

**PARENTS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LITERACY  
DEVELOPMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND  
LABRADOR**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development. Data were collected through phone interviews using the Parent Reading Belief Inventory adapted from DeBaryshe (1994). This qualitative study consists of eight female participants with children aged four to six. The results provide a basis for understanding parents' perceptions and their rationales for parenting practices. All the participating parents believe they play an important role in their children's early learning. The majority of participants replicated their own childhood experiences with reading. Overall, the findings suggest that parents evaluate their child's level of readiness when determining their reading support strategies, and that literacy development is unique to each child. These findings contribute to an understanding of both the importance of researching parents' perceptions and also the way in which such perceptions may influence their child's literacy development.

Key words: parental roles, parental perceptions, children's literacy development

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**List of Abbreviations and Symbols**

PBCL	Parental beliefs about children's learning
PBR	Parental beliefs about their role
PFRI	Parental feelings about literacy interactions
PLP	Parental literacy practices
SCT	Social cognitive theory
HLE	Home literacy environment
SORT	Significant others as reading teachers



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Parents play a vital role in their children's growth and education. It is important to understand parents' beliefs about how their children acquire literacy skills because such beliefs can influence their children's attitudes toward learning to read. What parents believe about how to support their children's literacy development is one of many important factors that shape the home milieu for supporting children's literacy development, the *home literacy environment* (HLE).

Definitions of HLE vary within the literature. According to Baker and Scher (2002), HLEs include materials provided to children, such as books for learning basic concepts, like alphabet books and storybooks. Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002) extended this concept to include parental skills, abilities, and opportunities for literacy interactions between family members. Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) broadened the definition of HLE to include the experiences and attitudes pertaining to literacy that a child encounters and interacts with at home. It includes (a) maternal strategies, (b) children's interest in reading, (c) frequency of shared book reading, and (d) parents' responsiveness to children's engagement. It is a combination of emotional and verbal responsiveness, acceptance of children's behavior, organization of the home environment, and both academic stimulation and language stimulation in the home.

Models of HLE, therefore, emphasize a complex interplay of factors, rather than a single componential model. Leseman and de Jong (1998) posited that the HLE included (a) resources, (b) children's experiences, and (c) literacy interactions between family members. They (1998) assert that there is a relationship between the facets and other features of daily life. Home literacy can be seen as a micro social system of *constructive*

*processes* (children acquiring knowledge and skills without intentional mediation by a parent) and *co-constructive processes* (skills and knowledge being created in an inter-psychological way before being internalized) in language and literacy learning, which consists of four facets, which, in turn, are determined by contextual factors outside the system. These facets are (a) literacy opportunity, (b) quality of instruction, (c) parent-child cooperation, and (d) social-emotional quality. *Literacy opportunity* pertains to literacy interactions of any kind that take place in the home. *Quality of instruction* occurs when young children profit from guidance by a parent. *Parent-Child cooperation* requires consensus between the parent and child about what has to be accomplished in a reading situation. Last, *Social-emotional quality* has to do with the bond parents and children share and the affective experience they create together (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). The HLE includes an interaction between physical resources and the quality of parent-child relationships and interactions.

Little is known regarding parental beliefs about how children learn to read and write before formal schooling, according to Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro (2006). There is evidence that HLEs directly contribute to children's reading comprehension (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Sénéchal and LeFevre provided strong support for the HLE. Results from their studies show that children become fluent readers through various paths of early literacy exposure. Children develop vocabulary and listening comprehension skills through exposure to books, which is directly related to their ability to read in Grade 3. When parents teach children about reading and writing words, specifically through print-engagement tasks such as letter games, this is related to the development of early literacy skills, which predict word reading at the end of Grade 1

and indirectly predicts reading ability in grade three. According to Sénéchal and LeFevre (2006), the formal literacy environment (parent teaching) is linked to growth in reading, whereas informal literacy (shared book reading) is linked to growth in oral language.

The HLE has been well studied; however, further research is needed about the continued contribution of parent-child reading and whether parents' roles contribute to children's development of independent reading skills. The available literature suggests that parental perceptions influence the kind of home experiences that parents provide and, in turn, children's achievement (DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000). Given that parents play a vital role in their children's literacy development, studying their perceptions of their own roles is an important area of study. There is a need for research on parental perceptions of their role and what they do to support their children. This study is important for building a better understanding of parental beliefs about how best to help their children learn to read. This study aims to add to the literature available by examining parental perceptions and promotes early learning and positive HLEs.

This qualitative study gathered data from eight parents regarding their perspectives and actions in relation to helping their children learning to read. The researcher interviewed each parent and asked both Likert-scale and open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of their perceptions. A qualitative methodology was chosen because it is an effective approach to enhance understandings of people's experiences (Patton, 2002). The qualitative research process allows educators to engage in research in the communities where they teach. As Merriam (2009) stated, "qualitative research is a journey of discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 18) during which researchers explore and develop an understanding of others' experiences and thoughts.

*Social Cognitive Theory* ([SCT], Bandura, 1986) is used as a theoretical framework to describe the influences on how parents perceive their role in supporting their children's literacy development and why parents choose to become involved in varying capacities. SCT theorizes that individuals learn within a social context (Bandura). This social theory provides a framework for predicting future behavior and builds on insight into how individuals learn information. According to Bandura, people's *self-efficacy* (their beliefs in their abilities) influences anticipated events and how they prepare for them. As is relevant to this study, Bandura argued that parents with a higher self-efficacy likely believe that their involvement will make positive differences to their children's reading achievement.

Parental involvement in their children's development can influence early children's literacy learning and success since parents are children's first teachers (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Epstein, 1990). It has been found that parents who provide literacy-enriched home environments create a strong literacy foundation for their pre-school children (Switzer, 2012), but little is known regarding their perceptions of their role. It is crucial to understand why parents may or may not make a positive impact in their children's literacy success.

The remainder of Chapter 1 provides a review of the literature regarding the role of parents and their perceptions of children's literacy development, setting the context for describing the purpose of the study, presenting the research questions, and situating the study in relevant academic literature. Chapter 2 outlines the methods and methodology including a detailed rationale for the choice of methodology to address the research questions. The results are presented in Chapter 3, and the findings are articulated in both

narrative and table form. In Chapter 4, the discussion situates the findings of this study in the context of the reviewed literature, identifies the limitations of the study, and explores possible future directions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Parents' contribution to their children's learning.**

Research on family literacy has shown that significant people in children's lives play a central role in forming their beliefs and values about reading (Phillips, 2002). In order to promote optimal early childhood development, effective parenting practices are crucial to develop language and cognitive skills (Glascoe & Leew, 2010). Parents promote early language development for young children through stimulating activities such as frequent talking and playing, using a rich vocabulary, and emphasizing language for communicating. Before formal schooling, parents influence their children's transition into school and their future performance (Glascoe & Leew, 2010).

Many researchers have discussed children's readiness for school. During a two-year longitudinal investigation, Pelletier and Brent (2002) studied how parent involvement improved school readiness as well as how effective parental engagement with school affected children's achievement. According to Pelletier and Brent, school readiness is a developmental process that involves adaptation by both parents and children. Each day, families can provide their children with social, emotional, and cultural support. Parents promote abilities, life skills, and attitudes that help their children become successful in school. This home support helps children to be ready for school and to develop positive beliefs about success.

SCT assumes that individuals learn within a social context (Bandura, 1986). This is an appropriate theoretical framework since for pre-school aged children the most influential social context may be their family unit. SCT is useful for predicting behavior and provides insight into how people learn. In this study, SCT is used as a theoretical framework to analyze the factors that influence parents' roles in supporting their children's literacy development. According to this theory, learning and new patterns of behavior develop during the processes of modeling and observing behavior, and through direct experiences. SCT posits that behavior is governed by social and personal determinants (Bandura, 1986). As a result of prior experiences, people learn behaviors that have proven successful.

SCT theory proposes that self-efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1993). People's beliefs in their abilities can motivate the types of activities they involve themselves in. The self-efficacy dimension of SCT addresses the origin of self-efficacy beliefs and how to develop and elicit such beliefs for personal and social change (Bandura, 1997). Parents' beliefs of self-efficacy include their own teaching efficacy (based on their ability to motivate their child) and their teaching experience (formal or informal). It also includes their beliefs about who controls learning (teacher or parent) and how much academic, social, and motivational influence they have on their child (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Self-efficacy is socially constructed and is influenced by personal experiences (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). Parents' self-efficacy is socially constructed since it stems from what they observed their own parents doing and what they observe other individuals doing with their children. Their own personal experiences (such as childhood school experiences)

and ideas about culturally appropriate practices may affect how their self-efficacy develops.

*Parental self-efficacy*, defined as parents' beliefs about how their involvement in their children's schooling will affect their children's learning and school success (Anderson & Minke, 2007), may be a factor in how parents support their children's literacy development. With regard to reading, parental self-efficacy is related to parents' beliefs about their ability to influence their children's reading ability. If parents believe that they are capable of helping with their children's reading and learning, they are more likely to want to help (Oldford-Matchim & Singh, 2002). Parents need to believe that their efforts can help in order for them to want to be involved. They also need to think that being involved is a part of their role as a parent. According to Bandura (1997), roles are defined as a set of expectations held by groups or individuals. Parents are a group of individuals who hold different expectations for their children and themselves. Many different influencing factors such as family, friends, and schools shape parents' perceived roles.

In addition, Bandura's (1996) research showed positive relationships among parental self-efficacy, children's self-perceptions, and children's academic achievement. According to Bandura, our thoughts shape most of our courses of action. Bandura stated that "children with the same level of cognitive skill development differ in their intellectual performance depending on the strength of their perceived self-efficacy" (p. 1256). People's beliefs in their abilities can influence anticipated events and how they prepare themselves for these events. When people doubt their abilities, they envision failure instead of positive outcomes. Therefore, if parents doubt their ability to support

their children when reading, they may refrain from helping them at all because they are fearful of failure.

