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# Outside of School Activities that May Foster Emergent Literacy Abilities of First Graders

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**Outside of School Activities that May Foster Emergent Literacy Abilities  
of First Graders**

by

Kristen K. Maxwell

August 2011


A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of  
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Outside of School Activities that May Foster Emergent Literacy Abilities  
of First Graders

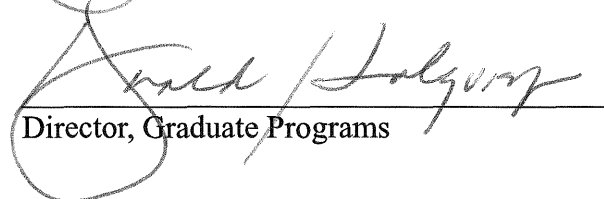
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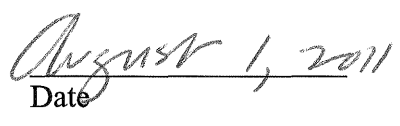
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## Chapter One: Introduction

"Teach the parent, reach the child."~Carolyn Brink (1993)

Literacy development is a complex process that is shaped by multiple factors, some of which are controlled by people close to the child, some of which are not (Tompkins, 2010). My first grade students came from families who incorporated literacy activities into their daily lives. For example, many of my students' families shared stories with their children before bedtime while others discussed the school day through listening and speaking at dinnertime. Both activities incorporated literacy. Most families included literacy activities in their lives in some way, which then influenced how each student came to understand what literacy means and how it looks. Literacy activities can be any activity that involves reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and visually representing materials.

In my school, there was a big emphasis placed on a well-balanced literacy program. In order to prepare my students for that, my colleagues and I followed the balanced literacy program, which contained opportunities for read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing and independent writing. The balanced literacy program was carried out through the curriculum based on students' needs. My grade level colleagues and I believed that it was important to instill those skills in our first grade students because literacy skills would be an important part of their future when filling out job applications, attending interviews, communicating with colleagues and meeting the



demands of the work place (Ryan, 2000).

In addition, my school created a new program based on the results of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA 2) and the Assessment and Data Management for RTI (Reading AIMS Web) scores. The new program divided all sixty first grade students into one of three differentiated groups. One group consisted of students who performed above grade level on the assessments, another group for those students who performed at grade level, and the last group was for those students who performed below grade level. The teacher who had the low achieving students worked collaboratively with several reading teachers to create an intensive reading program for the students. I had the opportunity to teach those readers who achieved above level based on the results of the DRA 2 and AIMSweb data. As my first grade students continue on to higher grades, they may undergo the Soar to Success intervention or the Quick Reads intervention. Soar to Success is a reading intervention program established by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2001). The Quick Reads intervention is a reading intervention established by Pearson (2006) that focuses on reading fluency, automaticity and comprehension.

My first graders had a range of abilities, strengths and weaknesses due to the literacy activities that they participated in both in and out of school. Some of my students were active members of theater works, players on soccer teams, members of a church choir, and listeners of music. Others spent most of their time viewing television shows or Internet websites. The activities that students participated in when they were away from school seemed to link strongly to one of the many areas of

literacy. For example, one of my students who actively listened and danced to music at home seemed to participate stronger in the activities that involve rhythm at school.

The outcome of a student's learning prior to the start of school is oftentimes put into the hands of parents who are the first teachers in children's lives. The parents' or caregivers' abilities with attitudes toward literacy are a crucial influence (Bergin, 2001). In my opinion, their abilities and attitudes may either encourage or discourage how their child comes to understand what it means to read, write, speak, listen, view, or visually represent.

The following conversation took place between two students regarding their different perceptions of what counts as literacy:

- Norm: I will read page 1, you can read page 2.  
John: OK. (Both students are holding the *Scholastic News* article entitled "What Is the Magic Word?")  
Norm: (starts reading) It's please! How el-else can we be polite in school?  
John: (starts to read the next page, instead of reading the words on the page, John notices images on the page) Hey look! That bus is a Chevy! I love Chevy trucks.  
Norm: Stop goofing around. We are supposed to be reading.  
John: I am reading! Don't you see that Chevy sign? (Points to the Chevy logo on the front of the bus)  
Norm: It's not a Chevy sign! The word says "bus driver." You aren't reading. I'm telling.

Clearly, these two first grade students had different perceptions of literacy. While John only thought that reading constituted reading the words on the page, Norm realized that reading also meant looking at the environmental print in photographs.

Parental involvement in out-of-school literacy activities is a critical learning

opportunity that often leads to literacy success, especially at the early stages in life (Bergin, 2001). Involvement with reading activities at home has positive influences in reading achievement, language comprehension, expressive language skills, while giving children an authentic interest in reading (Rowe, 1991). Being involved in literacy activities outside of school is one of the most important learning opportunities of emerging readers and has been directly associated to an improved later oral language development as well as reading abilities in the primary school years (Price, Van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2009).

My nineteen students came from a variety of family structures, some had parents who were still married, others had single parent families, or some currently lived with people outside of their family. While each student came from a different background, it was very likely that he/she was involved in some type of literacy activity. For example, students may have participated in making grocery lists, coloring pictures, going to a cub scout meeting, viewing signs around the neighbor, and listening to a parent give directions. Many middle class families, like several of those in my classroom, may have read the newspaper, wrote messages using magnetic letters on the fridge, searched for information on the Internet, paid bills or completed crosswords puzzles (Tompkins, 2010). Because each family was different, there were many different kinds of activities, uses of language, values, work, social interactions, and social organization that each family used to develop knowledge in its own way (Owocki, 2002).

During the first two weeks of the school year, I observed the students learning

more about where they fell along the literacy development continuum. Some students entered first grade understanding that print had meaning and that people read for many purposes. Others were still emerging in terms of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and visually representing abilities and abilities. These students may have had very little contact with print or had not conversed about environmental print in the area that they lived. Also, these students may have never visited a library or were read a book. Because culture and learning are so closely linked, some children that enter our school are at risk for failing because they were not yet familiar with literacy activities that teachers use and value (Tompkins, 2010). It is important that I as the teacher looked into the lives of my students when they were not in school so I could better support their literacy development.

### **Definition of Outside of School Literacy**

Outside of school literacy refers to the literacy experiences that students participate in with the help of another individual such as, a parent, sibling, neighbor, coach, etc. when they are away from the classroom. Literacy activities can be any activity that involves reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and visually representing materials. Examples include reading books with parents, talking with a peer or adult, creating a list, drawing a picture, listening to music, and watching television (Owocki, 2002).

## **Problem Statement**

Often teachers assume that parents know how to support their child's literacy learning; however, as Tompkins (2010) highlights,

Not all parents understand the crucial role they play in their children's literacy development and academic success. It's up to the teachers to establish collaborative relationships with parents so that they can work together and meet children's needs more effectively. (p. 30)

This is why it is so important to introduce young children to literacy activities such as reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and visually representing as early as possible. Kuo, Todd, Regalado, and Halfon (2004) asserted that many educational researchers have found that literacy development and a family's literacy routine contribute significantly to a child's ability to read and write.

However, as Bergin (2001) pointed out, we cannot assume that "more is better" (p. 682) when it comes to participating in literacy at home. The quality is much more important. She found that the type of literacy activity the adult engaged in with the child not the amount of time spent reading to the child, predicted reading achievement of five year olds. In her study, Bergin videotaped parents reading to their four and five year old children and recorded the types of interactions that took place during book reading. She noted the positive effect, support, affection, praise, criticisms, hostility, and physical proximity between the participants. Bergin's results indicated that parents who were more affectionate during book sharing had children who were less frustrated in reading and who had positive attitude in literacy.

I would argue that more research is needed to indicate what constitutes "successful" outside of school literacy activities in early years. Thus I was curious to

see what types of literacy activities my students participated in outside of school.

### **Significance of Problem**

I felt strongly that it was important for parents to learn ways to help their children experience a range of literacy activities and interactions prior to entering school. Children who enter school without knowing how to spell their name, or recognize letters of the alphabet are already behind (Senechal, 2002). Most students begin school knowing their colors, alphabet and some print awareness.

During the first three years of schooling, children develop quickly in their cognitive learning in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing understandings and abilities. The more a student practices literacy at home, the faster they will move across the curriculum in these areas.

I have witnessed how today's education system has become more demanding with more content expected of children before they enter kindergarten. Schools expect that students start school with background knowledge that will help lead them through literacy. For example, students who come from families that participate in many events, like going on a trip or going camping will have more background knowledge than students who stay home often. Students who have participated in a lot of experiences are able to make connections when viewing, listening, speaking, writing, reading, and visually representing literature. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, (ed.gov, 2004) students are expected to master more in all areas of education. For example, instead of students learning to read in first grade, today's

kindergarten teachers are teaching their children the skills and strategies to read, write, listen, speak, view and visually represent. The NCLB law is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (2003).

By January, the kindergarten students in our school are expected to start orally reading through the use of picture books. If some students begin school not yet knowing the letters of the alphabet, they will spend the majority of the beginning of the school year practicing those skills so they can be on level with their kindergarten peers. Often there is not enough time to help the students reach a level of proficiency before January.

In today's schools, administrators and teachers are required to offer Academic Intervention Strategies (AIS) reading classes for those students who struggle with reading and as a result need a strong base program that is backed up by research (Klein, 2010). Joel Klein (2010), Chancellor of New York City Department of Education, explained that AIS classes support students developing and practicing strategies that enable them to connect what they know with what they are reading, make predictions about what they will learn from the reading, ask questions about what they do not understand, identify important ideas from the text, summarize those ideas and use strategies when encountering text they don't understand.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study, then, was to find out what kind of literacy activities

my first grade students participated in before and after school. In addition, I examined the different approaches the parents of my students took when interacting in literacy activities with their children outside of school. I used the following research questions to guide my study:

1. What types of outside of school activities foster emergent literacy abilities in first grade children?
2. Which gender typically participates more frequently in out of school literacy activities with young children?
3. What different types of literacy activities do first grade boys and girls typically participate in outside of school?

Clark (2007) indicated that parental involvement at home leads to a child's higher achievement, greater cognitive competence, and greater problem solving skills, more school enjoyment and a better school attendance. She also found that early parental involvement in a child's reading was an important determinant of emergent literacy and language.

Through a previous pilot study, I found that the majority of my first grade rural students participated with a female figure (e.g., their mothers) during literacy activities. I was curious to find out if the same was true for my first grade students who live in an urban setting.

It is critical that parents participate in a variety of literacy activities with their children as early as possible regardless of their setting (Clark, 2007) because early access to print and literature is said to accelerate learning in young children (Owocki, 2002). As Makin (2006) explained, "literacy involvement in families is strongly



linked with successful school literacy and thus with identity, belonging and participation in literate societies.” (p. 268)

Through this research study, I examined the types of outside of school literacy activities my first grade students experienced. To do this, I asked parents to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) in which I asked for information regarding literacy practiced at home. I assessed my students through teacher-led interviews (see Appendix B) and through observations of their abilities to converse over the different types of literacies that were being shared in class. In addition, I asked parents to keep a weekly log (see Appendix C), in which they wrote the literacy activities that are being done at home while students are out of school.

### **Rationale**

As a student who was completing her master’s degree in childhood literacy, I had great interest in helping my first grade students achieve their highest potential in all aspects of literacy: reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking and visually representing. One goal of mine was to find out what literacy activities students were engaged in at home and how the activities did or did not influence the students’ literacy abilities. Another goal was to build on those outside of school literacy activities in school.

It was interesting for me to find out which areas of literacy my students were using outside of school. I recognized that most parents know that children should be read to at home, but I believed that it is important that parents understand that there

are so many other activities that may enhance their child's development and that can instill a love for literacy. Therefore, this study served as an informative piece for both parents and teachers.

My data collection involved the use of parent and student questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B), parent log books (see Appendix C), and pre post surveys (see Appendix D). I used these methods to collect data because they are the most authentic way of gathering evidence. For example, the parent log book was the only way that I could capture what literacy activities were being conducted outside of school. I recognized that parents had a good understanding after our conversations at Open House about the six different areas of literacies, and could document the different types of activities they witnessed their child participating in on the log. First grade students would have a difficult time explaining or recording the different literacy activities that they partook in, so having their parent record the information in the log seemed most logical and practical.

Also, the data from the survey was beneficial in that it helped answer some of my research questions that were not answered through the parent log. The survey was time efficient and did not require the parents a lot of time to complete. It contained straight forward questions about literacy outside of school. The survey also enabled parents to provide information that they thought would be useful for this research project.

Lastly, interviewing students during our guided reading block allowed me to record my students' understanding of the six areas of literacy. I also observed how

each student discussed his or her literacy activities from the parent log during our class sharing time. I recorded what the student said and how he or she viewed the activities.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I discuss current research in the field of the six areas of literacy and how each area impacts students, teachers and teaching and learning. The specific sections of this chapter are: 1) literacy practices over time, 2) the six areas of literacy, including: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing and 3) Effective literacy instruction in a first grade classroom. I present literature that provides evidence of the importance of outside of school literacy activities in first grade students.

### **Literacy Practices over Time**

Literacy practices have changed dramatically throughout the past few decades (Wooten, 2009). When America was still young, school children used the New England primer and scriptures, which were considered pieces of moralistic reading during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During this time children spelled and then sounded out their way through book reading (Wooten, 2009). Over one hundred years ago, Edmund Huey (1908) suggested that literature be part of the central role of learning to read. This idea carried across into the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Teachers studied texts that provided them with strategies of how to make children literate and not around the idea of the types of literature that should surround them in their classrooms.

It was not until mid-century that children's book publishing started to market

picture books. At the same time libraries stocked bookshelves of limited books by Margaret Wise Brown and Dr. Seuss. Baby boomers most likely read Little Golden Books or comic books at home (Lester, 2007). Sadly, the public school libraries had even fewer books than the public library; there was clearly no threat of literature assuming a place of prominence in society (Wooten, 2009).

In the 1960s many citizens expressed a distrust of authority and demanded that the education system be changed (Tompkins, 2010). This was during the time period when schools were following a behaviorist approach, which was a teacher-centered theory (Tompkins, 2010) According to Wooten (2009), human survival during this period depended on teachers offering students the strategies of relativity, probability, uncertainty and incongruity. The future seemed uncertain during the 1960s and America wanted citizens who were active inquirers that were curious, tolerant and adaptive.

According to Wooten, “The proliferation of children’s trade books published in the late 1970s and 1980s occurred alongside theories and practice providing evidence for sharing the best and most natural of language in classrooms” ( p. 78). Finally, literature began to claim classroom shelves and curricular time. Teachers during these decades also started to talk and write about their literature-based programs. At the same time, policymakers started to note a decline in reading test scores. The converging forces of falling standardized scores with the proximity of reading “real books” in classrooms created dissatisfaction in schools. Talk of a more direct instruction and more systematic approach began.

