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Home and school literacy partnerships : building stronger tomorrows hand in hand

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Home and school literacy partnerships : building stronger tomorrows hand in hand

Abstract

This project aims to bring quality literacy interactions into homes of young children. These literacy interactions are important because research has shown that quality literacy experiences during the early childhood years impact a child's emergent literacy learning. Because children are not yet in formal schooling, many of these interactions can take place in home so family involvement is critical. The project is threefold: (a) to increase the quantity and quality of literacy interactions in the home, (b) to help parents become more informed contributors of their children's emergent literacy development, and (c) to promote more family involvement and two-way communication with schools.

Three approaches to implementing this project will be taken. First, newsletters will be used to inform parents on developmentally appropriate literacy strategies, literacy skill development, and literacy activities. Secondly, literacy take-home bags will be used to promote more family involvement using appropriate literacy materials that are paired with instructional strategies and activities. Lastly, literacy nights will be held to promote family literacy education, build stronger home-school partnerships, and allow for more meaningful two-way communication to take place.

HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS:

BUILDING STRONGER TOMORROWS HAND IN HAND

A Graduate Research Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Education

With a Major in Literacy Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Tera Bockenstedt

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This project by: Tera Bockenstedt

Titled: Home and School Literacy Partnerships: Building Stronger Tomorrows Hand in Hand

Has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Degree of Masters of

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Being a reader is essential for school success and one's later success in life. How a child becomes a reader has been debated heavily over the last century, and now it is known from rigorous research that the experiences in the beginning years of a child's life have a great impact on their literacy acquisition (Burgess, 2002; Cecil, 2003; Dickenson & Sprague, 2002; Morrow, 2005; New, 2002; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002; Teale & Yokota, 2000). To ensure a child's literacy success, there has been an increasing emphasis on the need for involving families in the literacy learning that occurs before formal schooling.

This chapter begins with a description of the proposed project, which includes the goals of the proposed project. Then, the purpose of the project will lay out the specific components of the proposed project. Next, the rationale will cover the importance for family involvement in children's literacy learning at an early age and the need for family literacy programs.

Description of Project

With the increasing emphasis placed on emergent literacy, this project aims to support the development of the emergent literacy learning of children in my pre-kindergarten classroom by promoting family literacy involvement. There are various ways in which teachers, administrators, and early childhood promoters try to encourage family involvement. These range from workshops, portfolios or journals, home visits, in-school interactions, family events, newsletters, and the list could go on and on. Because

families are busy with all that life brings their way day to day, the intent of this project is to find the least obtrusive ways for families to increase the amount of literacy interactions they have with their children and, in addition, enhance the quality of those interactions.

The project goals are threefold in that their intent is to increase the quality and quantity of literacy interactions in young children's homes, provide further knowledge and resources to families to help them foster emergent literacy development, and develop a home-school partnership that supports emergent literacy learning and increases two-way communication and involvement between home and school. Waldbart, Meyers, and Meyers (2006) state, "An appropriate method to bridge home and school is by involving parents and family members of young schoolchildren in the fascination of their children's emergent literacy skills" (p. 774). It is my hopes that parents will become more fascinated with literacy, understand its importance in a child's educational development and success, and make it a more meaningful part of their family life.

Purpose of Project

Involving parents and/or families is critical to achieve the purpose of this project. In looking at what family literacy is, it refers to "...a term that is used to describe parents and children learning together" (LINCS, 2005, p. 1). A family literacy program should have parents and children working together, focus on the literacy strengths and needs of the family/community, promote adult involvement in the child's literacy learning and encourage the reciprocal nature in the parent-child relationship while learning, and provide experiences that help a child better succeed in school and life (LINCS, 2005). This project aims to do these very things through newsletters to inform and educate, take-

home bags to promote reciprocal literacy involvement in the home and provide ways

parents can work with their child during story book reading, and literacy fun nights to

encourage positive adult involvement in children's literacy acquisition while building

stronger home-school relationships.

Rationale of Project

Although there is mention of the importance of family involvement in documents

written by the International Reading Association (IRA), National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the Bush Administration, not much is

being done to implement programs that will benefit *all* families and *all* children. Some

factors limiting early literacy learning through family literacy programs are: an inability

to reach parents (Cecil, 2003), limited parental and child access to reading materials

(Krashen, 2004), and limited quality early literacy experiences taking place in the early

childhood years (Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002). These literacy experiences would include

the reading, writing, and speaking experiences the child has. Also, Paratore (2002),

found limitations with family issues such as income, English as a second language, belief

system, and time commitment. She further suggested that there are problems with family

literacy programs due to lack of funding, problems with implementation, assumptions

that parents lack knowledge, imposition of certain visions of literacy, and time for

qualified educators to work with families. Even family literacy programs that are in place

show inconsistencies in the benefits they provide (Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2002).

As Dickinson and Sprague (2002) stated, "the need for services is pressing, the level of

quality is uneven, and evidence of the long term impact of this period on later literacy

functioning is compelling" (p. 275). Consequently, further work needs to be done in refining early literacy learning and programs that foster early literacy development.

Even though problems exist on exactly how to get families involved, there is evidence that literacy learning at an early age is critical. Children need to be taught emergent literacy skills in the preschool years of life. Scarborough (2002) stated "...results of kindergarten prediction studies suggest that the important cognitive-linguistic strands that must be coordinated in learning to read are rather securely in place before formal school instruction begins" (p. 100). If the child has not had the opportunity to construct these strands, they will then enter formal schooling behind that of their peers potentially beginning the pattern of school failure begins at an early age (Strickland, 2002).

During the preschool years, children begin to construct their knowledge through interactive processes in order to acquire an understanding of literacy concepts and their functions (Celenk, 2003; NAEYC Position Statement, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998; PreK Standards, 2003; Teale & Yokota, 2000). With a lack of literacy rich experiences before entering formal schooling, students will have fewer opportunities to construct their knowledge. NAEYC and IRA (1998) agree that failure to expose children to literacy experiences early on in life or waiting until a child is school age to teach him/her about literacy can severely limit a child's reading and writing attainment levels. They further suggested that a lack of early literacy experiences in the early years of life will likely lead to a child who needs more support with literacy learning when entering formal schooling (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998).

Vellutino and Scanlon (2002) further support the importance of starting literacy acquisition at an early age as they state, "...most reading difficulties are caused by limitations in a child's early literacy experiences and/or less than adequate literacy instruction" (p. 296). It is evident then that parents and childcare providers play a major role in a young child's failure or success in literacy development since they are the main caretakers of children from birth to the age they enter formal schooling. The amount of time parents or adults caring for children spend on literacy activities has an impact on a child's future success or failure.

The drawbacks of not facilitating early literacy development can be grim, but they can also be avoided if parents, and those working with children in the preschool years, are educated on how to work with children in developing their emergent literacy skills. As Senechal and LeFevre (2001) observed, "...good emergent literacy skills are likely to enhance children's school experience and help them get started on the path to reading success" (p. 49).

Obviously there is a need to do something to increase the amount of family literacy programs available early on in childrens' lives. At the local level, where there is better understanding of the served population and resources that may be available, the chance for successful implementation of such a program may be greater. A qualified educator with the knowledge of the local area who can reach the families of young children, access reading materials, and has the ability to provide meaningful examples of literacy rich experiences would be more fitting for the needs and interests of parents than perhaps the state or federal programs. With six years teaching experience in the district I

currently teach, a masters in early childhood education, and a reading masters in the works, I am willing to take on such an endeavor. Teaching pre-kindergarten children and working with their families over the last four years has shown me that students are coming in with a wider range of literacy skills because of the differences in exposure to literacy rich experiences in the home. Also, it has been my experience that families welcome ideas on how to help their child, are excited to participate in activities with their child, and are very open to working with materials sent home from school. Therefore, the three components of this project will include newsletters to inform parents of what is going on in school and offer ideas they can use at home relating to literacy and early childhood development, take-home bags to bring new literacy materials into the home with parent tip sheets to provide activities that can be done with the child while reading, and monthly literacy nights where parents and children can enjoy a story and literacy activity together.

<div align="center">Definitions</div>

These definitions are meant to help in clarifying any ambiguities in regards to terms used for this project. Although there are variations to the definitions of the terms listed, those chosen for this project are in line with the author's intent in portraying the information that follows.

Alphabetic (letter) knowledge – "knowing the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet" (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p. 58).

Comprehension – "the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read" (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p. 58).

Decoding – "figuring out the pronunciation of a printed word" (Scarborough, 2002, p. 98).

Early literacy skills – "those skills that are thought to be relevant for the acquisition of conventional reading skills" (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 319).

Emergent literacy – "the view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful reading and writing activities" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 58) or the "developmental precursors of formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002, p. 12).

Family – individuals living together and functioning as what would be considered a traditional family unit

Family Literacy – "provision of three core services to families: parenting education, adult basic education, and early childhood education, with some activities provided with parents and children together and some instructional components taking place in the home" (Benjamin & Lord, 1996, p. 6).

Fluency – "the ability to read a text accurately and quickly and with expression" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Invented spelling – "phonic spelling or use of symbols associated with the sounds heard in words a child wishes to write" (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, p. 5).

Literacy – "all the activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and appreciating both spoken and written language" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Parent – anyone fulfilling the roles and responsibilities associated with long term care of a child.

Phonemes – "smallest parts of spoken language that combine to form words" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p.59).

Phonemic awareness – "a child's understanding and conscious awareness that speech is composed of identifiable units such as spoken words, syllables, and sounds" (NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, p. 4) or "the ability to hear and identify the individual sounds in spoken words" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p.59)

Phonics – "relationship between letters and sounds of spoken words and the individual letters of groups of letters that represent those sounds in written words" (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p. 59).

Phonological awareness – "sensitivity to the component sounds in words" (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 320) and the "sensitivity and ability to manipulate the sound structure of oral language" (Burgess, 2002, p. 3) that "can involve work with rhymes, words, sentences, syllables, and phonemes" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 59).

Shared reading – "a group reading experience that simulates the best aspects of a bedtime reading experience and provides whole-class or small-group instruction in reading skills and strategies" (Combs, 2006, p. 178).

