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## Building partnerships between teachers and families to enhance literacy learning

Lisa Jasiewicz  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Building partnerships between teachers and families to enhance literacy learning

### Abstract

Parents and the classroom teacher hold separate yet overlapping roles in helping to increase student achievement. The roles are separate because they are being accomplished in two different settings, separate from one another, and each adult will have his or her own way of conducting the reading experience. They are similar because they are both centered on the child's literacy learning and both parties are trying to meet the needs of the child.

The difficulty in this situation can be developing separate roles for the parent and teacher and also finding a way to work together in the roles they share and developing that partnership. The key to effective parent involvement is the ability for both the parents and the teacher to work together, communicate, collaborate, develop a partnership, allow both voices to be heard, and most importantly, keep the needs of the student in mind at all times.

**Building Partnerships Between Teachers  
and Families to Enhance Literacy Learning**

**A Graduate Project**

**Submitted to the**

**Division of Literacy Education**

**Department of Curriculum and Instruction**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts in Education**

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**By**

**Lisa Jasiewicz**

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Learning

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in Education.

July 19, 2006  
Date Approved

**Deborah L. Tidwell**  

---

Graduate Faculty Reader

July 19, 2006  
Date Approved

**Penny L. Beed**  

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Graduate Faculty Reader

7-21-06  
Date Approved

**William P. Callahan**  

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Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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## Introduction

Literacy learning in school is of great importance and an area that classroom teachers work on daily with students (Neuman, 2000). Being able to achieve in reading could build up a student's confidence, imbed in them a desire for learning, and possibly increase their chances for higher education and a brighter future (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Neuman, 2000). Successful literacy learning involves practice from the students and support from those around them (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Walsh, 2001). Students are able to get support from classroom teachers and teacher aids throughout the school day, but what happens when the students go home for the evening and the weekends? It is important for students to be supported in their literacy learning which is why teachers need to collaborate with families in developing successful readers (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Neuman, 2000). Families can provide support for the students' literacy outside of the school day which would help increase students' learning (Haughey, Snart & Costa; Walsh).

It is essential for teachers and families to communicate because collaboration between teachers and families continue to show positive effects on student's reading achievement (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997; Fiala & Sheridan, 2003; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Miller & Narrett, 1995). Many students in schools today are struggling in reading and find it very difficult to overcome those struggles (Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli & Slostad, 1999; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Rasinski, 2003). McIntyre et al. (2005) stated that "Children who struggle with reading in the early grades often remain behind their peers throughout school, and academic progress in all subject areas suffers" (p.1). This ongoing pattern of failure

among struggling readers can be changed through building a strong partnership between the classroom teacher and families.

Classroom teachers have a major responsibility when it comes to teaching reading to early elementary students. When students first enter school, they are each entering with a variety of background experiences, cultural, and literacy experiences (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Janiak, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Neuman, 2000). Classroom teachers must take all of those different experiences into account and attempt to teach each student a variety of strategies and skills that will enhance their literacy development, especially when they do not come to school with strong literacy development (Anderson, 2000; Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Rasinski, 2003). A few examples of strategies and skills teachers may need to teach or review with students in order to enhance their overall literacy development follows: letters, sounds, letter-sound patterns, word-recognition strategies, comprehension strategies, and fluency (Gunning, 2004; Neuman, 2000; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Rasinski, 2004).

All of these reading skills, whether new to the student or familiar, can be learned with time and practice. One way these strategies and skills can be practiced is through authentic acts of reading used by both the teacher and families at home. Practice activities may include reading aloud to the student, pointing out pictures in a book and how they help tell the story, listening to a student read independently, or simply modeling reading for the student by independently reading (Cullinan, 2000; Gunning, 2004). Walsh (2001) agrees that practice in reading is the best way to improve reading skills. He believes that the reasons children do not know how to read is because they are not reading often enough.



Based on research, practice in reading is needed in order to help improve students' reading achievement and is something families can be actively involved (Walsh, 2001). Families have become increasingly more involved in their child's literacy learning and the role of families has become more active (Solo, 1997). A family's involvement may include participation in the classroom such as leading or guiding literacy activities or family participation can be in the home which could include reading every night with their child (Anderson, 2000; Hara & Burke, 1998; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Solo, 1997). Parents and adult family members are seen as a child's first and most influential teacher and this continued support in the home is vital for improvement in literacy achievement for all readers, especially for struggling readers (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997). It is important for families to know and understand what happens at school regarding their child's literacy learning, the strengths and needs of their child in reading, and what role families can take to increase learning at home (Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Rasinski, 2003). This is vital so that the family can use the child's strengths in reading to practice and reinforce the child's needs in reading.

In order for this learning to occur, it is imperative for families and teachers to communicate effectively, learn from one another, and create an active partnership in order to increase achievement in struggling readers (Danielson, 1997; Loucks, 1992; Rasinski, 2003). Creating this partnership will allow the classroom teacher and families to become equal links in the child's literacy learning (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003; Hara & Burke, 1998). The teacher can share observations he or she has seen in the classroom, the family can share observations they have seen at home, and then they can work together to

help the child's literacy achievement increase. If both the classroom teacher and the families are working on the same needs of the student, then that child is getting double the practice, and will potentially develop further in his or her literacy development (Solo, 1997; Walsh, 2001).

Parents and the classroom teacher hold separate yet overlapping roles in helping to increase student achievement (Rasinski, 2003). The roles are separate because they are being accomplished in two different settings, separate from one another, and each adult will have his or her own way of conducting the reading experience (Danielson, 1997). They are similar because they are both centered on the child's literacy learning and both parties are trying to meet the needs of the child. The difficulty in this situation can be developing separate roles for the parent and teacher and also finding a way to work together in the roles they share and developing that partnership (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Rasinski, 2003). The key to effective parent involvement is the ability for both the parents and the teacher to work together, communicate, collaborate, develop a partnership, allow both voices to be heard, and most importantly, keep the needs of the student in mind at all times (Hara & Burke, 1998).

Involving parents in their child's literacy learning is very difficult at times and may cause great frustration for both the parents and the classroom teacher (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997). Several research studies have discussed the need for an equal partnership among parents and teachers, but that does not always happen successfully (Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Lazar et al., 1999; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Rasinski, 2003). Creating a successful partnership between the classroom teacher and families is at times very difficult, but not impossible. A few ways to successfully build a partnership

between the teacher and the families are to communicate on a consistent basis, be open and honest with each other, and be clear in what each party are trying to suggest to the other (Rasinski, 2003).

### **Literature Review**

The partnership and communication built between the classroom teacher and families is very important to students' literacy learning (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Rasinski, 2003). To improve students' overall literacy development, the families and the classroom teacher must collaborate together, share a variety of ideas and suggestions, discover what is best for each student within literacy learning, and develop a strong connection for the students between reading in school and reading at home for the students in hopes of improving their overall literacy development (Janiak, 2003; Lazar et al., 1999).

The development of strong partnerships between classroom teachers and families takes time and involves open communication and shared ideas by both parties (Miller & Narrett, 1995; Rasinski, 2003; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Despite the amount of work or time it may entail, this partnership is something that could increase students' achievement in reading (Anderson, 2000; Lazar et al., 1999). For example, it was found that developing a partnership between the classroom teacher and families could improve students' overall grades, increase student attendance and retention, and enhance motivation and self-esteem, all of which hold great importance when attempting to increase student's achievement level in reading (Anderson, 2000; Lazar, et al., 1999).

There are many ways classroom teachers and families can work together to help improve a child's reading achievement. One way is to allow students plenty of time to

practice reading both at school and at home (Walsh, 2001). Not only do students need practice in reading, but they need practice in reading books that have been appropriately selected. It is important to have books available to students to which they can make connections and which they have an interest (Cole, 2003; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2005; Neuman, 2000). If students are reading books that are of interest to them and ones they can make connections to, then there is a better chance they will enjoy the book and become motivated to read more books which in the end will hopefully increase their overall literacy development (Cole; Edmunds & Bauserman).

Another important way to enrich students' reading achievement is to connect the literacy experiences they are doing at school to the type of literacy experiences they are receiving at home (Miller & Narrett, 1995; Neuman, 2000). At times these reading experiences may look completely different and unknown to the classroom teacher, but through communication with the families, the classroom teacher will have the opportunity to learn more about the type of literacy experiences the students are receiving at home (Haughey, Snart & Coast, 2001). After the classroom teacher better understands those experiences, he or she can then try to incorporate those experiences in the classroom in order to make it more meaningful and motivational for the student (Neuman).

It is important for the classroom teacher and families to work together in any situation and work together to help all students, but the students who would benefit immensely from this partnership are the struggling readers (Pullen, Lane, Lloyd, Nowak & Ryals, 2005). Students who struggle in reading are in need of support from both the school and home (German et al., 2000; Neuman, 2000).

## **Struggling Readers and Achievement**

The reasons that students struggle in reading and the reasons for potential low reading achievement have been studied by many researchers (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; German et al., 2000; Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Neuman, 2000; Walsh, 2001). A review of research concerning struggling readers and their reading achievement reveals a variety of patterns.

One area that is a concern and a possible reason for students to struggle in reading or to show low achievement results is student's level of readiness for school (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Solo, 1997). Some children come to school having many literacy experiences already such as knowing their alphabet, having heard stories being read to them, understanding how to hold a book, and recognizing letter-sound combinations. Other students, however, come to school not having any of those experiences for one reason or another (Haughey, Snart & Costa). Having these experiences before entering school is vital in maintaining a high reading achievement level (McIntyre et al., 2005; Miedal & Reynolds, 1999; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Morrongiello, 2001; Pullen et al., 2005). One study that best represents and argues the importance of reading experiences prior to coming to school was by Pullen et al. (2005) in a parochial school in Florida. The study included struggling beginning readers in first grade from various socio-economic backgrounds. The students were tested on decoding skills they used when they came to an unknown word. Explicit teaching was an essential component to beginning reading instruction to promote decoding skills in this school. Results from this study showed that students' failure to gain reading proficiency is often related to a developmental lag and early intervention appropriately designed to target areas of deficiency can help students

become proficient readers. The study stated that those students who start off poorly often remain poor students throughout their education; one reason Pullen et al. (2005) found for this was the students' lack of background knowledge before they entered school.

A second study that also supports the need for students to have had a variety of literacy experiences before entering school and support from families was by Miedal and Reynolds (1999). This study investigated the association between parent involvement in early intervention programs and children's school competence in their future educational experiences. The study included a total of 704 parents and was a pre-kindergarten and kindergarten longitudinal study. Results of this study indicated that the number of activities in which parents participated in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms was significantly associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of retention at age 14, and fewer years of special education. The findings support the benefits of parent involvement in early childhood programs. This study by Miedal and Reynolds helps show the importance for early support by parents in children's educational experiences and how it affects student's success later in school.

A third study that helps to support the importance of literacy experiences prior to entering school and the need for consistent help and support from families in students' reading development was by McIntyre et al. (2005). This study took place with first and second grade students and compared phonics and reading comprehension achievement. During the study, half of the students received daily supplemental reading instruction while the other half did not. The findings of the study found that when students received supplemental reading instruction their comprehension scores increased, but there was no difference found in their phonics scores. This study by McIntyre et al. (2005) helps

explain the importance of literacy instruction and support occurring both at school and in the home. When literacy learning is also occurring within the home, families are helping to reinforce and strengthen those important reading strategies that are taught at school to help improve students' literacy development.

