STRENGTHENING THE HOME-SCHOOL LITERACY CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this case study was to investigate the underlying issues impacting the home-school connection for readers in kindergarten classrooms, by exploring the following questions: What issues do parents face that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home, and what do parents suggest for teachers to strengthen the home-school connection? The study examined the hidden issues or underlying causes that prevent parents from supporting their children with literacy activities at home. The study also explored parents’ perceptions of their child’s current classroom teacher and her parent involvement techniques and communication. Parents were asked to provide suggestions on what the classroom teacher could do differently in order to strengthen the home-school connection. Using active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) as the primary method of data collection, this study examined the responses of a teacher and parents in a kindergarten classroom in Northwest Ohio. The data was used to determine the issues that affect parents’ abilities to work with their children on reading. It was also used to discover what parent involvement strategies are successful, and to find what parents feel teachers could do differently to strengthen the connection between home and school.

The results of this study suggest that there are factors in the home environment that affect the amount and quality of literacy interactions that take place in the home. The study revealed that there is a need for teachers to understand the home environments that students come from in an effort to provide literacy activities that meet the needs of all students and families. Lastly, more consistent communication between the home and school is needed in order to strengthen the home-school connection.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement continues to be a crucial element in children’s success in school (Baker, 2003; Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000; Finn, 1998). The foundation of literacy development begins at a very young age, before a child begins formal schooling (Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Neuman, 2004). A continuous pattern of parental involvement throughout a child’s years in school can have significant benefits such as increased academic performance and motivation.

However, while educational researchers know that the parent plays an important role in a child’s literacy development, knowing this does not ensure a literacy rich home environment. Research has found that many parents want to help their children succeed but are often unaware of how to do so or are unable to do so because of certain circumstances (Edwards, McMillon, Turner, & Laier, 2001). Parents do not know what educators know, nor should they be expected to be reading teachers on par with trained educators. If home literacy opportunities are to be improved, educators need to provide meaningful tools with which parents may work with their children (Baker, 2003). Rather than blame parents for providing an inadequate home literacy environment, educators need to examine and understand the reasons why every child does not have a successful home literacy experience.

Many studies over time have shown a relationship between the actions of a parent at home and reading success (Evan et al. 2000; Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Linder & Foote, 2002; Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006). Researchers believe the disconnect between what is happening in the home environment and at school is causing students’ difficulties (Neuman, 2000; Paratore, 2002). Reading scores continue to decline in many schools and “over one-third of U.S. children enter public schools with such low levels of the skills and motivation needed as starting points in our current educational system that they are at substantial risk for
early academic difficulties” (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001, p. 53). This is why educators need to examine what is happening in homes related to literacy development.

It is important for educators to understand the reasons why home literacy practices are so challenging for parents. Educators may not have the background to understand these issues at home and therefore have not done anything more to involve parents. This is because literacy often functions differently in the home than at school, thus creating an imbalance between home and school (Baker, 2003; Paratore, 2002). In addition, all parents face the challenge of helping their child perform well in school. Parent’s behaviors, press for achievement, and goals for learning also affect the student’s performance (Finn, 1998). One primary reason these difficulties arise is because parents may not have the education needed to assist their child. Also, many middle class and working class parents work long hours, and parents of working class families often work more than one job and may work the night shift. As a result, they spend less time with their children in the evening and on the weekends than a parent who works a day job. In addition, parents of different ethnic backgrounds often value literacy in different ways. Many times educators make assumptions about the reasons parents do not seem to help; oftentimes, however, the assumptions made are incorrect. Parents often do not have a choice on the issues they face at home. Therefore, educators need to be aware of and work with parents to benefit the child.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a significant amount of research conducted on parental involvement and the positive effects that it has on children’s academic development (Linder & Foote, 2002; Lynch et al. 2006; Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). Parents who introduce their children to books and participate in literacy related interactions early in life
are helping to prepare their children for reading at school (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). However, while this is an ideal situation, oftentimes these literacy rich experiences do not take place until children begin school. According to Finn (1998), many parents do not have reading materials or activities to use with their children to support their literacy development. He argues that parents often want to help their children succeed but believe that they lack the skills needed to help with their children’s reading. In addition, parents of diverse backgrounds often do not understand school-based literacy practices and have a difficult time implementing reading activities in the home (Nieto, 1996). There are many issues that parents face in the home environment and because of these, it is important to focus on understanding the reasons why some parents, especially those of low socioeconomic status and culturally diverse backgrounds, are involved in ways that do not necessarily translate into school success (Edwards, 1995). Little effort has been made to help educators understand the various forms of literacy that are occurring in these homes (Linder & Foote, 2002).