Classrooms are different today; they have become communities of learners where students assume more responsibility for their learning (Tompkins, 2010). With the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, prescriptive teaching manuals were created as well as the installation of practices that focus on how, when, and what words students should be able to read. Along with this, a big focus is placed on skills and strategies students lacked in literacy. Teachers today are faced with mandated scripts, prescriptive reading material, and a strict pacing schedule for literacy instruction. Schools who “are failing” are oftentimes associated with having a “one size fits all” solution to teach students. Today there is more pressure than ever to relinquish the time for quality literacy opportunities in the classrooms (Wooten, 2009).

### **Evolution of Before and After School Care**

Years ago, back in the mid-1900s, many parents, mostly mothers, were stay at home mothers who raised and taught their children during the years before school. Today, the number of households in which both parents work has drastically increased. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of families who have both working parents today is 88 percent ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)). Rhyner’s (2007) study of examining the language of childcare center caregivers during book sharing with young children mentioned that this change has left nobody at home to take care of children during the early primary years. One generation is all it took for this change to take place.

Gramling (2009) noted that in 1974, only 7 percent of children in the United

States received care outside of the home. By 1995, that number increased dramatically to 61 percent. Consequently, parents have sent their children off to childcare services, which then turned the role of teaching to the adult who was working with the child during the day.

According to Rhyner (2007), center-based caregivers have assumed much more responsibility for fostering children's language development. Rhyner examined the language childcare center caregivers used during book sharing with children and described the caregivers' use of linguistic structures (declarative, imperative, and compound/complex sentences; wh-, yes/no, and choice questions) that have been suggested to positively or negatively affect early language acquisition. Four female caregivers and twelve children from a childcare center were participants in this investigation. Rhyner gave each caregiver a questionnaire to fill out at the beginning of the study that was related to the use of language facilitation strategies and the incorporation of books reading within the classroom. The caregivers had not received training on the use of language facilitation strategies.

During the investigation, each caregiver engaged in book sharing with each of the three assigned children while Rhyner videotaped their interactions for later analysis. The texts were age appropriate for the toddler children. Results from Rhyner's (2007) study revealed both similarities and differences in the caregivers' use of the structures. For example, the findings indicated that all the caregivers in the study used linguistic structures that positively and/or negatively affected the children's language acquisition. During the observations, Rhyner noted that each

caregiver demonstrated a different communicative style during book sharing with the participating children.

Through the analysis of multiple pieces of research, the early parental book sharing has been shown to positively affect the reading abilities of children when they enter school (Bergin, 2001; Senechal, Pagan, & Lever, 2008; Kim & Anderson, 2008). Even though there have been a variety of studies already conducted related to this topic, it is still necessary for further studies to help inform both parents and educators. Parents and educators need to find out what literacy activities first grade students and their families are participating outside of school, so the school community can become informed of what constitutes as literacy in regards to reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing. This is important because parents need to be informed of different activities that they can partake in with their children so that they can provide as many opportunities for their children to grow in literacy.

### **Effective Literacy Practices in a First Grade Classroom**

The goal of literacy instruction is to ensure that all students achieve their highest potential (Tompkins, 2010). Effective first grade classrooms follow a balanced literacy program that balances explicit teaching with authentic reading and writing through guided practice, collaborative learning, an independent reading and writing. Tompkins (2010) believes that “what matters most is that teachers know their students well so they can adapt the components in their instructional program to



ensure that all students succeed” (p. 19).

Writing should be a daily exercise in first grade that includes journal writing and responses to stories. There are five major writing pieces, which all relate to the writing process. First, a personal narrative is a true story that happens to the writer. A story contains a beginning, middle and end. In a friendly letter, students are taught to tell a friend about what they are doing by completing the date, greeting, body and closing of the letter. A descriptive writing piece enables students to use their five senses to create a writing piece. The last writing piece is the research report. This type of writing tells facts about a topic in a writer’s own words (Culham, 2003).

These writing pieces take place throughout the day during a time called Writer’s Workshop. According to Calkins (1986), Writer’s Workshop incorporates an interdisciplinary writing technique. Students during this time can build their fluency in writing by repeating exposure to the process of writing. At the kindergarten level Writer’s Workshop can be introduced and can continue all the way through high school (Calkins, 1986).

To be successful in school and in life, first grade students must develop strong background knowledge and literacy skills in the content areas (Wooten, 2009). Integrating subject matter in a primary classroom is essential. It is vital to integrate subject matter at an early age in order to prepare students for when they reach middle school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are more than eight million students in grades four through twelve who cannot master the grade content material (Wooten, 2009). One way to assure that this does not happen, is to

implement literacy practices as part of teaching to ensure that all first grade students can develop the skills they need to meet challenging content area standards. During a guided reading lesson a teacher could use a first grade social studies topic like Veteran's Day to teach students strategies to use when reading. When a teacher teaches literacy and content together, the teacher expands student's chances to learn both (Wooten, 2009).

### **The Six Areas of Literacy**

Many researchers have attributed literacy to much more than reading and writing (Tompkins, 2010; Wooten, 2009). For example, Cooper (2004) views literacy as reading, writing, thinking, listening, viewing and discussing. None of these components are viewed as separate entities, but rather as actions that work simultaneously and interactively (Cooper, 2004). Students learn these abilities through authentic explorations and experiences inside and outside of school.

#### **Reading**

To be literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means more than just being able to read (Wooten, 2009). In order to live productively, citizens must be able to read not only newspapers and books, but emails, recipes, directions, text messages via cell phones and blogs (Owocki & Goodman, 2002).

Typically, parents will expose their children to the literacy practices valued by their community during the early years of life. It is usually the parent who influences the amount and types of literacy knowledge the child will experience and then bring to school upon entry. However, other key persons, such as coaches, instrument

teachers, choir directors, siblings, and neighbors can also influence a child's reading development (Akkok, 1999).

One of the most common literacy activities that a parent and a child participate in is called book sharing. There has been much research done on the interactions that take place during book sharing between a child and a parent. Kuo, Todd, Regalado, and Halfon (2004), for example, investigated the predictors and frequency of book sharing activities in a nationally representative sample of families with young children. In addition, they examined the extent to which parents reported that pediatric health care providers were addressing early literacy activities. Researchers analyzed data from a 2000 telephone survey of 2068 parents of children aged four to 35 months. The structured telephone interview lasted thirty minutes and addressed questions related to the content and quality of early childhood health care. Parents were also asked questions related to the frequency of reading with their child and whether their pediatric provider discussed reading with them in the last year. The response options for the study were "never," "1-2 days," "3-4 days," or "every day."

Results indicated that 52 percent of children in the study were reported to have been read to every day by a parent. Many of the predictors were contingent upon the level of education received by the mother, number of children's books at home, and discussion of reading by the pediatric provider. The toddlers were more likely to be read to every day compared to infants. In addition, more white children are read to every day compared with black children and Hispanic children. Also, results showed that 37 percent of parents admitted to not discussing reading with their child's

pediatric provider. The researchers found that parents read to their young children less frequently than is optimal.

Bergin (2001) addressed the association between parental shared reading and later reading ability. Specifically, she assessed the affective quality of parent-child interaction during joint reading and the reading fluency and attitude of kindergarten and first-grade children. Additionally, she measured children's attitudes toward reading in terms of their level of engagement and frustration. Participants in this study consisted of 32 kindergarten/ first grade children at an elementary school in a white, working class neighborhood in Arizona. The students were assessed at different ages throughout the course of the school year. As each child reached the ability to begin to read books independently, Bergin invited a parent to come into the school to read with the child in a simulated home setting. The parent who came in during the first simulation would be the same adult who would continue the investigation throughout the year. The interactions took 30 to 40 minutes and were observed by Bergin for later analysis. Many variables were noted during each interaction. For example, affection, warmth, responsiveness, flexibility, sensitivity, emotional spontaneity, supportiveness, praise, and criticism were taken into account during the shared reading interaction.

Results of Bergin's (2001) study suggest that the affective quality of parent-child interaction during joint storybook reading is related to reading fluency and attitude toward beginning reading. Children who were read to early at home tend to be more affectionate, emotional, and supportive. Past research has emphasized the

frequency, rather than quality; of parent-child reading with beginning readers Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995), demonstrated that the amount of time parents read to their children is directly related to language growth, emergent literacy, and overall school achievement.

### **Writing**

Today it is more important than ever for students to learn to write clearly, critically, and concisely (Wooten, 2009). Writing is a complex process of producing text (Tompkins, 2010). One way to support this learning while addressing the mechanics of literacy is through writing and sharing connections. Writing and sharing connections serves as a framework for listening, reading, writing, sharing and reflecting about literature in the classroom (Wooten, 2009). In a classroom, students can write in many ways. Children can write reflectively, jot down notes on sticky pads of paper, or write lists of books they have read at school. Giving students a choice of what they can write about is a great motivator for literacy experiences. Students can only write about what they comprehend and know (Wooten, 2009).

### **Listening**

Oftentimes, frequent book sharing between a parent and a child results in higher reading abilities among children when they reach school. For example, Lever, Pagan, and Senechal (2008) assessed whether the frequency of shared book reading affected skills in reading, such as comprehension of morphologically complex words

and syntactically complex sentences. The participants in the study were 106 four-year-old kindergartners (and their parents) who attended school in Canada. The samples included 49 boys and 57 girls who all spoke English as their primary language. Each participating parent was given a multitude of questionnaires and forms to fill out in order for Lever, Pagan and Senechal to get a better understanding of each child's shared reading experience and the child's storybook exposure. Testing was conducted over two testing sessions that were less than one week apart, each lasting about 30 minutes. Checklists on the parent print exposure were also given to measure their own exposure to adult literature. Other forms of assessment were given to measure each child's reading experiences. The Expressive Vocabulary Test, Test for Auditory Comprehension of Language and other standardized assessments were used to find the child understanding of expressive vocabulary, morphological comprehension, syntax comprehension, book narratives, personal narratives and nonverbal intelligence.

Results indicated that the average parent reported reading to her child five times a week and made occasional visits to the library with her child. The performance of the participating children on the standardized measures was slightly higher than most mean scores. In addition, shared reading was related to the children's expressive vocabulary and comprehension of complex words and sentences. This finding agrees with earlier findings of Hayes and Ahrens (1988) who reported those children's books include 50 percent more interesting words than what is heard on television or in conversations held by college students.

## **Speaking**

One of the most common features of highly effective classrooms is student talk (Wooten, 2009). This has been a theory that has been around since Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that learning through social interaction was beneficial to students. Parents play a huge part in guiding cognitive and linguistic development of a young child (Britto et al, 2006; Akkok, 1999). Comprehension of texts can be furthered through purposeful discussions in a whole group or small group setting. According to Wooten (2009), during both discussions, teachers should model how students might problem solve or ask each other questions. This is true of the vignette of students from my classroom. Through discussion, Noah was able to teach John that reading consisted of reading the pictures and signs, not just the words on the page.

The language that emerges as parents and children talk together during book sharing is what leads to higher reading ability among children (Akkok, 1999) The discussions that parents decide to have with their children can scaffold children's comprehension and engagement with the text in ways that have shown to facilitate children's development in literacy ( Kaderavek & Pakulski, 2007).

According to Price, Van Kleeck and Hubert (2009), book sharing is the process in "which parents mediate texts for young children, scaffolding their comprehension through interactions about the content and the illustrations and helping the child participate in more sophisticated ways than he or she would be capable of independently" (p. 172) Price, et al. (2009) conducted a case study with the purpose of exploring parent and child extra-textual talk during storybook and

expository book sharing. The researchers defined “extra-textual talk” as the utterances that were being spoken between the parent and the child during book sharing. The focus of the investigation was to determine if there were differences between the talk that takes place during storybook sharing and expository books such as those that are non-fiction.

The participants of the study consisted of sixty-two parents and their three to four-year old children. Out of the sixty-two parents, 87 percent reported that book sharing was an established routine in their household and had children who were typically developing in terms of literacy and language use. Throughout the study, the parent-child book sharing sessions using both storybooks and expository books were videotaped. During each sitting, Price et al. coded each parent’s and child’s utterance length and language diversity during the book reading.

Results indicated that parents were more likely to read entire storybooks than they were expository books during book sharing. Because the expository books usually led to a longer duration of book sharing, both the parent and the child used higher rates of extratextual utterances during the observation. For example, during the book sharing the parent and child utterances were directed around making inferences and recalling information that was presented earlier. The parent of one participant had made a text-to-life connection by comparing the pig in one of the stories to the child’s father. Therefore, the findings indicated that the genre of book can influence the amount of talk that takes place during book sharing.

Price, Van Kleeck, and Huberty (2009) noted that when a parent reads books



with his/her child, a dynamic context is created in which the child, the parent, and the book all interact with each other. All of these pieces affect the talk that occurs during the activity. It has been suggested that language coming from adults is slightly more difficult than the child's language which will facilitate language acquisition. Another study by Rhyner (2007) showed a positive relationship when parents use yes/no questions, declarative sentences and *wh* (what, where, when, and why) questions.

While Price et al. (2009) exemplified the extra-textual talk between parents and children during book sharing, researchers Anderson and Kim (2008) compared the mother-child interactions that took place during shared reading in multiple contexts. The purpose of the study was to compare the exchanges between a mother and her two sons during shared reading using a traditional book, electronic books, noting the extra-textual talk during each reading. Participants in the study involved a Korean mother and her two sons, who lived in an urban setting in Canada. One son was three years old and the older son was seven years old. During the study, the mother read a traditional print book with her younger son between five and six times a week while she read to her older son about once a week as he read independently every day. In addition, she read electronic books with her three-year old son once a week while her seven-year old son read electronic books independently.

Throughout the study, Anderson and Kim conducted observations and videotaping once each week at the home of the family while the participants interacted in shared reading and writing through the multiple contexts at the dining room table. Anderson and Kim (2008) asked the mother to share books with her

children as she would normally do. The interactions from the observations were transcribed in Korean and then later translated into English.

The results from this research are consistent with previous research done by Van Kleeck and Beckley-McCall (2002) in that the participant's age is a variable in shared reading. During Anderson and Kim's study the sessions were longer for the three year-old than for the seven-year-old as the younger child needed more support. The mother and the three-year old focused more on the meaning of the story than actually reading the text compared with the mother and the seven-year-old child. Also, the results agreed with Worden's (1987) earlier research findings in that there were more parent-child interactions during shared book activities than during a computer software activity. In addition, the length of the sessions increased over time. This can be attributed to the fact that children become familiar with the context of the texts, which created extra textual talk (Price et al, 2009).