Parental self-efficacy may impact their children's literacy development and the type of guidance and materials parents provide. Weigel, Martin, and Bennett (2006) researched the importance of HLEs and parents' beliefs about their children's performance. Their study included parents and their preschool children (average age of 49 months). They examined (a) parents' beliefs about children's literacy development, (b) how these beliefs were associated with literacy development, and (c) how parental beliefs were associated with other aspects of the HLE. The researchers investigated how differences in print knowledge, HLE, and interest in reading may be influenced by parents' beliefs. The participants completed self-administered questionnaires using the Parental Reading Belief Inventory (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). Follow-up tests a year later found that parental literacy beliefs differed depending on the mother's education. There was also an association between mothers' beliefs and the types of literacy enhancement activities mothers and children engaged in at home. These results suggest that parents' literacy beliefs and education may impact literacy development because of the home literacy environment that they create, which is based on their beliefs. For example, mothers who took an active role in teaching their pre-school children and reading books with them, were more likely to report they enjoyed reading and spent more time participating in reading and writing activities than mothers who believed they could do little to prepare their children for school. The actively involved mothers believed in education, and their children observed them in literacy activities such as reading, in their everyday life. It was argued that the activities they reported regularly engaging in, such as



drawing pictures, singing songs, and telling stories helped children develop oral language and precursors of literacy.

A substantial body of research suggests that it is important for parents to support their children's learning through the provision of a language rich environment. Glascoe and Leew (2010) investigated the relations among parenting behaviors, perceptions, and psychosocial risks associated with children's language development. The researchers posited that when parents read books with their children, they provide necessary language stimulation such as rich vocabulary, a focus of interest on reading and age-appropriate communication. To examine this hypothesis, Glascoe and Leew studied a large number of families recruited from 17 American states. Data were collected through (a) a parent questionnaire, (b) testing of the children, and (c) examiner observations of parent-child interactions. The tests measured a variety of language milestones in children compared to their age-equivalent scores and percentiles. The questionnaire and the observations provided data about parenting behaviors and parents' perceptions of their children. It was found that parents who exhibited four parenting behaviors or perceptions—(a) reading to their children, (b) speaking in a variety of ways, (c) participating in a range of activities, and/or (d) perceiving their children as “interesting” and “fun to be with” —had children with language skills in the average range. In addition, the questionnaires found that the absence of these four positive parenting behaviors plus negative perceptions of children (for example, “my child is not very much fun to be with” or “my child does not seem to calm down or seem very interested when I talk to him or her”) negatively affected children's literacy development. These results suggest the importance of promoting the

early language development of children by encouraging parents to focus on talking, playing, and reading with their children.

### **Parents' role perception and their children's reading.**

Parental role construction begins before their children enter school and extends throughout their children's lives. According to Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, and Closson (2005) *parental role construction* refers to parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their children's education. The researchers reviewed parental involvement and discussed a theoretical model involving school counselors. This model addresses (a) why parents become involved, (b) the forms of involvement, and (c) how their involvement influences both motivation and student achievement. The researchers posited that role construction is rooted in parents' understanding of their responsibility to be involved with their children. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argued that parental role construction influences parental decisions about their involvement in their children's schooling. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler proposed that parental role construction is the result of observation and of modeling their own parents' involvement with school related activities and their friends' involvement in their children's schooling. They argued that it is crucial that parents develop their role as they think about, imagine, and anticipate their involvement in their children's educational related activities. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), parents become involved in their children's education as they construct their role.

Parents may be unsure of their role in supporting their children. Epstein (1990) reviewed the literature on the influence of schools and families on student success, finding that that parents of all educational backgrounds wanted to be involved with their

children's education and help their children's learning at home, however, many were unsure if they were doing the right things. In addition, some parents helped their children with the best of intentions; however, they indicated that the school did not provide information about how to help their children most effectively. Similarly, Mui and Anderson (2008) found that some parents were unaware of the extent to which a literacy-infused family life aids their children's literacy development and literacy knowledge/skills. The family they studied fostered a language and educationally enriched home by posting their children's school projects on walls; hanging posters of concepts that the children were learning at school; and attaching phonics flashcards, sticky notes, as well as school notices, memos, and reminders to the refrigerators with large magnetic letters. This family also played structured learning games such as counting games, hide-and-seek, and board games. As well, they sang daily and read for practical purposes, such as reading a recipe. Mui and Anderson found that the family engaged in these practices without realizing their myriad ways of supporting literacy.

Smith's review (1990) of the research on involving parents in their children's literacy development found that parents often believe that their children's school does not want them to participate in the instructional process at home, although this may not reflect educators' actual perspectives. Given the previous research that supports parent involvement, it is important that teachers and parents develop a connection. Teachers should provide parents with ideas and strongly encourage parents to be involved with their children's learning. When parents believe that their involvement matters and will positively contribute to their children's education, they are more likely to be engaged

(Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002).

Some researchers have studied parents' beliefs about taking an active role in supporting their children's literacy development. Lynch (2002) studied families in a literacy project for approximately one year investigating the relationships among parents' self-efficacy beliefs, children's reader self-perceptions, and reading achievement. She found significant relationships between parents' self-efficacy beliefs and children's reader self-perceptions. Weigel et al. (2006) also examined families for one year and found connections among parental literacy beliefs, HLEs, and children's literacy performance. These researchers found that certain mothers believed they should take an active role at home in teaching their children. These mothers, termed *facilitative* mothers, believed gaining vocabulary and knowledge would help their children to do better in school. In contrast, other mothers, termed *conventional*, who believed that preschoolers were too young to learn about reading and that it was the school's responsibility to teach reading, reported many challenges to reading at home, such as lack of reading materials and a quiet place to read. Thus, mothers in this study had different perceptions about their role in literacy development.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1992) argued that the self-efficacy of parents can help their children succeed in school because it enables them to be highly involved with their children's education. In addition, Oldford-Matchim and Singh (2002) used questionnaires to explore and investigate the relationships among parents' role constructs, self-efficacy, and involvement practices when helping their children learn to read. Based on the questionnaire results, reports from parents, and evaluation using the Significant Others as

Reading Teachers (SORT) program, they found that parents who think they could influence their children's development were proactive and successful in fostering positive attitudes toward reading for their children. It is important that parents understand how their help can aid their children's literacy development and influence their children's sense of reading ability. Parents who are self-efficacious viewed education as a shared responsibility with the school (Bandura, 1993). Also, when teachers are self-efficacious with their teaching practices, they increase parents' ability to help their children learn (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Confident teachers may give tips and resources to parents to develop a positive relationship between school and home. Given these findings, both a teacher's and a parent's sense of efficacy can influence parents' involvement with their children's education and success (Bandura, 1993).

Furthermore, Epstein (1990) found that students of all ages benefitted from parent involvement. Nevertheless, most schools leave it up to the family to decide how much involvement they would like to have with their children's schools. Epstein (1990) posited that students would learn more if parent and school resources were combined because students would get a varied and coordinated learning experience. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) argued that students' school performance is influenced by events in the home. From their review of the literature, they found a common theme that teachers need to communicate the importance of home-school collaborative decision-making. An important finding from these studies is that successful parent involvement requires that teachers encourage parents to become their children's advocates and to engage with their children's learning and mastery of skills.

Parental beliefs about their children's abilities may impact their children's school performance. Aunola, Nurmi, Lerkkanen, and Rasku-Puttonen (2003) conducted a study that looked at a variety of items including children's mathematical performance, behaviors children showed in the classroom, and their parents' beliefs concerning their children's school competence. Of particular importance for this current study was the questionnaire filled out by 111 parents measuring their general beliefs regarding their children's competencies at the beginning and at the end of the school year. Researchers used this as a means to measure the extent to which parental beliefs about children's mathematical performance were mediated by the behaviors children showed at school. They found that parental beliefs about their child's school competence predicted the level of achievement their child had at school, which in return contributed to their child's reading performance. This finding, that parents' beliefs about their child's abilities may influence the child's performance, demonstrates the importance of studying parental perceptions.

Becker and Epstein (1982) found that one of the most important parent involvement activities that parents viewed as useful was reading with their children. Similarly, DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) posited that reading out loud to young children was one of the most beneficial learning experiences that parents provide. Bandura (1996) proposed that there are positive relationships among parental efficacy, children's self-perceptions, and children's school achievement. Furthermore, research has shown a relationship between children's reading ability and their opportunities for job success and personal fulfillment (National Academy of Education, 1985) in the future. Given these research results, it is evident that children need to be given ample opportunities to read in order to

be successful in the future and that parents play a vital role in their children's literacy development.

**Parent perceptions and actions.**

DeBaryshe et al. (2000) reviewed the literature on parents' implicit theories of early literacy instruction to examine whether parents' perceptions of instructions are related to the kinds of literacy experiences they provide for their children and the level of skill their children display. They concluded that there is little literature on parental beliefs about literacy and how children acquire literacy skills; however, they did suggest that these beliefs influence the kinds of home experiences that parents provide for their children.

Lynch (2002) made a similar argument about the paucity of research on parental self-efficacy beliefs in relation to helping children succeed in school. Some research studies have examined what parents want their children to be able to do, but there is little in the literature about how parents believe these goals can be attained (Stipek, Milburn, Clements, & Daniels, 1992). Some other researchers (Aunola, et al., 2003; Oldford-Matchim & Singh, 2002; & Weigel et al., 2006) have studied the perceptions of parents with regard to general help and encouragement; however, there has been little research on their perceptions of teaching their children how to read. There is substantial research on the importance of reading to young children (Becker & Epstein, 1982; DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994; Epstein, 1990; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) but little with regard to parental perceptions of their roles.

According to Baker and Scher (2002), children who have more opportunities to engage in literacy-relevant activities at home have more positive views about reading, engage in more leisure reading, and have better reading achievement. Parental roles have

been studied in terms of what materials they provide and the literacy activities they do. However, less frequently assessed are the parental role and its impact on their children's literacy development and motivation for reading. Moreover, the studies that have been completed on parental perceptions and school performance have dealt with older school-age children or adolescents (Frome & Eccles, 1998; Ladd & Price, 1986; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982; Phillips, 2002; Stevenson & Newman, 1986). Since, "reading achievement is critical for students' entire academic success" (Lynch, 2002, p. 66) and parents play a major role in aiding their literacy development, further research in this area is pertinent.

Parents are an obvious focus for research since they give their children their first feedback on their abilities (Lynch, 2002) and contribute to their children's reading self-perceptions. It is important to study parental perceptions of their roles because it has been found that parents who interact regularly with their children often bring strength to their children's learning process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Therefore, if parents do not know how they contribute to their child's literacy development, they may not participate in their child's learning at all. This could have a negative impact on their child's school performance. This current study aims to examine parental perceptions about their role and why they participate in different literacy activities.

### **Purpose of Current Study**

The cited research underscores the importance of parental involvement in the literacy development of their children. It also suggests that some parents are unaware of the potential they have in supporting their child's early literacy development. Parents may question whether teaching their child to read is an appropriate role. Some may not



feel it is their role as a parent to teach their children how to read or to engage them in literacy activities. According to Baker and Scher (2002), a less frequent conceptualization of the parental role is the perspective that reading is pleasurable and worthwhile, which contributes to children's motivation for reading.