According to Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants (2000), teachers must listen to parents and ask them to share information about their literacy environment at home. Baker (2003) agrees with this notion of parent involvement arguing that educators must provide advice to parents but that parents should provide advice to teachers as well. Through this relationship she believes that literacy interactions can be improved at home and at school. If educators and parents work together to design literacy activities, it is hopeful that a home-school connection can be made (Baker). Furthermore, research needs to be conducted to understand the underlying issues in the home environment that prevents parents from providing, using, or assisting their children with literacy interactions in the home. In addition, research should be conducted to find what parents think teachers can do in order to strengthen the connection between home and school.
Research Question

Much research has been conducted on factors in the home that effect literacy development. Socioeconomic status and a person’s cultural background can have an affect on the amount of parent involvement in the home (Nieto, 1996). Many parents want to help their child succeed, yet they are not providing the support needed at home. Therefore, this study examined the hidden issues or underlying causes that prevent parents from supporting their children with literacy activities at home. It also focused on the communication and activities provided by the classroom teacher. The questions were: “What issues do parents face that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home, and what do parents suggest for teachers to strengthen the home-school connection?”

Rationale

The results of this study will be useful in understanding the complex issues in home environments that contribute to the type and amount of parental involvement in literacy. With this information, teachers will be able to better understand what prevents some parents from successfully supporting their children with literacy activities in the home. The data from the study will also allow teachers to understand what tools of communication or parent involvement strategies are effective. Teachers who understand these issues and what strategies are effective will be able to develop more valuable communication techniques and relationships with parents. In addition, understanding these issues will allow administrators and teachers to develop a plan to promote and support parental involvement in these homes.

Definition of Terms

The following terms need to be defined to understand the research and outcomes of this study.
1. Emergent Reader/Literacy – “The child acquires some knowledge about language, reading, and writing before coming to school. Literacy development begins early in life and is ongoing” (Morrow, 1997, p. 131).

2. Family Literacy – the rich literacy practices that pervade home and community (Cairney, 2002, p. 154).

3. Home Literacy Environment – participation in literacy-related activities in the home, which can include aspects of exposure (availability of print material) and frequency of reading (Leseman & de Jong, 1998).

4. Home-School Connection – the connection between the home and school setting and the contributions each makes to fostering children’s development (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

5. Recreational Reading – “Independent reading to foster positive attitudes and interests as well as good reading habits” (Gipe, 1998, p. 412).

Limitations

It is important to identify the limitations that may be present within this study. First, parents shared personal information for the study. Therefore, participants may have shared what they think the interviewer wanted to hear. As a result, not all information shared may be truthful or accurate. Secondly, participants were selected based on recommendations made by the teacher. In addition, five parents were interviewed during the study. Lastly, each parent interviewed was from the same school district and were parents of children who are in the same kindergarten classroom. While this provides a rich insight into the home literacy practices of children in a single educational setting, it is not intended to paint a complete picture of the home literacy issues that parents face.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the theory and historical perspectives on parent involvement as well as the importance of a strong home environment for emergent readers. In addition, it outlines the influences on home environments and explores parents’ roles and perceptions about home-school partnerships. Lastly, it lays out the literature on parent-teacher collaboration and looks at what teachers are and are not providing to foster a home-school connection.

Theoretical Perspective on Parental Involvement

The social constructivist theory studied by Vygotsky suggests that emergent literacy is influenced by various factors in the child’s environment including literacy opportunity, instruction, cooperation, and social-emotional quality (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). Thus, children construct their own knowledge through social interactions with others (Santrock, 2004). Leseman and de Jong found that through these social interactions, children develop knowledge, skills, and values. They argue that the characteristics and opportunities for social participation vary from child to child. As a result, these variations can lead to differences in developmental outcomes for children. Neuman and Roskos (1997) state that “Children use the resources and constraints of the social and physical environment, as well as their relevant knowledge and skills, to analyze and construct their understanding of print and their world” (p. 10). That is, emerging children develop and learn through aspects of their environment without explicit instruction from a teacher or parent (Leseman & de Jong). Vygotskian theory suggests that learning first happens between individuals and their environments and is later internalized within the child (Edwards et al. 2001). Therefore, learning activities first take place socially, between at least two people, and later they become activities that can be done individually. Overall, Vygotsky believes that the social context is a major contributor in the development of young children.
A child’s emergent literacy is constructed through his or her social world, and because of this it is important to look at parent involvement in the home environment. There is consistent evidence throughout the research on parent involvement that suggests teachers often assume that parents are not involved and do not care about their children’s education. Many times educators blame parents and believe that parents know how to help their children read, and oftentimes this is not the case (Baker, 2003; Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants, 2000; Edwards, 1995). This common misconception does not help improve the parent-teacher relationship between the home and school. Edwards has looked at this issue and found that parents of middle class and working class families do want their children to succeed. However, she argues that these parents, and especially the parents of low socioeconomic status and minority children, are often unaware of how to help their children with literacy activities. As a result, teachers need to provide guidance to help parents understand and practice the skills that will in turn allow them to provide appropriate social interactions for their children (Baker,).