Vocabulary – "words we must know in order to communicate effectively" (Armbruster et al., 2003, p. 60).

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The following sections will discuss the procedures used in the development of the project. The demographics of the school district in which this project is proposed for, brief community information, and precursors to the inception of such a project idea including the research reviewed are discussed.

Procedures

The district in which I work has approximately 2,750 students with 345 receiving special education services. Nine students are enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, 122 are minority students, and a little over 25% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Geographically, this district has the largest land mass to cover in the state and includes nine attendance centers (six elementary, two high schools, and one middle school). Students come from over ten different small towns to attend the center closest to them. The district has had an Early Childhood Special Education program in place for many years along with a Shared Visions (early childhood) program. Four years ago, a regular education pre-kindergarten program began and next year a preschool reversed integration program will be established to meet the needs of regular education four year olds and provide an integrated general education setting for the current early childhood special education students. Therefore, we are beginning to meet the developmental needs of children in our district at an earlier age.

As mentioned, there are over ten small communities that make up the greater school district. These are rural communities in eastern Iowa that remain true to core

values, take pride in family heritage, and are strong with community support. The area is predominantly Caucasian in ethnicity although there are increasing numbers of African American and Hispanic families moving to the area. There is also a strong Catholic Christian religious base.

My teaching career began in this community, and throughout the last few years I furthered my education in the areas of early childhood and literacy education. I began this project after researching emergent literacy learning (as part of my early childhood masters requirements) because a major part of the emergent literacy learning occurring depends on the presence of materials, support, and knowledge on how to teach young children to read and write. In my teaching of pre-kindergarten students, I see varying levels of literacy learning occurring in the home. Because of the opportunities I have to get students and families started off on the right foot with literacy instruction, I saw the need to create a literacy program that would initiate more literacy interactions in the home, create increased home-school support, and share knowledge on literacy and resources to help families. I agree with Dwyer, Chait, and McKee (2000) as they state the following:

> Preschool sets the pattern for the family's contact with the formal learning
>
> system. Early childhood teachers have the responsibility for reaching out to
>
> parents and engaging them with their children's learning so that parents begin to
>
> understand the responsibility they have for supporting their children through the
>
> school years…it becomes the job of the early childhood teacher to recognize and

build on the strengths of the child and family while introducing the expectations

of the formal learning environment (p. 7).

My goal was to develop a program that was not obtrusive yet still effective within

the current structure of the families I serve. Most parents are not ready or willing to

become involved with a program that might seem overwhelming, too time consuming, or

over their heads. Therefore, I started with the following three main areas of home-school

literacy interactions: newsletters, take-home bags, and family literacy nights.

The research I reviewed included books on literacy education and family literacy,

research articles on emergent literacy learning and family literacy programs, books

published by the Department of Education, and various other articles from journals or the

internet relating to family literacy. Primarily searches were conducted over *WilsonWeb*

search engine and articles were found in *The Reading Teacher* and *Reading Research*

Quarterly. The rigorous research on emergent literacy learning as well as essays,

research, action research and other qualitative and quantitative works gave me

foundational knowledge built on strong research findings and a compelling theoretical

basis for the importance of family literacy programs.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will discuss three phases of this project. This first phase of the
review of literature will discuss selected background knowledge. The second phase will
include information on how to design a family literacy program as well on specifics about
the development of the proposed project: Project Hand in Hand. Phase three will discuss
the partial implementation of the project.

Background Knowledge

The first phase provides brief background knowledge on emergent literacy
learning. This includes looking at the importance of emergent literacy and the concept of
family literacy programs in order to get a better understanding of the purpose and
importance of implementing a family literacy program.

The importance of emergent literacy learning

Before trying to put a family literacy program in place, it is critical to know the
effectiveness of such programs and best practices for implementation. Therefore, this
review of literature will begin by briefly providing an overview of emergent literacy and
the importance in encouraging family involvement while children are young.

During the 20th century literacy instruction primarily focused on basic reading and
writing abilities with formal instruction starting at age six (New, 2002; Teale & Yokota,
2000). This focus began to shift from equating a child's age to beginning literacy
instruction to what teaching strategies would be more appropriate in preparing a child's
readiness for learning literacy skills (New, 2002). Researchers began to look seriously at

the relationship between children's oral language development and the environmental

factors influencing literacy development, including parents' beliefs about literacy and the

role they played on literacy development (New, 2002). Two predominate views of how

children developed readiness were debated. One idea was that children come to learn

literacy as a result of natural maturation, and the other was that reading readiness was a

product of experiences that fostered literacy learning (Teale & Yokota, 2000). These two

ideas of how children acquire reading readiness were rejected in the late 1980's when the

concept of emergent literacy surfaced.

Emergent literacy is a term coined by Marie Clay (1966), whose seminal work

studied the acquisition of literacy and changed the views of when literacy learning and

literacy development actually occur. Marie Clay looked at emergent literacy as "the stage

at which children begin to receive formal reading and writing instruction in a school

setting, the point at which children are expected to begin to demonstrate an understanding

of print" (Combs, 2006, p. 26). Today the term refers to the "developmental precursors of

formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child" (Whitehurst & Lonigan,

2002, p. 12) and that literacy learning is "encouraged through participation with adults in

meaningful reading and writing activities" beginning at birth (Armbruster et. al., 2003, p.

59). These include formal and informal activities and experiences that occur in a child's

day to day living.

Therefore, emergent literacy skills are those skills that foster literacy development

before a child enters formal schooling. Through these early literacy activities, children

develop various skills in the areas of reading, writing, and language. It is appropriate for

preschool aged children to learn the following literacy skills: alphabet knowledge

(Combs, 2006; NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), which is understanding the

shape and names of letters and practicing writing; phonological awareness (Combs, 2006;

NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998), which is being sensitive to the sounds in

words and being able to manipulate them orally; comprehension in terms of connecting

information from stories to their real life and discussing a book when questioned about it

(NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998); concepts about print (Combs, 2006; NAEYC

& IRA Position Statement, 1998) such as the understandings that letters make words,

words carry meaning, letters can be in different places in words, and that writing has a

function to convey meaning (Combs, 2006); and vocabulary by picking up new words

through listening to stories be read aloud and having regular dialogue (NAEYC & IRA

Position Statement, 1998).

Acceptance of the developmental stage of *emergent literacy* has led to a change in

the way children are viewed as learners, hence changing the approach society has toward

emergent literacy learning. Because of this, there is a need to teach emergent literacy

skills at an early age to assure all children reach their fullest potential in literacy learning.

To achieve this, a triangulation needs to occur between understanding the foundational

skills of emergent literacy learning, understanding home factors that influence a child's

literacy learning, and increasing literacy rich experiences in the home in order to foster

early literacy acquisition. A family literacy program must address these three areas.

The concept of family literacy programs

The concept of family literacy will be discussed in terms of the many different components that are involved in discussing families and their impact on emergent literacy learning and the goals of establishing a family literacy program. The need for early exposure, quality experiences, a literacy rich environment, accepting and understanding the diversity in families, as well as understanding the social and cultural impacts on families will be reviewed.

Early childhood experiences provide the foundation for later success in school and life (NAEYC Position Statement, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998; PreK Standards, 2003). Therefore, children need to be exposed to a variety of literacy experiences to build this foundation. Research contributed by Dickenson and Sprague (2002) has supported the belief that the years before formal school are critical to a child's long-term success in literacy. Children are active learners developing cognitive skills and attitudes towards literacy long before formal schooling (Burgess, 2002; Scarborough, 2002; Strickland, 2002; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Because the experiences children have on the road to becoming proficient readers and writers starts early in life (Cecil, 2003; Morrow, 2005; New, 2002) and does not just begin at age five or six as previously thought (Teale & Yokota, 2000), waiting until formal schooling to expose children to literacy is no longer an acceptable option. Organizations such as the NAEYC and IRA support instruction for children from birth through pre-school age because research reveals teaching emergent literacy skills is critical for young children (NAEYC & IRA Position Statement, 1998).

Early exposure to literacy needs to occur, but these experiences must be quality experiences for all involved. New (2002) has suggested that more needs to be done to make early literacy learning more "relevant," "necessary," and "meaningful" to parents and other family members (p. 257). By making parents aware of what should be taught, when it should be taught, and why it is so essential to address literacy learning at a young age though a family literacy program, the first step will be taken in making literacy learning more relevant, necessary, and meaningful for all involved.

Part of quality experiences starts with having a rich educational environment (Prek Standards, 2003) and a positive and supportive relationship early on (NAEYC, 1997) because these are influential to a child's long-term gains and cognitive development. Family involvement is necessary for this to occur (Prek Standards, 2003) because a child's home experiences influence their emergent literacy development (Heath, 1982; Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). Differences in the quality of family involvement at home, as well as sociocultural factors, may contribute to the literacy achievement gap. Heath's (1982) seminal work revealed the impact of sociocultural factors towards a child's literacy development, specifically language development. Because of these factors, not all students come to formal schooling ready for the same learning experiences. That is where the importance of family literacy programs comes in.

Understanding home factors that influence emergent literacy development is also important when trying to understand the way a family will participate in a family literacy program. Because of the increased diversity of American families, there is a gap between what literacy interactions or experiences look like at school, and how they are perceived

at home, as well as what literacy expectations are held by each group. There needs to be an acceptance and understanding of the diversity in families, by educators and those involved with family literacy development, in order to help families facilitate learning and literacy development in the home. This requires taking into account the environmental and sociocultural influences in the home and working with families to create programs that benefit everyone involved. Waldbart, Meyers, and Meyers (2006) suggest that family literacy program interventions should be an, "...effort to align families and home with the classroom to facilitate early literacy development, not to correct a shortcoming inherent in the family of student" (p. 775).