One possible reason for a lack of reading involvement before entering school is a lack of resources at home (Banks & Banks, 2001; Janiak, 2003). For students to show gains in reading achievement, they need to be reading books at their instructional level and books that are of interest to the students which may not be readily available in all homes (Banks & Banks).

One important finding in the literature is that if students have had significant difficulties in reading achievement in the past, the chances of those difficulties continuing throughout their life are great (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003; Jitendra et al., 2004; McIntyre et al., 2005; Pullen et al., 2005). One could compare this pattern to the Matthew Effect in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003). One reason for this occurrence might be that struggling readers have been struggling for a while and are aware they are struggling. They simply do not enjoy reading anymore because so many people have told them that they are not correct and they need to fix this and fix that; reading is not enjoyable anymore and they start to read less and less. Struggling readers stop practicing the important reading skills, but in order to improve, they need to practice. Struggling readers then just keep getting lower and lower and lose that initial motivation for reading they once had (Fiala & Sheridan).

Walsh (2001) discusses the importance of practicing reading and actually defends classroom teachers by explaining that it is not only the fault of the schools and the

classroom teachers. He believes that the reasons children do not know how to read is because they are not reading. One of the best ways to increase reading achievement and become a successful reader is to practice reading (Walsh, 2001). Practice is the way one becomes successful at any task (Everhart, 2002; Rasinski, 2003; Walsh, 2001).

A research study by Fiala and Sheridan (2003) helps to support the importance of student practice in reading and how it can help improve students' reading achievement. The study examined the effectiveness of a paired reading intervention with third and fourth grade students who were all below average readers. The paired reading intervention was a parent involvement activity in order to get the families more involved within the classroom and with the students' reading development. Findings from the study showed that both students' reading accuracy and rates increased after the students worked with parents in the paired reading intervention. This study by Fiala and Sheridan provided another example or opportunity for students to practice reading daily and showed that an increase in practice can alter reading achievement for the better.

Children are engaged in many activities outside of school hours other than practicing reading which may include watching television or playing video games. One reason Walsh (2001) believes that children choose these activities is because they offer instant gratification whereas reading offers delayed gratification taking anywhere between four to seven years to master. Reading is an activity that is self-reinforcing for both good and struggling readers. The fact that it offers delayed gratification though is dissatisfying for struggling readers because they obviously will not find gratification very readily from the activity. The more struggling readers read, the better readers they will become, but how many struggling readers are interested in reading when it only makes



them feel bad about themselves and is a source of failure? This is the reason many struggling readers do not want to practice and their reading achievement either stays the same or drops even lower.

Neuman (2000) believes that, at a certain age, children feel a sense of power after learning to read and that the more children know, the more they are going to want to learn. As students increase their willingness to learn, it is important for classroom teachers to provide time for students to explore reading and for children to practice and to use the skills they are good at in an independent or group setting (Neuman). Hopefully as students find skills and strategies in reading which they understand and can successfully use, they will want to continue their learning and their reading achievement levels will increase gradually.

One way to enhance continuity suggested by Neuman (2000) is to work in partnerships with families or other caregivers. It has been discovered that strategies and activities learned in school can also be extended to students' home lives which will help them encounter new ways of learning. But for some students that is not the case. Some students' literacy experiences in the home look completely different from the literacy learning experienced in schools (Neuman). This makes it very difficult for students to see the power connection between school and home. Some researchers have even suggested that it is this discontinuity between home and school experiences that could have a serious impact on children's ability to succeed in literacy and in school (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997; Fiala & Sheridan, 2003; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Neuman, 2000; Rasinski, 2003).

A study by Anderson (2000) helps to better explain the importance and need for the strong connection between school and home educational experiences. This study took place in a public school in St. Louis. The population of the school was 100% African American, 95% of the students received free breakfasts or lunch, and 60% of the students were in Chapter I remedial reading or math. The study consisted of thirty second graders and all of which were in the Chapter I reading program. The study was completed to test whether parent intervention makes a difference in reading achievement. Subtests were given to each of the students to obtain scores prior to involving parents. Results of the subtests were poor because of the students' lack of exposure to books, information found in the books, and the lack of parent involvement in the home and at school. After parents were involved in the students' literacy development, students increased their scores in vocabulary and comprehension in reading because of their hard work and because of the praise and encouragement from teachers and parents. This study by Anderson found that direct relationships between parents behaviors at home regardless of socioeconomic status of the family helped to increase student reading achievement.

Another practice that was found successful in helping to increase reading achievement among many struggling readers was to use materials that spoke positively of the student's cultural heritage or background (Rasinski, 2003). Relating class work to students' cultural backgrounds could not only increase student reading achievement levels, but could also increase parent's attitudes towards school and the instructional strategies used by the classroom teachers (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001).

Another finding about struggling readers' reading achievement is explained by Blozis (2003) in that "smaller group ratios will increase the chances of academic success

through student-teacher interactions, individualization of instruction, student on-task behavior, and teaching monitoring of student progress and feedback” (p. 1). Group size was found to be an instructional format that could have effective outcomes for students especially in the area of reading (Elbaum Vaughn, Hughes & Moody, 2000).

For those who struggle in reading, smaller groups will be more effective because the student gets more attention from the teacher and is able to receive immediate feedback (Elbaum, et al., 2000). It is believed that the smaller the group size the better it is for struggling readers which would make a one-to-one reading instruction group the most successful for struggling readers (Blozis, 2003). Although one-to-one instruction is found to be successful for struggling readers, finding the time to meet one-to-one with every student each day is a challenge for classroom teachers.

### **Teacher’s Role with Struggling Readers**

The role of the teacher with struggling readers in the classroom is very important and the teacher must work with these students right away in order to prevent any further reading failures in the future (McIntyre et al., 2005; Pullen et al., 2005). As mentioned earlier, research suggests that children who start off poorly in reading typically remain poor readers throughout their schooling and beyond (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003; Jitendra et al., 2004; McIntyre et al., 2005; Pullen et al., 2005). This fact strongly indicates a need for early intervention for struggling readers in the classroom (Pullen et al., 2005).

It is the teacher’s responsibility to provide quality teaching to struggling readers in the classroom which include appropriate and specific learning experiences in order to learn strategies and skills for reading and understanding a variety of texts (McIntyre et

al., 2005). Teachers must provide struggling readers with instruction that is explicit for their learning needs and books that are at an appropriate level (Pullen et al., 2005).

Appropriate leveled books could be books in which the students have suitable background knowledge of, the students are familiar with, the book has predictable text structure, and that will be motivating to read (Pullen et al., 2005). The teacher should also provide decoding strategies and skills struggling students can use in order to successfully read words that may be unknown to them. This will be helpful to students when they are reading independently or at home (Kinnucan-Walsh, Magill & Dean, 1999; Pullen et al., 2005).

Another important role a teacher has in providing efficient instruction to struggling readers is to find time to meet with them in small, intensified groups (Blozis, 2003). This small group setting allows more teacher-student interactions, student on-task behavior, teacher monitoring of student progress, and feedback for the students from the teacher (Blozis). The more one-on-one attention struggling readers receive from the classroom teacher, the more skills they are attaining, the more they are reading accurately, and the better readers they will become (McIntyre, et al., 2005).

A variety of studies have been completed in order to learn more about group size and what works best for struggling readers. One of these studies was by Schumm, Moody and Vaughn (2000) with a group of 29 third graders. The study was done in order to examine teachers' perceptions and practices for grouping students during reader instruction. The study examined the impact of these grouping practices on the academic and social progress of the students and whose attitudes about reading of students at a variety of achievement levels. The results of this study indicated that overall, teachers

used whole-class instruction for reading and the same materials for all students. The teachers in this study focused on a one-size-fits-all format of reading instruction which is not found to be the most successful for struggling readers. Blozis (2003) completed a study on grouping conditions as well and found different results. This study included groups of second graders in an urban school district who received the same supplemental instruction but were put into three different grouping conditions. The first group included one-to-one reading instruction, the second group included one-to-three reading instruction, and the third group included one-to-ten reading instruction. Results from this study showed that one-to-one and one-to-three grouping conditions were both highly effective for reading instruction. Students showed gains in comprehension, phoneme segmentation, and fluency.

The last important role teachers hold in providing efficient instruction to struggling readers is described by Allington (2002). He provides a list of six ways effective elementary reading instruction can be maintained within a classroom. He starts off by explaining that one thing that really does matter when developing a reading instruction program in the classroom is the expertise of the teacher. He believes that the more the teacher knows and has learned about reading instruction, the better the instruction will be. Allington describes the six ways labeling them as the six T's of effective elementary literacy education:

1. **Time:** A great amount of time is needed when trying to teach students how to read. Literacy should be a major part of the classroom both in the literacy block and in other subjects. It has been found that only 10% of the total five hour school day is dedicated to reading instruction.

2. **Texts:** Students need “easy” books in order to practice new reading skills and strategies taught in small group and books at all students’ levels in order to have literature to read during independent reading time.
3. **Teaching:** Classroom teachers need to take time to teach and model new reading strategies they want and expect their students to use.
4. **Talk:** Teachers need to talk about the books that are being read and personalize the kind of talk they have with their students. Teachers need to also ask students questions about the books they are reading in order to check for comprehension and involvement.
5. **Tasks:** Teachers should provide students with longer, more in-depth reading assignments that take more time and the students are able to develop an ownership with the reading instead of trying to fill the day with short, smaller reading assignments and projects.
6. **Testing:** If teachers are expecting students to receive positive achievement scores on reading tests than it starts with meaningful instruction by the classroom teacher and not simply teaching the students the test.

The six T’s of effective elementary literacy education provided by Allington (2002) help to sum up the role classroom teachers play with struggling readers. Teachers have a vital role and must provide a great deal of time and effort to reading instruction in the classroom, but it is not all the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Families should also play a role in the literacy development and instruction of their children and have a hand in their achievement (Allington).

## **Family's Role with Struggling Readers**

A family's role with struggling readers is of great importance because, like mentioned earlier in this literature review, it is believed that parents are a child's first and most influential teacher (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997). Findings discovered by the Commission on Reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1995) reported that "parents play roles of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to read" (p.27). For this reason it is very important for all family members to be positive role models in learning to read which could improve a child's motivation (Anderson, 2000; Hara & Burke, 1998; Solo, 1997).