Paratore (2002) argues that schools need to reach out to parents in supportive ways so that parents can provide appropriate social opportunities for their children to develop. Traditionally, schools often prescribe various approaches for parents to use without listening to their needs. However, schools need to focus on listening and understanding parents to provide solutions that fit their needs. Researchers such as Heath (1983) and Paratore argue that educators must look beyond the mainstream classroom to find literacy behaviors that are a part of other cultures. Teachers need to understand the multiple literacy environments from which students come so they can make a better home-school connection (Edwards, 1995). For instance, literacy may be different in homes that maintain their native language or in homes where parents have little educational experience (Nieto, 1996). Therefore, teachers must listen to parents and
understand how literacy is different in these homes in order to provide support that meets the needs of these children. Through this, educators can also provide literacy intervention programs that help teach parents how to engage in at home literacy activities. As a result, educators can be sure that they are not too narrowly focused on literacy behaviors of the mainstream culture.

The parent-school connection is critical because it encourages parents to work with their children and provide them with opportunities for social interaction. However, schools need to make sure that parents are receiving the resources they may need to be successful teachers of their children at home (Finn, 1998). According to Finn, these resources may include access to books and literacy materials, knowledge of concepts, or support. Parents who want to help their children with literacy need to become knowledgeable on the importance of literacy and learn reading strategies that will help their child succeed (Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, & Shapiro, 2006). As a result, educators must provide guidance, support, and advice for parents to help them become successful (Baker, 2003). In addition, Baker argues that parents must share information with their children’s educator about the literacy environment at home. According to Edwards (1995), a tight home-school connection can continue to help educators build relationships with parents in order to understand what is happening in homes. She argues that the home-school connection needs to involve parent and teacher communication in both directions. That is, parents need to share information with the teacher and teachers must listen to the parents’ needs, understand them, and then provide activities that parents can use to help their child be successful.

Historical Perspective

Historically, parents have always been a part of children’s lives and have supported their schooling in some way. During the traditional era from Colonial Times until after the Civil War, schools made no attempt to relate children’s school experience to the home (Finn, 1999). Parent
involvement during this time was seen in a very narrow scope. Schools assumed that all homes were the same and therefore a “prescribed” method was used in an effort to involve all parents. The level of involvement was a one way transaction, from the school to the home (Linder & Foote, 2002; Paratore, 2002). Educators often blamed the home for failure and failed to look at their own method as being a part of the problem (Finn). This “one size fits all” approach is a very narrow focus which still continues to be a concern for educators today. All in all, this approach does not meet the needs of all students and their families.

In the early 1970s attitudes toward culture, class, and race continued to be an issue which affected the amount of parent involvement that was taking place. Many teachers and schools did not want to acknowledge differences and as result had an attitude that said “I don’t see black and white, I only see students” (Nieto, 1996). Educators who refused to see differences were teaching to the majority population, thus inhibiting the learning of those students who were not part of the dominant culture. Teachers claimed that they were not being biased because everyone was receiving the same materials and education. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a school district in 1974 saying that teachers must understand differences and provide methods and strategies to meet the needs of all students. They ruled that “Equal is not the same” and teachers must learn to accept differences instead of avoiding them (Nieto). This court ruling allowed for the advancement in understanding differences including gender, race, ethnicity, language, and social class. As a result, teachers slowly began to understand that they must acknowledge the differences and needs of every child and make provisions for them.

Also during the 1970s Shirley Brice Heath conducted a study that allowed for advancement in the history of parent involvement. Desegregation was in full force during this time and she was interested in studying the language differences between towns in the Carolinas.
Her study found that the lives and cultures of children affect their literacy development. In addition, the use of language is affected by cultural patterns and the socialization process. She found that patterns of interactions between oral and written language vary between communities because of the cultural patterns. Therefore, one must understand the cultural differences between homes and what is happening at school. Prior to this, teachers were only focused on the habits of the “norm” and therefore failed to recognize and meet the differences of others (Heath, 1983).

Finn (1999) continued to develop the idea of parent involvement during the 1990s. Finn argued that progressive education was different than what was previously being taught and that educators needed to focus on two different concepts. These included focusing their lessons around the “whole child” and all of the experiences that he or she may have. In addition, it included the notion that every child is different and each has his or her own interests and background experiences. Through this movement Finn argued that educators must be sensitive to the experiences their students bring to the classroom. He argued that educators need to look at the deeper issues to understand their students and work more with parents. He believed that there was no “prescribed” way of working with parents and that educators must develop ways to meet the needs of all families (Finn).

Recently, Edwards (1992; 1995) and others (McMillon, Turner, & Laier, 2001) have been studying the issue of parent involvement and have examined the relationship between the home and the school as a network. Edwards argues that no teacher can do the job alone and that he or she must work with parents to create a working relationship. She believes that a network between the home and school is often difficult to create because of a disconnection between the home environment and school. Edwards (1995) argues that this disconnect often exists because teachers use mainstream approaches in the classroom. She believes that while there are
mainstream approaches such as reading aloud to a child and book-reading activities, these can be altered to fit different cultures and reading levels. Therefore, teachers must understand how home and school literacy may be different in ways and work to minimize it to best assist the families of each child in their classroom. Edwards et al. (2001) and Dandridge et al. (2000) found that through an effort to work and communicate with parents, teachers can come to understand the diverse needs of the families with whom they are working. As a result, they can work to eliminate the blame they often place on parents who are not involved in their child’s schooling (Edwards et al.; Dandridge et al.). Edwards continues to see the notion of parent involvement as a team effort in which all people must understand the diversity of homes in which children live.