Kaderavek and Pakulski (2007) designed a study to explore the interactions between mothers and their preschool children. Specifically, the study was designed to explore the twelve preschool children's literacy orientation during mother-child literacy and non-literacy interactions in relation to repeated exposure, story book genre, and maternal level of text modification. This was the first published report of literacy orientation in children who had a hearing impairment. The twelve children who participated in this study had hearing impairments, seven of the twelve were girls, and five were boys. The ages ranged from 24 to 59 months of age, respectively. Each child had a history of hearing impairment and used a variety of communication

modalities.

The participants and their mothers were randomly observed by the researchers four times at home within a four to six week period. The first visit called 'one-visit protocol' was a presentation of two books and a toy that was selected to elicit imaginative play. The 'three visit protocol' consisted of repeated presentations of books and toys. Each protocol visit was started after the researcher handed a bag of books and toys to the mother of the child. Mothers were told to play and read in a way that was typical for her and the child. As the mother and child interacted in an authentic way, lasting no longer than 30 minutes, the interactions were videotaped for further analysis. The videotaped interactions were rated by researchers on the orientation of the mother-child interaction by using a four-point scale, "1" meaning there was a lack of engagement and "4" meaning high interest.

Results of this study suggested that observations of children with the first protocol visit did not reveal the same level of engagement as was observed with the repeated visits. This result was consistent with past researchers who have noted changed responses in children that have repeated exposure to a manipulative or toy (Martinez and Roser, 1985). During the study researchers also noted that the older children were less likely to have the text read to them than younger children. This finding suggests the need for clinical intervention at early ages in relation to literacy.

### **Viewing**

According to Wooten (2009), children learn to become visually literate by

attending to the illustrations in picture books. Children can acquire a better concept of this idea by being introduced to the art elements and physical characteristics of a story during book sharing. Another type of viewing in literacy is done through the use of graphic novels, such as comic books (Wooten, 2009).

Similar to Bergin (2001), Britto, Griffin and Brooks-Gun (2006) linked their study to the effects of early reading patterns with African American families. The intent of the Britto's et al. (2006) study was to understand the ways in which poor, urban, and minority children were exposed to literacy through parent-child interactions and then to link that to the child's scores of several assessments. The study consisted of 126 participants from the Newark Young Family Study, all of which were young African American mothers who had children 25 months or younger. The teenage mothers were between the ages of 14 and 20 years old. Throughout the study, each family was observed three times, at the start of the study, 24 months later, and then 40 months after that. Each visit followed with an interview and an assessment of the reading level and receptive vocabulary of the child. The interviewers observed the mothers reading books to their children in 'their own way,' as well as watching children solve a puzzle activity where the participants were given two puzzles in which they had to assemble under parental guidance.

The assessments used in this study focused on expressive language use, receptive vocabulary, and school readiness. Expressive language was assessed during the shared book reading session. The expressive language score was given by using the Academic Stimulation Scale analyses. The Receptive Vocabulary piece was

assessed by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test while the school readiness was assessed by the Caldwell Preschool Inventory. Results indicated that ninety mothers were classified as being story-readers while twenty seven mothers were considered story tellers. Seven mothers did not fit into the story reader or story teller group due to their failure to use extratextual comments during book reading activities.

Another controversial topic of viewing is television watching. Koolstra, van der Voort, and van der Kamp (1997) argued that television can improve reading performance by broadcasting programs that promote children's interest in reading books. A study, which involved younger school age children, found that those students who watched one to two hours of television viewing per day performed better on reading achievement tests (Anderson, Mead, & Sullivan, 1986).

### **Visually Representing**

A study conducted by Korn (2007) was designed to examine the impact of the Guggenheim's pioneering program, Learning Through Art, on third-grade students' ability to describe and interpret art, and to apply these skills to understanding written text. The participants in the study consisted of 605 third graders who completed questionnaires. The participants were placed into two groups, the Treatment Group A and the Treatments Group B (control). Among the 605 third graders, 51 percent of the participants were female and 75 percent spoke English and one other language at home. The study found that students in the program performed better in several categories of literacy and critical-thinking skills, including extended focus,

hypothesizing, and providing multiple interpretations,—than did students who were not in the program (Korn, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Learning to read, write, speak, listen, view and visually represent starts at an early age and involves parents, caregivers, other adults and the child. Environments outside of school play a significant role in literacy development. Many times, the home is the most significant environment for development of the six areas of literacies. Early experiences with the different types of literacies play a major role in child's success.

## **Chapter Three: Study Design**

I designed this study to learn more about the kinds of literacy activities my first grade students experienced outside of school. I learned about the specific literacy activities by reviewing weekly parent logs, interviewing students and by asking students to complete a pre and post survey related to different literacy activities.

### **Research Questions**

1. What types of outside of school activities foster emergent literacy abilities in first grade children?
2. Which gender typically participates more frequently in out of school literacy activities with young children?
3. What different types of literacy activities do first grade boys and girls typically participate in outside of school?

### **Participants and Contexts**

The participants in the research study were my nineteen first grade students, all of whom were currently enrolled in an urban school in western New York, and their parents. The students ranged in age from five to six years old. Among the nineteen participants, fourteen students were Caucasian, four were Mulatto and one student was African American. Nine of the nineteen participants were female and ten were male. They were general education students; none were known to have identified disabilities. I chose the participants because of convenience, accessibility and professional connections. I ensured the confidentiality of the participants through

the use of pseudonyms.

The school district in which I conducted the research has five buildings in several locations. Each of the elementary schools houses students from preschool to fifth grade, while the middle/high school houses students from sixth grade up to twelfth grade. There are about 350 students in this school, which is part of three public schools and one parochial elementary school in the city. The school district is predominantly composed of Caucasian students, who account for approximately 74 percent of the school's population. The overall population of this school district is 2,426 students. In addition, a county report (School Matters, 2010) in which the school exists, reported that this school has the lowest test scores on all state tests among the three elementary schools in the district. Approximately 70 percent of the school in which I conducted the research qualified to receive a free or reduced lunch too. My classroom population closely reflected this percentage. There were also three first grade classrooms in my elementary school, totaling sixty students.

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

I was in my final semester of graduate studies for a master's degree in childhood literacy while I conducted the research. Once the research is completed, my provisional certification will become permanent. I hold a New York State initial teaching certificate in childhood education grades 1-6 and completed the requirements for a certificate in special education. My most recent studies focused on parental book sharing related to the area of literacy in first grade students.



I was the long term substitute teacher in the classroom in which I conducted the study. I had been working with the students since the beginning of the school year. It was my first year being employed in the school, but I had substitute taught at the other elementary schools in the district for three years.

### **Data Collection**

To determine the different literacy activities that my first grade students participated in before and after school, I used three primary data collection instruments—parent surveys, student interviews and parent logs.

#### ***Parent Survey***

The first instrument was a parent survey (see Appendix A) in which I asked questions about what types of literacy activities, if any, were being used with their children. Parents wrote down information that pertained to language and literacy practices. For example, I asked, “Do they read with their children at home? What kinds of reading does your child participate in alone or observe at home?” In another question on the survey I asked the parents to list what they read most frequently with their child.

#### ***Student Interview***

The second instrument I used was a student interview (see Appendix B). I anticipated that the interview would create an opportunity for me to explore and learn

more about the types of literacy activities students were participating in outside of school: at home, at a family member's house, at practice, or at afterschool daycare. I anticipated that I would find out what kinds of activities the student believed were related to literacy, how they felt about the activities, and other aspects of literacy. I took the interview questions from Owocki and Goodman's (2002) *Kidwatching* book.

### ***Parent Log Books***

I also collected data through parent log books (see Appendix C), which the parents completed each week during the study. I asked the parents to record the different types of literary activities that they were doing with their child or that their child was doing alone or with someone else outside of school on each day of the week. I had also asked parents to write down comments next to the literacy activities.

Each week I invited one student to explain to the class the different literacy activities that he/she participated in over the week. This allowed students to get a broader understanding of the many activities their peers participated in before and after school. Having my students share the activities from the parent logs promoted students understanding of what counts as literacy.

### ***Pre and Post Student Survey***

I used pre and post student surveys (see Appendix D) during the first and sixth week of my study. Prior to sharing my participants' log books, I assessed my

students' understanding of the six areas of literacy. I read the survey to my students and asked that they place a checkmark in the box that they feel accurately answered each question. On my survey, there were six questions altogether. Each question gave an example of writing, reading, viewing, listening, speaking and visually representing. The students decided which examples, if any, constituted as literacy. If my students felt that an activity was an example of literacy, they would place a checkmark under the "Yes" column. During the last week of the study, I gave my students the same survey and asked them to fill out the questions based on our discussions and their experiences over the past six weeks.

### **Data Analysis**

I used several data collection techniques in order to explore the different literacy activities that were done outside of school. The parent surveys was used to collect data from those participating families that did not have the opportunity to fill out a parent log over the six weeks of the study. Parents shared the different activities that they noticed their children participating in at home in terms of literacy. This helped me direct students to share the literacy activities they participated in before and after school to the classroom. The student interviews were used as a conversation piece between me and my students. Through the use of the interview, I asked many questions pertaining to literacy to see how my students perceived reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing. During the student interview I helped answer any confusion that my students had about literacy. The parent logs

were used to observe the activities that my first grade students were participating in over time.

### **Time Schedule**

I began the data collection process in September 2010 and continued through December 2010. The data analysis and construct of the case studies continued throughout the spring and summer of 2011.

### **Procedures**

I anticipated that my study would begin in September 2010 and be completed prior to the winter break. It took place over a six week time period. During that time period, parent participants filled out parent logs and reflected on their child's outside of school literacy activities. The students then shared the literacy activities they were doing outside of school during our share out time at the end of the day.

During the first week of my study, I shared my research questions with parents at Open House. After explaining my curiosity of what types of literacy activities my students were participating in outside of school, I discussed that their children are participating in literacy in many ways, some of which they might not be aware. For example, I explained to parents that literacy activities consist of writing, reading, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing. At the Open House, I handed out the parent log and asked them to fill it out for the next six weeks. I included a handout (Appendix E) of possible examples of different literacy activities

under each of the six area of literacy.

Next, I gathered input from the student's pre and post-surveys. These surveys were administered to students in small groups during our classroom guided reading block. The pre survey was made up of six yes or no questions. It assessed students understanding of the six areas of literacy. The survey had six activities, all of which were related to literacy. The activities were examples of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing. Students were asked to put a checkmark in the "yes" column if he/she believed that it is a literacy activity or the "no" column if he/she felt that it is not a literacy activity.

As the parent log books were returned, I randomly selected students to share with the class the literacy activities that they participated during over the week. As the students gave examples of the different literacy activities, I made anecdotal notes of the students' conversation. After the sharing, I asked several questions to the class.

Some questions that were asked include:

1. What types of literacy activities include reading? Writing? Speaking? Viewing? Listening? Visually Representing?
2. Have any literacy activities shared by the student been something you have done recently?

I asked students about the literacy actions that they participated in, to help the students come to understand how they had many opportunities outside of school to engage in reading, writing, listening, viewing and visually representing, and that they don't necessarily do things in the same way as they do in school but that

they are doing them. Completing the pre and post surveys helped my students make connections and build their understanding of reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and visually representing.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

My goal for this research was to present my observations and the interviews in an honest and professional manner. For example, I made every attempt not to be subjective when presenting the results of the study. I took every precaution to list the facts in a nonjudgmental way and to not let my personal and professional connections influence the data collection and analysis. I maintained my participants' confidentiality by not recording the names of the school or school district in which I conducted the study. I did not use the names of students who participated in the study; instead I gave each of my students a pseudonym so that confidentiality was contained. In addition, I only recorded the information pertaining to my research topic during the data collection process.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations impacted this study. Perhaps most significant was the fact that the participants were from one classroom in western New York. The participants' demographics reflected an extremely narrow sampling of students and parents. I was also limited in the time I could spend conducting the study. I

completed my long term substitute teacher position in December, and therefore I had a narrow window, which was just under six weeks, to complete the data collection process.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

My objective for this research study was to examine the outside of school literacy activities of my first grade students. I conducted this research in my long-term first grade classroom at an urban elementary school in western New York. The participants in the study were ten first grade students. This research study provided me with the opportunity to reflect on what outside of school activities students and their families constituted as literacy.

My three research questions were:

1. What types of outside of school activities foster emergent literacy abilities in young children?
2. Which gender typically participates more frequently in out of school literacy activities with young children?
3. What different types of outside of school literacy activities do first grade boys and girls typically participate in?

Of the ten first graders, I decided to look more closely at five individual students: Pamela, Cole, Norm, Lance and Adam. Their case studies follow.

### **Case Study Participants**

#### **Pamela**

During the time of the study, Pamela was a six year-old Caucasian student from an urban community in western, New York. Both her mother and her father



lived in the same house and gave Pamela a lot of academic support. Pamela's mother served on the school's parent support team and volunteered weekly in our classroom. Her father worked during the day, but spent the evenings helping Pamela with her homework and supported her in reading. Pamela had a 13 year old sister, who she spoke a lot about at school. Pamela wrote about how much she loved her sister during our writer's workshop time. Pamela felt that her sister was a great remodel, and enjoyed watching her play soccer. Like Pamela, her sister also did well in school and received a lot of support at home from her parents. During the study, Pamela and her mother and sister helped organize a big event at our school. Every year Pamela's family prepares the Breakfast with Santa event. This event is free to the community and gets many visitors. Community members can come eat a pancake breakfast, do holiday crafts, and buy tickets for a Chinese auction. Instead of participating in the games with the children, Pamela chose to work the craft stations with the adults. During this time she explained the directions for the crafts to the students who came to visit her.

### **Academic Abilities**

Pamela's Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) score was a 10 at the beginning of first grade, which was slightly above average when compared to the other students in the school district in which I conducted the study. In addition, I assessed Pamela on the Houghton Mifflin themed test (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), on which she scored an 82 percent. I also gave Pamela weekly running records

to monitor her reading progress.

Due to Pamela's assessment scores, I placed her in the "on grade level" group during our reading intervention time. For 70 minutes a day, Pamela traveled to another classroom where she received reading instruction from another first grade teacher. During the 70 minute time block, Pamela participated in shared reading and writing activities; the class began with the students participating in a shared writing piece on editing the morning message. According to Pamela's reading intervention teacher, Pamela participated often.

Pamela had a good attitude towards school and enjoyed reading time. In her writing journal, Pamela would often write about her teachers and friends at school. She came in each morning with a smile on her face and would go home to role play her day at school with her stuffed animals. Pamela mentioned that when she got older, she would "like to be a teacher."