Several studies will be discussed that highlight the importance of the home literacy environment (HLE) in the development of children's emerging literacy acquisition. In a study extended from previous work on the relationship between home literacy environment (HLE) during preschool years and the developmental outcomes related to emergent literacy acquisition, Burgess (2002) examined the relationship between shared reading and the development of phonological sensitivity and oral language skills in 115 pre-school children ages four and five from middle income homes. Multiple regression analysis was computed to determine the extent to which difference in HLE impacted phonological sensitivity and oral language development. The number of children's books in the home significantly affected a child's oral language and expressive vocabulary ($p < .05$) and the age the child was at the onset of shared reading significantly affected a child's oral language and phonological sensitivity development ($p < .05$). This data suggested that early and sustained reading experiences in the home are important to

a child's oral language and phonological sensitivity development and also relates to a child's vocabulary development.

Being read to consistently early on also helps children develop concepts about print (Cecil, 2003; Ufferman, 1996) and relates to reading proficiency later on (Ufferman, 1996). In a study analyzing a kindergarten program in order to reveal how to improve emergent literacy instruction, Ufferman (1996) found parental interest influenced a child's confidence and interest in reading, and that a child's interest in books was related to being read to when they were younger. Simply having exposure to materials in the home was also found to relate to reading proficiency later on. Analysis of data also suggested that children had an increased understanding of concepts of print and improved in the areas of listening and interacting behaviors in both one-on-one and larger group settings.

Celenk (2003) investigated the effect of reading and writing experiences of 223 pre-school students. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated and indicated a sufficiently high inner consistency of reliability measuring among the three groups ($\alpha = .83$). Findings indicated that pre-school education had a significant effect on reading comprehension during emergent literacy learning ($p < .001$), reading tradition in the family significantly effected reading comprehension scores ($p < .001$), reading illustrated books significantly effected comprehension scores ($p < .001$), and listening activities also showed significant effects on reading comprehension ($p < .001$). The findings suggested that family reading traditions and modeling are very important as they made significant contributions to a child's comprehension and understanding of reading and writing skills.

Senechal and LeFevre's (2001) five-year longitudinal study examined the relations among home literacy experiences, language, and literacy development. Three cohorts of children were involved in the study ($N = 111$) using vocabulary and emergent literacy skills data at grades 1 and 3. Findings suggested that parent teaching and storybook reading were important factors in developing emergent literacy skills. While parent teaching facilitated early learning skills, these skills must be maintained through additional support with shared reading. Senechal and LeFevre's (2001) research also supported the idea that vocabulary skills are related to exposure to language rich experiences and that storybook reading may have long-term implications on reading because of the exposure to vocabulary. If there is meaningful dialogue that keeps children engaged, they can be introduced to new words and have them explained by their parents or other adults in familiar terms. Specifically, children can learn, on average, "...two new words from a single storybook session" (p. 42). Cecil (2003) also stated that, "the more numerous the reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences young children have, the more they will come into contact with intriguing new words" (p.136). Senechal and LeFevre (2001) also examined how home experiences related to young children's language and literacy development from their longitudinal research. They found that young children learned vocabulary by listening to storybooks being read aloud. The authors concluded that it is important to use children's prior knowledge when teaching new words. This is because a child's language skills are related to the experiences the child had with books, and the frequency of parents teaching about reading influences a child's emergent literacy development.

Social factors such as language, culture, and class are also influential to a child's literacy success (Paratore, 2002; Prek Standards, 2003). Celenk (2003) stated that, "…all social relationships that a child lives in have influence on the success of reading and writing" (117). Children come to formal schooling with initial differences and families play an important role in the literacy learning that occurs before formal schooling (Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler, 2000). Nord et al. (2000) reviewed longitudinal data from the National Household Education Surveys collected in the years of 1993 to 1999 and examined the association between home literacy activities and signs of emerging literacy in children age three to five years of age. The sociocultural risk factors associated with emerging literacy from the National Household Education Survey included: having a mother with less than a high school education, having a family below the official poverty line, having a mother that speaks a primary language other than English, having a race or ethnicity other than white, non-Hispanic, and having only one parent in the home.

Findings from the National Household Education Survey were interpreted as follows (Nord et al., 2000). First, children with one or more risk factors were less likely to take part in literacy activities at home with their families with the exception of being taught songs or music. Secondly, children with less risk factors had the most statistically significant changes between 1993-1999 in their emergent literacy skills while children living below the poverty level were less likely to show signs of emergent literacy. Thirdly, study findings suggested that students who were of an ethnicity other than white, non-Hispanic, were less likely to have been read to, have been told stories, or have done arts and crafts with their families three or more times a week. Furthermore, Hispanic

children were less likely to recognize all the letters of the alphabet and be able to count to 20 or higher compared to non-Hispanic students (Nord et al., 2000). Further findings discussed the categories of children being read to; being told a story; being taught letters, words or numbers; being taught songs or music, doing arts or crafts; and visiting the library. For example, children who were read to three or more times a week were more likely to know all the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their own names, and be almost twice as likely to show skills associated with emerging literacy. Telling stories rather than being read to three or more times a week also suggested that children were more likely to recognize all letters, count to 20 or higher, read or pretend to read, write their own names, and were more likely to show signs of emergent literacy.

Other research data has also been analyzed relating to the sociocultural factors that influence a child's emergent literacy learning. Baker, Sonnenschein, and Serpell (1999) reported on details of a study comparing family literacy practices of families from preschool to grade three. Their five-year longitudinal study, also known as The Early Childhood Project, focused on the development of literacy of urban children from a variety of sociocultural groups. Their study provided information about literacy-related activities in the home and children's early literacy competencies. A final sample of 54 families was involved in the study. The data from interviews, observations, parent diaries, and yearly testing of children on literacy tasks indicated that having experiences with ABC books, having knowledge of nursery rhymes, and frequently visiting the library before formal schooling were strong predictors of word recognition in grades first through third. Baker et al. (1999), more specifically, found that children experiencing

reading by age five in a nurturing context were more likely to recognize the value of reading, show interest in reading, and have a more positive self-concept as a reader in the future. Their findings also concluded that parents from diverse backgrounds do follow practices promoting early literacy development.

Baker et al.'s (1999) findings also indicated that parent's beliefs about literacy contributed heavily to their child's attitude toward literacy. Two parental perspectives on literacy were discussed. The first perspective was that of parents who view literacy as a "…source of entertainment" and the second was that parents who view literacy as consisting of "a set of skills that should be deliberately cultivated" (p. 7). The first view was found to be that of mainly middle-income homes and the second view was that of mainly low-income homes. These perspectives were shown to affect the literacy outcomes of children with those parents viewing literacy as a source of entertainment and fun having children reflecting higher literacy outcomes. It was also indicated by Sonnenschein & Munsterman (2002) that maternal beliefs about the development of literacy predicted their children's reading practice and interest in reading.

Shapiro's (1994) longitudinal study supported the idea that school success is related to the environment provided in the home. The researcher analyzed the relationships between 60 preschool students' home literacy and preschool literacy knowledge and abilities with their future reading achievement over five years. The more literacy exposure children had, the more literacy knowledge they showed compared to that of children the same age from low literacy homes. Furthermore, Shapiro (1994) looked at the development of preschool children's literacy and language development and

found younger student's HLE was related to their emerging concepts of print while older student's HLE was related more to their abilities to identify environmental print and map spoken words to their orthographic representation. There were also implications that the HLE may have affects on first grade reading achievement scores.

Lyytinen, Laakso, and Poikkeus (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of 108 children examining the relationship between parent's age, education, literacy activities, and shared reading experiences and also examined children's language and interest in books. There was a significant association between the mother's educational background and the literacy activities that took place in the home between the ages of 14 to 24 months ($p < .05$) as well as a strong link between the education of the father and the child's early reading interest ($p < .001$).

Lyytinen et al. (1998) also found that maternal factors contributed more to children's early language skill development; for example, a mother's literacy activities and education positively impacted the sentence length children produced. They also found that children with parents who took part in shared reading experiences frequently were more linguistically advanced, and being read to by both parents increased the likelihood of a child taking their own initiative toward reading. Furthermore, the length of reading interactions between the parent and child was related to their child's language skill development and ability to interact linguistically for a longer period of time. The research findings indicated that children who were read to more frequently had a greater interest in reading and developed better language skills at 14 and 24 months of age.

Interactions between adults and children need to be meaningful and build upon the child's prior knowledge (Baker et al., 1999; NAEYC, 1997; NAEYC/IRA Position Statement, 1998). Dodici, Draper, and Peterson (2003) examined the relationship between parent-child interactions and early literacy skills for 27 families living in low-income households as part of a larger longitudinal study. Findings indicated that the quality of parent-child interactions was related to early literacy skill development in the areas of receptive vocabulary, symbolic representation, and phonemic analysis beginning at a very early age.

Regardless of the environmental or sociocultural factors effecting families, it is important that parents are aware of the activities promoting language and literacy development in the home (IRA, 2005) because the pre-formal school experiences their children have may affect their progress when they start formal schooling (Celenk, 2003; Burgess, 2002; Ufferman, 1996). Having a variety of family experiences expands the knowledge base of a child, which will help them when learning to read (Baker et al., 1999). Cecil (2003) and Paratore (2002) agreed that regardless of income or background, parents generally value their child's education, although the family perceptions of what it means to be literate and how to foster that literacy may differ. Therefore, the goal is to try to get parent's perceptions about literacy and the activities they do to foster literacy on a developmentally appropriate path conducive to emergent literacy learning.

Designing Family Literacy Programs

As described previously, there are many components within a family that affect the literacy outcomes of children. My review of literature resulted in the application of

findings to the development of a program design, Project Hand in Hand, revolving around shared reading experiences. Shared reading experiences include group reading experiences simulating the best aspects of a bedtime reading experiences and provide instruction in reading skills and strategies (Combs, 2006). Suggested activities from the review of literature, considerations in the program design, and the overview of Project Hand in Hand will be discussed.

Although there is a wide variety of things parents can do to promote emergent literacy learning, the main focus of Project Hand in Hand was to get parents reading with their children in relevant, meaningful, and engaging ways. Neuman & Bredekamp (2000) suggested effective things parents can do when reading with their child including: getting their child's attention, giving meaning when appropriate, connecting what they are reading to real life, asking and answering questions, and allowing the child to take some responsibility. They further suggest that when parents read aloud effectively with their child, they are building a sense of community, helping their child increase their vocabulary, increasing their child's attention span, teaching their child print concepts, providing literacy instruction in a non-threatening environment, allowing their child to experiment with sounds, building their child's understanding of story structure, and showing that reading can be an enjoyable past time. The child can also begin to label words or pictures while reading as the responsibility slowly transfers from the adult to the child.