Currently, little is known regarding the perceptions of Canadian parents of their role in supporting their children's early literacy development. The research that exists in this area has mainly been conducted with American families (DeBaryshe et al., 2000; Epstein, 1990; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Morrow, 1995; and Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Results may vary because of differences between education systems and curriculum. Since most studies have been carried out in the United States, it is not known if Canadian parents have the same perceptions and if their perceptions influence behaviors at home in the same way. This research will aid the fields of education and psychology, and stakeholders such as schools, educational psychologists, literacy specialists, early childhood educators, and university programs, in understanding how parents' perceptions contribute to the HLE.

The overarching focus of inquiry of this study is the interplay of parental perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development and their resulting feelings and interactions with their children. The main research question is: "What are Newfoundland and Labrador parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development?"

In order to further explore the main research question, the following guiding sub-questions frame the research.

- What are parents' perceptions of children's literacy development?

- What are parents' perceptions of how to support their children with literacy development?
- What factors have influenced these perceptions?
- How do parents support their children's literacy development?

### **Summary**

Parental perceptions of their role in literacy activities is an important area to study. This study will provide valuable knowledge towards understanding what parents think they should be doing with their children and why they are doing what they are doing. The literature demonstrates that parents contribute to children's learning; however, there is little research on why they do particular activities and they perceive their roles to be. The next chapter addresses the methods and methodology. It includes a description of the eight participants, the measures used in this study, the researcher's procedure, and data analysis procedures.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the study design and includes a general explanation of qualitative research. It also includes details specific to this study including (a) participants, (b) sample selection and the recruitment process, (c) instruments, (d) data collection and analysis, and (e) the researcher's role in the research. Recall that the overarching goal of this study is to explore Newfoundland and Labrador parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development.

### **Explanation of Qualitative Research**

The current study used a qualitative design to gather information to further the investigation of parental perceptions about their role in supporting their children's literacy development. This design was the most effective in gathering data relevant to the research question because it enabled participants to share their honest opinions and ideas about their role. Qualitative research was best suited for this study because it provides a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell, 2016, p. 40).

Qualitative research can be difficult to explain concretely; however, it has many important characteristics, such as a focus on meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection, and rich description based on people's experiences (Merriam, 2009). Having the researcher be the primary instrument has advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that a human being can be flexible and curious in the research process and can provide detailed information about the topic. Relying on a human as the main source of data collection, however, can also be disadvantageous as people have various "shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). In the case of this study, the researcher is

interested in the perceptions of parents about their role in supporting the literacy development of their children. Through the course of this research study, the researcher developed a better understanding of these perceptions and what factors influence them. The participants gave useful insight into what their beliefs were and provided greater knowledge of the origin of their roles. Qualitative research was most appropriate for this research, although it was noteworthy to reference both the advantages and disadvantages of this method of data collection.

### **Measures**

For this study, the researcher adapted the Parent Reading Belief Inventory of Barbara D. DeBaryshe (1994) with her permission. The inventory (DeBaryshe) had been used with parents in other qualitative studies such as Weigel et al. (2006). The researcher chose to use a questionnaire in order to obtain substantial and rich information and to produce a thick description of parental beliefs and practices. According to Creswell (2016), questionnaires provide useful information when the researcher is unable to directly observe participants and they give participants an opportunity to describe detailed personal information. In addition, this adapted questionnaire was used so that the researcher had some control over the types of information gathered because she could ask specific questions to elicit the desired information. The researcher chose to use an oral questionnaire, to facilitate the interview, and to record the participants' answers. Recording the interview was helpful in that the researcher could re-listen to participant responses as many times as needed.

Questionnaires can be a combination of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2016). This questionnaire was a combination of Likert-scale

questions and open-ended questions. Prior to the interview, all items and "questions (Likert and open-ended) on the questionnaire were organized into four categories to identify types of inherent theories held by parents about how and why they support their children's literacy development. The categories are: (a) parental beliefs about children's learning (PBCL), (b) parental beliefs about their role (PBR), (c) parental feelings about literacy interactions (PFLI), and (d) parental literacy practices (PLP).

The parent questionnaire consisted of a series of questions about parents' reading beliefs and literacy involvement at home. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was intended to measure parents' reading beliefs about their role in helping their children's literacy development. Prior to adapting the interview, the researcher investigated how DeBaryshe and Binder (1994) had conceptualized the original Parent Reading Belief Inventory. DeBaryshe and Binder assessed the psychometric properties of the instrument to determine the validity of the scale, and they found the instrument to be a reliable and valid tool for assessing reading-related belief systems. The original inventory used a four-point Likert scale and 55 belief inventory items that were grouped into seven categories conceived beforehand. In the current study, the researcher considered the question/category ratio of the original tool and established 38 belief inventory items to be used in the Likert-scale statement section, grouping them into four categories, similarly to DeBaryshe and Binder. The total number of questions and categories was reduced to accommodate the smaller number of participants and the research questions unique to the current study. To test the clarity of the adapted questionnaire, the researcher did a pilot test interview prior to beginning formal data collection. In this way, the researcher knew that individuals were capable of completing the survey and understanding the questions

(Creswell, 2016). The researcher also made the necessary alterations to the questionnaire to enhance the clarity of the data and to reflect concerns the sample participant had before she used it with the sample in this study.

## **Methods**

The questionnaire that was created was administered to participants as a semi-structured interview. The interviews took place over the telephone and were audio-recorded using GarageBand for transcription and analysis. There were three distinct parts to the interview.

The first section, which followed a Likert-scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree), included 36 brief statements regarding parental beliefs about reading. The statements fell into the following categories: 10 statements regarding PBCL (for example, “My child learns many important things from me”), one statement regarding PLP (“I have to scold or discipline my child when we try to read”), ten statements regarding PBR (“Parents should teach children how to read before they start school”), and nine statements regarding PFLI (“I find it boring or difficult to read with my child”). The researcher read out each statement, and the parent responded with a rating of 1, 2, 3, or 4, indicating their level of agreement.

The second section comprised six Likert-scale statements from the PLP category. If participants answered these questions with “4” (strongly agree) or “3” (agree), participants were asked a follow-up question (“Why?”) so that parents could elaborate on their response. For example, when read the statement, “I ask my child a lot of questions when we read,” Fiona responded,

Three. um just to see, for one thing if he is paying attention and then to expand on the vocabulary as well, so I find a lot of the books we read might just be, the sentences are more simple, so I like to expand on the vocabulary and point out different things in the pictures and then ask him like why does he think this happened.

At the beginning of the interview the researcher made participants aware that there were no right or wrong answers to these questions by stating:

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Please just provide your true opinion and information in response to each question, as this is the information that I am looking for. I am not trying to be impersonal; however, I will not provide my own opinion on the answers given. Do you have any questions before we begin?

This gave participants an opportunity to ask any questions or address any concerns they had before beginning the interview.

The third section consisted of 13 open-ended questions designed to gain a richer understanding of participants' experiences. These questions investigated parents' experiences with reading and their ideas about literacy development. Each question fell into one of the four categories. There were two open-ended questions from the PBCL category, seven from the PLP category, one from the PBR category, and two from the PFLI category. These questions were distinctly different from the Likert questions because they allowed participants to disclose as much information as they wanted. An example of a question in this section is: "What do you remember about reading when you were a child?"

## **Participants**

The study was conducted with a total of eight female participants. This number of participants was appropriate because it allowed for robust, detailed, rich information and, therefore, was sufficient. The researcher used homogeneous sampling, which is the process of selecting a small group of participants (Creswell, 2016). The researcher selected certain people who possessed similar characteristics so as to understand and describe a particular group in depth. All eight participants had children aged four to six, and their perspectives allowed for sufficient saturation.

The participants were English-speaking mothers from a mid-size city in eastern Canada and surrounding smaller communities. In addition to parenting, two of the participants worked part-time (substitute teacher and student assistant), three participants did not work (two specified staying at home with their children, and one stated that she was studying to be a dental hygienist when not taking care of her children), and three participants worked full-time (teacher, supply chain manager, and child-care provider). Three participants had children aged six years old (one in kindergarten, two in Grade 1), two participants had children aged five years old (both in kindergarten), and three participants had children aged four years old (one in kinderstart and two in kindergarten). Signed consents were obtained from parent participants. Parents were informed of confidentiality and participation requirements prior to the administration of questionnaires.

### **Selection criteria.**

Individuals living in Newfoundland and Labrador who were parents of children aged four to six were eligible to participate in this study. The researcher chose parents of



children in this age group because these children are developing reading strategies at a rapid pace. Some children in this age range were pre-school children and others had started formal schooling, which helped give a wide range of perspectives on parents' role perception. The researcher wanted a broad picture of parents' roles with a typical child learning to read, rather than those who have children with specific reading difficulties. The researcher was interested to learn why parents become involved in their children's education and the ideas they possessed about what they were supposed to do with relation to their children learning to read.

### **Procedure**

All procedures in this study were approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee of Ethics in Human Research of Memorial University since the research involved human participants. The recruitment process began using snowball sampling through social media (i.e., Facebook). The recruitment message was posted online, and prospective participants contacted the researcher through email if they were interested in the study. The informed consent was sent through email, and parents signed and returned these to the researcher. The researcher advised all participants that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time prior to the data being aggregated. Additionally, participants were informed that all interview responses were anonymous. Email was used to arrange a time for the phone interview, and participants decided a time that best fit their schedules. The informed consent was also reviewed verbally with the participants at the time of the interview.

Participant semi-structured interviews were completed in approximately 30 minutes over the phone. Before each phone interview, the overall study was briefly discussed, and

the researcher gave the participants an opportunity to ask any questions that they had. Eight interviews were conducted with mothers who had children between four to six years old. Each participant responded to a number of questions regarding their beliefs about reading, and their role in supporting their children's literacy development. The researcher made handwritten notes throughout the interview. The data was collected between March 2016 and September 2016.

### **Data Analysis**

The data set included a set of eight audio recordings, the transcripts from the interviews, and handwritten notes from the researcher. Once all interviews were completed, the researcher read through the transcripts to identify the participants' general feelings about their role in supporting their child's literacy development. The researcher read and re-read through the interview transcripts several times in order to get closer to the data, looking for similarities, differences, unique statements, and general themes prior to beginning the content analysis. After discussion with the supervisory committee, the researcher decided to analyze the data by hand without the use of a qualitative data software program.