I observed that Pamela had excellent behavior at school. She attended to directions immediately and was always cooperative. At school, Pamela participated in all areas of literacy. On a weekly basis, she listened to stories at the listening center and viewed reading games on the computer. At free time, Pamela often chose to participate in activities that related to visual representations. She enjoyed drawing pictures on the Promethean board, creating objects with modeling dough and putting together puzzles.

## **Reading**

According to Pamela's mother, Pamela "enjoys reading to others" (Parent Survey, 09/20/10). Pamela read to her stuffed animals at home and was excited to read to her family members. She often used storybooks from the reading cart in the classroom to read to others. Every night, Pamela and her classmates had the opportunity to choose a book of their choice off of the book cart in our classroom. The book was tailored to Pamela's reading level. Some of Pamela's favorite books to read were stories about princesses. Pamela was read many fairytale books when she was younger, so she knew most of the story lines to these types of books. Pamela could read the books by reading the words, if the book was at her level, or she could tell the book through the pictures or through memorizing the story as it was being read to her.

Pamela mentioned in her student survey that she read every day when she came to school. She read the signs out front of the school that had the school's name and the year it was built. The other signs on the building's grounds say "We are a Drug-Free School" and "Welcome to 'ABC' School." She mentioned that she always read the name of the school on the outside of the building before coming into the building. This shows how observant Pamela is, and at one point has had a conversation with somebody, possibly her mother, to find out what the signs mean. She may have even observed somebody else reading the sign or noticed that most places have welcome signs before someone enters.

## Writing

Writing is something that Pamela did a lot when she was outside of school. She tended to write letters to others around the holidays or for birthdays. Pamela wrote cards to her mother and father on their birthdays and even wrote me a holiday card around Christmas time. Pamela's messages were usually basic, one sentence phrases. She almost always included "I love you" in her card.

At the beginning of the school year, Pamela brought a letter to give to me during the First Grade Open House. Students and their parents were able to come in before school started to meet their teacher and get familiar with their classroom. Pamela brought in a picture with a few words that depicted her summer. She explained through her picture that she loved school and could not wait to come back.

Pamela continued through first grade by writing notes to me on a biweekly basis. For example, one morning she brought me a letter that depicted Pamela doing her math homework from the night before. Pamela's picture was surrounded by addition problems, like  $3 + 4 = 7$ . Pamela was very impressed with her math skills and wanted to share her excitement with me through her letter. I displayed her letter on my desk for the next few weeks, which made others want to write letters as well. On the way to the store Pamela would help her mother by writing down words for a list that they would later use while shopping. Pamela seemed to understand the concept that words can help a person remember what to do, and give a message.

## **Listening**

At home, Pamela enjoyed listening to stories often read by her mother and thirteen year old sister. (Student Survey, 10/09/10) After school, Pamela attended a program in which students whose parents worked late could go until their parents picked them up after work. At this program, Pamela mentioned that she "listens to the person in charge" so she knew what activities they were doing that day. Also, during evenings, Pamela attended Girl Scout meetings. This is another place where she utilized her listening skills. Because Pamela's mother was her girl scout leader, she often did a lot of organizing prior to the meeting, helping her mother get materials ready. Pamela also "listens to her leader" so that she could "help her other girl scout members" with the directions for that night's meeting. When Pamela's mother was doing work, Pamela often turned on the radio to listen to songs. She mentioned that she would usually "sing along with the artist and at times would perform dances to songs." (Parent Survey, 09/22/10)

## **Speaking**

At home, Pamela participated in several literacy activities around speaking. She used old workbook pages to "teach her stuffed animals." (Parent Survey, 10/04/10) While she was teaching, her mother claimed that Pamela used sayings that she heard me say in class, such as "Friends, let's get ready to clean up." Pamela also used our calendar routine when teaching her stuffed animals and mini calendar pieces similar to the ones we used at school. According to her mother, this activity was "very

frequent, sometimes ninety minutes a night.”

Not only did Pamela “test” her stuffed animals, but she enjoyed quizzing family members about words and math problems as well. When friends and family did not live close, Pamela would make phone call to speak to them. In addition, Pamela talked to family members when riding in the car to faraway places. For example, Pamela would ask, “Are we there yet?” or “Where are we going?” when traveling to her sister’s basketball games. When traveling, Pamela would occasionally "ask about signs and scenes when they cross new areas." (Parent Survey, 09/21/10)

### **Viewing**

During the evenings, Pamela and her family often sat down together to view television or play a board game. (Parent Survey, 10/12/10) Through conversation with Pamela’s mother, I learned that Pamela liked to create her own questions to board games and had her family answer them. Her mother also noted that Pamela enjoyed watching the scenery when traveling to new places, she would often comment about what she noticed to her family members. Pamela was able to determine when she visited a rural area based on the field and farm animals that were in view outside of her window. In comparison, she was able to determine when she is driving in her urban community based on the buildings and cars in view.

## **Visually Representing**

According to her mother, Pamela enjoyed using crafts before and after school. (Parent Survey, 10/10/10) She often used her art set, which consisted of crayons, paints, markers, glue and tape to make creations of her choice. She would often find unique things around the house to incorporate into her work, like beans and feathers. Pamela also "uses her creativity to design card games for her family to play." (Parent Log, 10/14/10) During Thanksgiving, I asked each first grade student to decorate a turkey using objects around the house. Most students went out to buy materials, like feathers, to decorate their turkeys. Pamela knew that that was not the object of the project. The object of the project was to find things that the family already had around the house and to use those materials to create their family turkey. Pamela's turkey came into class with several materials on it: beans, cereal, glitter, and beads. She was very proud of her work.

## **Cole**

During the time of the study, Cole was a six-year old Caucasian student who lived with his mother and step-father. Cole also had an older brother and a baby sister. On the weekends, Cole visited his father, who lived in a nearby neighborhood. Cole's family had a good relationship, even though the mother and father were divorced. His parents both attended conferences and open house as a way to support Cole's learning. Cole's mother was recently remarried during the time of the study. His step-

father also participated in school events when his health was good. Cole's mother was an active member in volunteering in our classroom. She would come to our classroom on Tuesdays and Thursdays to help with guided reading groups. In addition, Cole's mother and step-father came to our classroom for special events, like our Halloween party and parade. Cole's mother was a waitress in the town where he lived in and his step-father was the cook at the same restaurant. They were always able to adjust their schedules to ensure that they did not miss many of Cole's school events. Cole talked about his family often, and included all of his family members, even his step-father, in family portraits that he drew.

### **Academic Abilities**

On the DRA, Cole performed at a Level "4," which constituted an early first grade reading level. Due to the school's high standards in reading, this score was deemed below grade level and indicated that Cole might be at risk of falling behind. I placed Cole in the "average" reading group during our first grade intervention block. Because Cole was on the border of being an "average" and "low" reader, I closely watched his performance in all areas of literacy.

For seventy minutes a day, Cole visited another first grade teacher's classroom to work on phonic skills as well as independent work skills. This was also the time Cole participated in shared reading and writing. In November, I gave Cole a spelling pretest of sixty kindergarten and first grade sight words. Of the sixty words, he misspelled thirteen of them. Some of the more difficult words for Cole were: his,



how, out, they, was, and with. Cole was able to spell the following words correctly: is, in, like, see, the, at, and look. Cole was then placed in the average group in spelling where he worked on spelling strategies based on Sarah Sit and Spell.

During writing workshop, Cole wrote a lot about his family. Family appeared to be very important to him. Cole had written about eating M&M's with his father and playing football with his brother, Zack.

Cole had a good attitude toward school. Our school was following the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) behavior program that focused on positive discipline. I observed that Cole always followed directions and enjoyed getting compliments from others. He made sure his desk was cleaned, he always raised his hand and participated, and he walked quietly in the hallway. During free time, I often noticed that Cole appeared to feel over stimulated by the noise of his peers' and that he chose to sit alone at his desk. Oftentimes he would even ask me if he could go to the nurse to avoid socializing with the other students. On a few occasions, Cole got sick to his stomach from the anxiety he had about free time at the end of the day.

## **Reading**

According to Cole's student interview (November, 2010), he enjoyed reading "very much." He spent most of his time reading with his mother and step-father outside of school. When Cole took the time to read, it was usually the reading he had to do for school. Some of his favorite books were *Butterfly House* (Bunting, 1999)

and SpongeBob SquarePants books. *Butterfly House* is a book Cole chose from the reading cart in our classroom the night before I conducted the student interview. He remembered learning about butterflies in kindergarten, so he took the book home because he already knew much of the vocabulary inside the book. I observed that Cole had a typical first grade sense of humor and that he found SpongeBob hilarious. He enjoyed reading the stories while thinking about the television shows he had watched on the screen. "Sometimes," Cole said, "he reads some books that are on the T.V." Cole had even brought several wrestling stories into class that was too difficult for him to read. Cole enjoyed reading his wrestling chapter books by looking at the pictures on the pages.

### **Writing**

Cole admitted that he did not spend a lot of time writing at home, unless it is for school (Student Interview, November 2010). He did enjoy drawing pictures though and "will draw sometimes when he gets bored." At school, Cole's writing was often predictable. He was not much of a risk taker and would often start his sentences with "I see..." I perceived that Cole did not like to go out of his comfort zone and spell words he may not know, which may have contributed to his unwillingness to write a lot before and after school. At the beginning of the year Cole's first ten journal entries all started with "I see." The first three entries all had the same message, "I see mom, dad, and zack." His writing often lacked capitalization and punctuation, but was spelled correctly and neat. When I asked Cole about his recurring writing habit,

he explained that those were the words he remembered from kindergarten.

Cole used free time at the end of the day to color pictures to give to people. He gave some pictures to me after noticing other students doing it first. Cole would often write his name at the bottom of the paper and write "To Miss Newton" at the top. Cole would almost always include the name of the person he was giving the drawing on the paper somewhere.

### **Listening**

While at home, Cole mentioned that he listened to a lot of things happening outside. For example, he "listens to cars as they drive by" and he "hears his baby sister cry when she gets upset." (Student Interview, November 2010) Cole's mother mentioned that during the summer Cole plays baseball and listens to his baseball coach to understand the rules. (Parent Survey, 09/20/10) At school, Cole enjoyed going to the listening center during our guided reading block where he would follow along with the C.D. or cassette tape as he flipped through the pages in the book. He was so good at participating in the listening center correctly that I appointed him as the "go to person" if the listening center did not work. I would also pair Cole up with new students in our class as he was good at explaining how things work as well.

### **Speaking**

During the summer Cole played baseball and spoke a lot to his teammates. He often cheered on his teammates, telling them "good job" or "watch the ball." In

school, Cole received extra help in speech. He had trouble articulating his "c's" and "t's." This impediment did not seem to get in the way of Cole's communication with other people. He was able to get his message across, but often had to repeat himself or use different words to convey his message. For example, when Cole introduced himself to others he would say that his name is "Tole." After being asked if his name was "Tole," he would be able to correct himself by practicing the hard-c sound prior to saying "Cole." Cole's brother also had trouble with speech, and often stuttered when trying to speak. It seems as though speech difficulties ran in the family. Cole's mother did inform me at the beginning of the school year that both of her sons have trouble with speech. She also mentioned that she thought they talked cute when they spoke inappropriately, and did not seem overly concerned about it.

In school, Cole took on an active role of speaking up to an adult when another student was not following directions. Cole reported a lot to adults of bad happenings, such as classmates leaving one student out of a game, or wrestling that occurred on the playground during recess. At the beginning of the school year, we focused heavily on the issue of bullying. Cole felt this issue was very important and spoke up when he saw someone being bullied. He was comfortable speaking to adults, but did not communicate to classmates when he saw something he did not like. One student on a particular occasion accused him of tattling when she overheard Cole reporting an incident that occurred on the playground.

During the time of the study, Cole brought his pet turtle from home into the classroom. The students were very excited to hear about the pet turtle and asked

many questions after Cole told us about his show and tell item. Cole was able to answer questions with the help of his mother.

### **Viewing**

Cole had many technological devices at home that he used to view things. For example, Cole viewed the Wii system on his television as he played games. Cole's favorite game consisted of boxing against his brother. He used the Wii controller to pretend box against his brother by moving his arms as if he was hitting someone. Cole had also mentioned bowling on the Wii. He liked to bowl against his mom in this game. Cole and his family viewed the television to watch shows and movies during the evenings and on the weekends, too. Cole's favorite television shows to watch were Wrestling Mania and SpongeBob SquarePants. His favorite wrestler was John Cena, and he often brought an action figure of to school to play with during free time.

### **Visually Representing**

As I mentioned earlier, Cole would sometimes draw pictures during free time in class, but rarely did at home. Cole did like to build things with his hands. I noticed him using play dough to construct a snowman. He enjoyed using Lego's and Lincoln Logs to build homes and cars. During reading centers, Cole did an immaculate job of painting, cutting, gluing and putting glitter on projects at the art station. The art station consisted of one craft that the students took turns doing during the week. The

craft would have a seasonal connection or relate to a theme we were studying that week. For example, during a science lesson we studied the anatomy of an apple. During the craft center that week, I instructed students to use tissue paper and black construction paper to make stained-glass apples, which were then hung on the classroom windows. Oftentimes because it is not teacher-directed, students did not follow directions and their craft turned out to misrepresent the intended outcome. However, Cole always followed the directions and his crafts were done correctly and looked close to the model that was left for the students to use.

### **Norm**

Norm was a six year-old Caucasian student who lived with his mother and visited his father some weekends. Norm had older sisters, but did not see a lot of his siblings due to their decision to live with family members not associated with Norm's immediate family. Norm did not talk much about his family. The information I did receive came from his mother, who came in to talk on a weekly basis. Norm came from a low socioeconomic home. His mother was unable to afford a vehicle and did not have a driver's license, so Norm often walked to school and to the grocery store. Norm's mother did not have a job at the beginning of the study and worked for a couple of weeks at Target during the Christmas season. Norm's father worked out of town doing construction work.

Norm's mother started the year volunteering in our classroom once a week.

She enjoyed observing Norm in the school environment, but often interfered with his socializing as she would follow him around and sit with him at lunch. After Norm's mother got a job, she stopped volunteering in our classroom. I noticed that Norm's behavior improved when his mother was not in our classroom. For example, Norm would follow the first direction given by the adult in charge. He would not act aggressively or try to get away with doing something the rest of the class was not doing. Norm's mother tried to support his learning while at home, but lacked the skills to help him. Norm's mother did not graduate from high school and had trouble in school. She had difficulty reading chapter books and often wrote letters to me at school that contained many misspellings. Norm got frustrated when he did his homework at home and as a result his mother tried doing it for him. Norm's homework was almost always done, but he often forgets to hand it in or he lost going from the bus to the classroom.