**Strong Home Environments**

For many years research has been conducted to examine how a child’s home environment affects his or her literacy development and overall achievement in school. Through this, researchers have found that home environments rich in literacy activities (such as age-appropriate books and magazines, literacy games, or environmental print) will help promote young children to be successful readers and writers (Morrow, 1997). Leseman and de Jong (1998) agree that the number of books and literacy activities in the home are important in preparing children for reading and writing success in school.

There are many variables that help construct a strong home environment that supports emergent readers. Factors such as a caring adult (Paratore, 2002; Rashid et al. 2005), a family member role model (Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Rashid et al.), opportunities for practice (Finn, 1999; Leseman & de Jong; Neuman, 2004), motivation (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Leseman & de Jong), and the amount of reading materials (Finn, 1998) in the home are all aspects that
make a strong home environment. Home environments that provide these opportunities for children help them develop their literacy skills and can help them increase their overall performance in school. This list of home literacy factors is explored more fully in the following sections.

**Caring Role Models**

One factor that is seen in strong home environments is that of a caring parent role model. In these homes, time is spent on reading with parents serving as role models for their young children (Durkin, 1966 as cited in Paratore, 2002). Rashid et al. (2005) agree with this notion of parent involvement. They believe that promotion of literacy by literate family members is an important aspect of a strong literacy environment in the home. In addition, children are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards reading when they see their parents participating in literature activities. Watching their parents read a TV schedule or write a shopping list are ways in which literacy is easily modeled in the home (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). They argue that while this type of literacy is not directly related to school literacy, it may help children develop an awareness of print and make literacy more familiar. As a result, parents who want their children to be successful in school need to model literacy practices and provide opportunities for practice.

While many parents may care about their children, literacy practices may not be a common, everyday occurrence because oftentimes parents have limited time or knowledge to devote to working with their children (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Many parents want to help their children but may find it difficult (Edwards, 1995). Edwards conducted a study to find how a program influenced low-income mothers and fathers after the program developer was no longer involved. She found that the parents did care about their children and could now help them
because they had been taught. Criticism has been made over family literacy programs because they feel that they blame the parent for being uninformed. However, Edwards found that most times parents are happy to learn new expectations and opportunities for their children because they care. Rasinski and Padak argue that expectations and activities taught to parents should be based on effective “state-of-the-art knowledge” because of the lack of time that parents have. This way, when parents do work on activities with their children, they are highly effective. Overall, it is important to look at the fact that a caring parent role model is part of a strong home environment but because of time commitments and experiences, they do not always provide literacy activities and support to help their children succeed (Rasinski & Padak).

Opportunities for Practice

Another aspect of the home environment that is associated with school performance is the amount of time children spend reading. Finn (1998) argues that a parent’s organization and consistent monitoring of his or her children’s time is important for their success. He says that parents who are active in helping their children manage time are assisting or overseeing that the children are spending time on literacy or school-related activities. In turn, these children are completing their homework and may be doing additional activities because the parents are there for support. These children may also be receiving additional practice from parents. Studies done by Crawford, 1985; Leach & Sidall, 1990; Mehrean & White, 1988, indicated that parent tutoring can have a positive effect on a child’s literacy development. Parent tutoring increases performance because the child is receiving individualized practice with reading and reading related activities (Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000). However, it is important to recognize that for parent tutoring to be successful, parents must have teaching strategies and knowledge to actively assist their child in a meaningful, appropriate way (Finn). Powell-Smith et
al. did a comparison study on two parent tutoring programs. One program used children’s literature books and the other used classroom basals. In the end, they found that neither program had a significant effect on student achievement. Instead they found that lack of literacy skills could hinder the tutoring experience thus discouraging the parent and child. Therefore, it is important to understand that tutoring can be a positive experience for the parent and the child as long as the parents have the skills or have been trained on how to successfully tutor their children. Consistent reading practice in the home along with motivation may help children develop skills for literacy success (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

Motivation

Motivation is a major factor in whether children enjoy reading, and it can affect their ability to be good or poor readers. Parents and family members have a large influence on their child’s attitude toward reading. According to Edwards and Bauserman (2006), parents can influence their children’s book choice by providing materials that are interesting, thus motivating them to read. They found that the mother seems to be the family member that has the most impact on children’s reading motivation. However, it is important to note that all family members including fathers, grandparents, siblings, and cousins can affect reading motivation (Edmunds & Bauserman). Baker (2003) found that children who are given the opportunity to engage in reading activities at home have a better outlook on reading and participate more in recreational reading. In addition, these students are more likely to be successful in reading because it is something they enjoy and thus something they practice and become better at (Baker). Neuman (2004) suggests that reading to a child often can also help increase his or her motivation to read. She believes that through this, children “learn firsthand the pleasures that
reading can bring” (p. 22). As a result, it is important to understand the importance of motivation and how to motivate a child who is learning to read.