The researcher separated the data into unique comments and then sorted it by content in order to yield dominant themes, following procedures used in related studies (DeBaryshe et al., 2000). Specifically, *thematic content analysis* is aimed at noting frequencies or establishing categories or themes among the data (Faulkner, Klock, & Gale, 2002). *Qualitative thematic content analysis* is described as an inductive strategy by which the researcher starts with one unit of meaning (for example, a phrase from a parent about not understanding reading strategies) and compares it to another unit

(Merriam, 2009). Content analysis was used to build an increasingly detailed understanding of the data. The researcher reviewed the data for themes between each individual interview question among all participants and between each individual parent questionnaire. This action continued while the researcher looked for similarities across the data. The determined patterns were given names or *codes*. These codes were adjusted, refined, and renamed (as needed) as the analysis continued. Data were reviewed for themes and similar codes were grouped together.

The researcher used the four pre-determined categories—PBCL, PBR, PFLI, and PLP—to help organize the data, which facilitated the thematic content analysis. The categories directed the researcher’s attention to the themes that arose across the data and helped make sense of the data as the researcher coded the transcripts. Coding the data while holding in view the pre-identified categories helped the researcher analyze the data by illuminating relationships and patterns in the data.

### **Researcher’s Role in the Research**

In any qualitative study it is important to note the researcher’s role in the collection of data and in the research. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, which makes this this type of research unique. Merriam (2009) proposed that in qualitative research, “data have been filtered through [the researcher’s] particular theoretical position and bias” (p. 233). With these circumstances in mind, the primary researcher in this study has decided to communicate her personal perspective on parents’ roles in supporting the literacy development. The researcher is a graduate student who comes from a family where she was surrounded by literacy activities and opportunities. She believes that it is important for parents to be involved with their children’s education

and that parents can contribute to a children's success with reading. The researcher is also a primary/elementary teacher with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, has taught students of the same age as the participants' children, and was teaching young children at the time of data collection and analysis. She has an interest in early literacy development and home-school connections.

The researcher realizes that her position as a teacher and a student completing her Master of Education may have affected how parents responded. Because of the researcher's educational background, participants may have felt intimidated or nervous that the researcher might think that they are not doing the "right" activities with their children. The researcher used an informed consent procedure with all participants, indicating that all responses were welcomed, even those that the participants may have felt were less socially desirable. Even with the specific directive that the researcher welcomed all experiences, she experienced some hesitation when participants answered certain questions. At times, she questioned the validity of the responses.

*Social desirability* is the tendency of individuals to present themselves in the most favorable manner relative to dominant social norms. Participants may not have wanted to be completely honest because they were worried that the researcher would perceive them as inept parents if they were not doing an activity that they believed was a socially prevalent activity.

To minimize bias throughout the data collection process, the researcher did not deviate from the interview questions and did not offer any personal thoughts on the subject matter. The researcher made participants aware that she would not comment on her views of the accuracy of their responses. In addition, the researcher had her

supervisor review the data with her, both to minimize any bias and also to ensure validity and reliability.

This chapter discussed the methods used in the current study and described why qualitative research is effective. The measures, procedures, participants, data analysis, and the researcher's role in the study were also discussed. The subsequent chapter explains the results of the current study. It includes six tables and descriptions of the results, organized by the four categories: PBCL, PBR, PFLI, and PLP.

### Chapter 3: Results

The overarching goal of this study is to explore Newfoundland and Labrador parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development. The findings provide insight into the beliefs of the participants regarding how children develop their reading skills and what participants believe their role is when supporting their children. To keep participants anonymous, pseudonyms are used. Participants were asked to respond to 38 statements on a four-point Likert-type scale and 13 open-ended questions that expand upon their own inquiry about their role of supporting their children's literacy development. The four categories by which the results are organized are: parental beliefs about children's learning (PBCL), parental beliefs about their role (PBR), parental feelings about literacy interactions (PFLI), and parental literacy practices (PLP).

This chapter will provide an explanation of statements and questions in each category. Then, findings from the Likert-scale statements will be presented in a table, followed by a description. Last, the open-ended questions will be listed and the associated findings will be briefly described. Each theme is illustrated by specific examples from participants.

First, Table 1 below summarizes unanimity among parents' ratings of Likert statements. The table includes both positive and negative Likert-scale items that were endorsed by all participants. The four categories are presented in the left column, and the centre and right columns list the Likert statements that all participants agreed or disagreed with.

Table 1  
*Likert-Scale Statements Endorsed by All Participants (Positive and Negative)*

Category	Likert Statements	
	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Beliefs about child learning (PBCL)	Children learn new words, colors, names, etc. from books.	
	Reading helps children become better talkers and listeners.	
	Stories help build my child's imagination.	
	Reading helps children learn about things they never see in real life (like volcanoes and elephants).	
Parental beliefs about their role (PBR)	As a parent, I play an important role in my child's development.	I don't read to my child because I have other, more important things to do as a parent.
	My child learns many important things from me.	
	Parents need to be involved in their children's education.	
	I want my child to love books.	
	I enjoy reading with my child.	I don't read to my child because he/she won't sit still.
Parental feelings about literacy interactions (PFLI)	Reading with my child is a special time that we love to share.	I don't read to my child because we have nothing to read.
	I feel warm and close to my child when we read.	I don't read to my child because there is no room and no quiet place in the house.
Parent Literacy Practices (PLP)	<i>There were no universal findings from this category.</i>	

The results from the Likert-scale questions indicate that in three of the four categories all parents had certain similar beliefs. These categories were PBCL, PBR, and PBLI. There were no universally endorsed statements in the PLP category.

Table 2  
*Themes Developed From Open-Ended Questions*

Categories	Themes Generated From Open-Ended Questions
Beliefs about child learning (PBCL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents express confidence about children's literacy development</li> <li>• Diverse beliefs about what makes a good reader</li> </ul>
Parental beliefs about their role (PBR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of participants' experience with reading</li> <li>• Influence of participants' education</li> </ul>
Parental feelings about literacy interactions (PFLI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation and dedication to reading</li> </ul>
Parent Literacy Practices (PLP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similarities in parental literacy practices</li> <li>• Differences in parental literacy practices</li> <li>• Different sources of information</li> </ul>

Table 2 presents the themes that emerged from the open-ended questions, organized by the four categories (PBCL, PBR, PFLI, and PLP). Participants' responses to the open-ended questions were transcribed and then sorted using thematic content analysis. The themes that emerged from the PBCL category were: (a) parents value reading, (b) parents want their children to learn to read, and (c) parents have different beliefs about how children learn to read. In the PBR category, two themes arose: (a) the strategies learned during their own education that parents used to help their children learn to read, and (b) how their own experiences with reading had influenced their children's literacy development. In the PFLI category, the major theme was that parents appreciate



and dedicate time to read daily. Last, in the PLP category, the themes were: (a) parents used both similar and different literacy practices, and (b) parents received information about how to help their children learn to read from different sources.

The findings shown in Table 2 are further explained below. Each category (PBCL, PBR, PFLI, and PLP) is presented as a section, within which there are subsections that correspond to the themes developed from the open-ended questions.

### **Parental Beliefs About Children's Learning**

Table 3 describes findings from the Likert statements for Category 1: Parental beliefs about children's learning. Participants were asked to scale 11 different statements, choosing between "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." The responses in Table 3 are organized by number and percentage of participants who responded to each statement.

Table 3  
*Category 1: Likert Statements for Parental Beliefs About Children's Learning*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My child learns many important things from me.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (0)
Schools are responsible for teaching children, not parents.	50% (4)	50% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Stories help build my child's imagination.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
Children learn new words, colors, names, etc. from books.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
Reading helps children learn about things they never see in real life (like volcanoes and elephants).	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
My child learns lessons and morals from the stories we read.	0% (0)	0% (0)	25% (2)	75% (6)
When my child goes to school, the teacher will teach my child everything my child needs to know so I don't need to worry.	75% (6)	13% (1)	13% (1)	0% (0)
My child learns important life skills from books (like how to follow a cooking recipe, how to protect themselves from strangers).	13% (1)	0% (0)	25% (2)	63% (5)
Children inherit their language ability from their parents, it's in their genes.	38% (3)	50% (4)	13% (1)	0% (0)
Reading helps children become better talkers and better listeners.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
I read to my child so they will learn the letters and how to read simple words.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)

*Note.* Number in parenthesis indicates the number of participants who gave that particular response. Rows that do not total 100% are due to rounding of decimals.

In this category, participants were in agreement for six out of the 11 questions. All parents believed that (a) their children learn important knowledge from them; (b) stories help build their children's imagination; (c) children learn words, colors, names, etc. from books; (d) reading helps their children learn about things they never see in real life (such as volcanoes and elephants); (e) reading helps children become better talkers and better listeners; and (f) reading to their children helped them learn the letters and how to read simple words.

Two open-ended questions were asked of participants to gather further information regarding their beliefs about children's learning:

- What do you think are the signs of a good reader?
- How do you feel about your child's reading progress? What tells you this?

The themes that emerged were (a) parents' expressions of confidence about their child's reading progress, and (b) parents' diverse beliefs about what makes a good reader. The next sub-section describes the findings from the PBCL category of questions in more detail.

### **Parents expressed confidence about their child's literacy development.**

A universal finding was that parents felt confident about their children's literacy progress. Participants had determined their children's literacy development based on what they saw at home (their children asking to be read to or picking up books on their own) and by what their child's teachers were reporting (their child's report cards and identified reading level). This theme was illustrated by statements such as

I am really happy about how he's progressing. He is only had two weeks of homework so far and when he has a book that he brings home, he reads the whole book to me. He is only four so I think that's pretty impressive. His teacher said too

she's pretty impressed with how many words that he recognizes so yeah I am pretty happy about that (Lian),

and

I feel really confident about it. It is like all the sudden she is picking up more words and retaining them. Reading is exciting for her. When she reads two words in a row she gets excited so I feel good about it for sure (Natasha).

### **Diverse beliefs about what makes a good reader.**

Parents had different beliefs about what makes a good reader. For example, someone who shows "attention to the book" (Melissa) and "someone who can read many forms of a text" (Nancy). Other beliefs that parents had about being a good reader were someone who puts emphasis on the storyline (Miriam), someone who can sit down and read on their own (Lacey), and someone who reads expressively when reading a text (Miriam). However, universally they agreed that the greatest sign of children who are good readers is showing an interest in reading.

### **Parental Beliefs about Their Role**

Table 4 presents findings from the Likert statements for Category 2: Parental beliefs about their role in supporting their children's literacy development. Participants were asked to scale eight different statements, choosing between "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." Table 4 contains the percentage and number (in parentheses) of participant responses for each statement.