One way families can be positive role models is to model the value they have for reading and read in front of their children on a daily basis so they can witness school-related activities being completed in the home (Hara & Burke, 1998). Epstein (1998) reminds us that "if students witness their parents taking an active role and interest in school-related activities, improved academic achievement was more likely" (p.13). One study by Hara and Burke explains that parent involvement usually occurs when the student's academic grades have dropped below grade level or when specific problems arise. Hara and Burke (1998) suggest that consistent, active parent involvement results in greater recognition of teachers' skills, better teacher evaluations from principals, enhanced parental understanding of inner workings of school, and higher school ratings in effectiveness and program success. The purpose of the study was to determine if similar improvement in academic achievement could be attained by inner-city elementary students, specifically third grade, if parents became more directly involved in their children's education. The results of this study indicated that the third grader's reading

achievement improved by four months as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills test. The study by Hara and Burke also included responses from parents who participated in this program and reported three very significant outcomes from the study: "Their interest in and appreciation for education, teachers, and learning did, in fact increase, the level of interest their children had in school improved as did their attitudes about school and about their teachers and parents' respect for the role of teachers and for the impact they have on children changed dramatically" (p.17).

Another study involved parents to help with student's reading achievement. The study by Janiak (2003) initiated parent involvement plans to enable elementary school parents to incorporate a research-based knowledge of emergent literacy and reading strategies in parent-child home interactions. The parent involvement program that was designed and tested was the Book Checkout Program (BCP). Eight elementary schools, Kindergarten through fifth grade, participated and the sample included 792 students from those schools. Results indicated that students and families who frequently participated in BCP tended to be more positive about reading in school and students were more confident when called on to read in class. These same children also tended to have higher levels of reading achievement than their peers who had minimal participation in the BCP.

These studies by Hara and Burke (1998) and Janiak (2003) both describe research in which the results indicated that actively involving families in student's literacy development can help increase students' reading achievement, confidence, and excitement for reading. When both families and the classroom teacher are involved, the student is able to observe two models for effective literacy learning and development and are able to increase their achievement in reading.



A second way in which families can take an active role and model good reading to their children is to read aloud to them (Anderson, 2000; Gunning, 2004). Reading aloud to children can increase their listening vocabulary, letter and symbol recognition abilities, and comprehension abilities (Anderson, 2000). Some researchers caution that in order for families to conduct effective read aloud sessions they must be properly trained to do so by the classroom teacher (Lazar et al., 1999). For this to occur it is very important for families and teachers to communicate together regularly, clearly and frankly about the children's reading achievement levels and to work together to help improve the reading level of the students (Rasinski, 2003).

Rasinski (2003) agrees with Lazar et al. (1999) that families need appropriate content and instructional work they can implement at home in which they have been trained to use by classroom teachers. The instructional content will need to be effective, engaging, authentic, brief, and easy to implement at home. The need for home practice and engagement in reading activities is important because it is believed that in order to become a proficient reader; a developing reader needs to practice reading often (Rasinski).

Instructional content in reading that teachers would like families to implement should have a connection to the family's home life, background, culture, and literacy experiences already occurring within the home (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001). Making these connections between school and home life could help motivate families, students, and also the classroom teacher (Haughey, Snart & Costa). The willingness to share literacy experiences is one way in which strong partnerships can be built, communication

lines can be opened, and the opportunity can develop for struggling readers to increase their reading achievement (Haughey, Snart & Costa, 2001; Janiak, 2003; Rasinski, 2003).

### **Building a Partnership**

The amount of communication and the active partnerships that occur between families and the classroom teacher is different for both parties. Families and teachers disagree about the number of opportunities that are available in the schools for parents to be actively involved (Janiak, 2003). The families perceive there to be fewer opportunities to be involved than the teachers perceive (Janiak). The reason this disagreement has occurred is probably from the lack of consistent communication that is occurring between families and the classroom teachers. It has been researched and found that the more families and school staff work together, the more students will achieve in the area of reading (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Lazar et al., 1999). The reason for this achievement in reading after communication between home and school is because the families and the classroom teacher are working together and both voices are being heard and respected. They are teaching and completing the same reading strategies and techniques and the child is reading more often. This will help improve the child's reading achievement level and also their outlook on reading and motivational level (Janiak).

Unfortunately, though, this active and effective communication between families and the classroom teacher does not occur often (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998). In many examples, the only time teachers communicate with families is when the child has done something wrong or is doing poorly in school and the teacher calls to offer their advice about the situation (Hara & Burke). The family rarely ever gets

a chance to participate in the conversation and offer their own advice or feedback to the teacher (Danielson). This is very unfortunate because researchers believe that parents who are informed and communicate with classroom teachers on a consistent basis are more likely to have children that demonstrate high levels of achievement (Anderson, 2000).

There are ways to build a strong partnership between families and classroom teachers. It may take a great amount of time and effort, but witnessing the end result will be rewarding enough. One way to start building this communication and partnership with families starts with the classroom teacher. The teacher should communicate effectively and consistently before a problem ever occurs (Hara & Burke, 1998). The families will be more apt to respond to that type of communication than to a negative attempt (Hara & Burke).

There are a variety of ways classroom teachers can work on developing a partnership between families. Loucks (1992) has identified ten strategies for improving communication and relationships with families:

- “Parent/student switch days
- Parent/student fund-raising
- Teacher/parent roundtable discussions
- Parent/teacher organizations
- Newsletters
- Solicitation of parent volunteers
- Alumni events
- Invitational events

- Good news cards
- Parent classes (i.e. homework, communication, suggestions)” (p. 15).

The focus for this project is on collaborative activities which involves suggestions, opinions, and voices by both the classroom teacher and the families. Of the ten strategies for improving communication and relationships with families provided by Loucks (1992), seven of the ten are collaborative events:

- “Parent/student switch days
- Parent/student fund-raising
- Teacher/parent roundtable discussions
- Parent/teacher organizations
- Solicitation of parent volunteers
- Alumni events
- Parent classes (i.e. homework, communication, suggestions)” (p. 15).

All of these suggestions have the potential for success, but only two activities from this list will be focused on for the remainder of this project. The two collaborative activities that will be included are teacher/parent roundtable discussions and parent classes (Loucks, 1992). The roundtable discussions and the parent classes are going to be used in the project because they are a great way to meet one-to-one with families in order to effectively communicate together about the child’s learning and literacy development. The environment created from these gatherings will hopefully be one in which families and the classroom teacher will feel comfortable enough with one another to be open and share their thoughts and concerns and work together to improve student learning.

Roundtable discussions and parent classes are not the only two activities being used in

the project, but they are the two major focus areas. The other activities used will be the topics presented at the parent classes throughout the school year and will be explained further in the literature review and in the project.

While working with families on the activity ideas, it is very important for the classroom teacher to keep a few things in mind. The teacher should remember to keep the focus on the strengths and needs of each individual student and family (Danielson, 1997). Each family is coming from a variety of experiences and literacy beliefs, so it is important for the teacher to listen intently and be accepting of each suggestion and idea. When discussing different topics throughout the family workshops, it is important for the teacher to model effectively and provide any materials that may be needed (Danielson). The teacher should also establish activities that would create an atmosphere conducive to school-home communication (Hara & Burke, 1998).

### **Activities**

Many activities can be used with parents to create an atmosphere conducive to school-home communication; this plethora of activities could be used by both the classroom teacher and families, but only five activities have been included for this project:

1. Families on Feltboards (Morrow & Young, 1997)
2. Reading Aloud (Trelease, 2001)
3. Reading Strategies (Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill & Dean, 1999)
4. Home Journals (Jacobi, Wittreich & Hogue, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)
5. Roundtable Discussions (Truesdale, 2001)

## **Families on Feltboards**

Families on feltboards is an activity that will be used as a “getting to know you” activity or an ice breaker. Ice breakers are used as a way for people to become more comfortable with one another and get to know each other better before having to work together through the remainder of the school year. Families on feltboards will allow the families and classroom teacher a chance to introduce themselves, their family environment or background, and a special memory they have about their family and growing up. This activity will also help the teacher discover more about each family and ways in which they might be able to better communicate together (Morrow & Young, 1997).

## **Reading Aloud**

Reading aloud is a valuable and beneficial activity for students to experience in all grades (Trelease, 2001). Trelease provides suggestions for structuring a successful reading aloud experience for all students that can be used with families or classroom teachers alike:

- “Select books that you enjoy. Your enjoyment of the book will shine through. Also ask students to suggest titles that they would like to hear read aloud.
- If your students change classes, read aloud at the beginning of the period so the bell doesn’t interrupt the reading.
- Decide ahead of time how much time you will spend reading aloud. It could be 10 or 15 minutes, or it could be longer.
- Shorter books work better than longer ones.
- Follow up with talks about books that students might enjoy reading.

- Be imaginative and creative in book selections. You might read picture or joke books on occasion.
- Read slightly above students' reading level but not too far.
- Prepare your reading in advance. Note difficult vocabulary that might have to be discussed. Also note stopping points" (p. 352).

Reading aloud to students is something important to stress to families. It is an activity that allows students to hear reading being modeled for them and a way to bring active literacy learning into the home.

### **Reading Strategies for Solving Unknown Words**

One thing that is very important for students to know when they are reading independently or reading for someone else, is what to do when they come to an unknown word (Kinnucan-Welschm, Magill & Dean, 1999). Many common reading strategies used by classroom teachers are ones suggested by Kinnucan-Welschm, Magill & Dean. They also suggest five things good readers do when they meet a "tricky" word:

1. Think about the story and events that happened.
2. Check the picture for clues.
3. Go back and get your mouth ready to try and say the word.
4. Look for small chunks in the word that will help to break the word down into smaller pieces.
5. Think to yourself: Does that make sense? Would I say it that way? Does that sound right?

### **School-Home Journals**

New learning and reading experiences occur every single day and in order to help students increase their reading achievement and maintain a consistency in their learning, it is important that the classroom teacher and families work together and communicate that information effectively. School-home journals are a way for classroom teachers and parents to open up the communication lines and stay on the same page with students' literacy learning and reading progress that is occurring at home and in the classroom (Jacobi, Wittreich & Hogue, 2003).

School-home journal is a notebook that is sent back and forth between the classroom teacher and the families. Both the classroom teacher and the families will write in the notebook on a consistent basis and can write about anything they want concerning the student's literacy development. They each will write important things they see the student doing in reading, new ideas the student came up with about reading, or maybe even suggestions or ideas for improving the students' literacy development. It really does not matter what they write in the journal because it is about communicating effectively and trying to improve the students' understanding and development in literacy (Jacobi, Wittreich & Hogue, 2003).

### **Roundtable Discussions**

Roundtable discussions are a way for the classroom teacher and families to communicate face-to-face and on a consistent basis to discuss students' literacy learning, development, and status of other activities discussed at the first four workshops (Truesdale, 2001). This is a time for the classroom teacher and families to share any thoughts, concerns, questions, or ideas they may have for improving the literacy learning



of the students. This may also be a time and a safe zone in which anyone can share frustrations they have been experiencing and help each other to grow as learners themselves and improve in their ability to help the students in reading (Truesdale).

### **Conclusion**

It is very important for a partnership be built between the classroom teacher and families (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Rasinski, 2003). Building a partnership includes being able to communicate effectively and on a consistent basis in order to help improve the literacy learning of the students (Rasinski). While communicating, the classroom teacher and families must be honest and frank with each other in order to alleviate any unwanted confusion and frustration (Rasinski). Both parties must be open-minded and willing to try out any new ideas, suggestions, or activities to help improve the student's learning.