Furthermore, it is suggested by Baker et al. (1999) that parents working with their children on emergent literacy skills should engage in shared book reading experiences,

provide for multiple oral language experiences, encourage interactions with print, visit the library on a regular basis, value literacy in regards to everyday living, try increasing children's motivation to read, foster the enjoyment and independence of reading, and be actively involved once the child enters formal schooling in communicating with teachers. Implementing this project should encourage all of these suggested activities and experiences.

When designing a family literacy program, the following factors should be considered: the target population, the beliefs and attitudes of the families and community, and the components of the proposed program.

To begin, depending on the population the program serves, demographics will vary. Although family literacy programs are meant to improve literacy learning, not all families have access or are served by programs; frequently only families meeting certain demographic requirements are considered eligible. For example, the national Even Start program only allows participation of parents who are 16 or older with children age eight or younger (Mikulecky, 1996). The parents can not be enrolled in secondary school and must have weak basic skills (Mikulecky, 1996). This perhaps benefits those with more risk factors, but overlooks the needs of the remainder of the population. Strickland (1996) states it clearly:

> ...virtually all of the programs within the realm of family literacy have been targeted toward low-income populations in which literacy achievement has consistently lagged behind that of their mainstream counterparts. At the federal level, family literacy programs are tied to The Adult Education Act (Titles II and

III), The Library and Construction Act (Titles I and VI), The Head Start Act, The

Family Support Act of 1988 (Title IV-A) and several programs in the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act, including Chapter 1; Even Start; Title VII

Bilingual Education; and Title III, Part B, the Family School Partnership Program.

Similarly at the state and local levels almost all programs are targeted toward

those families for whom the need is perceived to be the greatest. (p. 90)

The benefit of starting a program at the local level is that the population served can be

broadened to include more children and their families than what federal or state levels

include, but a downfall is that funds may be harder to access.

Secondly, parental beliefs are critical to the success of family literacy programs

(Powell, 1996). It is important when starting a family literacy program to begin where

parents are and draw from parent's knowledge and experience (Powell, 1996). Along

with parental beliefs, it is necessary to consider the communities' beliefs and attitudes on

early literacy learning (McConnell & Holly, 1999). One way to determine how the

community feels about early literacy learning is to see how many formal and informal

activities and resources there are for kids and/or their parents.

Lastly, if we base children's literacy learning in the home on the three principles

discussed by Combs (2006), a family literacy program would address language and

literacy learning, teaching and learning relationships, and the learning environment.

Language and literacy learning would require use of language in a way that children were

actively involved in constructing and communicating meaning. Teaching and learning

relationships would result in children learning through adult modeling and building on

their prior knowledge while parents would encourage more independence in their child monitoring and regulating their learning over time. There would also be a meaningful, encouraging, safe, and respectful learning environment that promotes the child's independence as a learner. Tracy (2000) emphasizes the importance of shared reading experiences, a literacy rich environment, and quality parent-child interactions during reading and speaking experiences to build oral language skills and McConnell and Holly (1999) suggest three home factors important to promoting early literacy development that include the parent-child interactions and activities that take place, the materials available, and the language environment. All of these correlate to Combs' (2006) three principals.

Meaningful reading and language interactions between the parent and child are critical for emergent literacy learning. A family literacy program can improve the quality and quantity of these interactions (Mikulecky, 1996; Tracy, 2000). Parents can read to and with their children, build upon the language and strategies used, develop a deeper understanding of education and the role literacy plays in their child's life, and increase the modeling and support for literacy within their home with the guidance of a family literacy program.

Project Hand in Hand

Project Hand and Hand is a family literacy program I designed for children involved in my pre-kindergarten classroom and their families. My goals for this project were to improve both the quality and quantity of reading and language interactions within the home environment as well as give parents the skills and strategies needed to build upon prior knowledge, make literacy experiences more meaningful and engaging,

increase the amount of materials in the home, and create an encouraging and literacy rich environment. Furthermore, it would promote positive home-school relationships through informing parents, encouraging and modeling appropriate parent-child interactions, and practicing literacy skill activities and reflecting on instruction.

"The connections that are established between students' home and school environments can dramatically affect their literacy learning" (Tracy, 2000, p 47). Therefore, Project Hand in Hand used a variety of early intervention resources including newsletters, take home bags, and family reading nights to promote reading as a meaningful part of every day life as well as provide a supportive and positive connection between students home and school environments. The purpose was not to "train" parents on how to interact with their children, rather to give them a plethora of skills and strategies they can pull from to make their literacy experiences more meaningful, relevant, and engaging for their child. The activities and information provided though Project Hand in Hand will offer choices and opportunities for families to incorporate into their home environment that promote early literacy learning.

Three components make up the program: newsletters, take-home literacy bags, and literacy nights. The purpose of each, frequency of use, what they involve, the resources and funding associated with each, along with other information will be described below.

Newsletters

Since each teacher varies in the way in which they compose newsletters and the frequency in which they distribute them, the following is more of a suggested guide that

an educator may use to share resources, activities, and developmental information on literacy with parents to encourage more meaningful parent-child literacy interactions in the home. The newsletters are scripted in a way that can be used monthly. The topics on the newsletter are very general and can include a wide variety of activities occurring in the classroom or school. The various areas can be filled in as fitting to the month. Within this paper, only the literacy corner possibilities to be shared each month relating to literacy will be listed. These include brief comments, tips, and/or resources teachers can use to give parents information on how they may improve the parent-child interactions that take place in the home. Appendix A shows a sample newsletter layout.

Reading Corner Possibilities

The Reading is Fundamental (RIF) website: http://rif.org allows parents to read about how to motivate kids to read, choose good books, read aloud to your child, have a literacy-rich home, make school connections, along with articles to read and ideas about literacy for parents to use with their children. This is also a great place for ideas to include in the reading corner. For example, Figure 1 presents a list of literacy milestones to look for in children's literacy development. For literacy milestones for babies and toddlers or six year olds, go to Literacy Milestones from Birth to Age Six found from link www.rif.org/parents/articles/LanguageChecklist.mspx.

Figure 1. Literacy milestone for children ages 3-5.

Literacy milestones from age 3-4:

Most preschoolers become able to
- enjoy listening to and talking about story books
- understand that print carries a message
- make attempts to read and write
- identify familiar signs and labels
- participate in rhyming games
- identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches
- use know letters to represent written language especially for meaningful words like their names or phrases such as "I love you"

Literacy milestones at age 5:

Most kindergarteners become able to:
- sound as if they are reading when they pretend to read
- enjoy being read to and retell simple stories
- use descriptive language to explain or to ask questions
- recognize letters and letter-sound matches
- show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds
- understand that print is read left-to-right and top-to-bottom
- begin to match spoken words with written ones
- begin to write letters of the alphabet and some words they use and hear often
- begin to write stories with some readable parts

Talking with your child

Conversations are an important part of your child's literacy development. As parents, you are your child's first teacher. As your child grows, respond to their coo's, babbles, early words, and simple sentences. The hours you spend listening, talking, reading, and writing with them are all important to the language skills they develop. To help your child develop appropriate language skills: say their name, talk to them during daily activities, take turns during games, respond to their talking, model reading and taking turns, acknowledge them as they try to communicate their needs, sing songs, ask

and answer questions, connect literacy to the world around them (Bb is for bear),
encourage their thinking, and take part in various reading and writing activities.
(www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx, Conversations that Count) Sit down and have
a great conversation with your child today!

Fast Facts on Raising Readers

Just as a child develops language skills long before being able to speak, the child
also develops literacy skills long before being able to read. What parents do, or don't do,
has a lasting impact on their child's reading skill and literacy. Here are some facts that
may be of interest to you:

1. "Children develop much of their capacity for learning in the first three years of life,
when their brains grow to 90% of their eventual adult weight. When parents talk,
sing, and read to their child, links among the child's brain cells are strengthened and
new cells and links are formed!" (www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx, Raising
Readers, p. 1)

Ask your child what they sang today at school or the stories they read. Having
conversations like these will help them make more connections/links to the knowledge
they already have!

2. "Reading to your child for 30 minutes per day from infancy helps prepare a child to
learn. A five-year old who has not been read to daily will enter kindergarten with far
fewer hours of 'literacy nutrition' than a child who has been read to daily from
infancy." (www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx, Raising Readers, p. 1).

Keep your child nourished in literacy and keep on reading!

3. "Parents who value reading are more likely to visit the library and give books as gifts" (www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx, Raising Readers, p. 1).

See if you can check out books from your local library or read a book your child has brought home from the school library today!

10 things families can do to help their child become a reader

For suggestions parents and families can do to help children become better readers see the list below. These ideas are taken from the section Simple Things Families Can Do to Help Their Child Become a Reader found at www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx.

1. Read to and with your children for 30 minutes every day... [paragraph continues].

2. Talk with infants and young children before they learn to read...[paragraph continues].

3. Help your children to read on their own...[paragraph continues].

4. Help your child to see that reading is important...[paragraph continues].

5. Set up a reading area in your home...[paragraph continues].

6. Give your children writing materials...[paragraph continues].

7. Talk with your children as you do daily activities together...[paragraph continues].

8. Ask your children to describe events in their lives...[paragraph continues].

9. Restrict the amount and kind of TV your children watch...[paragraph continues].

10. Keep track of your children's progress in school...[paragraph continues].

Reading Aloud to Preschool Age Children

Reading aloud to children is an important parent-child literacy interaction. The following is a list of possible ideas to insure the quality of these interactions taken from the section Tips for Reading Aloud With Preschoolers found at www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx.

1. Make reading a positive, warm experience.

2. Have them pay attention to the language of books and how it is different that spoken language.

3. Have them listen to the sounds in words and notice how some are the same/different.

4. Build their vocabularies with words they can understand and use.

5. Help them gain background knowledge from books you read to them.

6. Talk about the characters, setting, plot, and relate it to their own life

7. Talk about how print is spoken words written down, that letters make up those words, etc. so they begin to have an understanding of the concepts of print.