**Materials**

The amount and variety of reading materials in the home is an important aspect of promoting and using literacy outside of school (Edwards, 1992). Edwards argues that many children come from homes where few books are available for their use. She says that if books are available, they are often not interesting to children or are not written at the appropriate level. For example, homes may have mainly adult books or books that are gender specific, which are not interesting to all children. Children who come from homes with little reading materials often start school with very little book experience (Finn, 1998). In addition, Rasinski and Padak (2004) found that many parent involvement plans often fail because homes do not have appropriate reading materials. As a result, they suggest that teachers provide parents with these materials so that they can find success in helping their children read.

However, it is important to note that materials alone are not the sole factor in successful home literacy. Weinberger (1996), for instance, noted the importance of a variety of experiences with print material. He suggests that going to the library, reading environmental print, and watching educational television can all have a positive impact on reading skills. As a result, it is important for parents to provide a variety of reading materials and opportunities for their children. These reading materials may include newspapers, magazines, books, a dictionary, or computer games which all promote the use of literacy and provides children with multiple options (Finn, 1998). The more literacy is promoted within the home, the more experience children will have when they begin school and the more likely they will be to succeed (Purcell-Gates, 1996).
Influences on the Home Environment

Currently there are many uncontrollable variables that influence a family’s home environment, such as socioeconomic status (Leseman & de Jong, 2001; Lynch et al. 2006; Storch & Whitehurst, 2001), single parenting or working parents (Finn, 1998), a parent’s educational level (Baker, 2003; Lynch et al. 2006), and cultural diversity (Finn; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005). Children who experience one or more of these variables often have increased difficulties in school because they may not be receiving the same support or the same literacy experiences (Baker). As a result, these children often need special school accommodations to help them succeed (Edwards et al. 2001).

The literacy environment that is created in the home has a significant impact on children’s development of reading and language skills (Evans et al. 2000). According to Finn (1998), parenting practices such as monitoring a child’s time, teaching and explaining concepts, reviewing homework, and providing support are related to children’s achievement. Differences in children’s performances can be related to a lack of these practices in homes (Finn; Roberts et al. 2005). According to Neuman (2003) children with socioeconomic and demographic risk factors are more likely to have learning difficulties in school. “In fact, more than half of U.S. children are reported to have one or more risk factors for school failure” (Neuman, p. 287). As a result, it is important to look at the factors that shape home environments and how they influence a developing child.

Socioeconomic Status

One of the variables that influences the type of literacy that takes place in the home is socioeconomic status or SES (Burchinal, Campbell, Bryant, Wasik, & Ramey, 1997; Linder & Foote, 2002). SES is determined by family income, parental educational level, parental
occupation, and social status in the community (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.). Students who come from low SES homes often experience learning or adjustment problems in the regular classroom; however, while these children are at risk, many experience no problems at all (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988). According to Nieto (1996), parents from low SES homes oftentimes have difficulty with forms of parent involvement such as helping their child with homework or supporting them at school activities. She argues that parents who have trouble helping their children with homework are often illiterate or simply naive about school literacy expectations. While these parents may not help their children with homework because of these factors, they oftentimes monitor their children to ensure that the work is getting done (Nieto). According to Adams (1990), parents from these homes typically have fewer resources to help their children with literacy activities. In addition, the quality and frequency of shared book reading is often much lower in these households (Adams). As a result, less time is spent on homework and reading. Children from low SES homes can be successful with parental support and school involvement (Edwards et al. 2001).

Single Parent Homes and Working Class Parents

Linking closely with the SES are single parent homes as well as working class parents. Parents care about their children and their education but oftentimes they are forced in different directions to provide food and healthcare for their children (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.). In addition, parents sometimes have to work two to three jobs to survive and pay for these basic living needs (Dandridge et al. 2000). For example, a single mother of three who is working two jobs to provide for her family is going to have a much harder time paying for expenses than a husband and a wife who both work a fulltime job to provide resources for their children. Nieto (1996) suggests that having multiple jobs can be difficult on parents because
it may force them to be out of the house when their children are home. As a result, many students often assume the role of parenting at a very young age (Nieto, 1996). Some students who are still learning to read themselves may be the only ones available to help younger siblings. Therefore, the amount of support the children are receiving at home is minimal.

Single parent homes often face many of the same issues (Finn, 1998). These parents may also have to take on additional jobs to make ends meet. In addition, many literacy activities that take place in the home require a time commitment. Single parents or parents who are busy working do not have the time needed to complete homework and other reading activities with their children (Finn). Parents of low SES want their children to achieve academic success (Edwards et al. 2001); however, many times, the amount of time these parents spend on literacy in the home is out of their control. Crises can arise in homes and parents have to deal with situations that are usually unplanned.