Many activities and strategies that can be used to help improve the partnership and communication between the classroom teacher and the families, but the most effective activities are those that are collaborative in effort and involve both the input and suggestions from the classroom teacher and the families (Lazar et al., 1999; Janiak, 2003). Almost all students participate in and observe literacy experiences both at home and at school and to better increase students' achievement in reading, it is important that those literacy experiences compliment each other and are helping to improve the students' overall literacy development.

In order to ensure that the literacy experiences at school and in the home compliment one another, it is important for the classroom teacher and families to communicate effectively and consistently. It is important for these two parties to

collaborate together, offer suggestions and ideas to one another, and work together towards improving the students' literacy learning (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Lazar et al., 1999; Rasinski, 2003).

### **Purpose of the Project**

Many students struggle to read in school (Blozis, 2003; Jitendra et al., 2004; McIntyre et al., 2005; Pullen et al., 2005; Schumm, Moody & Vaughn, 2000) and one way to help these students improve in their reading is for classroom teachers to build strong partnerships and communicate consistently with families (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Rasinski, 2003). Many research studies have reported that parents are a child's first teacher and that the family's expectations and views on school are one of the first impressions students have about the importance of learning (Anderson, 2000; Danielson, 1997; Solo, 1997). This strong belief that parents and adult family members are a child's first teacher and the role they play in a child's education is motivation for teachers to start early in building relationships and collaborating effectively with families.

Many parents understand how important education is for their child, but may not understand exactly what the school is teaching their child or how to accurately assist in their child's reading activities (Danielson, 1997; Janiak, 2003; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Many parents may also want to help in increasing their child's reading level, but do not have the resources to do so or do not know how to accurately chose books at their level of reading (Janiak). This is where the role of the classroom teacher becomes very important. Classroom teachers have access to many skills, strategies, ideas, resources, and education to teach students about the reading process. The classroom teachers,

however, are only with the students for part of the day to make sure they are practicing reading in order to improve their literacy development which is why it is important for teachers to communicate with families about their child's reading strengths and needs, about specific strategies to use with the child that will be successful strategies for them, and of the need for students' availability to many different kinds of books (Danielson, 1997; Miller & Narrett, 1995).

Families may be promoting literacy learning in their households that are not familiar strategies to classroom teachers (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). For this reason it is important for teachers and families to collaborate, hold similar expectations, and form goals together as to how the students will become successful readers. Families should be able to share the literacy experiences they have in the home with the classroom teacher and the classroom teacher should share what he or she does in the classroom. Then they can combine their practices and work together to better assist students in their literacy development (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel). It is this open communication, positive interactions, and developing partnership that can help students overcome reading difficulties and become successful readers. These efforts can assist students in becoming successful readers because they are getting practice, support, and modeling in reading from both school and home and they are getting reading instruction that is focused on their specific strengths and needs.

Many forms of communication can be used successfully such as phone calls or letters home, but one other way to communicate information to parents is through small group meetings in which families can be comfortable in asking questions about their child's literacy learning, can offer their own suggestions, and teachers can share their

thoughts, concerns, and suggestions (Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Rasinski, 2003).

The teacher and families can each share ways in which they feel literacy is important and collaborate on how the literacy learning can be achieved best for that specific child. This could be very fulfilling for the families because they will feel included and have a meaningful role in the school and with their child's literacy learning (Rasinski, 2003). If the families feel needed in the school and in their child's learning then it is more likely that they will help out in the school and classroom. When families volunteer their time at the school and help in their child's literacy learning, they are modeling the importance of learning and hopefully the child will react to this modeling and understand the importance of learning in school and at home (Rasinski). It is important for the teacher because they will have specific background knowledge about the students' interests and literacy experiences received from the families in which they can incorporate throughout daily classroom lessons and activities (Miller & Narrett, 1995). Knowing a student's interests and past literacy experiences is important for knowing where to begin with literacy instruction, where to go in the future, and how to better individualize the literacy instruction for all students (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Schiefele, 1999; Snow, 2002). The importance of knowing students' interests and past literacy experiences is important because it assists in developing ways to motivate readers, especially struggling readers, to enjoy and find a way to be a better reader.

Being able to communicate effectively with families in order to determine students' interests and past literacy experiences can be a difficult task, but it does not have to be impossible. There are ways to communicate with parents that can be more

effective than others. Many times it is said by classroom teachers that parents simply do not care about their child's education or that if parents did more at home then classroom teachers would not have as many problems (Schockely, Michalove & Allen, 1995). In some cases this may be true, but in many cases, the classroom teachers might not be using the best communication tools.

A positive way to effectively communicate with parents and build a partnership is offered by Patricia A. Edwards (1999). She explains the importance of classroom teachers meeting individually with each parent or adult family member and listening carefully to each family's story regarding the background and literacy experiences to which they have exposed their child thus far. When both family members and classroom teachers share their stories, literacy experiences, and listen carefully to one another, they are starting to gain trust and respect for each other. The two parties are becoming more comfortable in sharing new ideas and suggestions and creating similar expectations for the children's literacy learning and development (Edwards, 1999; Schockley et al., 1995). When the classroom teacher and families are talking and communicating, it is important for both parties to be respectful, listen, be open-minded, and not to pass any personal, moral, or political judgments on one another regardless of race, background, culture, or socio-economic status (Edwards; Schockley et al.). The classroom teachers and families need to remember that they are both there to help the child develop in their literacy learning and any exposure or literacy opportunities that may be available to the child are helpful and needed during this developmental time (Edwards; Schockley et al.).

Once this partnership between families and the classroom teacher has been developed initially, further communication will become more productive between the

teacher and families later on in the school year. Further communication will be more productive because an understanding between the two parties has already been set and everyone is working towards the same goal of the child, to improve their reading development (Hara & Burke, 1998; Miedal & Reynolds, 1999). The main goal of this project is to discover and communicate ways in which partnerships can successfully be built between classroom teachers and families.

### **Methodology of the Project**

Trying to get families involved in their child's literacy learning can be difficult for the classroom teacher (Edwards, 1999; Schockely et al., 1995). Families have changed over the years and have demanding schedules to attend to (Edwards). There are many different types of families as well which could also make the involvement process more difficult to happen. Some families have only one parent working and raising the children and other families have grandparents or aunts and uncles as the legal guardians (Edwards). Whatever the family situation may be at home, all families are busy and do not have much free time to spend with their children on school work. This does not always imply though that adult family members do not care. That has always been a misconception classroom teachers have (Schockley et al.). Most families care a great deal about their child's education but may not have a lot of time or might not know exactly how to help their child in their literacy learning (Edwards).

The misconception about families not caring for their child's education and other misconceptions might have been avoided if the classroom teacher and families communicated more often and worked together (Schockley et al., 1995). The classroom teacher must be the first to take action by making the initial contact with the families. The

classroom teacher should try and set up a time for them to meet together to discuss the child's literacy experiences at home, literacy experiences at school, and any other thoughts and suggestions each party wants to share. When the two parties meet, the teacher should allow the families time to share their story and listen intently to what they are trying to say and any suggestions or ideas they may have. When the families are done sharing, the classroom teacher will also share their story or experiences they have had with the child's literacy learning and development. The classroom teacher should not explain the child's literacy development as something that needs to be fixed (Thomas, Fazio & Stiefelmeyer, 1999) because that mind-set could make the families feel a sense of disempowerment and might hurt the partnership from being built (Thomas et al., 1999). The classroom teacher should explain to the families what they have seen in the child's development and offer suggestions or ideas, just as the families did. After both parties have shared, they can then work together and try to create literacy experiences for both school and home that would best meet that particular child's strengths and needs.

After the initial contact and meeting is made between the classroom teacher and the families, the teacher will invite the families to attend literacy workshops and roundtable discussions to help build a strong partnership and to help improve the student's literacy development through home and school literacy experiences. The day and time of the workshops and roundtable discussions will be discussed with all the families in order to choose a day and time that would best accommodate the family's busy schedules (Thomas et al., 1999). After a day and time has been set, the classroom teacher will pick the location for the workshops and roundtable discussions. The location

will be at a local library meeting room or community center in order to create a less-threatening and more welcoming environment for all of the families (Thomas et al.).

The workshops gatherings will be a time for both the classroom teachers and all the family members to discuss specific literacy related topics that are relevant to the student's literacy learning presently in their development. Both parties will have a chance to share their past and present experiences with the chosen literacy related topic and discuss other thoughts, ideas, and suggestions in order to make the literacy experience more meaningful to their child and their level of reading. There is no right or wrong suggestion or idea throughout the workshop experience. It is a safe environment in which everyone should feel comfortable. It is a chance to learn from each other and work together in order to help the student's in their literacy development.

The roundtable discussions will be held at the same day, time, and location as the workshops, just on opposite evenings. The workshops and roundtable discussions will alternate each month. The roundtable discussions are a time for the classroom teacher and the families to come together and discuss the literacy related topic that was discussed and attempted at school and at home since the last workshop meeting (Trelease, 2001). The parties will discuss what worked, what did not work, and what new strategies or activities they tried and how it worked better for their child. It is simply a time and a place to talk about literacy events happening in the home and at school, what is working, and what might need more improvement. It is a place to figure out where to go after something does work or where to go after something fails.

The initial contact with the families, the one-to-one meeting between the classroom teacher and families, and the workshops and roundtable discussions are all



ways to better increase communication between the classroom teacher and families concerning the student's literacy development. They are ways for the classroom teacher to try and communicate effectively with parents and make them feel more comfortable about school related activities and topics. Lastly, they are ways for the classroom teacher and families to develop successful and meaningful partnerships by working towards the same goal, creating successful literacy learning experiences for children and students.

## Project Overview

Building partnerships between the classroom teacher and families at home involves a lot of time and effective communication (Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Miller & Narrett, 1995; Rasinski, 2003). Creating a successful partnership between the classroom teacher and families can help assist students, especially struggling readers, improve in their literacy development (Danielson, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998; Janiak, 2003; Rasinski, 2003). This project involves many cooperative activities in which the classroom teacher and parents share thoughts, ideas, concerns, and struggles about specific literacy strategies. This project allows information about literacy activities occurring in school and literacy activities occurring in the home to be shared and results used to best meet the individual literacy needs of each student.

The families who are involved in this project may come from a variety of backgrounds such as different cultures, languages, learning styles, and may have different literacy activities occurring in their home. This project has to meet the needs of each family member involved, keeping in mind their different backgrounds, and can be done through a model called sheltered practice (Echevarria & Graves, 1998). This model provides assistance to all type of learners, young or old, in the form of visuals, modified texts and assignments, and attention to their linguistic strengths and needs (Echevarria & Graves). The emphasis in this model is on learning and maximizing instruction and not just on the completion of an activity or assignment. The teacher must hold high expectations of all learners no matter their experiences or abilities and the lesson delivery must have many connections to the learner's prior knowledge and cultural and background experiences (Echevarria & Graves). The teacher should model and

demonstrate new material being taught and check for learner's understanding of the material as they practice it independently overtime (Echevarria & Graves). Sheltered practice is a way to try and meet the needs of a variety of learners and is something to keep in mind throughout the duration of the project. Many different types of learners will be attending the workshops and roundtable discussions throughout the year, so the classroom teacher should be prepared to meet all of their individual needs to ensure new learning and understanding.