Choosing books that are appropriate for your child

Choosing books that have similar experiences to that of your child, have simple plots, are longer picture books, or are non-fiction can help your child learn new information. Also, choosing books that help children to understand new concepts or facts (such as folk tales and fairy tales), and books that have rhyme and alliteration in them, build your child's awareness of letter sounds. For more go to Tips for Reading Aloud With Preschoolers found at www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx

Tips for Reading Aloud

These tips are given in the section Tips for Reading Aloud With Preschoolers found at www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx.

1. Introduce the book: read the title, author, and illustrator; look at the cover; talk about what the book might be about; suggest things to look and listen for.

2. Run your finger under the text when reading.

3. Answer questions about the book; save other questions for later.

4. Talk about the story during and after a read-aloud session.

5. Use information and reference books to answer children's questions.

6. Ask children to look closely at the pictures to help them understand the story and make predictions about what might happen next.

7. Repeat interesting words and rhymes while reading a book and at a later time.

8. Pause and wait so children can say the word that ends a repetitive or predictable phrase.

9. Stop to ask thinking questions: "What might happen next? Where did he go? Why did she do that?"

10. Follow up on the story. Invite a child to talk; draw or paint; pretend to be one of the characters; and so on.

Other fun literacy activities

If you want a break from the normal reading time at home, the following activities promote literacy skill development and add a fun twist to the normal read aloud activities

you may be doing at home. These and other tips for parents are taken from the section 10 Tips for Parent of Young Children as found at www.rif.org/parents/articles/default.mspx.

1. Cook with your child: show them the recipe, read the labels on ingredients together, make a family cookbook of favorite recipes!

2. Tell stories with your child: talk about your family history, look at old vacation photos and discuss memories from the trip, tape your storytelling, etc.

3. Sing and rhyme with your child: choose songs with rhymes and word play, play rhyming games, challenge your child to say or sing rhymes really fast like a tongue twister and remember to laugh!!!

4. Write with your child: - use pencils, markers, chalk, crayons, etc. to write, or make thank you notes or to do lists with your child.

Other resources that may be useful to send home with parents or pull ideas from include the following:

1. *Iowa Literacy Link* sponsored by the Iowa Reading Association which gives a one page front and back newsletter all about information and activities parents can use to promote their child's literacy development.

2. Websites such as:

- http://www.partnershipschools.org for information on developing effective partnerships programs with families.

- http://www.naeyc.org/ece/eyly for short articles for teachers, parents, and other adults involved daily with children from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

- http://www.ncpie.org to access the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in
Education, which advocates for the involvement of parents and families in their
children's education, and fosters relationships between home, school, and
community.

- http://www.parentsasteachers.org to access Parents as Teachers site which is an
international early childhood parent education and family support program serving
families of children from pregnancy through kindergarten.

Literacy Take-Home Bags

The second component of the project is the literacy take-home bags. The purpose
of the take-home bags is to increase the number of literacy materials in the home, provide
meaningful ways to use the materials, provide books that are age appropriate for the
children, and engage parents and children in shared reading activities that can be
expanded upon no matter what the child's literacy skill level is. The frequency in which
these bags will be distributed into children's homes will be one take-home bag per week.
I am suggesting parents work on the take-home bag the evening it is sent home and return
it the next day of school so another child can then use it. If six take-home bags go home a
day for three days during the week, that would allow 18 students to have a bag one night
per week. This could vary depending on the number of students in a classroom and the
number of days students are in school. The purpose of only one bag per week is so that
parents do not feel overwhelmed with trying to find time each night to go through a bag
and can do other literacy activities that they wish to do with their child.

The take-home bags contain the following materials: two books, a folder, a sign out/parent comment sheet, and an activity sheet that goes with each book. There is the possibility to have only one book and activity sheet per bag, but because of similarities in many of the books I felt that it was beneficial to pair them. Parents could then discuss the similarities/differences between the books with their child. For example, if a bag has two books by Eric Carle, parent-child interactions can revolve around a discussion on how the pictures or writing is similar.

These take-home bags were bought as a kit called *Bookworm Kids Pre-kindergarten Take-Home Literacy Program* found on the Innovative Educators website: www.innovative-educators.com/item.asp?itemno=RKP208. The reasons for choosing these materials over others are as follows. The cost was within the allocated budget we had and equaled $367.86 for each set of 36 board books, 40 tote bags, 36 laminated activity sheets, and a spiral bound teacher's resource guide with reproducible activity cards, parent letters, reading certificates, and record keeping forms. The topics of the books tied into the themes and curricular goals of the district's pre-kindergarten program. The books were board books, which meant they would last the many trips to and from school, and give us more years of use. The age-appropriateness of the books was also appealing as they were books that were easy to follow, were good for emergent readers, and easy for parents to implement. The take-home bags were combined with activity sheets to assist in the goal of having parents work with kids in meaningful and engaging literacy activities. Lastly, there was the opportunity to purchase single copies of books in

case they were lost or ruined while being sent to children's homes. See Appendix A for a list of the take-home bag titles.

The funding for this part of the project was from a Transition to Kindergarten grant from the local Empowerment board to support the importance of reading aloud and to foster reciprocal interactions during parent-child reading. The materials were organized and tracked so all students had access to them throughout the year. Another key part of the grant was getting parents' feedback on the parent-child interactions that took place while they had the take-home bags. The comment section on the sign out/parent comment sheet was used to gather this information for both the teacher and the grant committee.

For more information on how this part of the project was implemented, see Appendix A which includes forms and letters used. It includes a sample activity sheet that accompanies each book sent home, an example introductory letter to parents on the purpose of the take-home bags and a brief explanation of what is expected, a sign in sheet used for check out and parent comments, and a sample letter giving parents more options to expand upon the take-home bag stories since students are at various levels in their literacy development.

Family Literacy Nights

The last component of the project is implementing family literacy nights. These family literacy nights were planned after reading various ideas and approaches used in literacy programs and adapted for the participants in this project. Over the course of the school year, one literacy night will be planned each month from October to April. This

allows both teachers and families to transition in and out of the school year without having to commit to attending a family literacy night and to allow time for a survey to be distributed and collected for planning purposes. See Appendix A for the survey/registration form that would generate feedback from parents regarding their interest and needs for proper implementation of the literacy nights.

Family Literacy Nights would involve families bringing their pre-kindergarten child to school with them to participate in literacy activities that will encourage the development of emergent literacy skills and provide resources and activities that could be done at home. Furthermore, the literacy nights will potentially increase the quality and quantity of the parent-child literacy interactions that take place within the home along with serving as a support group and a means to access other resources. Although the focus is for children ages 3-5, insight on how to work with children birth through 3 and children older than five will be shared.

Tentatively speaking, Family Literacy Nights will be held on the third Wednesday of the month from 6:30 to 7:30 at night. Materials will be funded through the Parent Teacher Organization and local contributions. Childcare for siblings will be available for $2.00 per child for parents who request it in the initial registration form. Childcare providers will be high school students. Sessions will be held in the elementary school library. At the end of each session, cards will be handed out for parents to make comments or ask questions that can be addressed with them individually if they wish or to be discussed as a whole group at the next session as a two-way communication piece. A notification letter will be sent to parents prior to the first session (See Appendix A).

The seven literacy night sessions will be in the following general lesson plan format:

6:30 Welcome and address feedback/comment cards.

6:45 Introduce a skill and a book to work on that skill and then read the story.

7:00 Participate in an activity/craft to expand on literacy skills.

7:15 Review skill, give homework, and allow time for feedback/comments to be addressed next session.

7:30 Dismiss.

With this general format in mind, I will go into more detail in the section to follow on the possible literacy skills, books, activities, and homework that could be covered for each month. These are suggested activities that could be changed depending on the materials and resources available in the school and community and are meant only as possibilities that can be expanded upon. Because the feedback/comment cards are a key piece in partnering with families to identify topics relevant and meaningful to them, the schedules would be tentative as they would be modified to meet the needs and interests of the families involved. October's Family Literacy Night session will be discussed to follow with November through April's suggested session's sample lesson plans along with an overview of each month's skill and activity found in Appendix B. The last session will include an evaluation form to be filled out instead of the feedback/comment cards (see Appendix A).

October Family Literacy Night

6:30 Welcome and Overview

The night would start out by welcoming parents and students to the first Family Literacy Night and thanking them for agreeing to participate in the sessions! The location of bathroom facilities would be pointed out and then the night would get started. The goal of the program would be discussed, the layout of the sessions shared, and the night will follow with 10 Ideas Parents Can Use to Improve the Quality of Shared Literacy Experiences, follow with a discussion about books and an interactive activity time. The night will conclude with a skill review, homework for next sesion, and time for feedback/comment cards.

Goal

The goal of the family literacy program is for families to participate in literacy activities that will encourage the development of emergent literacy skills and provide resources and activities that can be done at home; potentially increase the quality and quantity of the parent-child literacy interactions that take place within the home; serve as a support group and a means to access other resources.

Session Layout

6:30 Welcome and address feedback/comment cards.

6:45 Introduce a skill and a book to work on that skill and then read the story.

7:00 Participate in an activity/craft to expand on literacy skills.

7:15 Review skill, give homework, and allow time for feedback/comments to be addressed next session.

7:30 Dismiss.

6:45 10 Ideas Parents Can Use to Improve the Quality of Shared Literacy Experiences

We will start off tonight by going over 10 Ideas Parents Can Use to Improve the Quality of Shared Literacy Experiences just to get our brains thinking about literacy (Tracey, 2000, 50-51).

1. Get your children to talk! This helps with vocabulary development, language skills, increases their foundational knowledge, helps them make connections to their life, helps them understand concepts of print (explain), helps them develop phonemic awareness (explain), builds their self-esteem, builds a positive and supportive environment around reading time.

2. Help your children understand the story. This is checking your child's comprehension of the story and could help them develop knowledge of knew vocabulary.