### **Academic Abilities**

Throughout the past two years, Norm had struggled academically and behaviorally in school. Last year I had the opportunity to substitute teach in Norm's kindergarten classroom. I noticed that Norm had a behavior management plan for the year and that his seat was moved away from others in the classroom. On that day that I substitute taught, I sent Norm to the principal's office for not following directions and for not being able to control his actions. Norm did not do well when there was change in his environment, and unfortunately there was a lot of changes at home.

In kindergarten, Norm had several discipline referrals related to respect issues with the adult in charge. He had a temper and tended to have difficulty coping with rules and structure. When Norm's mother was in the classroom, his behavior worsened. He would act out in order to get attention from his mother or me. I instituted an individualized behavior plan at the beginning of the year to ensure Norm's success. Each day, he had the opportunity to earn eight stickers. If he earned at least six stickers in one day, he could receive his reward, such as, playing on the Promethean board or using play dough. Norm was able to choose a weekly reward that he worked towards for the week. At first Norm did well responding to his chart. He would jump up and down when he got a sticker and would count to see how many more stickers he would need in order to get a reward. After Norm's mother started volunteering in our classroom he seemed to not care about his behavior chart and would often leave it in the other rooms he visited throughout the day. After talking to Norm's kindergarten teacher about his change of behavior around mom, she had mentioned that this also took place last year. Norm's mom would want to come in for the day and follow him as he went from class, to lunch, to specials and other events. His kindergarten teacher suggested that I decrease the number of times that Norm's mother is allowed to visit our classroom, along with keeping the time she volunteers short.

### **Reading**

Norm struggled to achieve at the average level of a first grader. His DRA



score was a “6,” which constituted at a beginning of a first grade reading level. This score was considered below the desired level of “8” for a first grade student in October. In November I gave Norm a spelling pretest of kindergarten and first grade sight words. Out of 32 sight words from the first grade list, Norm spelled 16 words correctly. Some words Norm misspelled were: are, has, her, they, and have. Norm was able to spell the following words correctly: all, day, did and for. Norm tended to spell words incorrectly that had a silent letter in it. Norm also struggles on spelling words that are new to him. On the other hand, Norm spelled most of his kindergarten sight words correctly due to the fact that he has seen them several times over the past year.

With Norm’s below grade level achievement, the school reading specialists along with the first grade teachers decided to place him in the “Below Level” reading group during our intervention reading block. For seventy minutes each morning, Norm split his time between another first grade teacher and the school’s reading specialist. Norm spent thirty minutes with a small group of other first graders performing at the same level working on letter/sound recognition and sight word drills. For the other forty minutes of the intervention block, Norm and two other students visited the reading specialist as she carried out the Fountas and Pinnell’s (2009) Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program with them. During the LLI lessons the focus was on developing the students’ phonic skills through use of repetitious materials that would ensure success in a low achieving reader (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Only once did Norm's mother mention that her son read at home (Parent Log, 10/06/10) , but I know that for homework Norm had to read at least four times a week for fifteen minutes. I observed that Norm enjoyed reading books by looking at the pictures rather than reading the words. His favorite topic to read about was cranes or other machines used for construction work. During library time, Norm would ask the librarian where the books on cars were. Norm's dad worked as a construction worker, which may be the reason why he was interested in that topic.

Norm really enjoyed reading his writing to the class during writer's workshop. On one particular day he wrote a three word sentence that I helped him create that told a story of his family going to a pumpkin patch to pick a pumpkin. The sentence appeared as "I pmpkn pik" in Norm's writing journal. Norm then read his writing piece to the class by using the Elmo projector. The class was able to view Norm's writing and his picture as he read his sentence. This was the first time that I believe Norm felt like a real reader. This occurred at the end of October 2010, which was the beginning of my study.

## **Writing**

At school, Norm struggled with writing. He would typically avoid writing during writer's workshop by frequently visiting the bathroom and distracting his peers. He did not yet think of himself as a writer. His mother did not record anything on the parent log form pertaining to writing before and/or after school.

During writing workshop, I taught students to write based on Lucy Calkin's

(2003) *Units of Study for Primary Writing*. The program focused on "small moments" that a student participated in. Norm had many small moments to write about, for example, playing on the playground, or riding his bike, but chose to not write about them. In my use of Calkin's program I began by asking students to use basic pictures to convey their message and then add some labels to the writing to add more detail. By the end of the study, most students were writing in sentences and using less detailed pictures in their writing. Norm was still at the beginning stage of using pictures to represent his idea and then trying to come up with initial letter sounds to label his pictures.

Norm would typically misbehave during writing workshop as a result of his unwillingness to write. At times, he would stand on his chair, kick at his desk, or purposely break his pencils to get out of doing work. Toward the end of the study, I gave Norm his own special writing spot that was usually right next to me. This helped him stay more focused and often made him feel more comfortable knowing that somebody was next to him and could help him at any time.

### **Listening**

Norm was involved in several activities out of school that incorporated listening skills (Parent Log, 10/04/10). For example, every Tuesday after school Norm attended Hand Bell, a program for younger students to participate in a musical group using hand bells. The group performed at the School for the Blind, which Norm thoroughly enjoyed. When Norm came back from the concert he was jumping

up and down describing all of the wonderful things he saw at the School for the Blind. He particularly enjoyed seeing the pool that the students used. He mentioned what a nice job the students who were blind did at using their hand bells during the concert. He said, "It was amazing! You should have seen the blind kids playing." At Hand Bell, Norm needed to listen to his choir director to make sure that his hand bell was being held and used correctly.

In addition, Norm enrolled in Boy Scouts on Monday nights during the time of my study. Norm needed to listen to his scout leader talk about all the benefits of joining boy scouts. Norm's mother was not sure if her son would want to join scouts, so she let him attend the meeting to determine for himself if it is something he would enjoy doing. Norm decided that he liked the activities that the scouts were doing at the meeting, but never talked about them with me about them.

### **Speaking**

Much of Norm's out of school activities revolved around outdoor play. Over a three week period, Norm participated in outdoor play seven of the thirteen days according to his mother (Parent Log, October-November 2010). On one particular day, Norm asked his neighbor if he wanted to ride bikes. Earlier that day, the students attended an "Extreme Bike Rider" assembly to promote a drug-free community. I observed that Norm particularly enjoyed watching the professional bike riders perform stunts and tricks as they promoted ways of living healthy. Norm typically did not like to participate, but during this assembly his hand was up to ask questions in

order to interact with the performers. Norm excitedly clapped his hands as the extremist jumped over the principal with their bikes as he was sitting on a chair.

Norm and his neighbors interacted with each other that day after school as they pretended that they were part of the extreme bike rider show. Norm mentioned the next day at school that he and his friends were pretending to be extreme biker riders and attempted to do tricks, but failed in doing so. Norm's neighbor fell off his bike and got hurt before Norm tried to perform his stunt. Norm and his neighbor used many words that the bike extremist used as they were reanimating the performance, according to his mother during one of our weekly conversations after she volunteered in our class for reader's workshop. They would use words like, "dope" and "narly" when a cool stunt was performed.

### **Viewing**

At school, Norm had the opportunity to view interactive computer games in the classroom; however, Norm mentioned that he did not have a computer at home due to the family's level of income. During the evenings, once it got dark, Norm and his mother spent a great deal of time viewing television shows before bedtime (Parent Log, September 2010). When it was still light out, Norm and his mother did a lot of walking in the community as a leisure activity. One destination that Norm and his mother walked to during the time of my study was JCPenney. According to the his mom's comments of the parent log, Norm noticed a few items that he wanted in the store and looked at the price tag to see if they were on sale.

As he walked down streets, Norm mentioned that he noticed many animals around the playground, too. On one particular day, Norm had the opportunity to go pick out pumpkins with his mother and father. According to his mother, "Norm had a lot of fun at the pumpkin patch. He went on rides, including a hay ride, and played with animals and went on a train" (Parent Log, 10/24/10).

### **Visually Representing**

During school I noticed that Norm enjoyed using his hands to construct models. One of his favorite activities was playing with play dough and building cars with Legos. While Norm did not have these toys at home, he did have other toys that he used to pretend he is building things. Norm was not as creative as others when it came to making things. He would often copy other students' creations, which would make the other students upset because he was "copying them." On one particular assignment, I asked Norm to decorate a family wreath to hang up outside of our classroom. For each holiday, I asked the students to decorate something to display each family's own creativity. Norm's family decided that they would use crayons to color the wreath. Other students had used evergreens from their Christmas trees to decorate their wreath. I observed that Norm's wreath may have taken the least amount of time to make, which could be attributed to his family's low socioeconomic status.

## Lance

Lance was a six-year old African American male who lived in a single-parent home. At the start of the school year, Lance's father was placed in jail, but Lance had a lot of support from his mother. Lance had an older brother who was in fifth grade and a younger brother who was not yet in school. The brother who was in fifth grade was a student council representative in our school and was a good role model for Lance. Lance's family did not have a lot of money, but stayed heavily involved in the school and community. During the year of my study, Lance's family participated in our school's backpack program. This program chose the neediest families in the school district to receive a backpack full of food. The family was instructed to take the bag of canned foods and send the backpack back to school the next day for a new family to have. One family was chosen per week. Every day Lance's mother picked him up from school, and they walked home as a family. A couple of months into school, Lance had emotional problems due to the separation of his family. At the beginning of the school year Lance's mother, father and two brothers all lived in the same house. During the first few weeks of school, Lance's mother explained that his father was placed in jail after being physically abusive to his family. It devastated Lance to not have his dad at home, even if his father did a lot of mean things. He would cry or refuse to do his work during class.

## **Academic Abilities**

Lance came into first grade at a Level "3" on the DRA, which is considered below grade level. Lance was automatically placed in the lowest reading group because he was not yet able to sound out words or comprehend a story. I observed that he clearly did not like to read at the beginning of the year and sometimes chose to sit quietly instead of participating. Lance would not watch the book during guided reading, he would ask how much time was left until he could rotate to the art center and he would gaze outside of the window when it was his time to read. He was able to listen to his group members read the guided reading book and memorized the words. He did not pay attention to the written words in the story, but rather on what was said by others around him. When it was his turn to read to me, he was able to read the words correctly due to the book choices having a pattern. For example, he would read the book "I see" by looking only at the pictures. "I see a ball," "I see a boy," and "I see a dog."

During the first grade intervention block, Lance was placed in the lowest group. For a seventy minute time period he visited another classroom in which the students practiced sight word recognition, handwriting practice, letter-sound recognition and many interactive games that kept the busy group of boys active. During the intervention block time Lance visited his reading intervention teacher and used the Leveled Literacy Intervention reading program (Fountas and Pinnell, 2011). I did notice a huge increase in his motivation in reading. He seemed to develop the skills and strategies needed to become a reader. Lance started to use the initial letter



of the word to create the beginning sound and then used the picture to see what would make sense in the story. He also went back to reread when he realized that his reading did not make sense. Three months after school started, Lance was at a Level "6" DRA and was moving towards a first grade reading level.

## **Reading**

Every night Lance participated in reading as part of his homework assignment from his reading teacher. Lance's homework was to read for at least 15 minutes every night while rereading a story he practiced earlier that day. During the book reading Lance was asked questions off of his "reading star." Whoever Lance read to that night, such as his mom or his older brother, would ask him the following questions, "Where did the story take place?" "Who were the main characters?" "What was the problem in the story?" The reading star had five questions for him to practice as he was reading. The questions were all related to using comprehension strategies as he was reading. Lance liked to read to his younger brother, which attributed to the increase in Lance's confidence in reading. During a conversation in class Lance said, "I know how to read because I read to my baby brother." According to his mother, Lance would model how to read a book to his brother, much like I do for him in reading. When books were too difficult to read, Lance would look at the pictures and make up his own story. For example, Lance would take the daily newspaper and look through it to search for toys in the flier section (Parent Log, 10/05/10). At Christmas time, Lance used the flier to construct a list of items he wanted for the holiday. He

brought the list to school the next day to show me his hard work. I could see that Lance was able to get the difficult spelling of some words from the description of the toy or item in the magazine flier. Lance and I later explained his work to his classmates during our class meeting.

### **Writing**

According to his mother's comments on her parent log (10/04/10), Lance practiced writing at home by making a list of errands. Lance would use his pad of paper to write down the items his mother needed to pick up at the store or he would draw pictures of the items if the words would be too difficult to spell. Lance's penmanship was very neat and even though he could not yet spell a lot of words, his pictures or labels would help the reader understand what his message.

Even though Lance was developing his reading abilities, writing remained a struggle for him. During writing Lance tended to repeat his writing entries based on a few words he reviewed during his literacy intervention group that day. For example, like Cole, Lance used the "I like" sentence starter for most of his journal entries at the beginning of the year. This can be attributed to Lance only knowing few words when writing. He believed that good writing consisted of writing words correctly, and if Lance only knew a few words and could spell them correctly, then to Lance, he felt like he was a good writer. During our writer workshop meetings I reiterated that being a good writer means having good ideas to write about, and not just knowing all

the words. After a week of experimenting, Lance began to write words out of his comfort zone.

### **Listening**

When I interviewed Lance about the things that he listened to outside of school, he explained that he hears music a lot. The road that Lance lived on was very busy and many neighbors would sit on their porches and listen to music. Lance could often hear the music his downstairs neighbor would play and said, "Sometimes I knew the words to the songs." Lance also said that he hears a lot of music playing from cars when they drive by too.

Lance plays a lot with his family and listens to his brother give advice on how to do things, like play football, the correct way (Student Interview, November 2010).

### **Speaking**

Like Norm, Lance went to Hand Bell with several other first grade students on Tuesday afternoons. Lance looked forward to Tuesdays and would often ask me what day it was to see how many days were left until his next choir practice. The Hand Bell group gave several presentations, one at the School for the Blind in our area, and one to our school around Christmas time.

At home during winter time, Lance mentioned that he speaks a lot when

playing with his older brother and his friends (Student Interview, November 2010). On one particular afternoon, Lance spoke a lot during a snow ball fight against neighborhood kids. He gave directions to other kids about where to hide to make sure a snowball did not hit them.

### **Viewing**

Interestingly, during our parent log sharing (11/03/10), Lance mentioned how he watched television often at night. Most of the time Lance chose to watch cartoons, but he never mentioned which cartoon he watched during the student interview. During the time of the study he noticed the caption button located on the television remote. Without asking for help, Lance took the remote to explore what the button was used for. As he hit the caption button he noticed words appeared on the screen. Next, he realized that the words appeared to be what the characters were saying. When Lance got bored his mother mentioned that he would "click the caption button on the television and search for the words that he could read" as they appeared on the screen. At first Lance noticed words like "on" and "at," but he then said that he started to notice longer words, like "there" and "from" as he learned new words at school (Student Interview, November 2010).