The project is a year-long model that can be used to try and build a successful partnership between the classroom teacher at school and families in the home. The schedule can be adapted to different schedules and conflicts as needed, but gives an idea to the overall set-up of the project. The model begins as soon as the school year starts in August. The classroom teacher should already be thinking of days, times, and a location for the project, but all of that will be finalized after working with the families. In August the classroom teacher will send a letter home explaining the importance of literacy learning in the classroom, literacy learning in the home, and how to build a partnership combining those to best meet the individual needs of the students. The letter will also explain that they should be expecting a call from the classroom teacher. This is when the classroom teacher and families will set up a time to have a one-to-one meeting to discuss their child's literacy strengths and needs. At the one-to-one meeting, the classroom teacher will also get days, times, and locations that might work best for the families to best accommodate their busy schedules.

A total of three workshops and five roundtable discussions will occur throughout the school year (Truesdale, 2001). The workshops will include a get-to-know-you activity

called felt families (Morrow & Young, 1997), discussions and modeling of reading aloud to students (Trelease, 2001; Smolkin & Donovan, 2003), discussion and modeling of reading strategies students can use when they come to a word they do not know (Kinnucan-Walsh, Magill & Dean, 1999), and discussion and modeling of how to use home-school journals to help open communication lines between the classroom teacher and families about students' literacy development. A month after each workshop session, a roundtable discussion will take place. Roundtable discussions (Truesdale, 2001) are a time for the classroom teacher and families to meet and discuss how a specific literacy strategy has gone so far, progress the students have made, or any concerns and questions anyone might have. The last roundtable discussion meeting will include a small celebration for a great year of hard work by the families and students and also a workshop feedback form for the families to fill out and return before leaving. Responses from the feedback form will be used by the classroom teacher to adjust and make changes to the workshop experience for the next school year in order to best communicate with families.

The workshops and roundtable discussions will conclude in April and a conclusion letter thanking the families again will be sent out in May. For the summer months of June and July the parents have the opportunity to continue the home-journaling (Wollman-Bonilla, 2000) with the classroom teacher through e-mail to continue helping their child and learning more about their literacy development and experiences. The classroom teacher will also send out a follow-up survey to each of the families asking them to answer a few questions about their child's literacy learning, any new developments that have occurred over the summer, and questions they may still have.

This project was designed to help classroom teachers and families build partnerships and communicate effectively to better meet the individual needs of each student in their literacy development. This model is one way to achieve these goals.

### **Procedure**

At the beginning of the school year, at the end of August, the classroom teacher will send out a letter (see Appendix A) welcoming the families back to another school year and informing them of the upcoming workshop opportunity in order to learn more about reading and their child's literacy development. The letter will include a schedule overview (see Appendix B) of the workshop opportunity. The letter will also inform the families that in the next few days, the classroom teacher will be contacting them by phone to set up a one-to-one meeting with them to discuss their child's literacy strengths, needs, concerns, questions, or suggestions the families may have.

At the one-to-one meeting with the families, the classroom teacher will first allow the families time to explain what they feel is their child's strengths and weaknesses in reading and what they see at home. Then the classroom teacher will share what he or she sees in the classroom concerning the student's strengths and needs in reading. This is simply a time for the classroom teacher and families to meet one-to-one in order to try and start communicating effectively. At the end of the meeting, the classroom teacher will give the families time to fill out an availability form (see Appendix C). This form will help the classroom teacher decide what days, times, and locations are best for the families to meet monthly. The classroom teacher will make one more phone call to the families after all of the one-to-one meetings confirming the days, times, and location of the workshop and roundtable gatherings. The classroom teacher will also inform the

families about the activities being done at the first workshop. He or she will ask them if they could to bring in family pictures that they wouldn't mind cutting up and using for one of the activities. The classroom teacher will remind the families that they do not have to bring anything if they don't want to; it would just add more creativity to the activity.

### **Workshop 1: Families on Feltboards and Reading Aloud**

The first workshop will meet at the end of September. The first activity during this workshop is an introductory activity allowing the families and classroom teacher to get to know more about each other. The activity they will be doing is titled Families on Feltboards (Morrow & Young, 1997) (See Appendix D). Prior to the night of the workshop, the classroom teacher will have asked the parents to bring in family photos that they would not mind cutting into smaller pieces. If the parents do not have any photos, did not bring any, or did not want to cut them up, then they may draw their pictures the night of the workshop. The classroom teacher will provide the remainder of the materials for this activity. The main purpose of this activity is for the parents to recreate stories from their home or family life using felt board materials. The classroom teacher will first model sharing a story from his or her own family life using felt characters and settings. These stories can be historical, from a childhood experience, or a story from the recent past. The teacher will then model retelling the familiar story discussing who was there, where it took place, what happened first, second, third, etc using a graphic organizer (see Appendix E) to help arrange characters, events, and settings of the family memory (Morrow & Young, 1997).

After the teacher has modeled the activity and answered any questions the families might have about how to complete the activity, it will then be the families turn to

create families' on feltboards using the materials provided by the classroom teacher. If more than one member from each family attends the workshop, then those family members may work together on presenting one memory that is meaningful to them. The classroom teacher will provide the families about thirty minutes to complete the activity. After the thirty minutes, the classroom teacher will invite the families to share their stories with the rest of the group (Morrow & Young, 1997).

After everyone has shared their stories about a specific family memory, hopefully the group of families will feel more comfortable with one another and with the classroom teacher and will be willing to communicate more freely in the future. This activity was used in the workshop simply as a way to break the ice and introduce the classroom teacher to all of the families and introduce the classroom families to each other.

The second part of the first workshop will be about reading aloud to students (see Appendix F). The classroom teacher and families will first discuss what reading aloud is, why it is used, and how it is already being done in the classroom and in the home (see Appendix G). The classroom teacher and families will discuss ways in which both types of reading aloud experiences, in the classroom and at home, can be used together to create a successful literacy experience for the students.

Reading aloud is a valuable and beneficial activity for students to experience in all grades (Trelease, 2001). Trelease (2001) provides suggestions for structuring a successful reading aloud experience for all students that can be used with families or classroom teachers alike (see Appendix G):

- “Select books that you enjoy. Your enjoyment of the book will shine through.

Also ask students to suggest titles that they would like to hear read aloud.

- If your students change classes, read aloud at the beginning of the period so the bell doesn't interrupt the reading.
- Decide ahead of time how much time you will spend reading aloud. It could be 10 or 15 minutes, or it could be longer.
- Shorter books work better than longer ones.
- Follow up with talks about books that students might enjoy reading.
- Be imaginative and creative in book selections. You might read picture or joke books on occasion.
- Read slightly above students' reading level but not too far.
- Prepare your reading in advance. Note difficult vocabulary that might have to be discussed. Also note stopping points" (p. 352).

The classroom teacher will help clarify any confusion the families may have for conducting a reading aloud experience with their child at home.

The classroom teacher will then ask the families to share book titles they use for read alouds with their child at home and why they picked that book to use. The classroom teacher will share effective ways to pick out appropriate books to read aloud to children and why (see Appendix G). Lastly, the classroom teacher and families will discuss the types of questions that could be asked throughout a read aloud (see Appendix G). The classroom teacher will open the discussion up to the families and write down the question ideas they have. Together they will design a list of questions that could be used throughout a reading aloud experience either at home or at school.

Lastly, the classroom teacher will model a read aloud session for the families that he or she would conduct in a regular classroom setting. This will help the families hear



the tone of voice the teacher uses, the book selection used, the questions asked throughout the reading, and appropriate ways to start and end a read aloud experience.

### **Roundtable Discussions**

All roundtable discussion meetings will occur one month after a new workshop activity or strategy has been explained, modeled, and practiced. This month apart allows the families and classroom teacher time to practice using the new literacy strategy with the children and develop new ideas, suggestions, questions, or concerns about the specific strategy.

The roundtable discussion meetings will always start out by having all families and the classroom teacher fill out a reflection form about the specific literacy strategy being discussed. This reflection time helps the families and classroom teacher organize their thoughts, ideas, and gives them notes to refer to throughout the discussion.

After the reflection questions are answered, the families and the classroom teacher will discuss how the specific literacy strategy was implemented over the past month. They will discuss positive things that happened, new things the children learned or accomplished questions they still have about the strategy, problems that occurred while using the strategy, and new ways to implement and use the strategy at school or in the home.

The roundtable discussion meetings are simply a time for families and the classroom teacher to meet and talk face-to-face and compare literacy strategies used at home and in school to try and help meet students' individual literacy needs. There is no correct procedure for these meetings, but should be used for open discussion and between families and the classroom teacher.

### **Roundtable 1: Reading Aloud**

The first roundtable discussion will meet at the end of October because that will be one month since the end of workshop 1. The classroom teacher will first ask the families to answer some questions about the last month and to reflect on their experiences and get their thoughts down on paper (see Appendix H). During this roundtable discussion, the families and classroom teacher will talk about the reading aloud experiences they have had and how they have been going, successes they have seen while reading aloud, concerns that keep occurring, questions they have, or suggestions for how to make it a better experience.

At the end of the roundtable gathering, the classroom teacher will remind the families of the second workshop gathering that will meet at the end of November. This workshop will be about reading strategies students can use to help them solve an unknown word.

### **Workshop 2: Reading Strategies for Solving Unknown Words**

Reading strategies for solving unknown words will be the topic for the third workshop gathering (see Appendix I). The classroom teacher will first explain to the families what reading strategies are and why they are important tools for students to use and then explain some of the most common strategies being taught to students throughout the school day (see Appendix J).

Many common reading strategies used by classroom teachers are ones suggested by Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill & Dean (1999). Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill & Dean (1999) suggest five things good readers do when they meet a “tricky” word:

1. Think about the story and events that happened.

2. Check the picture for clues.
3. Go back and get your mouth ready to try and say the word.
4. Look for small chunks in the word that will help to break the word down into smaller pieces.
5. Think to yourself: Does that make sense? Would I say it that way? Does that sound right?

The classroom teacher will then ask the families what strategies they know their student is using on their own when they come to an unknown word or what strategies the families ask the students to use when they come to an unknown word (see appendix J).

The classroom teacher will combine the strategies used by the families with the strategies used by the classroom teacher to create a successful list of strategies to suggest to students when they get to a word they do not know.

The classroom teacher will then provide the families with a variety of books, both chapter books and picture books. The teacher will explain that the families should try practicing using and suggesting reading strategies to their peers at the workshop before trying it with their child in order to feel more comfortable using the strategies.

The classroom teacher will explain that over the next month he or she challenges the families to try and help their child use these strategies to figure out unknown words when reading at home or when the child is reading independently. Lastly, the teacher will remind the families that the next roundtable discussion will be in December, right before the students leave for winter break.

## **Roundtable 2: Reading Strategies for Solving Unknown Words**

The second roundtable discussion will meet in the middle of December; right before the students leave for winter break. The classroom teacher will first ask the families to answer some questions about the last month and to reflect on their experiences and get their thoughts down on paper (see Appendix K). During this roundtable discussion, the families and classroom teacher will talk about the reading strategies they used with their child when they came to an unknown word, successes they had with the strategies, concerns that came up, questions they have, or suggestions they have for how to make it a better experience.