**Parent’s Education Level**

Parents’ educational level also has an influence on the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home (Baker, 2003). Beginning readers often start school with very little book experience. Early, positive developmental behavior is important because behavior that is dysfunctional often continues to be throughout a child’s years in school (Finn, 1998). As a result, it is important to look at the influence of the parent’s educational level in relation to the amount of reading they are doing at home (Baker). Lynch et al. (2006) found that parents’ beliefs about literacy are related to their educational level. As a result, their beliefs affect the amount of interaction they believe is appropriate in the home. For example, a mother and father of three children with only a high school degree may believe that the literacy activities their children do in school are enough because they believe that learning should be done in school, not at home.
(Lynch et al.). On the other hand, they argue that a family of four where the parents both have a college degree understand the importance of literacy and reinforcing and practicing concepts at home. The quality of the interactions parents have with their children influences children’s literacy development and motivation for reading (Baker; Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein, & Serpell, 2001). In addition, parents may not have the skills needed to support their child while reading. Some parents who attempt to help their children oftentimes make mistakes or focus too much on mechanics. For example, a parent is reading a story aloud with their child. The child is reading fairly fluently and makes minor mistakes every once in awhile such as saying “up” instead of “in”. The meaning of the text is not changed but yet the parent continues to correct the child’s mistakes, thus causing frustration (Personal Example). Parents who do this often lower their child’s motivation to read (Finn).

**Cultural and Ethnic Factors**

Literacy in the home is also influenced by cultural and ethnic factors (Baker, 2003; Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Nieto, 1996). Nieto found that family cultural values are often different than those of the mainstream culture, or of school culture. She argues that parents of ethnic minorities are highly supportive of education and want to help their children succeed. However, she suggests that literacy in the homes of minority students is often viewed and valued differently depending on family cultural values and previous experiences. The value of literacy can be different depending on “inability to speak English, limited funds, lack of previous experiences, or negative previous experiences” (Nieto, p. 339). Therefore, these children often experience disconnect between what is happening at school and what is happening at home (Baker; Linder et al. 2002; Paratore, 2002). For example, many families wish to maintain their native language in the home. For others, literacy in the home and school are different and
therefore used for different purposes such as reading to learn at school as opposed to reading to complete a task at home. Baker proposes that this can be problematic and oftentimes makes it difficult for students to transfer literacy from one context to another. In addition, parents often want to help their children but are not familiar with school based literacy (Edwards, 1995; Edwards et al. 2001). These parents simply are uninformed and as a result have a difficult time assisting their children in the process. Parents of minority children may not speak English. As a result, they are often unable to help reinforce school concepts or reading in English (Nieto). The homes of minority students are often structured differently because of cultural values and therefore, educators must understand the influences this has on children’s literacy development (Edwards, 1995; Linder & Foote, 2002).

Overall, it is important to note that children who have multiple negative influences at home are more likely to have limited literacy experiences (Neuman, 2003). She argues that a combination of the previous influences (low SES, working parents, parent’s education level) can have a detrimental effect on children’s development. Storch and Whitehurst (2001) agree that home and family factors influence the development of skills that children acquire as emerging readers.

Parent Perceptions and the Home Environment

Parental support in the home environment is critical for students to develop and be successful readers (Finn, 1998; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005). The parent-child interactions that take place in the home are important because research has found a relationship between parent-child literacy activities and children’s success in school (Leseman et al. 1998). Parents’ beliefs about literacy relate to the amount of reading in the home, motivation, and achievement by their child (Baker, 2003). In addition, literacy activities are often viewed and valued
differently in many homes, especially in the homes of minority or disadvantaged families (Linder et al. 2002). According to Lynch et al. (2006), literacy in these types of home may be viewed and valued differently because of a parent’s educational level or their SES. In their study, parents were interviewed about their literacy beliefs and their behaviors. Based on the interview results, they found that low SES parents tend to have a more skills-based approach whereas high SES parents believe in an emergent literacy perspective. In the skills-based approach parents tend to focus more on specific skills whereas in an emergent literacy perspective, parents tend to ask more questions and involve children in conversations relating to the text (Lynch et al.; Heath, 1983). This research suggests that children in low SES homes are receiving different experiences because of their parent’s beliefs. As a result, educators cannot assume that parents do not care. Instead, they need to examine and understand parent perceptions on literacy activities and what is taking place between the home and school (Linder & Foote).