During the study I asked Lance to share this finding with his classmates. They were all eager to go home and do the same activity using their television remotes. The next week a few students came in and pointed out words they read on the television

screen that were also on our word wall. Some words that students saw were at, the, and, was, and I. At this point in the school year, only the basic sight words were added to our classroom word wall, so there were not many words that they could make connections to.

### **Visually Representing**

Lance enjoyed decorating at home. For example, around Halloween time, Lance and his family decorated their house in a "spooky design to get ready for trick or treating." (10/06/10) Lance also helped decorate during Christmas time and particularly enjoyed putting ornaments on the Christmas tree. When Lance finished his work quickly at school, which happened often, I would sometimes ask him to help hang up artwork inside our classroom as he had good judgment about where things should hang in order to look nice to view.

### **Adam**

During the time of the study, Adam was six-year old Caucasian male who came from a middle class family. Both of Adam's parents lived with him along with his two older brothers. Adam's mother worked for the school district as part of the clerical staff in the district office and his father owned his own painting business. Both of his parents were active in Adam's education. They attended the first grade

open house before school started for Adam to meet me and view his classroom. In addition, both parents attended the formal open house at our school weeks after school started. Adam's oldest brother attended the middle school in our school district and his older brother was in fifth grade. Adam lived close to school and would often walk home with his older brother when the weather permitted. Adam's mother included him and his brother in a lot of events that took place around the school. For example, on a Saturday in December she brought her two youngest boys to the Breakfast with Santa to play games and do crafts, after they enjoyed a pancake breakfast.

### **Academic Abilities**

At the beginning of first grade, Adam's Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) score was a "10," which was slightly above average when compared to other students in the school district. Adam also performed well on other assessments that I gave him at the beginning of the year. He performed above average on the Houghton Mifflin themed test (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), and also seemed to have a lot of reading strategies in place, which I observed during guided reading groups. For example, Adam knew that he could guess at a difficult word and read on to see if his reading made sense. Adam also knew that he was supposed to read to get information or to be entertained.

Because Adam appeared to be at the higher range of the DRA level "10," I

decided to place him in the "above level" reading group during our reading intervention time. For 70 minutes a day, Adam stayed in my classroom where he received challenging reading instruction with students of similar reading levels. At first, I noticed that Adam appeared to fall behind when he was being compared to other students who were at DRA level 12's and 14's, but he eventually caught up. Adam was placed in the high group due to his above average DRA score. He was put into literature groups with students who were at higher DRA levels as him, and who also held more strategies than Adam did. At first, Adam seems far behind these students in terms of his ability to comprehend and use reading strategies, but his reading increased after he observed the other students using strategies to read books that he never noticed before. He eventually started to use more reading skills than he did at the beginning of the year.

I noticed that Adam could be very quiet in school when it was time to participate. It appeared that he needed a lot of wait time when I asked him an academic question. For example, when I asked Adam the setting of a story, he would often stare at me with a blank look. At first I assumed he did not know the answer, but I eventually understood that Adam was just thinking back to the beginning of the story. While Adam was with me during the 70 minute time block, he participated in shared writing and would help discover writing errors in my messages that were left on the board. Also, Adam would participate in activities that involved shared reading, partner reading, independent reading, listening to reading, and interactive reading via the Promethean board to work on the skills and strategies that were in Houghton

Mifflin's scope and sequence (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002). Adam especially liked reading using the Promethean board. We would visit websites like [www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com) or [www.bookflix.com](http://www.bookflix.com) to practice using reading strategies. Many of the stories we read were related to social study topics like fire safety. I modeled to my students that nonfiction reading gives us information, and that we read these types of stories to get information. I also used many of these interactive stories to model correct fluency, expression, and pausing.

I observed that Adam did not always have a good attitude towards school (November, 2010), and that he seemed to struggle socially. Adam would often get in trouble for talking to others instead of listening and following the instruction provided by myself or another teacher. Adam's neighbor, who was his best friend, was also in our class. He spent a lot of time trying to get his neighbor to laugh or to talk when I was in the middle of teaching a literacy lesson. On a daily basis I would ask Adam to flip his card. This was our classroom behavior management plan. Every day Adam started off on green, and when he needed reminders about staying on task and doing his job, I had him move his card to yellow, then to orange, and finally to red. The color that Adam was on at the end of the day determined how much free time, if any, he got at the end of the day. Adam's mother and I emailed each other on a daily basis to discuss his behavior. Over the first school quarter Adam's behavior improved.



## Reading

Through conversation with Adam's mother I could tell that literacy activities surrounded Adam's life at home (Email, November 2010). Because Adam's mother worked in the school district, I usually received emails about the activities that Adam did the night before. He read picture books to his parents almost every night. Adam's mom also wrote him letters that she included in his lunch each day. Adam looked forward to reading these daily notes. Adam's mother noted that Adam would often read the environmental print and ask questions about what certain signs mean. No examples were given on the parent log as to what signs Adam viewed or asked his mother about (Parent Log, November 2010).

His mother did indicate that while preparing dinner, Adam helped out by reading a recipe to her. Adam enjoyed cooking with his family. One day at school Adam mentioned to me that he was getting ready to take a weekend visit to grandma's house. He explained that she makes the best apple pies, and that he was going to help her bake that weekend. The following Monday when Adam came back to school I asked him about his weekend. Adam smiled as I asked him and he could not wait to tell me about his baking experience. He felt that grandma "is the best cook in the world." (October 2010) He explained that they picked apples then had to put them in a "thing" that peeled the skin off the apple. Adam then described how he mixed the apple slices with sugar and cinnamon and then baked it in the oven. He then ate it later after supper (October 2010).

## **Writing**

When Adam played he sometimes participated in writing, however his parents did not provide specific examples in the parent log book. During the time of my study, Adam traveled to Florida by airplane with his family. On his vacation Adam kept a journal to write down all of his adventures as he vacationed (October 2010). Adam mentioned that he met his aunt, uncle and cousins at Disney World "and had a lot of fun." Adam wrote about his favorite ride, which was Splash Mountain. He added details in his writing piece about this particular ride. He mentioned the boat ride going "through the tunnels" and that he "saw lots of animals in the cave." Adam used a picture to illustrate his family on Splash Mountain above his writing. Adam used labels above each family member's head to give me a better understanding of where everyone was sitting on the ride. The writing in Adam's journal had perfect spelling and neat penmanship. It was evident that Adam received help on his journal because he liked everything to be perfect. Adam did write as neatly at school, but his writing often included misspellings, but was easily understood.

## **Listening**

Adam spent the majority of his time outside of school listening to technology. Out of the seven days noted on Adam's parent log, his mother wrote that he listened to television five out of the seven days (09/20/10-09/26/10). Along with listening to television shows, Adam also sat and listened to his parents read him bedtime stories

and he listened to the radio as he rode in the car. On Sundays, Adam attended church, where he listened to directions given by his parents as well as to the church service (09/26/10).

### **Speaking**

At home, Adam participated in several literacy activities that involved speaking. According to the Parent Log (09/20/10), a common conversation at the dinner table consisted of talking about Adam's day at school. His mother indicated that Adam usually engaged in a conversation with his family about all the events that happened on that particular day, and that his brothers would also share events that took place at school. Adam's family also loved sports, especially baseball. This was a popular topic of conversation at the dinner table (Parent Log, 09/22/10).

### **Viewing**

While Adam visited Florida he viewed many families of different cultures and backgrounds (October 2010). Adam was intrigued and often stared at people who spoke different languages and who behaved differently than his family did. For example, as he was waiting in line for a ride at Disney World, Adam noticed a family who had a handicapped child. She was in a wheelchair and he asked his mom how the young girl would be able to ride the ride (Parent Email, October 2010).

Adam and his family also did a lot of television viewing. On one of the parent

logs written by his mother, it was noted that Adam viewed television every day.

Adam's favorite television show to view was on Sundays when the Buffalo Bills play football.

### **Visually Representing**

Adam enjoyed creating things at school through the use on Lincoln Logs and Legos. Most of the objects that Adam built had a negative connotation to it. For example, I caught Adam several times building guns while at the Lego center. This was against our classroom rules to build guns or any other types of weapons. I observed that Adam would secretly build them and try to pretend shoot at other students. When I confronted Adam about his gun making he would silently break it apart and occasionally he would smirk to a friend after he was asked to put the gun away. Also, Adam would build army trenches with the Lincoln Logs and would use men to pretend they are shooting at each other and throwing bombs. After discussing this behavior with Adam's mother, she believed Adam's aggressive behavior came from him watching his older brothers play video games. In school Adam would reenact what he saw on the video games, which would get him in trouble for inappropriate school behavior.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

I have been able to note many differences and similarities among the five case

study students. Each student had at least one parent who was active in his or her education, and therefore had several examples of how he or she participated in literacy-related activities at home and outside of school. The literacy events were not always the same, but each student noted that he or she read books at home, which was usually a result from doing his or her daily reading assignments. Also, each student mentioned viewing the environment around them in some way. Some students noticed street signs as they went for walks while others remembered seeing animals and the changing of weather.

By looking at the data it seems as though the students took what they learned that day in school and carried it over to their home environment. For example, many parent logs noted students asking questions about the weather during our science unit on "Changes of Weather." In school we were charting the different patterns of weather for each month. Another example is from Pamela's parent log, which stated that she enjoys playing teacher at home using the talk and conversation that she hears at school. Pamela even bought her own calendar set so she could teach her stuffed animals their numbers and days of the week at home.

One difference that was highly noticeable in my study was that middle class families had more access to technology, like the computer and Wii system. The students from my case study that belonged to low socioeconomic homes, such as Lance and Norm, appeared to watch more television than Pamela, Adam and Cole.

## **All the First Graders**

### **Reading**

According to all of my case study participants, the number one literacy event at home is reading with their mothers (Student Interviews, November 2010). One student also mentioned that he read with his mom and his stepdad while another admitted that he reads at night with his mom and brothers (Student Interviews, November 2010). All students stated during their individual student interviews (November 2010) that they read books while outside of school. Two of the five students explained that they read signs too when they are outside, such as, street signs and the school sign. Three of the five students also were able to give me an example of a favorite book they read at home. The three students who recalled a favorite story were those students who belonged to middle-high class families. My two case study students who could not give a book title were the participants who belong to low class families.

### **Writing**

All of my case study students but one talked about the writing they do outside of school during the student interviews. Pamela was very descriptive and explained that she writes letters during special events, like birthdays and holidays. She also told me that she makes lists and draws pictures. Adam and Cole mentioned that they draw

pictures outside of school too. I believe the similarity in student interviews can be attributed to our class discussions during writing workshop that drawing pictures is a form of writing, and is how the best of writers begin writing down their ideas. Lance explained that he writes notes when he is not in school, but did not give an example of what kind of notes he writes.

### **Listening**

All of the boys in my study told me during the student interviews (November 2010) that they listened to nature and vehicles before and after school. The only girl in the study, Pamela, also admitted that she listened to music outside of school, but continued to say that she listened during Afternoon Adventure and Girl Scouts. While other case study students, like Norm, are part of clubs, they never once thought that participating in that activity was a form of listening. When I asked Norm about what he listened to outside of school he could not give me an answer.

### **Speaking**

Again, the boys on their student interviews had similar answers when being compared to Pamela's response on how/when do they speak outside of school. The boys, except for Norm who once again could not recall when he speaks, explained that their speaking revolved around physical activity. For example, Adam and Lance said they speak when they go to the playground. Lance also spoke during snowball

fight, baseball and soccer. Cole speaks outside of school when he is playing baseball. Pamela speaks during trips, for example, she will ask “Where are we going?” (Student Interview, November 2010)

### **Viewing**

Lance, Cole and Adam all view the computer/television when they are outside of school (Student Interviews, November 2010). Cole also watched his brother play football and Adam noticed leaves falling down before and after school. Lance viewed cars and trucks as they drove by. Pamela viewed holiday cards that were sent to her family in the mail, and watched her mom and dad celebrate their birthdays.

### **Visually Representing**

Each case study participant, except for Norm, participated in some type of art. Lance’s mother informed me that her son helped decorate the house around Halloween time (Parent Log, 10/05/10). Pamela also participated in Halloween related visual representations as she went shopping for pumpkins and decorated them. In addition, Pamela created a table of colored M&Ms she received from her sister’s New York City trip (Parent Log, 10/11/10). She counted the number of M&Ms she had and then put them in the column that had other similar colors. For fun, Pamela designed a word art poster for her kindergarten teacher. She used the painting icon on her computer to design her picture. Adam’s mom mentioned on her parent log



(09/23/10) that Adam drew pictures twice in one week. No information was given on the type of pictures he drew or how long he participated in the event.

### **Students' Understanding of Literacy Activities**

My students were excited about starting this research study as they looked forward to having an interview with me and they were excited to tell other students about the activities that they were involved in at home and outside of school.

A week before my study began; I closely observed my students talking about what they had done over the weekend or the night before during free time. I noticed a pattern among the students that I had previously seen in other years: Those students who achieve higher scores on literacy assessments seemed to be the students who were talking about the literacy events. It appears that students who are aware of their learning tend to make better connections in the classroom, which positively affects their assessment scores.

After the parent and student consent forms were returned, I started my study by asking all nineteen students to complete a pre survey (see Appendix D). The students' responses gave me insight into their views and understanding of what activities constitute literacy activities. I analyzed their answers to determine their awareness of my study topic. Many students did not know that the activities they participate in at home related to reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing. At the end of the study I administered the post survey to all nineteen students. This was the pencil-paper survey that I gave them on week one. I

read the questions to students as they wrote down their answers. Twelve of the nineteen students in my classroom recognized that more activities involved literacy than their first survey showed. Of the twelve students who showed growth, six were girls and six were boys.

Table 4.1 shows results of the students' pre and post survey. The first column are the activity(ies) the students believed were tied to literacy on their pre survey. Eleven students on the pre survey results had one or two activities that students believed were considered literacy. The second column is the activities that the students believed were literacy related from the post survey. .

**Table 4.1: Students' Responses to Pre and Post Survey**

	<b>Pre Survey</b>	<b>Post Survey</b>	
Karen	Listening to Music	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Listening to Music	Talking on a Phone Watching TV Painting a Picture
Jada	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV	Listening to Music
Steve	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Talking on a Phone	Listening to Music Painting a Picture
Mike	Watching TV	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV	Listening to Music Painting a Picture
Carol	Watching TV Talking on the Phone Listening to Music Painting a Picture	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV	Listening to Music Painting a Picture
Cole	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List	

	Watching TV Talking on a Phone Painting a Picture	Watching TV Painting a Picture	
Norm	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV Talking on a Phone Listening to Music Painting a Picture	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV Talking on a Phone Painting a Picture	
Pamela	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Listening to Music Painting a Picture	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Listening to Music	
Lance	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List	Reading a Newspaper Writing a List Watching TV	Talking on a Phone Listening to Music Painting a Picture
Adam	Writing a List	Writing a List Watching TV Talking on a Phone	Painting a Picture

The results of the pre survey showed that all students believed that at least one activity of the six was a literacy activity. Their perceptions of the activities were different. One student believed that watching TV was the only activity on the survey that linked to literacy, while other students believed that reading a newspaper (six) and writing a list (seven) was considered literacy.