Table 4  
*Category 2: Likert Statements for Parental Beliefs About Their Role*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
As a parent, I play an important role in my child's development.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
I am my child's most important teacher.	0% (0)	12.5% (1)	25% (2)	62.5% (5)
Parents need to be involved in their children's education.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
I want my child to love books.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
Parents should teach children how to read before they start school.	0% (0)	50% (4)	12.5% (1)	37.5% (3)
Even if I would like to, I'm just too busy and too tired to read to my child.	87.5% (7)	12.5% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I try to make the story more real to my child by relating the story to his or her life.	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	62.5% (5)
I don't read to my child because we have nothing to read.	100% (8)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I think that it is important to point out words in the environment to my child.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)

*Note.* Number in parenthesis indicates the number of participants who gave that particular response. Rows that do not total 100% are due to rounding of decimals.

In this category, participants agreed with 50% of the statements, and as the table shows, they unanimously agreed with several statements. All parents believed (a) they played an important role in their children's development, (b) they need to be involved in

their children's education, (c) it is important to point out words in the environment to their children, and (d) they wanted their children to love books. No participants reported having nothing to read to their children.

One open-ended question further developed an understanding of parental beliefs: “Do you think your own experiences with reading have influenced your child’s experiences with reading?” The findings generated from this question showed that participants believe (a) their own experiences with reading have influenced their children’s experiences with reading, and (b) parents’ own education influenced how they help their children with reading.

**Parental beliefs: Influenced by participants’ experiences with reading.**

Overwhelmingly, participants reported supporting their children’s literacy development based on their own experiences with their own mothers and with reading. For example, two-thirds of participants (63%) remembered that their mothers read to them every night, and most (75%) stated that they were exposed to many different books in their household. These results were supported by statements such as “My mom read to me so much, I always made it a point to read to my child a lot” (Wendy). Participants reported that their own experiences with their mothers and reading had positively influenced their own children’s experiences with reading, as evidenced in statements such as “I had a huge bookshelf with lots of books” (Wendy); “I think I had a very positive experience in my childhood with reading so I think with us we started right away” (Natasha); and “Bedtime routine was a few stories. We finished every night by reading a few stories” (Lacey). The majority of parents (75%) reported wanting their own love for reading to be passed on to their children and that this love of reading had influenced their

children's experiences with reading. For example, Nancy stated, "I am a good reader and I like to read so I definitely think that has influenced the role that I have taken;" and Natasha said, "I would say my love for reading has definitely influenced her in a positive way."

### **Parental beliefs: Influenced by their own education.**

In some cases, parents' schooling had helped them choose strategies to support their child's literacy development. Roughly one-third (37.5%) of participants reported that their own education had provided strategies and influenced how they supported their children's reading. For example, Lian mentioned how she had completed a child psychology course where she learned important information, and three others (Nancy, Natasha, and Wendy) indicated that working in the school system had influenced how they teach reading at home. Natasha said, "Wanting to do our best and as well as being a teacher. I think that being surrounded by students and students' learning every day and having friends who are in the same boat, really helps a lot for sure." In addition, Nancy stated, "Being a teacher has influenced my child's experiences with reading. I get to see first-hand the difficulties that kids can have with reading so I really wanted my children to not have that trouble in school."

### **Parental Feelings About Literacy Interactions**

Table 5 presents findings from the Likert statements for Category 3: Parental feelings about literacy interactions. Participants were asked to scale 10 different statements, choosing between "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." The responses in Table 5 are organized by percentage and then number of participants who responded to each statement.

Table 5  
*Category 3: Likert Statements for Parental Feelings About Literacy Interactions*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I find it boring or difficult to read to my child.	87.5% (7)	0% (0)	12.5% (1)	0% (0)
I enjoy reading with my child.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
I would like to help my child learn but I don't know how.	12.5% (1)	75% (6)	12.5% (1)	0% (0)
Reading with my child is a special time that we love to share.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
My child does not like to be read to.	87.5% (7)	12.5% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I feel warm and close to my child when we read.	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (8)
I don't read to my child because they won't sit still.	100% (8)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
I read to my child whenever they want.	0% (0)	0% (0)	37.5% (3)	63% (5)
I don't read to my child because there is no room and no quiet place in the house.	100% (8)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Note. Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who gave that particular response. Rows that do not total 100% are due to rounding of decimals.

It is interesting to note that all participants reported that they enjoyed reading with their children, and that it was a special time that they loved to share. Unanimously, participants reported a sense of warmth and closeness to their children when they read together. Additionally, all parents felt that their children would sit still when they were reading and that they had a quiet place in the house to read with their children. Most



parents read to their children whenever their children desired, and believed that their children enjoyed the experience.

To gain a better understanding of parents' feelings about their interactions with their children, two open-ended questions were posed:

- Is there anything that gets in the way of reading with your child? If so, what gets in the way?
- How much time do you spend reading with your child each week?

The overarching themes from the answers to these two questions was that parents were dedicated to fostering literacy and made reading a priority in their day-to-day lives.

### **Appreciation and dedication to reading.**

The importance participants placed on reading was evident when they were asked these two questions. All parents indicated that they read to their children daily, and on average participants spend four hours a week reading to their children. Participants found this question a little difficult to answer, as they indicated that the amount of time they spend reading each week could change. This was identifiable in statements participants made such as "Each week I would say it is a couple of hours for sure, at least 15 to 30 minutes per night" (Lacey), and "Um, I would say three to four hours. It is kind of hard. We break it up too" (Natasha).

Additionally, all parents had opinions about the use of electronics, and these thoughts tended to be similar. A common belief was that electronics could get in the way of reading at times and it was reported that children were more inclined to choose electronics (TV, iPad, or tablet) over reading a book if given the choice. Nevertheless, two parents did use electronics to support their children's literacy development. One parent (Miriam) had been advised to let her child watch an educational show on TV

called UmiZoomies and another (Lian) used the app called Easy Reader on her tablet to help her child learn sight words. When asked what else got in the way of reading, parents stated that their busy schedules (25%), electronics (37.5%), and other siblings (25%) could get in the way at times. These results indicate that even though parents believe that electronics can get in the way of reading occasionally, they also use electronics as a literacy practice to help support their children's literacy development.

### **Parental Literacy Practices**

Table 6 describes findings from the Likert statements for Category 4: Parental literacy practices. Participants were asked to scale seven different statements choosing between "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." The responses in Table 6 are organized by percentage and number of participants who responded to each statement.

Table 6  
*Category 4: Likert Statement Responses for Parent Literacy Practices*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have to scold or discipline my child when we try to read.	87.5% (7)	0% (0)	12.5% (1)	0% (0)
When my child and I read, I want my child to help me tell the story.	0% (0)	25% (2)	37.5% (3)	37.5% (3)
I ask my child a lot of questions when we read.	0% (0)	37.5% (3)	50% (4)	12.5% (1)
When we read, I want my child to ask questions about the book.	0% (0)	0% (0)	50% (4)	50% (4)
When we read we talk about the pictures as much as we read the story.	0% (0)	25% (2)	37.5% (3)	37.5% (3)
When we read, I have my child point out different letters or numbers that are printed in the book.	12.5% (1)	0% (0)	37.5% (3)	37.5% (3)
I try to make the story more real to my child by relating the story to his or her life.	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	62.5% (5)

*Note.* Number in parenthesis indicates the number of participants who gave that particular response. Rows that do not total 100% are due to rounding of decimals.

As the results indicate, there was no consensus, and there was some variation in response by parents to each question. The majority of parents wanted their child to (a) help tell the story when they read, (b) ask questions about the book, (c) talk about the pictures as they read, and (d) point out different letters or numbers printed in the book. Almost all (87.5%) of parents did not scold or discipline their child when they tried to read. Half of the participants asked their child many questions when they read, and most tried to make the story more real to their child by relating it to his or her life.

To gain a better understanding of the literacy practices the parents engaged in with their children, seven open-ended questions were asked:

- Do you talk with other parents about the things you do that you think are helpful?
- What has influenced how you help your child?
- Have you received any ideas or support for helping your child learn to read? If so, where?
- Did you teach your child particular things (for example, sing the alphabet, name the letters, print letters, print name) to prepare for learning to read before they went to kindergarten?
- Were there things that you decided not to teach (for example, upper and lowercase letters, letter sounds)? Why?
- What are the most important things you do to teach your child about reading?  
b) Why do you feel these are important?
- Beside from helping your child with reading, are there any other things that you do that helps your child become a reader? (for example, ask them about the book that they are reading)

The open-ended questions from the PLP category yielded the following themes:

(a) similarities in parental literacy practices, (b) differences in parental literacy practices, and (c) differences in sources of information about how to help their child learn to read.

These themes will be discussed in further detail in the next sub-section.

### **Similarities in parental literacy practices.**

The importance of reading consistently emerged as a theme within parents' similar literacy practices. Similar parental behavioural practices speak to what parents did with their children to facilitate their children's literacy development. Universally, parents based their reading support strategies on their own evaluation of their child's level of literacy development. Participants took a two-tier approach to developing their reading support practices. First, they replicated their own reading experiences, and second, they integrated their beliefs about reading into their interactions with their child. Through their

own reflection on a combination of their experiences of reading, their beliefs about reading, and their observations of their children, parents identified ways to support their children that they felt were beneficial. All parents taught their children skills such as how to sing the alphabet and how to print their name before kindergarten to prepare them for learning to read. Participants also disclosed that they read with their children every day.

All parents in this study reported providing books and incorporating reading into their bedtime routines. For example, Nancy stated, "I always make sure she has money when she has a book fair. I give her every opportunity to buy books or borrow books." Additionally, no participant reported sitting their children down to teach them how to read. Instead, participants taught them that words are everywhere, and they used books as a tool to teach children about new things: "[Reading] helps them understand the world a little better and understanding that it is not just a functional thing that they need to learn, but an enjoyable thing as well" (Lacey), and "[Reading] is how we learn about a lot of things that we cannot experience, like you mentioned volcanoes" (Lian). Parents also used books to develop their children's communication skills, to teach them about social interactions, and to teach them that reading is a functional skill in their everyday lives.

Based on the findings, all parents said that they value reading and want their children to learn to read. For example,

I guess reading is how we learn about a lot of things, that we cannot experience. I mean you have to be able to read and understand it the further you go with school. I guess the words get harder to understand, so if you start young then you can expand your vocabulary and reading (Lian).