According to Baker (2003), the parent’s self concept as a reader plays a large role in his or her perception of literacy activities that take place in the home environment. She argues that parents may be unmotivated to read to their own children because they may not be able to read or are simply poor readers themselves. Parents who face this dilemma often cannot read aloud to their children or may have difficulty reading newsletters that are sent home or the directions on their child’s homework (Edwards, 1995; Baker). As a result, they are unable to assist their child because they are unsure of what to do themselves. In addition, parents often believe they lack the skills needed to help their child with reading and schoolwork (Edwards, 1995; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Consequently, these parents may make mistakes or simply choose not to participate in literacy activities with their child out of frustration (Finn, 1998). Parents in this situation may have a negative perception of the literacy events that can take place in the home environment.
A parent’s self-concept affects their perceptions along with their cultural experiences (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). Parents of culturally diverse backgrounds often find it difficult to provide early literacy support for their children at home (Farver, Xu, Eppe, & Lonigan, 2006). According to Nieto (1996), families of diverse backgrounds often wish to maintain their native language along with their family traditions. She states that it is important for their children and themselves but often makes it difficult because the consistency between home and school are different. These parents want to assist their children with literacy and school related work but are often unable to reinforce the school concepts (Nieto). This makes it difficult on parents because it seems as though they may personally feel forced to give up their own home culture to align school literacy practices with those at home. As a result, it is important for educators to recognize and understand that parents may feel this pressure. Educators can then work to establish a relationship with the home that allows parents to feel comfortable practicing literacy in their home (Nieto).

Many parents want to be involved in their children’s education but their own perceptions often influence their interactions in the home environment (Finn, 1998). Rasinski and Padak (2004) argue that most parents are not teachers. Therefore, they suggest that parents need training that is understandable to them and that provides demonstrations, discussion, and a time for questions. Through this, parents can begin to understand what teachers expect of them and learn strategies that they can use at home to assist their children with literacy. Edwards (1995) agrees that parents need suggestions and ideas about ways that they can interact and engage their children in beneficial literacy activities. She argues that all parents can learn to help their children no matter what their educational level is. Rasinski and Stevenson (2005), agree that parents often do not know the focus or strategies they should be using with their children.
Therefore, parents must receive clear objectives and instructions from educators on how they can help their children with literacy in the home (Rasinski & Stevenson). Through these efforts, educators can make sure that all parents are comfortable in assisting their children with literacy activities.

Assisting Parents with Literacy Activities

According to Cunningham (1987), children who come to school with emergent literacy skills have been exposed to reading and writing experiences in the home. She argues that these children have learned skills at home to help them be successful learners at school. Dever and Burts (2002) found that many parents foster a home environment that supports literacy. However, they argue that there are other parents that may not have the literacy materials or the knowledge needed to help support their child. As a result, these researchers have looked at ways to provide materials to parents to help them help their child with literacy. Dever and Burts found that it is important to address the needs of families and provide activities to involve them in education. One such activity that was developed was Family Literacy Bags (Dever & Burts) or Home Literacy Bags (Grande, 2004). The contents of these bags may vary but contain books and materials that parents can use to help support their child with reading aloud at home. Materials may include such items as sight word cards or games, children’s picture books, or writing notebooks (Grande). According to Grande, and Dever and Burts, these bags are provided to help parents understand the level their child is reading at, to provide them with literacy materials, and to help them become more involved in their child’s education. However, Grande argues that educators must go beyond simply providing the literacy activities. They must also assist parents in knowing how to use these activities to support their children’s literacy at home. In addition, Barbour (1998-1999) argues that these bags allow parents to go beyond what they would
normally read or do with their children. She believes that these bags help to reach all families and encourage parents to read books and do literacy related activities together.

Parent-Teacher Collaboration

The relationship between parents and classroom teachers is an important aspect of the home-school connection (Neuman, 2000). Baumann Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro (2000) found that out of 1,207 teachers, 93% encouraged parents to read regularly to their children at home. In a survey of elementary reading instruction practices, Baumann et al., found that teachers recommend that parents listen to their children read aloud but only about half of those educators actually send books home for their students to read. Furthermore, the researchers found that only 10% of teachers indicated that they invite parents to school to learn more about how they can help their children with literacy activities. According to Baker (2003), the problem with parent-teacher collaboration is that teachers often assume that parents know how to help their children with these activities. In reality she argues that these parents may not know how to help their children especially if they are struggling readers. There are many aspects of the home environment that affect how the child performs in school (Dandridge et al. 2000). As a result, it is important to look at what teachers are doing and what more can be done to foster a tighter home-school connection.

A study designed by Linder and Foote (2002) found that there is an urgent need to develop teacher education programs on parent involvement strategies. In this study, data were collected from pre-service and practicing teachers on their awareness of the importance of family involvement. The results of the study found that the term family literacy was limited along with their awareness of programs and strategies to involve parents. Based on the results of this study,
it seems that there is a need to provide programs for teachers that help them understand and
develop strategies for working with parents (Linder & Foote, 2002).

According to Cairney (2002), administrators and educators across the United States have
designed and implemented various programs that are aimed at helping parents understand how
they can help their children with literacy. These programs are often federally funded such as
Head Start, Even Start, or the Family School Partnership Program (Cairney). A study done by
Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe, and Munsie (1995) found that these programs are limited in
their scope and few of the programs brought significant changes in educational programs. In
addition, many of the programs fail to recognize the language, literacy, and cultural diversity of
the communities they are working with (Nickse, 1993). Based on the research by Cairney et al.
and Nickse, these programs do not seem to be meeting the needs of the families they are serving.
While most of the programs are research based, it is important for the organizers to understand
their audience and their needs for the programs to be successful (Cairney).