3. Praise your children. This builds a positive and supportive environment when they are praised for their attention, reading efforts, answers, or ideas. For example, you could talk about how well they used the pictures, how good they are listening, or how they had a great idea about what would happen next in the story.

4. Relate the book to life. This opens communication between you and your child and shows them how a book can remind you of events that happen in your life.

5. Ask your children good questions during story. Good questions are Who? What? When? Where? Why? or How? questions because they allow your child to talk a lot more about an answer than saying "Yes" or "No."

6. Wait for answers. Some children need more think time than others. You can also model what good answers sound like by saying things like, "I think the bears are going to come home and find Goldilocks and they are not going to be happy" after the child responds. Even if the child's answer doesn't seem fitting, it can be used as a teaching tool. If they predicted a part in the story wrong, then ask them what really happened so they can revise their thought processes.

7. Point to words when you read to younger children. This helps children develop phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, and concepts of print.

8. Takes turns reading with older children (or turning the page for example with younger children). This helps promote independence and eases the frustration of doing it all on their own. It also creates a supportive environment while reading.

9. Choose books carefully. It is important to have books that are just right! Sometimes it is fun to read an easier book for repetition and because it is their favorite and sometimes you may want to read a longer and harder book (or parts of it) because they are interested. It is best to find books that can help the child be successful and also challenge their literacy development.

10. Have fun! If your book sharing experiences are not enjoyable, the child will not have much interest. Let your child be a part when choosing a book (give them options of two that you might have found appropriate and then maybe let them pick one that they want to pick whether it is easy or hard). Find a comfortable spot to read and if possible have a routine time when you read so they can anticipate it coming and not get upset.

Throughout the next sessions, we will find ways in which you can make these things become a natural part of your reading experiences. Tonight we are going to focus on the books you brought with you and if they are too hard, too easy, or just right. The point is that no matter what their level, there are ways in which you can use them effectively! Then we are going to talk about what to do before, during, and after your reading and let you practice!

7:15 Book Discussion & Activity Time

Hard, Easy, Just Right: (Show some books that would be examples of each and how you could adapt them to still make them useful. Have some parents share books that they have brought and discuss how they could be adapted if they are too hard or too easy).

Before, During, After: (Waldbart, Meyers, & Meyers, 2006). (Have these ideas on cards that parents can have to use and take home).

1. Before reading the story, have your child show you where the front and back of the book are. Also talk about the illustrations, find out why your child picked the book, or ask what he/she thinks the book is about. A preview or "picture walk" through the story can also be done. Have your child predict what's going to happen. (Give parents time to do this).

2. During the story you can do some activities (or as opportunities that occur during your reading allow you to tonight). This is a time to teach or point out certain literacy skills to your child. The interactions you have will depend upon your child's current literacy skill level and the story you are reading together. We will take ten minutes or so to do this

after I discuss some of the activities you can try. You can (a) point to the words as you read and remind your child that each word you say goes with a word on a page, (b) ask you child to point out words he/she knows in the story, (c) ask your child if what you have read makes sense "Does that look like the word I am saying?" (d) see if your child can show you capital letters, (e) ask if your child knows what periods, question marks, and exclamation points mean. Some of these you will have to directly teach the first few times briefly and then see if they can answer the questions the next few times you read.

3. After the story, these suggested activities can help your child process and understand the book better and review literacy skills already learned. Find out what your child thought about the story. Ask what character was his/her favorite? Ask if their predictions match the actual story? You can also go back through the book to see if your child can point to keywords used in the story. You can also have your child point to a certain letter or create the sound it makes. You might ask your child if he/she learned or heard any new words or have your child retell the story to you using the pictures.

7:30 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

We have discussed a lot tonight in order to get us started off. We have looked at 10 things parents can do during shared reading experiences, what to do with books that are varying levels of difficulty, and practiced what to do before, during, and after your shared reading experience. You will have opportunities at future literacy night sessions and at home to use these skills and activities more. We will also be doing more interactive activities in the upcoming literacy night sessions. For homework, please use your Before, During, and After cards while reading at home and bring a book that has

rhyming in it for next session. The next few minutes we will use to fill out a feedback/comment card. Your feedback can be about tonight or you can make comments and questions regarding literacy that you would like to discuss further. The beginning of each session will be used to address these cards. There will also be a hand out at the beginning of each session that addresses the feedback/comments for everyone to take with them. Thank you for coming and I will see you next time.

Partial Implementation of Project Hand in Hand

The use of newsletters and take-home bags were the two parts of this project partially implemented in my classroom. Reflections on the partial implementation of each follow.

Although I did not include a reading corner section in every newsletter, I did provide parents with literacy ideas and activities throughout the year. Sometimes these were tidbits in the newsletter, and other times they were free standing pages on how they could promote the literacy development of their child. I also shared suggestions with parents at conferences to encourage more quality and the quantity of literacy interactions in the home. Parents were happy to hear new suggestions to make reading exciting for both themselves and their child.

Unlike the newsletters, the take-home bags were more fully implemented. The take-home bags were started second quarter after discussing the purpose of them with parents at the first conference meeting. Parents were very receptive of the idea and liked the thought of new books coming into their home. The families were fairly responsible in returning the bags after each use, although there were a few that needed frequent

reminders of the importance of returning them for other families' use. The comment section on the sign out sheet was for the purpose of giving feedback to the grant committee in which the materials were purchased, but it was also helpful to me as the teacher. Those parents who repeatedly did not sign the sheets had the students that told me they didn't read with their parents that night which was a big sign. Those parents who did write comments revealed the level of literacy involvement in the home as well as the level of knowledge the parents had about developmentally appropriate literacy expectations. When some comments said the books were too easy for their child, I was quick to generate the second letter about how to use what appeared to be an easy book for a wide variety of purposes no matter what level their child was at. Since none of my students could read the text of any book, it was interesting to hear the parents comment that it was "too easy."

I chose to send two books that were similar home in a bag to increase the amount of books going home, increase the amount of time parents could sit and work on a take-home bag, decrease the number of nights parents and students were responsible for a bag, decrease the number of bags that were out at a time, and to allow parents and the students to see the similarities in the books sent. This also allowed me to focus on six books for six weeks (a cycle) and then move on to the next six books. Therefore, all students had access to each bag over the three cycles of six books which allowed them to work on 36 books over a period of about 40 weeks (because some weeks were cut short due to breaks).

In order to track materials being checked out, a chart was hung in the room with each students name on it. When they had a take-home bag, a card with the titles of the books in the bag was clipped by their name with a clothespin. The following day when the bag returned, the card would be clipped next to the student's name that followed. After a few times of sending out the bags, the students began to know when they would get the bag next because it always came to them after the same peer had it. This also helped in reinforcing responsibility in bringing it back because I could say, "Johnny, it was Stacy's turn to have the take-home bag today but you left it at home so I need you to be really responsible and bring it back tomorrow so she can share it with her family." I then sent a reminder note home in the child's take-home folder. I also kept a table with students' names and the dates they had the books in case there was tampering with the chart hanging in the room.

The only possible changes or suggestions to better the take-home bag experience would be to have an associate keep track of materials and to add an incentive piece. The associate would be helpful in signing out and collecting materials as well as writing notes if needed as this can be a timely process every day. A possible incentive would be students getting extra points or put in a drawing for every time they brought back an extension activity. Extension activities are suggested on the activity sheets enclosed with the books, but few parents really took the time to do these. This is a critical part of the shared-reading experience because it broadens the value of reading, makes books more meaningful and applicable, and increases the level of literacy skills used. An associate would also be helpful in making sure the students were acknowledged for their efforts if

an incentive was put in place. Time could also be used one day a week to share activities done and/or a special place in the room could be set aside for presentation of their work. This would allow emphasis to be placed on their literacy efforts and provide an extrinsic motivator to continue their literacy expansion activities.

Overall, I was impressed with the durability of the materials after so many trips to and from homes. The parents were also pretty responsible as far as signing in and making comments after reading. It was nice to see comments that suggested skills being taught at school were coming through at home in regards to rhyming words, nursery rhymes, repetition, etc. Best of all, the students were really excited when it was their turn to take a bag home which showed me their love and excitement about literacy!

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses conclusions and recommendations drawn from this project. Reflections on what was learned and proposed for the project as well as program revisions and further development will be shared.

Conclusions

In conclusion, family literacy programs are very important in regards to the emergent literacy learning that occurs before children enter formal schooling. Creating a program that is local and meets the needs of the population in your community may be more beneficial that using the state or national programs available.

The family literacy program that was proposed had a threefold purpose: to increase the quality and quantity of literacy interactions in the home, to provide further knowledge and resources that foster emergent literacy development to families, and to develop a home-school partnership that supports emergent literacy learning by increases the two-way communication between parents and teachers and increases parents' involvement in school.

The partial implementation of the project revealed the varying levels of knowledge and involvement of parents in the home in regards to shared-reading experiences. This suggests parents would benefit from more frequent newsletter information on reading as suggested in the Reading Corner as well as from structured Family Literacy Nights. Parent could then see that even "easy" books have a purpose and

can be expanded upon in so many ways that promote the development of emergent literacy skills.

Throughout this process, I have gained insight in the work it takes to plan and try implementing parts of a family literacy program. It is clear that it takes a significant amount of work planning; multiple resources in terms of people, materials, and funds; organization; and sufficient time to make such a program work effectively. The struggles in starting and keeping a program are these very components, but the need is great enough that more should be done for the benefit of children and their families.

Recommendations

In stating conclusions from this project, recommendations also come to mind. I would recommend revisions or further development in planning and resources.

First of all, in trying to plan a family literacy program throughout a district, as opposed to just one classroom, it would be helpful to meet with more district and community personnel. A survey, similar to the one that went out for the classroom, would be sent to the broader community or one that included all pre-kindergarten programs in the district may have increased the number of participants. However, in increasing the number of participants, more teachers and volunteers would be needed and that would take on a whole other level of planning and organizing. Planning the literacy nights would again depend upon the feedback/comments received in order to best meet the needs of the participants; therefore, the suggested activities are those that are good skills to work on but my not be what is needed once the program sessions start. This would mean that planning would take place month by month in order to make the two-way

communication between school and families lead the direction and content of the program.