At the end of the roundtable gathering, the classroom teacher will remind the families of the third and final workshop gathering that will meet at the end of January. This workshop will be about creating a school-home journal.

### **Workshop 3: School-Home Journals**

The fourth workshop will be used to explain home-school journals (see Appendix L). The classroom teacher will explain what home-school journals are, how the families can use them to better communicate with the classroom teacher, and how it can help student's reading development (see Appendix M). The classroom teacher will also show an example journal to the families (see Appendix M). This example will show comments and responses that could be made in the journal by either the families or the classroom teacher.

The classroom teacher will give the families an opportunity to practice writing an entry in the journal provided to them. The classroom teacher will explain to the families that they can write about anything they want concerning their child's reading

development. They can write strengths their child has in reading, certain areas in reading their child may need to work on, suggestions they have to help their child, questions they have to ask the teacher about their child's reading, etc. The teacher will explain that there is not set topic to write about in the journals, it is just a way to open up communication lines between what is happening at home with the child's reading and what is happening at school.

The classroom teacher will explain that over the next month he or she challenges the families to write in the school-home journal and send it back and forth with the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher will also explain that the students will be the ones bringing the notebook back and forth between the teacher and the families. Lastly, the teacher will remind the families that the next roundtable discussion will be at the end February to discuss the effects of the school-home journals.

### **Roundtable 3: School-Home Journals**

The third roundtable discussion will meet at the end of February. The classroom teacher will first ask the families to answer some questions about the last month and to reflect on their experiences and get their thoughts down on paper (see Appendix N). During this roundtable discussion, the families and classroom teacher will talk about using the home-school journals, successes they had with the journaling, concerns that came up, questions they have, or suggestions they have for how to make it a better experience and whether or not it is something they would want to continue throughout the rest of the school year.

At the end of the roundtable gathering, the classroom teacher will remind the families of the fourth roundtable discussion that will occur at the end of March to discuss

all of the activities that have been presented at the workshop opportunities which include reading aloud, reading strategies, and school-home journals.

#### **Roundtable 4: Reading Aloud, Reading Strategies, and School-Home Journals**

The fourth roundtable discussion will meet at the end of March. The classroom teacher will first ask the families to answer some questions about the last month and to reflect on their experiences and get their thoughts down on paper (see Appendix O). During this roundtable discussion, the families and classroom teacher will talk about all three activities that have been discussed at the past workshop opportunities which include reading aloud, reading strategies, and home-school journals. The group will discuss successes they have had with the activities at home, concerns that have come up over the past month, questions they have, or suggestions they have for how to make the activities a better experience.

At the end of the roundtable gathering, the classroom teacher will remind the families of the fifth roundtable discussion that will occur at the end of April to again discuss all of the activities that have been presented at the workshop opportunities which include reading aloud, reading strategies, and school-home journals.

#### **Roundtable 5: Reading Aloud, Reading Strategies, and School-Home Journals**

The fifth roundtable discussion will meet at the end of April. The classroom teacher will first ask the families to answer some questions about the last month and to reflect on their experiences and get their thoughts down on paper (see Appendix P). During this roundtable discussion, the families and classroom teacher will talk about all three activities that have been discussed at the past workshop opportunities which include reading aloud, reading strategies, and home-school journals. The group will discuss

successes they have had with the activities at home, concerns that have come up over the past month, questions they have, or suggestions they have for how to make the activities a better experience.

At the end of the roundtable gathering, the classroom teacher will remind the families that this roundtable gathering was the end of the workshop and roundtable opportunities for the school year. The classroom teacher will provide the families with refreshments and snacks to help celebrate the end of a great and successful school year and to thank the families for all of their hard work and dedication!

The classroom teacher will also ask the families to fill out an evaluation form (see Appendix Q) at the end of the fifth roundtable gathering in order to get feedback about how the families felt this opportunity was for them and if it was worthwhile of their time and efforts. The classroom teacher will also inform the families that throughout the summer months, a follow-up survey (see Appendix R) will be sent out for the families to fill out and send back to the classroom teacher. The follow-up survey is a way for the classroom teacher to know what the families are still doing for their child to help in their reading development and what strategies have not been as effective.

Lastly, the classroom teacher will offer to continue the home-school journaling experience throughout the summer months via e-mail to any family who is interested. If families are interested in continuing the journaling they should leave their contact information before leaving the last roundtable meeting.

## **Follow-Up**

After the last roundtable gathering the classroom teacher will send out a conclusion letter (see Appendix S) to all of the families involved. The letter is a way of thanking the families for being involved and for working so hard throughout the school year. The conclusion letter also gives the families a second opportunity to be involved in the home-school journaling activity throughout the summer months if they are interested in doing so. Lastly, the follow-up survey (see Appendix R) will be mailed out the families during mid-summer to get their feedback about what activities are still successes in their home and what activities are not.

## **Conclusion**

The main goal for the project was to help build a stronger partnership between the classroom teacher and the families in order to better meet the individual literacy needs of the students in the classroom. The workshop and roundtable discussions gave the families and classroom teacher many opportunities to meet throughout the entire year and communicate about what was happening at home and at school concerning the students' literacy learning. The workshop gatherings included activities that could be done both at home and at school and the roundtable gatherings allowed the families and classroom teacher an opportunity to share progress that has been made, changing strengths and weaknesses of the students, questions that they may have, and any suggestions they have for improving the overall literacy learning of the students. This workshop experience allows families to be very active in their child's literacy learning and gives classroom teachers extra information about the students' interests, strengths, and needs as a reader which can greatly help instruction throughout the school year.



This project was designed to take eight months to successfully implement. The project would begin right away when school started for the year in August and would end just one month before students were let out for summer break. The eight month implementation is needed in order to maintain effective communication with families about their child's literacy learning and development.

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## Appendix A

### Parent Letter

August day, year

Dear Families:

Welcome to a new school year! I am very excited to inform you about a new set of parent workshops that I would like to offer you this year. In the workshops, you will have chances to share ideas and learn more about helping your child at home with reading. The three workshops will include ideas for reading to your child, tips for helping your child read hard words, and an idea to help us (teacher and parent) keep in touch through a journal about your child's learning. Sometime during the month after each workshop, we will meet to have "roundtable discussions." At these meetings, we can talk about how your child is doing with the new ideas for reading at school and at home. Learning to read is not only something that should be done during school hours, but also something that should occur in the home as well. These workshops will give you a chance to share your ideas, learn new ideas, and talk with me and other families.

In order to best meet the needs of your student, I will be calling you within the next few days to set up a time for you and I to meet one-to-one to discuss your child's strengths and needs in reading and any other thoughts, concerns, suggestions, or questions you may have. Also at the meeting, I will be asking you to fill out a form about available days and times to meet and possible locations for the workshops and roundtable discussions.

If you have any questions about these parent workshops, please feel free to call me or e-mail anytime or talk to me about it at the one-to-one meeting. You can contact me through my e-mail address at \_\_\_\_\_ or by calling me at \_\_\_\_\_.  
Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Lisa Jasiewicz



## Appendix B

### Project Schedule

- August:** Send home a parent letter explaining the project. The letter will give families an overview of the workshop and roundtable discussion opportunities that will be offered throughout the school year concerning literacy development. The letter will also explain that a phone call will be made to them within the next few weeks from the classroom teacher and a one-to-one meeting with the teacher will be set-up.
- The families will receive a phone call from the classroom teacher to set up a time to meet one-to-one to discuss their child's literacy development and a day, time, and location that will work best for them to meet for the workshops and roundtable discussions.
- The families will receive a second phone call confirming the days, times, and specific location of the workshop and roundtable gatherings.
- September:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for workshop #1 which will be an introductory workshop to get to know each other better. The families and classroom teacher will also discuss reading aloud to students both at school and in the home.
- October:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for roundtable discussion #1. The two parties will discuss the reading aloud activity and how that has been progressing at home and at school and any comments, questions, or concerns anyone has.
- November:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for workshop #2 which will be about reading strategies students can use when they come to an unknown word.
- December:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for roundtable discussion #2. The two parties will discuss the reading strategies being used at home and at school, how that has been progressing, and any comments, questions, or concerns anyone has.
- January:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for workshop #3 which will be about home-journals that will be kept between the families and classroom teacher throughout the remainder of the year to help with communication between home and school.

- February:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for roundtable discussion #3. The two parties will discuss the home-journals, how that has been progressing, and any comments, questions, or concerns anyone has.
- March:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for roundtable discussion #4. The two parties will discuss reading aloud to students, reading strategies students are using, and the home-journals and how all of those are progressing both at home and at school. The two parties will also share any comments, questions, or concerns anyone has.
- April:** The families and classroom teacher will meet for roundtable discussion #5 which is the last time the two parties will meet for the school year. Again they will discuss reading aloud to students, reading strategies students are using, and the home-journals and how all of those are progressing both at home and at school. The two parties will also share any comments, questions, or concerns anyone has.
- The classroom teacher will offer to continue the home-journals through e-mail throughout the following summer to any family member interested in doing that.
- The classroom teacher will provide refreshments at the end and thank all of the families for participating. The classroom teacher will also remind the families to be looking for an evaluation form in the mail to fill out and send back to the teacher in order to adjust the workshops and roundtable discussions to better meet the needs of families in the future based on their comments.
- The classroom teacher will also inform the families that in a few months, throughout the summer months, he or she will be sending the families a follow-up survey to see how they and their child have been doing with the literacy activities after leaving the workshop and roundtable discussion environment.
- May:** A conclusion letter will be mailed out to the families thanking them for their commitment and hard work throughout the school year and stressing the importance of continuing to help and support their child throughout their entire literacy development
- June and July:** Continue home-journaling with families interested in doing so. Follow-up survey sent out to families.

**Appendix C****Parent Availability Form  
(Filled out by parents at one-to-one meeting)**

\* Monday-Friday must be anytime after school

\* Weekends- Anytime

**Name:**

**Date:**

<b>Days</b>	<b>Time Available and Suggested Location (School, Community Center, Library, etc)</b>
<b>Monday</b>	
<b>Tuesday</b>	
<b>Wednesday</b>	
<b>Thursday</b>	
<b>Friday</b>	
<b>Saturday</b>	
<b>Sunday</b>	

## Appendix D

### Workshop 1- Felt Families

The first workshop will include two activities, felt families (Morrow & Young, 1997) and reading aloud (Trelease, 2001). The classroom teacher will first start the workshop by introducing he or she to the families and explaining what will happen at the workshops and roundtable discussions and the official days and times of the meetings. The classroom teacher will then explain the first activity that will be introduced which is felt families (Morrow & Young, 1997). This activity is an introductory activity in order for the classroom teacher and families to get to know each other better.

#### **Felt Families:**

##### **Description of Activity**

In this activity, the families will recreate stories and memorable moments from their home/family life using felt board materials. The classroom teacher will first model sharing a story from his or her family life using felt characters and settings; these can be historical (Family heritage), from the teacher's childhood, or a story from his or her recent past. The families will then retell familiar, personally experienced stories (who was there, where it took place, what happened first, next, last) using felt boards.

