashcards, etc. mentioned as materials used

Says "fun-focused" but it doesn't sound fun. (write sentences)

Emphasizes "real life" interactions (not sure grade level appropriate)

No names of books or authors mentioned

Curriculum Vitae

Christina Ann Williams

Education	Elementary Education
August 1988	BS, University of Cincinnati
August 2004	MEd, Reading and Literacy Walden University
2007-Present	Doctoral Student, Teacher Leadership Walden University
Expected date of completion:	April, 2012
Academic Honors	4.0 GPA for all Masters and Doctoral Coursework
Teaching Experience	24 years
1988-Present	Grade 1 Teacher Reading Intervention Specialist, Grades 5 and 6 Reading Intervention Specialist, Grades 1 and 2 Unified Arts Teacher, Grades 1 and 2 Grade 4 Teacher Grade 1 Teacher Grade 3 Teacher
Certification	Ohio Department of Education Professional Certificate Elementary Education, 1-8
Professional	National Education Association Member Ohio Education Association Member Member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children Member of the National Council of Teachers of English Owner, Curriculum Design, Tutor Coordinator, Book Bums Whiz Kids' Site Summer Literacy Program Director and Coordinator for Center Pointe Christian Church Positive Behavior Support (PBS) trained