One strategy most parents used to support literacy development was asking questions when reading with their child. However, parents reported asking their child questions for different reasons, such as “to know if she is following and understanding” (Nancy), “helping with comprehension and expanding vocabulary” (Lacey), “to see if he is paying attention and to expand on vocabulary” (Lian), and “to teach him about feelings” (Wendy). All participants believed that asking questions helped children interact with the book. Participants also believed questioning helped develop communication skills (Melissa) and comprehension skills (Nancy, Lacey, and Melissa). Half of participants also reported talking about the pictures to keep their child focused and to check for understanding (Lacey, Miriam, Natasha, and Melissa). All participants reported asking what the story was about or asking their child to retell the story so that they could ensure their child understood the book.

The importance of reading consistently was a theme that developed from participants’ similar literacy practices. This theme captured participants’ feelings about the importance of reading to their children daily. All parents in this current study agreed that reading every day was important. For example, Melissa stated that “reading with him every day is the most important thing to do with your child,” and Lacey said that “getting them just reading every day is part of the routine and that is the most important thing.” They believed in reading during bedtime routines and that consistency was key: “[The] same [reading] routine is drilled into them and they would never go to bed without a story” (Nancy). When asked how much time they spent reading with their children each week, no participant said that they did not read to their children at all. On average, the range was two to seven hours per week.

Parents wanted to be involved as they knew that reading was an important part of their child's life. For example, when asked what the most important things they did to teach their child about reading were and why they thought these was important, a parent responded "just read to them every day and teach them that reading is fun. It is a great way to learn about different things."

### **Differences in parental literacy practices.**

Even though there were a number of similarities in what they were doing, parents reported several differences in how they supported their children's reading: asking their children to describe things in their environments (12.5% of participants), talking about words and pointing to words in the environment (25%), and making stories relatable to school (12.5%). Miriam reported that she asked her child to describe things (such as a toy). Lian spoke about words/pointing to words in the environment (such as stop signs), and Lacey said, "showing them that there are words everywhere." Natasha tried to relate the books to the material her child was learning about in school, to help her child become a reader.

Participants had very different views on teaching sounds to their children. Their approach was determined by their evaluation of their children's readiness. Miriam disclosed that she taught letter sounds because "it was one of the most important things," and Natasha stated, "We absolutely taught sounds. We always practised sounds of words." Other parents said, "We started with sounds a little, but mainly letters because she was at a different place at the time" (Lacey), and "Letter sounds I did not teach because basically I was told [through Applied Behavior Analysis] that he was not ready" (Melissa). It was found that parents asked their child to point to the letters when reading

more often when their child was younger. For example, Melissa (child aged four) said that she had her child point out letters and numbers:

His interests are mainly letters and numbers. He loves them. So if I can get him to interact at all with the book, or numbers, or anything, I think that it helps him and it also allows him to recognize things, numbers around him, and the world really.

However, Natasha stated that she still pointed to letters when reading with her four-year-old, but no longer did with her six-year-old.

Participants believed in doing a variety of things to help their children develop reading skills and become readers, such as pointing to words in the environment, going to the library/Chapters bookstore, talking about pictures, teaching sounds, making connections with school, and making the story more relatable. One-fourth of participants (25%) reported making connections with school—asking questions about books that their child was reading there, and reading books with a similar topic to what their child was learning about—because they believed these actions would help their child become a reader. Most parents (75%) reported specifically making the story more relatable to the children's life, as indicated by statements such as “[making the story more relatable] helps put perspective into his own life. Use it as a teaching tool” (Lian), and “keeps her interested, thinking, come more alive to them, more personal to them” (Lacey).

Participants had different ways of helping their children with reading, which was determined from statements such as

Show them that words are everywhere and then getting them just ready every day as part of the routine and that is the most important thing. Reading helps them



understand the world a little better and understanding that its not just a functional thing that they need to learn, but an enjoyable thing as well. (Lacey)

Miriam thought that teaching sounds was the most important thing:

I feel that once they know their sounds, learning to read is all about sounding out the words. Once she recognizes it and sounds it out then using those techniques to learn how to recognise a word then learn how to say it are the stepping stones.

**PLP based on professional and community sources of information.**

When asked if parents received any ideas or supports for helping their children learn to read, six participants acknowledged receiving support for their children's literacy development. The sources of information and support mentioned were (a) their child's school, (b) the library, (c) parenting books, and (d) the Janeway Children's Hospital Foundation.

Several parents (37.5%) indicated that their children's school and teachers had given them ideas on how to support their children. This was reflected in statements such as

In Kinderstart there were a lot of ideas of things thrown out from school. We had a couple of sessions in the library where the teacher librarian gave some lessons on how to read to your child and where to get books (Nancy);

“The school and their suggestions with helping her to read and we have had help with her itinerant teacher” (Lacey); and “Her kindergarten teacher, it is her speciality so I guess I rely on her a lot” (Natasha).

Only 25% of parents made comments about the library or bookstores helping them with resources for supporting their children's reading. For example, Miriam explained that

I take her to the library on a regular basis for her to pick out books. I do not buy her books every week so cost effectively it is good for me to take her to the library. The library has definitely affected the way I read or teach my child how to read.

Melissa stated that "[my son] is really eager to learn and wants to know everything. He is really caught up on facts right now. He wants to go to Chapters [bookstore] and find books about volcanoes, dinosaurs, earth quakes, and weather." In addition, Nancy said that "for Sunday afternoon activity, we went to Chapters [bookstore] to get new books."

Likewise, only 25% of participants indicated that reading pregnancy books and researching parenting practices were important and that these influenced how they supported their children's literacy development. Lian stated, "I have done a lot of research myself on parenting and I have read parenting books" and Nancy said,

I did what all the books said, read to your child while they are still inside of you. I mean I did that and when they were infants I started nightly routines when the bath was over it was straight to the rocking chair to read a story and that was a bedtime routine from the first day they were born. No doubt it was because of the pregnancy books that I read.

Last, 25% of parents received information from the Janeway Children's Hospital Foundation, through Applied Behavior Analysis therapy and a verbal therapist. As well, information was gathered from the question "Do you talk with other parents about the things you do that you think are helpful?" Parents disclosed that they only spoke to other

parents about their children's literacy development when they felt that they were not imposing or when bedtime routines were being discussed. Participants shared many different experiences, such as

Reading comes up sometimes, just talking about bedtime routines. So when anyone talks about bedtime, it is a major part of that, so we say we do a lot of reading then and that is where we get a lot of good quiet time, so yeah, I guess there is some discussion. (Lacey)

Participants also disclosed that "sometimes I share, if I feel that I am not imposing or if they ask me a question. But I also understand that all parents are different and they do not share the same views as me." (Melissa)

And

there is definitely a lot of social media and a lot of Facebook groups. For example, about parenting. I tend to answer questions for people sometimes. Now I would not say that I do it all the time, but if I feel that I have a helpful response then I will share my views. (Lian)

And

I would talk to my colleagues who are also teachers, you know different things they gave to encourage word comprehension and learning to read, so for example which ideas or workbooks they had and which sight words they did and things of that nature. So when we would go to Chapters [bookstore] we would pick out workbooks that my friends found were really helpful, so ah yeah, we definitely had that support. (Lacey)

## Summary

The interviews revealed a number of themes among what parents in this study believed about supporting their children's literacy development. They valued reading and wanted their children to learn to read, and they differed in their beliefs about how children learn to read.

Participants' views about their role have developed from their own experiences with reading and some have been influenced by their own schooling. Parents in this study are dedicated to fostering literacy and make reading a priority in their day-to-day lives. They all read regularly with their children although they have other differences in literacy practices.

In the next chapter, conclusions that are drawn from the results will be discussed. The results will be analyzed and evaluated with reference to relevant literature. SCT will be used as a theoretical framework to explore (a) parents' beliefs about literacy development, (b) factors that influence parents' beliefs about supporting children's literacy, and (c) parents' reasons for supporting their children's literacy development.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion**

The overarching goal of this study is to explore Newfoundland and Labrador parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development and to further the research in this domain. The study examined parents' beliefs on children's literacy development by asking questions regarding their own experiences with reading and how they help their children learn to read. The results are discussed by considering the research questions, which address (a) parents' perceptions about children's literacy development, (b) parents' perceptions of how to support their children with literacy development, (c) the factors that have influenced these perceptions, and (d) how parents support their children's literacy development.

A number of important themes frame the discussion: (a) importance of reading daily, (b) importance of a positive HLE, (c) dual approach to literacy development, (d) generational impact, and (e) parent-child interactions. The findings are interpreted in light of Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986) and other related literature that informs this discussion. As discussed in the literature review, Bandura's theory (1986) centers on an individual's belief in their ability to maintain or exercise some level of control over events that affect their life.

### **Importance of Reading Daily**

The perspective offered by each respondent provides significant insight into the role parents play in supporting their children's literacy development. The first major finding was that participating parents read with their child daily because they believed that this was important. It appears that they believed that reading with their child would help him or her do better in school and that it was part of achieving success. According to

Lynch (2002), parents act in a manner consistent with their literacy beliefs. Weigel et. al (2006) found that facilitative mothers believe that taking an active role in their children's learning at home (by providing reading books that offer opportunities to learn vocabulary, knowledge, and morals) will help children to do better in school. Parents in this current study also believed that reading should be a consistent activity with their children. Parents strove to be consistent by incorporating reading into bedtime routines. These beliefs and practices may have been developed based on their own experiences with being read to every night as a child. Participating parents stated that their participation with reading with their children was important and that they read to their children every day, which implies that they believed part of their role as a parent was to integrate reading into their lifestyle.

This current study does identify a firm and consistent view that parents thought it important to read every day with their children. This finding is supported by similar research by DeBaryshe et al. (2000), who found that mothers strongly believed in the importance of reading out loud to their children on a regular basis since it would help them in the future. With regard to Bandura's SCT, parents may have learned successful reading habits (such as reading before bedtime) from their prior experiences with reading during their own childhood. Participants may have engaged in the same literacy activities as their own parents since they believed reading every night was beneficial in helping them become readers. Although there is little literature on parents' beliefs about language and literacy development, the literature available does suggest that these beliefs influence the kinds of home experiences that parents provide (DeBaryshe et al., 2000).

Additionally, parents' beliefs about children's development and about appropriate home support of their children's education influences their role construction. As discussed in Chapter 1, parents' role construction is established before children go to school and continues to develop throughout their children's life. The first major finding of this study is that participating parents believed reading every day is important for children's literacy development.