During week one, four of the ten students (40 percent) believed that listening to music was a literacy event. After discussing how music play an important role in literacy as it has words that we read, sounds that we listen to, words that we write, and meaning that we understand, seven of ten students (70 percent) felt that listening to music was beneficial to their learning about literacy.

Six out of ten students (60 percent) felt that reading a newspaper helped develop literacy in their lives during week one and all but one student believed that

five weeks later that reading a newspaper helped them become better readers (90 percent) After reviewing parent logs I asked certain students to share different materials that they read throughout the week hoping to help all of my students realize that any material can be read, and reading something helps you become more aware in literacy.

The number of students who believed watching TV was a literacy event doubled from the pre survey to the post survey, from four to eight students (80 percent). Much of this change be a result of Lance's discussion of how he used the caption button on his remote to help find words he knew on the television screen. As a class, we also discussed that many different types of language styles can be heard on TV, from mature, sophisticated language, to baby talk done by toddlers.

All students chose writing a letter as a literacy activity during week six, compared with seven students during week one (30 percent increase). A lot of conversation was had during our Lucy Calkin's driven writing workshops about all the success students can have through the use of writing.

There was not much of a change from week one to week six in regards to the literacy activity "talking on the phone." Many of my first grade students were made to believe that talking on the phone is not a great use of time, which I believe is the reason why more students did not choose it on their survey for being a literacy activity. During week one, three students believed it was useful and during week six (30 percent), five students thought it was a beneficial literacy activity (20 percent increase). We did discuss that talking on the phone helps us understand how proper

grammar should be used, depending on the person we talk to.

During week one of my study, many students laughed when they heard me say that painting pictures was a sign of literacy. It is no surprise that the number of students from week one to week six who believed painting pictures was useful to them in literacy doubled. The percentage of students during week one that believed that painting was literacy was 30 percent. During week six, the students who believed that painting was literacy was 70 percent. Over the time period of my study, 40 percent of students changed their way of thinking in terms of visually representing and literacy.

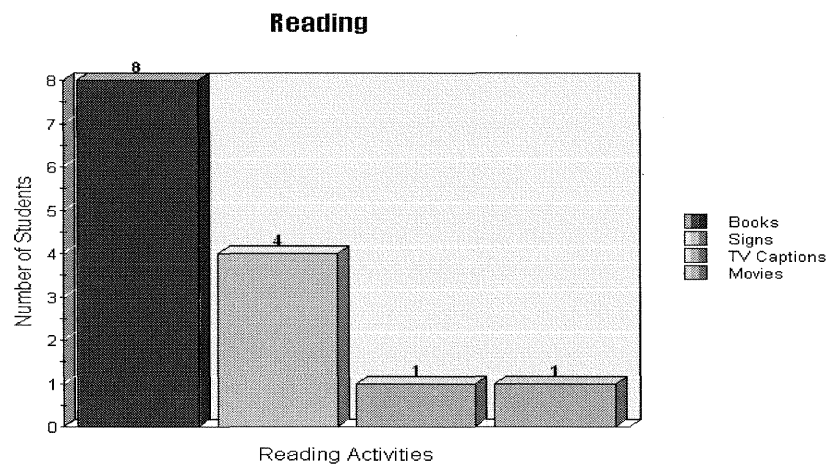
Eight students increased their awareness of literacy activities from the beginning to the end of the studies except for two students, Norm and Cole. At the beginning of the study, Norm and Cole were both "below level" readers and could not read the survey on their own so I read the pre survey to them during their guided reading group time. I noticed them going ahead of the group by circling the "yes" or "no" column before I could read the activities to them, therefore their pre survey may misrepresent their understanding of literacy activities. The post survey was also given during guided reading groups, but most students went ahead as I read after they realized that they had filled out the survey weeks ago and remembered the questions.

### **Student Interviews**

Throughout the research study, I conducted interviews with ten students who gave consent. I asked them several questions about the activities they do outside of

school and got a feel for how they viewed literacy (see Appendix B). The information from the interviews can be viewed by reading the following graphs:

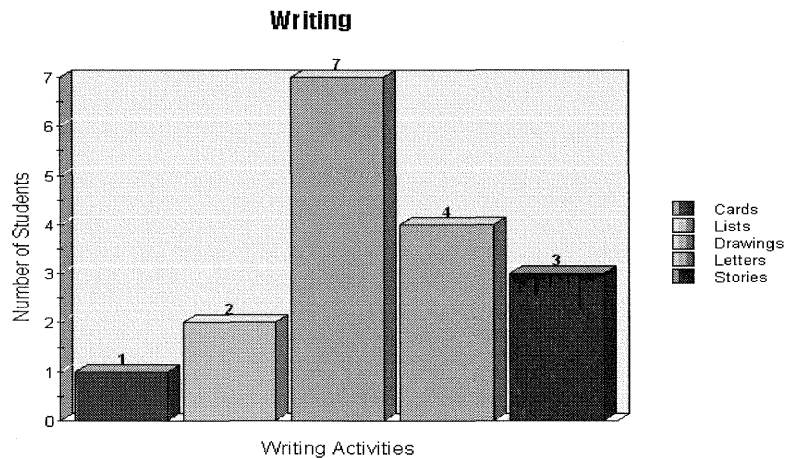
**Figure 4.1: Students' Outside of School Reading Activities**



Eight of the students represented in Figure 4.2 interacted in book reading as part of an outside of school reading activity. Some book titles that were stated in the student interviews were *Go Dog Go!*, *The Butterfly House*, and books about princesses. Many students did not realize that there were many more types of things to read besides books, which they probably read every day. For example, four students mentioned that they read signs. Some students read street signs as they were walking down the street while others read speed limit signs as they drove through town. One student noticed the school sign each morning when she walked into

school. Interestingly, another student (Lance) from my case study explained how he read at home by reading the captions on the television screen and by reading titles of movies when they played on the T.V.

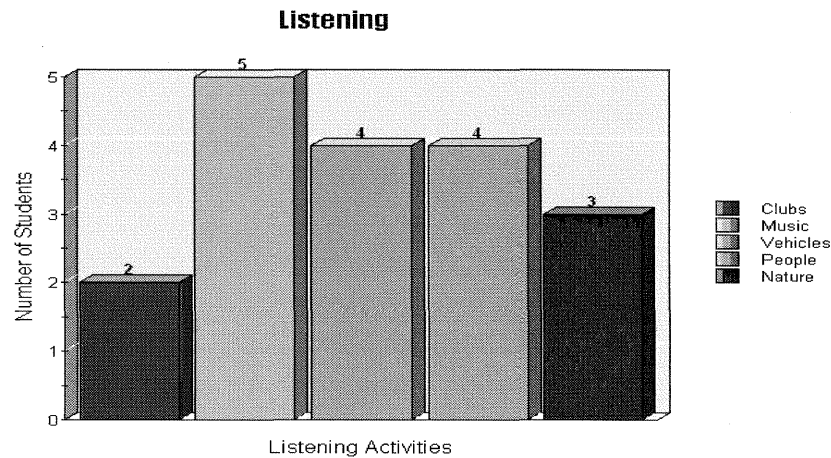
**Figure 4.2: Outside of School Writing Activities**



At the start of the school year, I taught my students that drawing pictures was a form of writing and that good writers start writing through the use of pictures. Therefore, it did not surprise me to see that the majority of my students explained that drawing was a literacy activity they did outside of school. At this point in my study, drawing is something that was easy for them as they had a full year in kindergarten to practice it. It is their way of expressing their ideas, their likes and interests, and their artistic abilities. Other students noted that they wrote notes to family members and myself, or made lists to use at the store, and wrote in cards to give to other people. One of my students (Mike) who is a great reader explained that he also writes his own books at home. He takes blank pages and staples them together, like we do in writer's

workshop, to create wonderful stories.

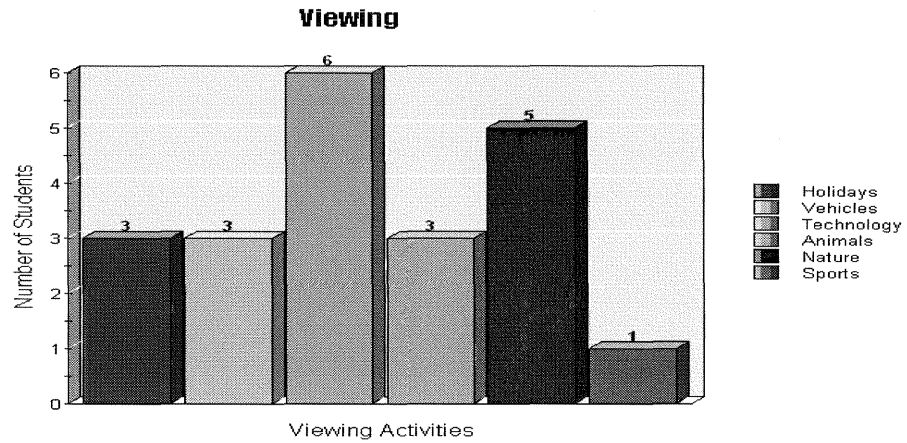
**Figure 4.3: Students' Outside of School Listening Activities**



I recognize that music is very important in a first grade student's life. This is something they hear all the time, especially after being taught different beats and rhythms in kindergarten. In the community in which my study was conducted, there is a lot of music being played on streets. Homes are very close together and the windows and doors are often left open for others to hear what is being listened to indoors. Five of my first grade students mentioned that listening to music is something they do on a daily basis. Along with living in a busy neighborhood, first grade students mentioned that they listen to sounds in their environment such as people and vehicles.

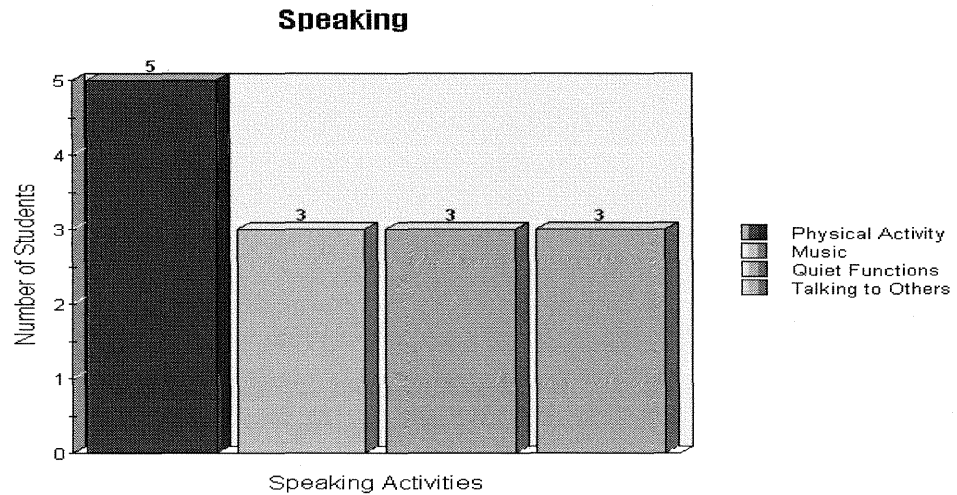


**Figure 4.4: Students' Outside of School Viewing Activities**



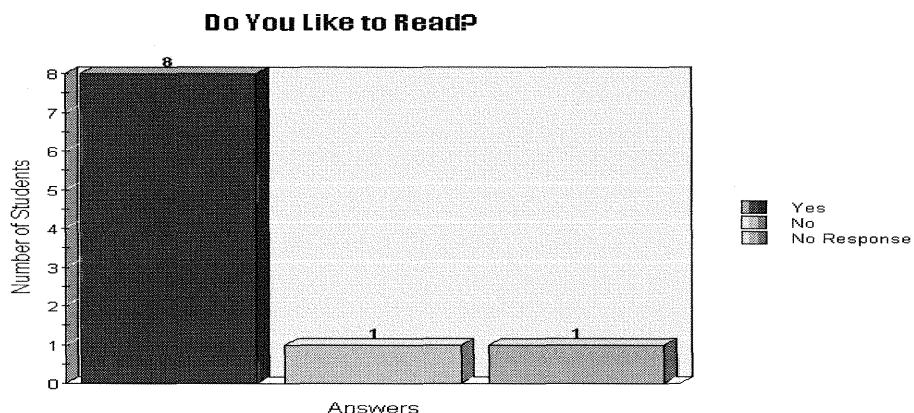
The most viewed literacy activity of students was some form of technology. Seven of my participants come from low socioeconomic homes, and therefore must have connections to neighbors or family members that have technology. Also five of the participants noted viewing nature as a literacy event. During the school year we took several nature walks around school and viewed animals in their environment, people playing outside and the changes of the weather according to the season. Some of the nature scenes that were viewed, according to my students during their interviews, were leaves falling from trees, rainbows after rainstorms, the sun on warm days, fireworks after celebrations, birds flying south for winter, and ladybugs and bugs landing on flowers to eat.

**Figure 4.5: Students' Outside of School Speaking Activities**



Five of my first grade students participated in speaking while being involved in a physical activity, like sports or playing on the playground. Some sports that the students mentioned during the interviews were baseball, soccer, and snowball fights. Other students spoke on the phone to family members who lived far away, or when traveling in a car, or at church with their families. Several students went into detail to mention how they spoke at different events. For example, when at church, one student (Adam) mentioned that he speaks quietly or he sings loudly during singing time. Many students admitted that they spoke a lot when they read to family members during the evening too.

**Figure 4.6: Students' Opinion of Reading**



I observed that my first grade students are very excited about reading. During the emergent stage of reading in their life and they realize the importance that reading has to their future. It is no surprise to me that all but two students enjoy reading. The student (Steve) who does not like reading feels that it is boring and prefers activities that have more simulation, like computer games or video games. The student (Steve) who does not like reading happens to be one of the highest readers in the class. The student (Norm) who did not respond was very distracted during the student interview and after the first six questions said he had enough of sitting down and did not want to finish the survey.

### **Summary**

Overall I found that looking at data more than once and over a period of time enabled me to gain more insight to my students' perception of literacy and the

activities that revolved around reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and visually representing. I was able to uncover themes and patterns by triangulating data from my study. Also, I was able to answer my research questions. I answered my questions through classroom observations, parent log books, student interviews and pre and post surveys. Though all of this data, I was able to see how patterns in outside of school literacy events, like the ones stated above, occur in different families.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this research study was to learn about the types of literacy activities my first grade students participated in before and after school. By analyzing the results of the students' surveys, my observation, parent logs, and classroom discussions, and reviewing the case studies, I have drawn several conclusions about the types of activities, with which the students engaged.