Secondly, having enough resources is critical. I had planned the family literacy nights with one educator in charge, but there would need to be other people willing to help manage, organize, and be willing to help to make it more successful for both a classroom or district wide program. It would also be nice to have more materials to give away to families to promote further literacy interactions in the home such as markers, paper, and books. This takes funding which I did not account for in my program. It would be a nice addition and an incentive to families. There are also many resources in terms of technology that encourage literacy skill development that families could be informed of. It would be a good addition to a program to have a technology night where parents can use school technology to try safe web sites that have developmentally appropriate activities that can be done interactively as a family. This would require someone skilled in computers in case there were problems, trust that school property would not be destroyed or damages, and funding to increase the number of computers accessible. If such a technology night were possible, it would be helpful to have parents sign up so smaller groups could attend to decrease the amount of people and insure a more safe and controlled technology room atmosphere.

These are just a few recommendations in terms of the planning and resources that could make a family literacy program better. One other recommendation in terms of the take-home bags would be to have some non-fiction books. The materials that were researched for this did not have non-fiction texts in them, but they are very important to a

child's literacy development. There are many other possibilities for recommendation, but they all depend on the local need and resources available.

This project's intent was to increase the quantity and quality of literacy interactions in the home, help parents become more informed contributors of their children's emergent literacy development, and promote more family involvement and two-way communication between schools and families. Although this project has not been fully implemented, it has been a start to promoting emergent literacy skill development in children through increased family involvement, and that is beneficial for the students, families, and school involved as well as the surrounding communities!

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APPENDIX A

FORMS AND LETTERS

Newsletter Sample Layout

Month	
What we have been working on:	**Reminders:**
What is coming up:	**Reading Corner:**

Take-Home Bag Book Titles

Bookworm Kids Family Literacy Pre-kindergarten Take-Home Literacy Program

1, 2, 3 to the Zoo

Big Red Barn

Come Along Daisy

Dear Zoo

Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too?

Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree

Good Night, Poppy and Max

I Love You Sun, I Love You Moon

I Spy Little Numbers

Itsy Bitsy Spider

Miss Mary Mack

Olivia Counts

One Hungry Monster

School Bus

Skip to My Lou

This Old Man

Time for Bed

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Little Red Hen

Little White Duck

Brown Bear Brown Bear What Do You See?

Fireman Small to the Rescue

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed

Freight Train

Goodnight Moon

I Spy Little Letters

I Went Walking

Lady with the Alligator Purse, The

Mrs. Wishy-Washy

Olivia's Opposites

Polar Bear Polar Bear What Do You Hear?

Sergeant Hippo's Busy Week

Snowballs

Three Bears, The

Tomie's Little Mother Goose

Wheels on the Bus

Take-Home Bag Activity Sheet
(comes with a Spanish version on the reverse of each)

reading kids
activity guide

Dear Parents,
Reading together is one of the most special experiences you can share with your child. It is also one of the most important ways you can help your child grow into a good reader. Please take the time to read this book to your child and do the activities on this page. Remember to return the book to school for other families to enjoy, too!

😊 **Picture Walk**
Before you begin reading, look at the pictures in the book. Ask your child what he or she thinks the story will be about.

😊 **Read Together**
Read the book to your child. Let your child listen and enjoy.

😊 **Talk about the Story**
After you read, ask your child to tell you what happened in the story.

😊 **Ask Questions**
What animals live in the zoo?

😊 **Talk about Words: Zoo**
A zoo is a man-made park where animals live. People visit the zoo to look at the animals.

😊 **Activity: Count the Animals**
Count the animals in each train. Which train car has the most animals?

😊 **Activity: Make an Animal Train**
Cut out pictures of animals from magazines or newspapers. Help your child draw a train car (a rectangle and two circles) and then paste the animals on the train.

1,2,3 to the Zoo by Eric Carle. Count the animals 1-10 as they take a train ride to the zoo.

Take home bags

Dear Parents,

I tried to visit with each of you at conferences about the take home bags that will be coming home, but in case I missed you, I will again explain them.

These take home bags include two books and a folder with two activity sheets and a sign in sheet. The activity sheets describe things you are encouraged to do before, during, and after reading the books with your child. The sign in sheet is for comments on your experience with the books. These materials are funded through empowerment grant money and your comments will be used as feedback to the grant committee.

Please be mindful that these are to **return to school the following day.** So it would be helpful to get in the habit of returning it to your child's book bag after you have read them together and checked to make sure all the proper materials are included. This is very important in order for all students to have access. Please also take care of these new materials so children who attend the following years may enjoy them with their families as well.

It is my hope that your child will have at least one bag to take home each week and that you enjoy these great books!

Happy Reading,
            (Signature)

Take-Home Bag Sign In Sheet

Date	Student Name	Parental Comments: These materials are provided to us because of a grant and your comments are appreciated for feedback to me and the grant committee. Thank you☺

Take-Home Bag Second Letter

Dear Parents,

I am starting the second round of take home bags. Please continue to return the bags the next day to school so the next child can take the bag home to share.

It is also important to write comments on the comment sheet so please remember to do that! I do look at the comments and just wanted to make a suggestion. Some of you have made comments that the books were too easy or that your child said they were too easy. These books are not meant to be hard or timely, yet they **are** meant to be an opportunity to enjoy reading with your child and practice expanding the use of even the simplest of books to develop your child's literacy skills. So PLEASE take these suggestions into consideration when reading the next batch of books with your child.

- Use the activity cards to expand the story or do the suggested activity.
- Look for another book at the library by that author.
- Search for words that start with a letter or sound.
- Look for capital and lowercase letters in the story.
- Search and write words that start with a certain letter from the story on a sheet of paper.
- Practice retelling what the story was about.
- Discuss another story or event the book reminds your child of.
- Talk about their favorite page in the story.
- Write your own extension of the story.
- Talk about words that might rhyme in the story or with a word from the story.
- Talk about home many words are on a page (this shows you if your child knows that letters make up words and words are separated by spaces).
- Pick a word or letter from the story and see if they can find (highlight or circle) that word or letter in a newspaper or magazine.

There are so many possibilities but these give you a few to start with. I hope you will use these suggestions with stories you read at home as well as with the take home books and library books sent home from school.

Happy Reading!
    Ms. Bockenstedt

Family Literacy Night Survey and Registration Form

Dear Parents,

Please fill out the following survey regarding Family Literacy Nights and return with your child's registration materials on or before your child's orientation day meeting. Family Literacy Nights would involve bringing your pre-kindergarten child to school with you to participate in literacy activities that will encourage the development of their emergent literacy skills and provide resources and activities for you that could be done at home. Furthermore, the literacy nights will potentially increase the quality and quantity of the parent-child literacy interactions that take place within your home as well as serve as a support group and a means to access other resources. Although the focus is for children ages 3-5, insight on how to work with children birth through 3 and children older than five will be shared.

Family Literacy Nights will take place one night per month from October to April at your child's school. You will be contacted in September on the dates and times for the Family Literacy Nights. In order to better fit your needs, please answer the following questions.

Thank you for your time in completing this survey! If you have any questions, please feel free to call.

Respectfully,

_____ I would be interested in participating in a Family Literacy Night.

The time of day that works best is between:
          _____ 5:30-6:30 _____ 6:30-7:30 _____7:30-8:30

The day of the week that works best is:
          _____ M _____ T _____ W _____ TH _____ F

_____ I would be interested in childcare for _____ children (other than my pre-kindergarten child).

_____ I would be willing to pay $2.00/child per hour for the childcare.

_____   _____
          (Parent Signature)   (phone)

Family Literacy Night Notification Letter

(Date)

Dear Parents,

You showed interest in the Family Literacy Nights from the survey you handed in. Family Literacy Nights will begin in October and run through April. They will be held in the school library every third Wednesday of the month from 6:30 to 7:30 pm so mark your calendars now!!!

For the first Family Literacy Night, please bring three to five books from your home literacy collection or from your local library. These can be any books you and your child pick. We will use these for our first literacy night activity. If you are unable to bring any books, please let me know and I will have extras ready for you that evening. Also, if you are unable to attend, please let me know so I can get you an overview of things discussed and information so you are prepared for the next month's Family Literacy Night. You can reach me at (phone and email).

It is important that you ready at 6:30. If you signed up for childcare, please have your child dropped off no earlier than 6:20. I am looking forward to seeing your family in October and sharing the excitement and joy of reading with you!

Respectfully,

(Signature)

Family Literacy Night Evaluation

Family Literacy Night
Evaluation of Program Sessions

Dear Parents,
     It has been a pleasure working with you and your family this year during the Family Literacy Nights. Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge so we may make improvements on the program for next year.
Please answer the following using:
1= decreased 2= stayed the same 3= some change 4= noticeable change

How did your participation in the program affect:
1. The number of parent-child shared book experiences in your home?
     1   2   3   4

2. The quality of parent-child shared book experiences in your home?
     1   2   3   4

3. Your child's interest in literacy activities?
     1   2   3   4

4. Your knowledge of literacy skill development?

     1   2   3   4

5. Your feelings toward literacy?

     1   2   3   4

6. The number of times you visit the library?

     1   2   3   4

7. What changes would you make to the program?

8. What did you like about the program?

Thank you again for your time and commitment to your child's literacy learning!
     Respectfully,
          (signature)

APPENDIX B

FAMILY LITERCY NIGHT SKILLS AND ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT SAMPLE LESSONS

Monthly Skill and Activity Overview

	Skill	Activity
October	Ideas to Improve Shared Reading Hard, Easy, Just Right	Before, During, After
November	Phonemic Awareness	Look and Listen for Rhymes Beginning & Ending Sounds
December	Alphabetic Knowledge	Letter Search
January	Tracking, Vocabulary, Before, During, After, Comprehension	Character Sketch
February	Language and Comprehension	Telling Stories Making a Story
March	Fiction or Nonfiction	Classifying books as Fiction or Nonfiction
April	Multiple Skills	Game Night

Family Literacy Night Sessions Sample Lesson Plans – November to April

November

6:30 Welcome and feedback

- Good evening and welcome back.