### **Importance of a Positive Home Literacy Environment**

Participating parents' own education and reading of parenting materials may have affected their beliefs about the home literacy environment. For example, participants learned from parenting books and child psychology courses that they should provide a rich literacy environment. This led to parents believing this was part of their role as a parent. Recall that a HLE includes materials provided to children as well as parental skills, abilities, and opportunities for literacy interactions between family members (Baker & Scher, 2002; Hecht & Lonigan, 2002). Parents' role construction influenced the kind of materials and opportunities they provide for their children.

Parents' previous education may impact their literacy beliefs and shape the kinds of involvement activities they might undertake (Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006). Certain participants in this study learned from completing an education degree that as parents they should engage in literacy activities with their children, such as developing good bedtime reading routines, pointing to words in the environment, and singing. The findings from DeBaryshe et al. (2000)—that the HLE is a particularly important setting for acquisition of reading knowledge and literacy engagement and is in part determined by parents' own childhood experiences—has been borne out in this study. For example,

parents taking their child to the library or the bookstore is evidence that they had found these activities significant in their own lives.

The findings are also similar to those of DeBaryshe (1995) in that parents in this current study also fostered a love for reading: participants indicated that their love for reading has been passed on to their children. Participants had had positive experiences with reading and still enjoyed reading themselves; thus, these positive educational experiences may explain why these mothers were more likely to establish a stimulating HLE. According to Oldford- Matchim and Singh (2002), mothers are more likely to provide their children with many books when they have a lot of their own books. In addition, children will learn and acquire knowledge of skills, processes, and concepts through observation of their parents (Bandura, 1997). Participants in this study who enjoyed reading were modeling for their children that literacy was a normal part of everyday life. Bandura (1986) argued that observational learning is limited to what individuals have access to and have the ability to observe in their everyday life. Some children may only be offered limited opportunity to observe their parents reading. The information individuals attend to is determined by the value placed on the expected outcome. Thus, parents' own literacy habits may present models for their children's literacy behaviors (Burgess, Hecht, & Lonigan, 2002).

Parents in this study created a positive home learning environment by being involved with their children's learning. For example, they asked their child questions about what they were learning and reading at school. The finding that parents were involved with their children's learning may be linked to the finding that all parents felt confident about their children's reading progress. An explanation for this link may be that



participating parents were involved with their child's literacy development (by asking questions about their learning and providing a positive HLE) and, therefore, have affected their child's literacy development. Similarly, Weigel et al. (2006) found that parents' literacy beliefs and education may influence children's literacy development because of the HLE that they have created based on their beliefs. Additionally, since parents form beliefs and pass them onto their children, it is important that parents develop beliefs that are consistent with achieving excellence in reading (Sullivan, 1992). Mothers who took an active role with their children's schooling and literacy development, reported that they enjoyed spending time reading with their children and participating in other literacy related activities (DeBaryshe et al., 2000).

### **Dual Approach to Literacy Development**

The finding that participants used books to teach their children a variety of skills, attitudes, and knowledge suggests that they used reading and books as a tool to not only teach their children how to read, but also to teach them about living, communication, and social relations. It appears that parents' beliefs about literacy development were broader than their child simply being able to read words on a page. Instead, they read as a teaching tool to help their child navigate through everyday life in the present and future. This is consistent with previous research (Sonnenschein, Baker, & Katenkamp, Serpell, Truitt-Goddard, Munsterman, 1997) that demonstrated how parents believe important reasons for reading are for (a) daily living (the child needs to learn to read to participate in daily living activities), (b) employment (reading will help the child eventually get a job or fill job requirements), (c) becoming educated (reading is necessary for getting through school), and (d) empowerment (reading will make the child independent).

In addition, no parents in this study reported using a direct- instruction approach with their child. This conclusion stems from comments about a child not wanting to sit down and be taught and about an absence of structure when facilitating reading with their child. This finding suggests that participating parents took more of an entertainment approach to fostering literacy development than a skills approach. Thus, they wanted their children to find reading enjoyable while simultaneously demonstrating that they could learn general knowledge about the world instead of reading solely for educational purposes. These findings are similar to those of Sonnenschein et al. (1997), who revealed that parents who emphasize an entertainment approach tend to engage in storybook reading and playing with print. They believe these valuable activities will help achieve both their academic and entertainment goals for their children. The parents in Sonnenschein et al.'s study emphasized the role of interactional storybook reading and considered children's own experiences and interests when choosing storybooks.

Another main finding is that parents balance their approach for helping their child learn to read with their child's interests and abilities. Participants believed that their child would learn to read more easily if they were interested in the literacy activities they were engaging in. Similarly, Sonnenschein et al. (1997) and Weigel et al. (2006) found that parents and children who engage in literacy activities as a source of entertainment (instead of direct instruction such as flash cards or completing worksheets) generally reported reading storybooks and enjoying engagement with literacy play activities.

It was from the findings of this current study and from those of other researchers' studies (Sonnenschein et al., 1997; Weigel et al., 2006) that the researcher concluded that parental perceptions about literacy development are unique to their own child. Without

realizing it, participants in this study helped their children with reading by meeting their needs and current level of reading. Thus, it was concluded that parents should find out what their children are interested in and then engage in literacy play activities that their children are fascinated with in order to get the best results. Similarly, Sonnenschein et al., (1997) found that parents in their study were more likely to discuss the importance of tailoring their literacy activities to children's abilities and interest.

Sonnenschein et al. (1997) also found that parents' perspectives on literacy development should be considered when discussing the role of the home environment in fostering literacy. This is consistent with the study by Serpell, Sonnenschein, Baker, Hill, Goddard-Truit, & Danesco (1996), which proposed that parents who emphasized a more entertainment approach to reading valued their child's own experiences and tailored their approach to the child's interest and abilities. Likewise, in the study by Hoover-Dempsey et al., (1997) parents responded to their child's unique learning preferences and offered help appropriate to the child's understanding and abilities.

### **Becoming a Literacy Mentor: Generational Impact**

The finding that participants supported their children's literacy development based on their own experiences with their mothers and reading suggests that participants believed their own parents successfully supported them when learning to read. Participants chose ways to support their children based on their own experiences with reading and what they thought had worked for themselves when they were children. These experiences and beliefs about reading influenced how they helped their child. One possible explanation for why participants' past positive experiences influenced their current beliefs is mothers' feelings about their ability to successfully read to their

children (Lin, Reich, Kataoka, & Farkas, 2014). Participants' sense of self-efficacy may have influenced which activities they felt comfortable doing with their children.

Participants who read to their children because their mothers read to them, did so because they believed such an activity was beneficial and because they were comfortable with it. According to SCT, parents' motivations for involvement are a function of the social systems to which they belong. For instance, parents' sense of self-efficacy is influenced by their own family and academic experiences during their childhood (Bandura, 1997).

The finding that participants read to their children because they were read to at a young age suggests that being read to will prevent trouble with reading later in life. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) theorized that parents model their own parents' involvement with school-related activities. Parents' roles are constructed early, with admiration of their own personal involvement and the way they believe they should engage in their children's learning based on their own past experiences. In addition, recall that self-efficacy is socially constructed and is influenced by parents' personal experiences of success. Therefore, if parents are successful with reading, it is possible that this motivates them to take an active role with their children's literacy-related activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Participants disclosed that their children were not having trouble with reading at their present age. The success that these parents reported may be attributable to their children's reading success at home based on their observations. This is evidence that participants' support as their child learned to read may have helped him or her to be successful. Since participants' children had successful reading experiences, this was an influential source of data about self-efficacy. Parents may be more capable and willing to become involved if they believe they are able to

effectively influence their children's education (Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, & Younoszai, 1999).

Participants also provided books and a language-enriched environment because they had experienced this themselves when they were children and hoped that their children would develop a love for reading similar to their own. Thus, they believed that providing a rich literacy environment would result in their child having successful reading experiences because this is what had happened for them. Furthermore, parents with higher reading self-efficacy perceived fewer barriers to reading (Lin, Reich, Kataoka, & Farkas, 2014). One parent mentioned wanting to be a good parent indicating that helping her child learn to read was a part of being a good parent (Lian). Overall, the evidence suggests that participation in reading activities is a part of the role of being a parent. Parents engage in these activities in hopes to fill the "parent role" in relation to their children's educational success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). They believe they should be involved and that their participation is wanted, expected, and therefore will make a difference to their children's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey et al.).

### **Enacting the Role of Mentor: Parent-Child Interactions**

A key finding is that parents use differing literacy practices to support their children's literacy development. Indeed, although there were some similarities in practices, such as reading daily and providing books, several different strategies were used as well. The results suggest that the literacy practices participating parents employed were based on what they thought was best for their child and on how they tuned into their child's readiness. Similarly, DeBaryshe et al., (2000) found that mothers' beliefs were associated with their child's literacy skill level and that subsequently parents based their

literacy activities on readiness. The mothers in DeBaryshe et al.'s study reported that children's nonconventional reading and writing attempts were encouraged. These mothers did not teach storybook grammar or drill letter formation. Instead, they concentrated on oral stories and tracing the outlines of letters on their child's back. This group of mothers was less likely to make use of core whole-language or phonics instructional techniques and tended to employ a set of instructional methods individualized to their child's interests and needs. Likewise, parents in this current study did not teach upper- and lower-case letters because their children were not interested or engaged when interacting with them. Certain participants did not teach letter sounds because they thought their children were not ready for them. The researcher concluded that, as parents formed a sense of their children's literacy attainment, they engaged their children in reading tasks with a sensible level of challenge, one at which the child could successfully perform with an appropriate amount of parental support. When parents attend to their children's level of challenge, a child is pushed to go beyond what they could accomplish independently, which promotes the parent's role in scaffolding learning (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2015).

Bandura (1996) theorized that parental self-efficacy for helping their children succeed in school is related to their beliefs about whether or not their involvement is likely to have a positive influence on their children's education. Just as student self-efficacy influences academic-related behaviors, parents' sense of self-efficacy shapes what activities parents do with their children. Although causality has not been proven, this relationship suggests that parents' self-efficacy shapes their activities with their

children, which may lead to effective and beneficial practices that support and encourage their literacy development.

The lack of consensus among participating parents about the types of literacy activities they practiced with their children suggests that these parents believed that literacy development is unique to each child. This conclusion is supported by the evidence that they helped their children in different ways based on their assessment of their children's needs and subsequently choose the strategies and activities they used with their children.

Regardless of age, reading level, and strategies used to help their child learn to read, all parents indicated that they were satisfied with their child's reading progress. Parents reported they knew their child's reading was progressing based on school report cards and what they observe at home. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002), parents' beliefs and attitudes about their child's competence during home activities is positively influenced by student variables (such as self-concept of ability and perceptions of personal competence) associated with school performance.