The purpose of this activity is to use the family's memorable life narratives as a way of bridging literacy between home and school environments and to creatively introduce one another to the group and the classroom teacher.

##### **Materials:**

- Flannel (1 large piece per family and many colored smaller pieces)
- Cardboard boxes (The teacher will have these prepared for the families)
- Scissors
- Pencils
- Paper/graphic organizer to organize ideas
- Markers

##### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher will introduce the idea of telling a story based upon our real lives (face versus fiction) and that we can share those stories using felt boards.
2. The teacher will demonstrate this type of story telling to the families using a past family experience.

3. The teacher will ask the families to brainstorm a few story ideas. The families may be given some guiding questions by the teacher to help them think of elicited stories from their past family experiences. The families need to pick a story for this evening's activity.
4. Story ideas should be sketched out first using a graphic organizer (storyboard, story map). Include a rough plot sequence of at least three parts, the setting, characters, and actions. Remind the families that they don't need to cut out all of the characters or settings, just enough to help tell the story.
5. All related family members can work together and divide up the work. The families can be as detailed with their stories as time allows. If time allows, the families can also add specific words to help describe the characters, settings, and actions.
6. When time is up, the families should each pair up with other families to share their narrative. After everyone has shared in small groups, the classroom teacher will ask families to volunteer to share their narratives with the whole group.
7. Encourage the families to use the felt boards at home with their children. The children can add people, settings, and create new stories. Remind them that the idea is that the children are practicing oral storytelling. They might have a notebook where they write the titles of each of the stories they create.

**Appendix E**  
**Graphic Organizer**

**1** Share your ideas for stories



## Appendix F

### Workshop 1- Reading Aloud

After the felt families activity is completed, the classroom teacher will continue with the workshop and introduce the reading strategy topic which is reading aloud (Trelease, 2001).

#### **Reading Aloud:**

##### **Description of Strategy**

Reading aloud to students is a strategy that can be used successfully both at school and in the home and can benefit children at any age or grade level. Reading aloud is a strategy used to help children become motivated to read and build an interest in reading or is also a great way to model fluency, expression, and a positive attitude towards reading. Adults can ask children questions throughout the reading aloud experience in order to elicit interest, understanding, and motivation. This strategy is something used everyday in the schools and at home and is a strategy that could greatly benefit all types of readers.

##### **Materials**

- A variety of books. Books at many different reading levels (Book choice will vary depending on grade level of students)
- Steps to take for a successful read aloud experience
- Example questions to ask during a read aloud experience
- Steps on how to pick an appropriate book for the read aloud experience
- Computer and projector for PowerPoint
- Flash drive saving PowerPoint presentation

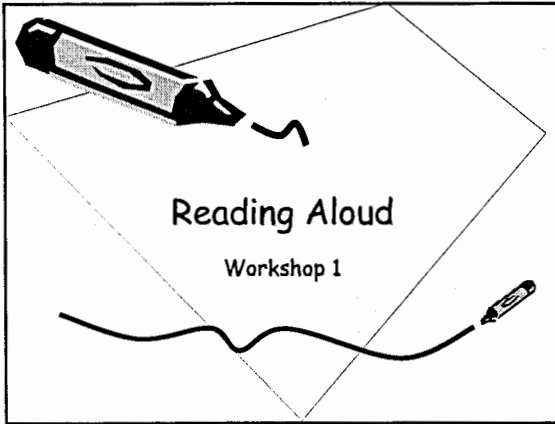
##### **Procedure**

1. The read aloud strategy will first be defined and explained by the classroom teacher using an overhead or projector screen to present materials.
2. The classroom teacher will explain the importance of a read aloud, how it can benefit all students, and that it can be used both in the classroom and in the home (Presented in the PowerPoint that is included Appendix A)



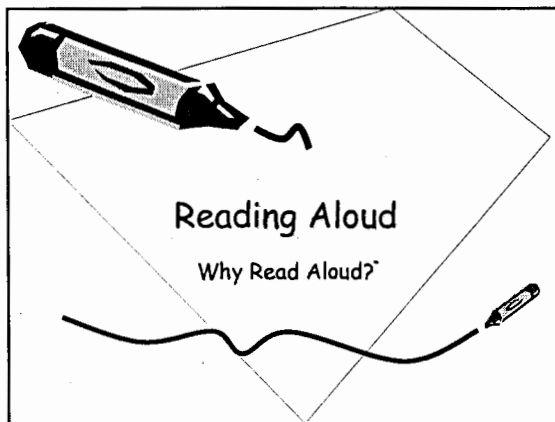

3. The teacher will ask the families if any of them have read aloud to their children at home before. If so, what does a read aloud experience look like in their household? Ideas will be shared throughout the group.
4. The classroom teacher will then explain how to pick out an appropriate book for the read aloud experience explaining that books that are read aloud can be slightly above the child's reading level as long as he or she can comprehend the material unaided or aided by an adult. The teacher will ask the families to share a few book titles they have read aloud to their child or titles they remember being read to as a child. This will help the families get in the right mindset for this activity and will give all families a chance to participate.
5. The classroom teacher will then explain to the families that reading aloud also involves asking the child questions in order to maintain active engagement with the text, motivation, interest, and comprehension. The teacher will ask the families to share example questions that could be asked in a read aloud experience and the teacher will write them in front of the group. The teacher will also add questions he or she thinks are important that are not already on the list (Included in the PowerPoint).
6. The classroom teacher will read a book aloud to the families modeling the way he or she would read aloud to students during a regular school day.
7. Using the books that the classroom teacher brought to the workshop, the families will practice reading aloud to other family members. They will practice reading clearly and modeling good reading and they will also practice asking questions from the list made earlier in the session.
8. Lastly, the classroom teacher will ask the families if they have any other questions about reading aloud to their child at home. The teacher will address the questions as best as he or she can and then challenge each family to try and read aloud to their child on a consistent basis that fits best into their schedules. The families will keep track of the books they read to their child, successes they have from doing the read alouds, challenges they may experience, questions or concerns, and any suggestions or new ideas that they thought of while reading aloud to their child.
9. The classroom teacher will explain that the next meeting will be a roundtable discussion where they will be sharing the experiences they had with reading aloud to their child over the past month. The teacher will ask the families to please bring in a book they read aloud with their child to help explain the successes and struggles with the reading aloud experience.

**Appendix G**  
**Reading Aloud PowerPoint**




### Why Read Aloud?

- Reading aloud to students is a strategy that can be used successfully both at school and in the home and can benefit children at any age or grade level. (Trelease, 2001)




### Why Read Aloud?

- Reading aloud is a strategy used to help children become motivated to read and build an interest in reading.
- Reading aloud is a great way to model fluency, expression, and a positive attitude towards reading. (Trelease, 2001)




### Why Read Aloud?

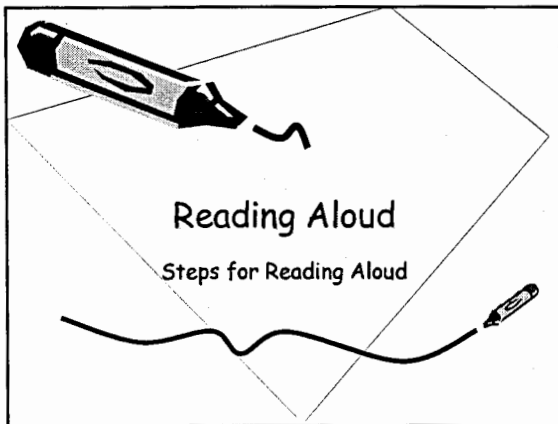
- Adults can ask children questions throughout the reading aloud experience in order to build interest, understanding, and motivation.
- Reading aloud is a successful strategy to help make the literacy connection between school and home. (Trelease, 2001)



### Why Read Aloud?

- Reading aloud is something used everyday in the schools and at home and is a strategy that could greatly benefit all types of readers. (Trelease, 2001)





### Steps for Reading Aloud

- Select books that you enjoy. Your enjoyment of the book will shine through. Also ask students to suggest titles that they would like to hear read aloud. (Trelease, 2001)

### Steps for Reading Aloud

- Be consistent about when and how long you read aloud to your child. Developing a routine for reading aloud will be more beneficial. (Trelease, 2001)

### Steps for Reading Aloud

- Decide how much time you will spend reading aloud before you start. It could be 10 or 15 minutes, or it could be longer. (Trelease, 2001)

### Steps for Reading Aloud

- Shorter books work better than longer ones.
- Follow up with talks and questions about books.
- Read books slightly above students' reading level. (Trelease, 2001)

### Steps for Reading Aloud

- Be imaginative and creative in book selections. You might read picture or joke books on occasion. (Trelease, 2001)

## Steps for Reading Aloud

- Read aloud the same book more than once to your child. This will make it more fun for students and they will learn something new each time they read the book.

## Steps for Reading Aloud

- Prepare your reading in advance. Note difficult vocabulary that might have to be discussed. Also note stopping points in which you can ask questions or make comments about the story. (Trelease, 2001)

## Reading Aloud

### Choosing a Book

## Choosing a Book

- The book should match the child's interest in order to help motivate them as a reader.
- A variety of books should be used. Don't use the same book for each read aloud presented. It is okay though to use a book more than once. (Trelease, 2001)

## Choosing a Book

- The book should be an appropriate length for the age of the child. Remember, the read aloud is roughly 10-15 minutes in length. (Trelease, 2001)

## Choosing a Book

- The book choice should be one you as an adult are interested in too because your enjoyment for reading is a good model for the child. (Trelease, 2001)

## Choosing a Book

- The book choice should be slightly above the child's level in reading because most of the time children are able to comprehend at a higher level when they are listening than when they are reading. (Trelease, 2001)

## Choosing a Book

- For younger students, the book choice should include pictures to help the students comprehend more of the story. (Trelease, 2001)

## Reading Aloud

Questioning

## Questioning

- Ask students questions that will help them predict what will happen in the story. This assists students in their comprehension of the story.

## Questioning

- Some example questions may be:
  - What do you think will happen next?
  - Who do you think it was?
  - Do you think that will happen again?

## Questioning

- Ask students questions about different parts of the story.

## Questioning

- Some example questions may be:
  - Who was the main character?
  - Was there more than one main character?
  - Where did the story take place?
  - What was the problem in the story?
  - What was the resolution to that problem?



## Questioning

- Ask students questions about their enjoyment of the story.



## Questioning

- Some example questions may be:
  - Did you enjoy this story? Why or why not?
  - What was your favorite part? Why? Can you find the page with your favorite part?
  - Who were your favorite characters? Why?



## **Appendix H**

### **Roundtable Discussion 1- Reading Aloud**

#### **Reflection**

1. What was something new you tried this month while reading aloud to your child and found to be beneficial?
2. What types of books or literature did you use with your student while reading aloud?
3. What types of questions did you use before, throughout, and at the end of the reading to check for your child's understanding?
4. What questions do you still have about reading aloud to your child?
5. What are some new ideas, thoughts, and suggestions you have to share with the group about reading aloud?