- Discuss feedback/comment cards.

6:45 Introduction of skill, book, reading

- Tonight we will be Phonemic Awareness which is teaching the skill of knowing and manipulating the sounds of letters. We are going to focus on teaching your child the sounds of letters or the place they are at in words if they are familiar with letter/sound relationships already. (Model reading nursery rhymes to the families and talk about the rhyming words they hear and where they are at in nursery rhyme. The use of laminated nursery rhymes posters is helpful so you can write on them and they are larger for a bigger group to see).

7:00 Activity/Craft

- While you read your book together, I want you to work together and listen for words that rhyme. Write those words down on your piece of paper (hand out paper and markers) and see if you can figure out what sounds they start with and end with. Then see if you can think of other words that rhyme with the ones from your story. (Give them time to work)

7:15 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

- All right, we are ready to come back to group. Raise your hand if you would like to share a few of your rhyming words. I am only going to pick three people to share tonight.

(Pick three and discuss how they sound alike and what sound we hear at the beginning and end with each). For your homework, I would like you to keep searching for rhyming words when you are reading. Write them down if you want to with mom and dad's help to see how big of a list you can get. Next week, we are going to talk about the letters in our names so I need you to bring one of your favorite stories and a newspaper or magazine that you can write in! Now is your time to fill out the feedback/comment cards and then I will see you next month!

7:30 Dismiss

December

6:30 Welcome and feedback

- Welcome back! So how did our rhyming word search go? Who was able to find some rhyming words when they were reading? (Pick a few to share). (Discussion over feedback/comment cards).

6:45 Introduction of skill, book, reading

- Tonight I said we were going to talk about the letters in your name. This is going to focus on practicing alphabet knowledge mom and dads. So first I would like you to take your piece of paper (markers and paper handed out) and the kids are going to write your first and last name – with mom and dad's help if needed. (Using a big book of choice, read a couple pages aloud to the group and have children come up and see if they can find the first letter in their name on the page. When they find it say the letter and the sound the letter makes in that word, then say the word. After a few examples have the students get ready to work with their book. (Give ten minutes to read and do their letter search using their visual).

7:00 Activity/Craft

- Okay! We are going to come back to group because I want to hear how many of you found some of the letters in your name in the book you were reading. (Take volunteers). Now you are going to get to I Spy the letters in your name even more by using the newspaper of magazine you brought and the markers setting around to highlight the letters in your name that you can find. Each time you find a letter I want you to look at where it is in the word you are working on and tell mom and dad. You can even talk

about the shape the letter is and practice the sound that letter makes in the word it is in!

Have fun! (Have extra newspapers/magazines for those who do not have one).

7:15 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

- Tonight we focused on the literacy skill of alphabetic knowledge or learning the letters

and shapes of letters along with some phonological awareness in discussing the sounds

letters make. For your homework, I want you to keep looking for letters all around you.

You can even write down where you find letters or draw a picture. For example, if you go

out to eat or drive by a restaurant, see if you can find some letters that you know in the

menu or in the sign where it says the restaurant's name. Parents, this is encouraging your

child to look for letters in environmental print (or the words around them in every day

life). Next time, I would like you to bring a make-believe story like a fairy tale! Now you

can use the next few minutes to fill out your feedback/comment cards. Enjoy your

holiday!

7:30 Dismiss

January

6:30 Welcome and feedback

- Hello again. I hope all of you had a great holiday break! I hope you have still been finding rhyming words and letters all over the place and using your Before, During, and After cards. Tonight we will use those suggestions for Before, During, and After reading again as we read our make-believe stories. First, I would like to address some of the feedback/comment cards.

6:45 Introduction of skill, book, reading

- Like I mentioned, I would like you to use you Before, During, and After suggestions when reading your story. While you are reading, I would like you to make sure you are tracking (or pointing to the words as you read) which helps you child become more aware that what you are saying matches the print and that the print carries meaning. I also want you to discuss any new words that come up in your story as fairy tales often have terms we may not hear of very often any more (for example: porridge in Goldilocks). When you explain a new term, try to connect it to something your child can relate to (porridge is like oatmeal). Then we are going to work on a comprehension skill for our activity. (Allow families to read and set out marker, marker paints, and paper for acitivity).

7:00 Activity/Craft

5. I heard a lot of great stories out there tonight! Now I want you to take a moment to think of your favorite character from the story and all the things you know about that character…was she/he mean, happy, helpful, etc.

6. Now you are going to make a picture of your favorite character and write all those great words or ideas about your character around their picture. This will help you think of what happened in your story and all the different things your character did. (Show example of how to do activity by drawing spider man and letting the kids tell you everything they know about spider man to add words around the outside of the picture. Parents be sure to prompt your child with questions or go through the pictures to pull ideas out. (Work time).

7:15 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

- Oh it looked like you had so much fun reading your stories tonight and making your character sketches. You came up with a lot of great words to describe your characters. For your homework, I want you to try to do another character sketch on a story you read at home. Remember to look back at the pictures if you need help remembering all the things your character did in the story! Next time we will talk about story telling. You don't have to bring anything but your mind! Please take a moment to fill out the feedback/comment cards and I will see you next time.

7:30 Dismiss

February

6:30 Welcome and feedback

- Hello to all! How many of you have been hearing rhyming words when you read? How many of you have been finding letters and talking about the sounds they make when you read? How many of you did another character sketch from a story you read? (Take volunteers to share). That is great! Keep up the great work reading! A few responses to feedback/comment cards...

6:45 Introduction of skill, book, reading

- How many of you have gone on a trip somewhere? Maybe it was to grandma's house or to a park. Maybe it was really far away and you got to ride a plane or drive a long way. I bet you could tell me a story about that! Well tonight we are going to be telling stories. Some stories are true and really happened like going on a trip, and some stories you might make up with your great imagination. I want you to talk for a few minutes about your true story that really happened about a trip that you went on. (Give a few minutes for them to share and pass out paper and markers). I heard some great stories about trips you took – WOW! Now I am going to have you use your imagination. That is all those great ideas that pop into your head!

7:00 Activity/Craft

- I want you to write down or draw on your paper the name of a special place, some special characters that can be people or animals, and a problem that might happen with one of the characters. After you write down or draw these three things, you are going to make up a make-believe story to write. It doesn't have to be a long story, I just want to

make sure you talk about those three things for sure! Then you are going to be the illustrator of your story and make a fabulous picture of what happened in your story. (Give time for them to work).

7:15 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

- Tonight we worked on story telling; which is a great way to build language skills, develop parts of a story, and encourage your child's imagination. (Have a couple volunteers share some stories). For your homework, I would like you to go home and look through photo albums with your child and share stories together about the pictures. Also, please bring both a fiction and non fiction book for next session. Please fill out the feedback/comment cards before you leave and I will see you next time.

7:30 Dismiss

March

6:30 Welcome and feedback

- Hi everyone! Last session we worked on story telling and you had some fabulous

stories. I hope you had time to look through photo albums and reminisce about memories

or stories from your past together. A few responses to feedback/comment cards before we

get started...

6:45 Introduction of skill, book, reading

- I had you bring a fiction and non fiction book tonight so you can discuss with your child

the ways they are alike/different. I want you to look for the following when comparing:

Does the book have a table of contents, index, or glossary? Does the book begin with

"Once upon a time..." or share facts? Does the book have real pictures or are they

illustrated? Does the book have characters or is it about one person or thing? What do

you learn from each book?

7:00 Activity/Craft

- Fiction or Non Fiction Game: each family is going to look at a set of books (three

fiction and three non fiction that are pre-arranged) to find out whether it is a fiction or

non fiction book. You will have six colored chips. If you decide that the book is fiction,

the child needs to bring it up and set it on this table. If it is non fiction, set it on this table.

Before you bring your book up, talk about why it is either fiction or non fiction and what

the book would be about. This is not a race so take your time and have fun! We will talk

about a few of them when you are all finished to see how you knew which table it went

on!

7:15 Skill review, homework, feedback/comment cards

Good job tonight everyone! Next time, please come early for a pizza in celebration of our last family literacy night session. Pizza and beverages will be served from 6:15 – 6:30 and you may eat while we start with our welcome and feedback time. For homework, please be aware of the types of books you are reading to your child. It is really important to read a good balance of both fiction and non fiction books. Please fill out the feedback/comment cards and have a great night!

7:30 Dismiss

April

6:15 - 6:30 Pizza, welcome and feedback

- Welcome to the last family literacy night this year! I hope you are all enjoying the pizza and beverages! I am going to go over a few responses to the feedback/comment cards and then we are going to get right to work!

6:45 Fun Review

- Tonight we are going to have several activities that you will rotate through to practice basic literacy skills. These activities include the following:

1. Make and Break Names. This is basically writing the letters of your name, cutting it apart, and then putting it back together like a puzzle. Then you can pull the letters down and say their name and sound. Trying to do it in reverse order is important to see if your child knows the letter beyond the order in which it appears in his/her name. This will work on alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness!

2. Salt Boxes and Human Letters. These centers will allow you and your child to work on the shape of letters as they feel the texture of the salt in the box or bend their body to the shape of the letter picked. These are kinesthetic activities that get their brain thinking while their body is moving or feeling.

3. Puppets. This center allows you and your child to story tell. See what fun stories you can come up with during your dialogue!

4. Letter Search. This activity will allow you and your child to search for letters in your name or find simple words.

5. Character Sketch. Have your child paint their favorite character from a story and help them label it with words describing the character.

6. Reading Corner. Pick out a book and have fun reading!

You are free to go to which ever area you would like but try to get to at least three different areas before 7:25. That will allow you about ten minutes at each activity you choose. Have fun!

7:25 Skill review, homework, evaluation

- Tonight we reviewed many good beginning literacy activities that can promote the development of your child's literacy skills. I hope you have enjoyed the family literacy night sessions and your homework is to keep on reading and find enjoyment in it! Please fill out the evaluation tonight instead of our regular feedback/comment cards and drop it off on the table before you leave. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you ever have questions!

7:30 Dismiss