In order to support their children's literacy development, participating parents read to them daily and taught them early literacy skills such as the alphabet letter names and sounds before kindergarten. It has been shown that early exposure to reading will help children develop good reading habits and abilities (DeBaryshe et al., 2000). Participants also taught their children that reading was a functional and enjoyable part of life by modelling their own reading habits. Parents chose activities based on their evaluation of their child's readiness and literacy needs, which is supported by research by DeBaryshe (1995). Additionally, Snow (2002) argued that parents provide hours of direct literacy

and language experiences for their children when they share books, draw pictures, and sing with their children.

These findings can also be understood through SCT: participating parents had acquired literacy practices through their own direct experience with reading. They had learned what would support their children's literacy development from what their own parents had done with them as children and which had proven to be successful.

According to Oldford, Matchim and Singh (2002), if parents' self-efficacy for helping children learn to read is strong, they are more likely to be involved with reading activities with their children. In the case of this study, SCT (Bandura, 1986) helps explain why participants followed what their parents had modelled with them as children, such as reading before bedtime. The findings also show that parents chose different activities with their children based on their understanding of their children's literacy readiness.

### **Summary and Implication of the Findings**

This study explored parental perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development and their resulting feelings and interactions with their children. The major findings were: (a) participating parents valued reading and read to their children daily, (b) parents differed in their beliefs about children's literacy development, (c) parents' own experiences and education influenced their beliefs about their role, (d) parents engaged in both similar and different literacy activities with their child, and (e) parents received information from different professional and community sources.

The results of this study will help to clarify our understanding of how parents perceive their role in supporting the literacy development of their children. This information will help explain why parents do particular things to help their children. It



will deepen our understanding of parental beliefs about children's learning, as well as their feelings about literacy interactions with their children. While it is premature to make causal statements, the results of this study may justify further study in the area of parental perceptions and how they may affect children's literacy development.

It is important to note that the results of this study may not be generalized to all parental beliefs as this study had a small sample size. The results suggest that parental beliefs about their role are constructed from their individual history and unique interactions with their child. Participating parents had different ideas about what was important to teach their children about reading. However, that reading every day and demonstrating that reading are functional skills for life were consistent findings throughout this study. These parents valued reading, took ownership of literacy, and fostered a love for reading by providing books and resources for their children.

Although the researcher cannot conclusively state that all parents support their children based on their child's readiness or that they develop their role based on their own experiences with reading as children, the evidence presented suggests that parents develop their roles based on these factors. In summary, the research on parental involvement and actions, and on parent and child self-efficacy, point to the importance that parents understand how their beliefs may affect their children's literacy development. Thus, it is important to advocate for parent involvement in the literacy development and literacy activities of their children.

This study will help parents understand the importance of their role and how their beliefs may have consequences in relation to their children's academic achievement (Lynch, 2002). The researcher will provide a brief report of the findings to participants.

Parents who read the report may better understand their role, how their beliefs may affect their children's academic progress, and how their roles have been shaped. The results will add to Lynch's research (2002), which focused on understanding factors related to young children's reading achievement in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Limitations of this study.**

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged. This study was based on a small sample localized across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador using qualitative methodology. The results are limited in generalizability to those who volunteered to participate and, therefore, it is difficult to make inferences about the entire provincial population.

Second, a challenge when creating the interview questions was wording them to best capture parental perceptions. Although the questionnaire wording was carefully adapted and the researcher assured participants that their responses would not be judged; it may have been unavoidable that parents responded to questions in a way that they perceived to be desirable. Socially desirability bias, which describes a type of response bias should be considered when interpreting these results. The social desirability of some actions might also have had influence when the participants were evaluating the statements or answering the questions during the interview. For example, parents probably did not reveal that they did not like or value reading because they thought that might not reflect well on them as parents. All parents disclosed that they enjoyed reading throughout the interview, which could be a limitation because the entire parent population does not enjoy reading. Locke and Prinz (2002) considered social-desirability bias as a challenge in wording items to best capture the most effective types of discipline

practices. In their study, the descriptions of discipline may have caused respondents to avoid sharing parenting discipline practices that they perceived as less socially acceptable.

While social desirability is a possible limitation in this study, it may not always be a threat to the reliability of the data. Johnston, Scoular, & Ohan (2004) investigated whether parental reports of their parenting behavior reflected their actual practices or if their reports were influenced by the desire to present a positive impression. The researchers were interested in finding out whether parents responded in a socially desirable manner. They found no evidence that a social-desirability response bias had interfered with the validity of maternal reports of parenting. Similarly, Marachi, McMahon, Spieker, and Munson (1999) examined mothers' tendency to respond in socially desirable ways with regard to discipline styles and found that when social desirability was controlled, the number of significant correlations remained the same. Additionally, Vereijken, Hanta, and Van Lieshout (1997) reported that socially desirable responses did not influence the relationship between attachment scores and observed mother-child and peer interactions in a community sample. Given that the research indicates mixed findings with respect to social desirability, the findings of the research should be interpreted with caution.

#### **Future direction.**

Now that a base sample of parental perceptions in Newfoundland and Labrador exists, it would be interesting to study the difference in parental perceptions of their level of involvement with children who are strong readers versus parental perceptions of involvement with children who are struggling. Further research might also examine how

parents' experiences as children may affect how they engage as parents with their own children and what impact this has on their children's academic success. Scant previous research has considered how parents' own experience with reading may affect the future role they take with their children.

The present results also point to the need for examination of parents' previous experiences with school and reading. Previous research results (Bandura, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) demonstrated that parents who are self-efficacious view education as a shared responsibility with schools. Also, teachers who believe strongly in their teaching practices increase the ability of parents to help their children learn. Given this information, it is important to continue to research ways that parents and teachers can work together to further develop children's success.

### **Conclusion**

The overarching goal of this study has been to explore Newfoundland and Labrador parents' perceptions of their role in supporting their children's literacy development. Overall, the findings are congruent with previous research on parental literacy beliefs and the importance of reading daily with children. Important findings of the present study are that the literacy beliefs of participating parents developed from their own past experiences with reading and that the activities they implemented were associated with their children's readiness and enjoyment. Children's successful literacy development may be affected by parents' beliefs and, therefore, it is particularly important to study their beliefs. Data from parents in this study support the notions that families can do many activities to support children's learning and that parents want to be involved with their children's literacy development; for example, establishing a positive learning

environment, providing books and other materials, using a variety of supportive strategies, and establishing consistent reading routines. This study provides a basis for understanding parents' beliefs about literacy development in a small population of parents in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Although further research is required to gain a more complete understanding of parental perceptions, these findings indicate that parents' roles begin to develop based on their own prior experiences and continue to evolve as their children begin to learn to read. Continued investigation is warranted for developing a deeper understanding of the role of parents in children's literacy development. Such research will help to inform approaches for supporting children's literacy development in the important early years of childhood.

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## **Appendix A: Parent Interview Questions**

In this interview first I will ask you a few background questions. Then, I will ask you some questions about your thoughts concerning how to help your child with reading and some of the things you do at home to help your child. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Please just provide your true opinion and information in response to each question as this is the information that I am looking for. I am not trying to be impersonal however I will not provide my own opinion on the answers given. Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Family Demographics**

1. How old is your child?
2. What grade is your child in?
3. Do you work outside the home? Part-time or full time?
4. What is your occupation and education?

### **Likert-Scale Questions**

Please respond to the following statements with 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: agree or 4: strongly agree

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

1. As a parent, I play an important role in my child's development.
2. My child learns many important things from me.
3. I would like to help my child learn, but I don't know how.
4. I am my child's most important teacher.
5. Schools are responsible for teaching children, not parents.
6. Parents need to be involved in their children's education.
7. When my child goes to school, the teacher will teach my child everything my child needs to know so I don't need to worry.
8. I find it boring or difficult to read to my child.
9. I enjoy reading with my child.
10. Reading with my child is a special time that we love to share.
11. My child does not like to be read to.
12. I feel warm and close to my child when we read.
13. I have to scold or discipline my child when we try to read.
14. I want my child to love books.
15. I don't read to my child because they won't sit still.
16. I read to my child whenever they want.
17. Children learn new words, colors, names, etc. from books.
18. Reading helps children become better talkers and better listeners.
19. I read with my child so they will learn the letters and how to read simple words.
20. Parents should teach children how to read before they start school.
21. Stories help build my child's imagination.
22. My child learns lessons and morals from the stories we read.

23. Reading helps children learn about things they never see in real life (like volcanoes and elephants).
24. My child learns important life skills from books (like how to follow a cooking recipe, how to protect themselves from strangers).
25. Even if I would like to, I'm just too busy and too tired to read to my child.
26. I don't read to my child because we have nothing to read.
27. I don't read to my child because there is no room and no quiet place in the house.
28. I don't read to my child because I have other, more important things to do as a parent.
29. Children inherit their language ability from their parents, it's in their genes.
30. I think that it is important to point out words in the environment to my child.

*In this section if the parent answers with agree or strongly agree, follow up by asking the question "why?"*

1. When my child and I read, I want my child to help me tell the story.
2. I ask my child a lot of questions when we read.
3. When we read, I want my child to ask questions about the book.
4. When we read we talk about the pictures as much as we read the story.
5. When we read, I have my child point out different letters or numbers that are printed in the book.
6. I try to make the story more real to my child by relating the story to his or her life.

*Questions regarding parents' experiences with reading and their ideas about reading*

1. What do you remember about reading when you were a child?
2. Do you think your own experiences with reading have influenced your child's experiences with reading?
3. Do you talk with other parents about the things you do that you think are helpful?
4. What has influenced how you help your child?
5. Have you received any ideas or support for helping your child learn to read? If so, where?
6. What do you think are the signs of a good reader?
7. How do you feel about your child's reading progress? What tells you this?

*What do parents do to help their children learn to read?*

1. How much time on average do you (or another adult) spend reading with your child each week?
2. Did you teach your child particular things (for example, sing the alphabet, name the letters, print letters, print name) to prepare for learning to read before they went to kindergarten?
3. Were there things that you decided not to teach (for example, upper and lowercase letters, letter sounds)? Why?
4. (a) What are the most important things you do to teach your child about reading?  
(b) Why do you feel these are important?
5. Beside from helping your child with reading, are there any other things that you do that helps your child become a reader? (for example, ask them about the book that they are reading)

6. Is there anything that gets in the way of reading with your child? If so, what gets in the way?

Adapted from Barbara D. DeBaryshe (1994)  
Parent Reading Belief Inventory