The following research questions guided my study:

1. What types of outside of school activities foster emergent literacy abilities in first grade children?
2. Which gender typically participates more frequently in out of school literacy activities with young children?
3. What different types of literacy activities do first grade boys and girls typically participate in outside of school?

### **Conclusions**

#### **Students Participated in a Variety of Outside of School Activities**

After analyzing the student interviews and parent logs, I have come to the understanding that the participants engaged in a variety of outside of school activities that fostered their emergent literacy abilities. For example, my five case study students participated in reading, writing, viewing, listening, speaking and visually representing throughout the six week time period.

However, while each participant participated in all five areas, they relied heavily on the reading, writing and viewing areas of literacy. A little more than half of the

participants (60 percent) read a book every night or were read to during my six week study. This is consistent with Kuo et al (2004) study in which 52 percent of young children were reported to have been read to every day by a parent. Each student also participated in a writing activity at least twice a week. The writing events, however, varied.

According to data from the parent log, all case study students participated in viewing activities at least four times a week. Some weeks parents would not note that his/her child listened, spoke or visually represented, which was quite surprising to me because it is very difficult for a child to not listen, speak or visually represent in a one day time period.

### **Both Boys and Girls from Low Socioeconomic Status Participated in Literacy Outside of School**

Prior to conducting my study I predicted that families from low socioeconomic status would participate less in literacy activities than families from middle or high socioeconomic status. I also believed that gender would play a large role in how students participated in literacy activities outside of school.

After conducting the research I found that both of my predictions are false. Each family gave their child a wide range of literacy activities, however some first grade students participated in activities that provided more learning opportunities than others. One low socioeconomic status student, for example, played on the playground with other neighborhood children and listened to other students play,

laugh and tell direction. A middle socioeconomic status student went to the same playground and viewed a student who bullied another child, which then resulted in him writing about the experience the next day at school.

Both boys and girls in the study participated in daily literacy activities, however, their experiences varied. It appeared that the student who came from a family with a higher socioeconomic status was involved in a richer literacy experience as he took an event and turned it into a positive learning experience.

### **Boys Participated in Literacy Activities that Revolved Around Physical Play**

All of the students in my study participated in literacy outside of school. The literacy experiences were different depending on the student. I noticed that each gender participated in several activities revolving around the six areas of literacy, but the female participants seemed to do more reading than the male participants and the male participants appeared to do more literacy activities that revolved around sports or physical activity. For example, the parents of the four male case study students listed on their logs that their sons rode bikes, scooters, and wagons while they listened and spoke to their peers. Other physical literacy activities included playing outside with friends, playing football, watching physical events, like football games, and running around at the park and on the playground. Other male students from my class who were not part of my case study students mentioned that they played baseball, wrestled with brothers, and helped build forts with their dads.

According to Kuo et al (2004), the literacy development of a child is

identified on family characteristics and routines that are associated with a family's literacy orientation. This was also true of the participants in my study. Parents who once played sports and who still considered physical activity part of their schedule had children who participated more frequently in sporting events. For those parents who were girl scout members and eventually became girl scout leaders most likely had children who attended scouts or an equivalent group that taught social skills and community involvement.

### **Surveys Create Purpose for Learning**

I noticed that all ten participants (100 percent) performed better on their post survey than on their pre survey. During week one, each student had a chance to respond to the questions that we would learn throughout the next six weeks. After each student had taken the initial survey, we went over the answers as a class, which gave students the chance to realize their misunderstandings about the six areas of literacy. This may have given the study motivation to look more carefully at their literacy activities and experiences. Completing the pre survey may have also provided students with a window into what they would learn about so there were less surprises in their learning and they could become familiar with the terms and ideas that were new to them.

When the case study students took the post survey, they were able to compare answers, and each student had a strong sense of self when they noticed their increased



score over the six weeks, which helped them become more confident in their abilities to learn new material.

### **Student Interviews Help Establish Stronger Student-Teacher Relationships**

Participating in the interviews left a lasting impression on my students. I noticed that they appeared to develop a sense of voice in relation to their learning. My twenty students knew that the result of our interview would most likely become a teaching and learning moment during our next class meeting. I believe this helped my students feel as though they had a role in our classroom. The student interview also enabled me to develop a better understand my students. I was able to learn more about my students' home life than I would if I were to have just greeted them every day. As my students and I were discussing their literacy experiences, I also shared some of my own experiences and aspects of myself during the interview. I felt that the interviews led to healthy, respectful relationships between my students and me because we were able to learn so much about each other.

## **Implications for Student Learning**

### **Students Increased Their Understanding of the Value of Outside of School**

#### **Literacy Activities**

Throughout my study, my participants learned a great deal in terms of how

outside of school activities revolve around literacy. At the beginning of the study, most students felt that watching television was bad and that it did not help them in any way develop their literacy abilities. They were used to hearing that “watching television rotted their brains.” In class, we discussed that watching television promotes literacy because they hear people speaking English correctly. They are exposed to different languages, and notice that people speak in different dialects and at different levels. For example, the students noted that when children and babies talk on television it is usually in short, sometimes incomplete sentences. When adults talk, they were able to hear how language is supposed to be spoken, in purposeful, complete sentences.

### **Class Discussions Enabled Students to Become Aware of Their Learning**

A significant part of my study consisted of talking with students about literacy experiences and activities that they participated in outside of school. This was very beneficial in helping the students become aware of their learning. For the first time, they were using words, such as, literacy, visually representing, and mentioning unique signs and stories that they never considered previously. Students believed that they could develop their literacy abilities by continuing the activities they had been participating in, or by starting an activity that they heard their peer discuss the day before in class. The discussions led each student to think about how the events he or she attended before and after school helped him or her become a better writer, reader, listener, viewer, speaker, and visually representers.

## **Sharing Outside of School Literacy Experiences Helped Students Become More Confident in Speaking in Front of the Class**

At the beginning of the school year my students were very shy when they had to stand before their peers and talk. For example, when Norm shared his first writing piece to the class on the ELMO projector, he looked at me until I read his writing for him to the class. As I tried to explain his picture to the class, Norm stared at the floor and shuffled his feet around. It was obvious that Norm did not feel confident in his work and could not yet explain his picture to the class.

Participating in this study gave Norm and some of his peers the confidence to speak in class, a very difficult process for seven of my nineteen students. During the class discussions, I made everybody feel like experts on the events that were included on their parent logs. Each child got to be “the teacher” and explain to others what he or she did before and after school to become better learners. We also learned through the discussions that each student is different and may participate in activities that another student had never heard of or would never consider doing before. This study tied in greatly with the social studies unit at the time of “My Community and Me.”

### **Implications for My Teaching**

**Class Meetings Should be Held as Frequently as Possible in a First Grade Classroom**

Our classroom discussions helped students understand that the activities they participated in before and after school were practices of literacy. Most of the students who shared their parent logs regarding their literacy experiences helped give other students insight and helped them become aware of activities at home that revolved around listening, speaking, viewing, reading, writing, and visually representing.

Several interesting conclusions can be drawn by analyzing the pre and post surveys. When I looked at all of the checked columns from the students, it was evident that most students increased their awareness of literacy from week one to week six. The classroom discussions contributed much to this success.

### **Parent Information Can be Used to Help Plan Instruction**

Noticing the differences in literacy activities that the boys and girls participated in can help me differentiate my instruction to better suit my students. It is apparent from my results that first grade boys tend to participate in literacy activities that were more physical activities and therefore I have come to the realization that boys would benefit from participating in more physical learning activities in school. For example, when I am introducing new spelling words I can have them jump to each letter as we spell the word. I could also use sports related themes to help engage my boys in the material.

I noticed that the girls enjoyed participating in activities that revolved around visually representing. When introducing vocabulary throughout the week I could ask my girls to draw pictures next to the vocabulary words to help them remember the

meaning of the word through the use of their visual representation.

Both girls and boys enjoyed constructing things with their hands. I could offer more time during the day where students could construct things. For example, I could have students use pipe cleaners to create an animal and then write about their animal during writing time. In science, I could provide more time for students to problem solve as they are constructing their materials and then share aloud to the group on the steps they took to solve the problem.

### **I Need to Establish Collaborative Relationships with Parents**

Teaching students to read takes teamwork between teachers and parents. I learned how helpful it is to involve parents in their child's education through my study. Focusing on this topic was a great way to communicate with parents on their child's literacy experiences. It enabled me to create meaningful class discussions with my students about the different types of things students do outside of the classroom. Through the use of parent logs I was able to see which students were able to take the material they learned in class in their home environment. I was also able to see the parents' perceptions of literacy activities that their children partake in outside of school. This gave me insight on what the different types of backgrounds that the students bring into my classroom.

After talking with parents I understood that my research topic helped them become more aware of different activities that they might offer their children that are relate to and support their child's literacy development. My research topic also helped

equip parents with skills that facilitated their understanding of what their child is capable of doing outside of school, and helped positively influence many parents' attitudes toward school. One parent asked if she could volunteer in the classroom after she gained the confidence in first grade literacy activities. This type of change was consistent with Clark's (2007) research who found that the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices the more profound the results of long lasting effects on the students. Clark also found that parental involvement in their child's literacy learning positively affects their child's performance at school, better school attendance and few behavior problems.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **How Much Time Should Be Spent on Literacy Activities Outside of School?**

While the findings of my study showed the different literacy activities that students participated in outside of school, further research needs to be done to explore the amount of time spent participating in literacy activities. On their parent logs parents listed the events that their children participated in, but seldom gave the amount of time their children engaged in the literacy activity. Therefore, I am uncertain of whether a child wrote a list for two minutes or twelve minutes. More research needs to be done documenting how much time first grade students spend in literacy outside of the classroom. This is important because as a first grade teacher I

want to know how long my first grade students should participate in an activity that will lead to literacy achievement. I want to know if there is a time period that is both too short and too long for a student to participate in reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking and visually representing.

### **How Often Do Parents Interact in Literacy Activities With Their Children?**

In addition, more research needs to be done on the quality of parent and child interaction during outside of school literacy activities. In my study, the parents mentioned what the child participated in, but not all parents indicated if they partook in the literacy experience or if their child did it solely. It is important to determine if parents partook in literacy experiences indicated on the parent logs because students often experience richer literacy activities when an adult is present. The reason being, adults can model how the literacy activity looks or sounds. Parents can also converse with their children on the literacy experiences that the child participated in. This can help the child understand more about reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking and visually representing. If a parent was not active in a literacy experience with their child, then the child may not realize that the event was considered a literacy activity and as a result, gains no understanding of what they just did.

### **Which Literacy Activities Correlate to High Scores in Literacy?**

Last, research needs to be done on linking outside of school literacy experiences to academic success in first grade students. I am interested to find out if

certain literacy activities benefit students more than others. It is important to determine if there is a correlation of outside of school literacy experiences to student success because as a teacher it is my job to give my students the best education they can receive. If there are certain activities that can promote higher achievement in first graders, then I want to pass that along to my students' parents and to other teachers to ensure success in each student.

### **Final Thoughts**

As I have shown through the finding of my research, reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing begin at an early age and involves parents and other family members as well as the children themselves. I have learned through my study that each child partakes in literacy in his or her own way. Aspects of gender, race, and socio-economic status did not play a large role in the students' involvement in literacy activities outside of the classroom. The literacy experiences do often vary, depending on these factors, but each child in my classroom participated in literacy in one way or another. I did notice, however, that oftentimes it was the parent who helped promote or demote literacy outside of school. In addition, students often participated in events outside of the classroom that directly connected to experiences that occurred inside of the classroom.

The findings of this study show that it is never too early to start instilling the love of literacy outside of school. A child's attitude toward literacy is affected by the



way reading, writing, listening, viewing, writing, and visually representing are presented to him/her. In order for a child to succeed in school, literacy needs to be a meaningful, rich experience in which he or she can participate daily.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix A: Parent Survey

November 12, 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your answers to the following questions will help me learn more about activities or interests your child's interests and his or her literacy experiences outside of school. Thank you.

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What activities does your child enjoy participating in before and after school?

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2. Who does your child typically participate in literacy with outside of school? (example: mom, dad, brother, sister, grandmother, coach, babysitter etc.)

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3. What literacy activities does your child engage in at home? (examples: reading, writing, watching television, playing video games, conversation with others, talking on the phone, drawing pictures or making crafts)

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4. What else do you think I should know about your child in terms of his/her literacy activities outside of school?

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**Appendix B: Student Survey**

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

Nov. 2010

What do you like to do outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who do you spend like with outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you read outside of school? What types of things do you read?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who do you spend most of your time reading with outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you listen to outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who do you talk with outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

What things do you view or watch outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you write outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_

What activity from the parent log would you like to share with your classmates?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C: Parent Log**

Day of the Week	Out of School Literacy Activities	Comments
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		

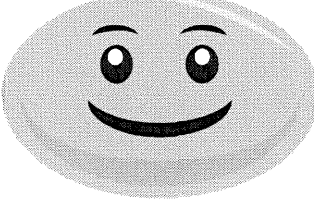
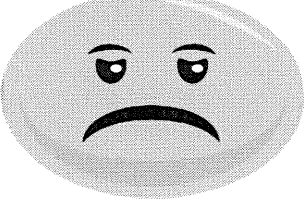


Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

### Appendix D: Pre/Post Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Please put a checkmark for each activity under the “yes” picture (if you think it’s a literacy event) or the “no” picture (if you do not believe it is a literacy event).

Activity	 YES	 NO
Reading a Newspaper		
Writing a List		
Watching TV		
Talking on a Phone		
Listening to Music		
Painting a Picture		

## Appendix E

### Examples of Outside of School Literacy Activities



<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Listening</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Child reads a book, magazine, newspaper, note, etc.</li> <li>-Child is read to at night by another person (mom, dad, sister, brother, grandma, etc.)</li> <li>-Child reads signs at the store or on the road. (McDonalds, Wal-Mart, Martins, etc.</li> <li>- following a recipe to cook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Child writes in a journal</li> <li>-Child labels a picture</li> <li>-Child helps create a grocery list</li> <li>-Child makes a list of things to do, or a Christmas wish list</li> <li>-Doing homework, such as writing math problems or filling in answers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Child listens to the radio, IPOD, computer, television program</li> <li>-Child listens to a conversation</li> <li>-Child listens to a book being read</li> <li>-Child listens to directions given by another person, such as, a coach or parent</li> </ul>
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Visually Representing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Child has a conversation with a peer or family member</li> <li>- Asking your children the topics that they are learning in school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Child draws a picture or creates a craft</li> </ul>	