## **Appendix I**

### **Workshop 2- Reading Strategies**

During this workshop, the families will learn about reading strategies (Kinnucan-Walsh, Magill & Dean, M., 1999) to use and practice with their child.

#### **Reading Strategies for Solving Unknown Words**

##### **Description of Strategy**

Reading strategies are tips students can learn and use on their own in reading when they come to a word they don't know. These are strategies children should be practicing daily in order to know what to do when they come to a word they are unsure while reading. There are five strategies in particular that will be presented at this workshop by the classroom teacher, but other strategies will be suggested by families and also discussed and practiced.

##### **Materials**

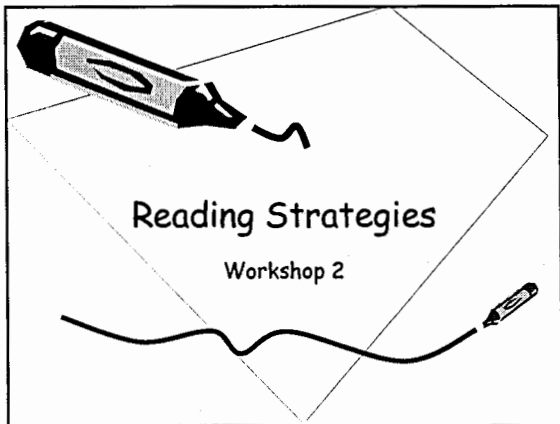
- Five examples for possible reading strategies to use with students and how they are used
- Computer and projector for PowerPoint
- Flash drive saving PowerPoint presentation
- Variety of books to use for practicing using strategies

##### **Procedure**

1. The classroom teacher will first explain why it is importance for students to practice and use reading strategies on a daily basis (Presented on PowerPoint that is included in Appendix B).
2. The classroom teacher will explain five reading strategies that are often used in schools with students (Presented on PowerPoint that is included in Appendix B). He or she will explain each strategy and how the child would use it when coming to an unknown word.
3. The teacher will ask the families to share any of their experiences with these five reading strategies.
4. The teacher will ask the families to share any of their experiences with other reading strategies besides the five shared at this workshop.
5. The classroom teacher and families will continue to discuss the strategies and how to use them with their children.
6. Then, the families will take the children's books provided and practice teaching and using the strategies with other family members at the workshop.

7. Lastly, the classroom teacher will ask the families if they have any other questions about reading strategies to use with their child at home. The teacher will address the questions as best as he or she can and then will explain that over the next month, each family will practice using these reading strategies with their child.
8. The families will keep track of the successes they have from using the reading strategies, struggles they may experience, questions or concerns, and any suggestions or new ideas that they thought of while using the reading strategies with their child.

**Appendix J**  
**Reading Strategy PowerPoint**



## Reading Strategies

- Reading strategies are tips students can learn and use on their own in reading when they come to a word they don't know. (Kinnaman-Walsh, K., Magill, D., & Dean, M., 1999)

## Reading Strategies

- These are strategies children should be practicing daily in order to know what to do when they come to a word they are unsure while reading. (Kinnaman-Walsh, K., Magill, D., & Dean, M., 1999)

## Reading Strategies

- There are five strategies in particular that will be presented at this workshop:
  - Think about the story
  - Check the picture
  - Go back and reread, and get your mouth ready to make the first sound in the word.
  - Look for "chunks"
  - Ask yourself, "Does that make sense? Would we say it that way?" (Kinnaman-Walsh, K., Magill, D., & Dean, M., 1999)

## Reading Strategies

- Does your child already use some of these strategies when reading aloud or independently?
- What other strategies does your child use?
- What other strategies do you use with your child at home?



## Appendix L

### Workshop 3- School-Home Journals

During this workshop, the families will learn about school-home journals (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hotue, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000).

#### School-Home Journals

##### Description of Strategy

School-home journaling (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hotue, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000) is an activity to use that helps increase communication between home and school concerning literacy. School-home journals are a way for families and the classroom teacher to communicate back and forth about the students' progress in literacy. These journals are a great way to communicate what is happening in the home and what is happening in school to best meet the individual needs of each student in their literacy development.

##### Materials

- Explanation of school-home journals
- Example school-home journal entry
- Journal for each family
- Writing utensils
- Computer and projector for PowerPoint
- Flash drive saving the PowerPoint Presentation

##### Procedure

1. The classroom teacher will explain school-home journals (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hotue, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000), what they are used for, and why they are important for the student's literacy development (This will be included in the PowerPoint that can be found in Appendix C).
2. The classroom teacher will then present an example school-home journal to the families for better understanding and explain the procedure for sending the journal back and forth between the classroom teacher and the families (This will be included in the PowerPoint that can be found in Appendix C).
3. The classroom teacher will answer any questions the families may have about how to use the school-home journals or the advantage of using them.
4. The families will write their first journal entry to the classroom teacher about how they think their child is doing in their literacy development, what types of literacy

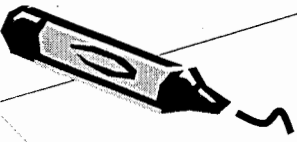
experiences the child has at home, concerns the family has, questions the family has, or suggestions and ideas they have for helping their child for success literacy learning.

5. The families will turn in their journals to the classroom teacher who will respond to the entries within a week and return them back the following week.
6. The classroom teacher will explain that the next meeting will be the third roundtable discussion where they will be sharing the experiences they had with using the school-home journals over the past month.

**Appendix M**



**School-Home Journals PowerPoint**







## Home-School Journals

### Workshop 3





## Home-School Journals

- School-home journals are an activity to use to help increase communication between home and school concerning student's literacy. (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hertz, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)





## Home-School Journals

- School-home journals are a way for families and the classroom teacher to communicate back and forth about the students' progress in literacy. (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hertz, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)





## Home-School Journals

- School-home journals are a great way to communicate what is happening in the home and what is happening in school to best meet the individual needs of each student in their literacy development. (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hertz, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)




## Home-School Journals

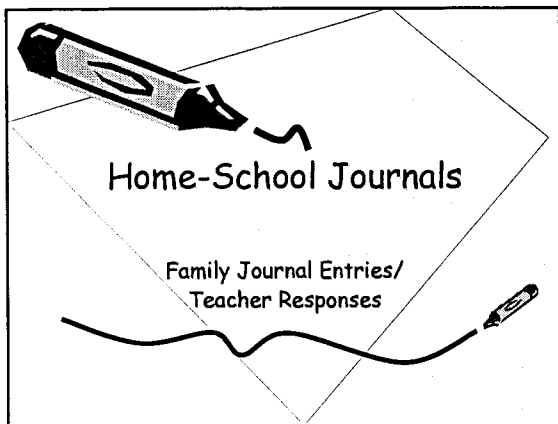
- School-home journals consist of a journal or notebook that is passed back and forth between the classroom teacher and families. Each party will keep the journal and write it in for one week and then send it back to the other party who will keep it for a week and continue the process for the remainder of the school year. (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hertz, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)



## Home-School Journals


- The journal is used by each party to write down literacy strengths and needs of the student, breakthroughs the student may have had, concerns about the student's literacy development, or suggestions or new ideas to help the student's literacy learning. (Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hertz, 2003; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000)






### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Family Entry:
- Monday, Date
- Alex really enjoyed reading a picture book about dogs. He laughed and asked a lot of questions about the book.




### Home-School Journals (Example)

- *Teacher's Response: That is very good to know that he enjoys books about dogs. I will try to implement that more into my instruction.*




### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Tuesday, Date
- Alex refused to read aloud to me. He must have had a long day. Did anything happen at school that would have affected his attitude towards reading?




### Home-School Journal (Example)

- *Teacher's Response: Alex seemed frustrated this day to me too. He wasn't as motivated as he usually is. He also did not raise his hand a lot during whole group discussions. Maybe he just wasn't interested in the book we read.*



### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Thursday, Date
- Alex brought home a book from the library that he wanted me to read every night before he went to bed. He told me that you helped him pick out the book, good choice!



### Home-School Journal (Example)

- *Teacher's Response: I enjoyed helping him pick out the book. I never knew he liked dogs before. Exposing him to new books will help him decide what his real interests are.*

### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Alex related a lot of information from the library book to his own life. After each page I read to him, he told a story about how our family did that too. He really enjoyed the book.

### Home-School Journal

Teacher Journal Entries/  
Parent Responses

### Home-School Journal (Example)

- **Teacher Entry:**
- **Monday, Date**
- I really enjoyed working with Alex today in guided reading. He was eager to answer a lot of the questions and liked learning about communities.

### Home-School Journals (Example)

- He used a new strategy today during guided reading. When he did not know how to read a word, he read the rest of the sentence, and then went back to reread the unknown word and he got it right!!!

### Home-School Journal (Example)

- *Family Response: I have seen him use this strategy at home too! Sometimes I would remind him of this strategy and I think he finally is using it on his own!*

### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Wednesday, Date
- Alex read very well with his partner today. He and his partner talked a lot about the pictures. They were reading an insect book that had a lot of great pictures and information bubbles included.



### Home-School Journal (Example)

- *Family Response: I read aloud a lot of picture books to Alex and always comments on the pictures no matter what book we are reading. I think he understands a lot of the story just by looking at the pictures.*



### Home-School Journal (Example)

- Friday, Date
- During centers today, I saw Alex help one of his classmates read an unknown word.



## Appendix N

### Roundtable 3: Home-School Journals

#### Reflection

1. What do you think the benefits are to school-home journaling?
2. What do you think the barriers are to school-home journaling?
3. What adjustments do you think should be made to the school-home journals?
4. What questions or concerns do you have about the school-home journals?
5. Would you be interested in continuing the home-school journals throughout the summer months?

## **Appendix O**

### **Roundtable Discussion 4- Reading Aloud, Reading Strategies, and School-Home Journals**

#### **Reflection**

1. How is your child responding to the reading aloud and reading strategy literacy activities?
2. What new ideas, suggestions, or comments do you have about any of these literacy activities?
3. What new questions do you have about any of these literacy activities you have been doing over the past month?

## Appendix P

### Roundtable Discussion 5- Reading Aloud, Reading Strategies, and School-Home Journals

#### Reflection

1. How is your child responding to the reading aloud and reading strategy literacy activities?
2. What new ideas, suggestions, or comments do you have about any of these literacy activities?
3. What new questions do you have about any of these literacy activities you have been doing over the past month?
4. Would you be interested in continuing the home-school journals throughout the summer months? If so, please also include your e-mail address on this form.







**Appendix S**  
**Final Parent Letter**

April day, year

Dear Families:

I wanted to thank you all for being a part of the workshop experiences this school year. I hope you all learned more about your child's reading strengths and needs and were better able to make connections between what happens in the home and what happens in the school and how both are very important to the student's learning. Thank you for all of your hard work this school year!

I had a great year working with all of you and wanted to make sure you had my contact information in case you had any questions about your child's literacy learning or you change your mind about continuing to communicate with me through the school-home journaling activity. You can contact me through my e-mail address at \_\_\_\_\_ or by calling me at \_\_\_\_\_.

Thanks again and have a great summer!

Sincerely,

Lisa Jasiewicz