For children to receive the most of their education, it is important for the home and
school to have a positive relationship (Lynch et al. 2006; Neuman, 2000). Recently, family
literacy programs have been developed for schools to understand the homes of families and build
relationships with them accordingly (Auerbach, 1995). According to Steinberg (1996), many of
the developed programs only examined the most basic level with parents being involved only
when needed. For example, parents were involved only when help was needed for a special
program, event, or with individual children (Steinberg). Handel (1999) argues that this
relationship is often problematic because schools are failing to look at the home environments
from which the children come. He believes that parents often mistrust the school environment
because they often do not acknowledge their children’s literacy needs. Handel believes that these
programs are designed in a one-way direction: from school to home. Thus, he argues that educators are continuing to focus on parent involvement without understanding the underlying issues at home that may affect it.

According to Edwards (1995), many different forms of literacy exist and literacy can be used in many ways. She argues that it is important for teachers to understand this concept because their students and families may not be practicing mainstream literacy at home. If teachers are able to understand the multiple literacy environments that students come from, they will be able to make a stronger home-school connection (Edwards). Paratore’s (2002) research found that many home environments offer various literacy and language practices in the home. However, he argues that these practices are often not understood or noticed and therefore, they are often not built upon in the classroom. Rasinski and Stevenson (2005) believe that parent-involvement programs allow the teacher to understand and learn more about family literacy practices. Through this, they believe that teachers can then design curriculum to better meet the needs of their students. Overall, it is important for teachers to understand and practice multiple ways of literacy in the classroom to make the home-school connection stronger (Neuman, 2000).

According to Baker (2003), there is a large impact for students on the amount of parent-teacher collaboration that takes place. She found that “Struggling readers will benefit from effective collaborations involving home and school” (Baker, p. 92). Therefore, she suggests that it is important for both parents and teachers to make a strong connection between the two environments. In addition, the amount and quality of parent-child literacy interactions helps to determine a child’s success in school (Leseman, & de Jong, 1998). Leseman and de Jong agree that educators must help parents learn about how to engage in these activities at home. In addition, Handel (1999) and Steinberg (1996) argue that teachers must try to understand families
better. Therefore, it is important that teachers do not assume that parents know what to do (Baker). She believes that teachers must provide guidance, build confidence, and allow parents to visit their classroom. Teachers should provide advice to parents but parents should also provide advice to teachers about their own children (Baker). This two-way relationship is important because it helps motivate readers and allows for a more consistent literacy environment between the home and the school.

Summary

As children begin to fall farther behind in their early reading experiences, it is important to look at the amount of parent involvement that is taking place in the home. There are many aspects that make up a strong home environment that help in a child’s success in reading (Evans et al. 2000). Edwards (1995) and Finn (1998) state that it is important to understand that many parents do care and they want to help their children be successful in their education. However, they argue that parents often do not know how to help their children or do not have the time or resources to do so. In addition, there seems to be a cultural disconnect between what is happening in homes and what is happening at school (Edwards; Neuman, 2000). Edwards and Neuman argue that the values and beliefs on literacy at home often do not fit those of the mainstream culture at school. As a result, they believe that teachers need to understand parents and the home environments that children come from. In addition, teachers need to have open communication with parents and a continuous, two directional relationships (Edwards, 2001). Through this, she believes that teachers will begin to understand the underlying issues in an effort to promote and use strategies to increase parent involvement.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This case study was designed to examine the underlying issues impacting the home environments of early readers and the suggestions parents have for teachers to strengthen the relationship between home and school. Research has found that “parents and the literacy environments they create in their homes are widely believed to play an important role in the development of children’s reading and language skills” (Evans et al. 2000, p. 65). Understanding issues in the home will allow teachers to develop communication techniques that meet the needs of all families. As a result, teachers need to delve deeper into the issues their students face at home to understand and communicate better with parents. Given this, this study asks the following questions: “What issues do parents face that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home, and what do parents suggest for teachers to strengthen the home-school connection?”

Methods

Research Design

The researcher used case study methods to explore the issues in this study. The case study method involves assembling information gathered during interviews into summaries about each participant.

The construction of information through parent interviews allowed the researcher to compile the information into five case summaries. Each of these case summaries examined demographic factors and literacy activities in the homes. The construction of information also allowed the researcher to examine the reasons or factors that contribute to variations in parent involvement in literacy in the home. The researcher examined what parents do with their children and the successes and difficulties they face. In addition, parents offered insight into the
literacy activities the teacher currently provides for students. Parents also indicated what the teacher does in order to help them be a teacher for their child at home. The parents were asked about the teacher’s communication techniques and if they were effective. Lastly, suggestions were made on what the teacher can do differently to strengthen the connection between home and school. The information gathered was useful in understanding what the kindergarten teacher is currently doing or not doing to involve parents and how the parents feel about her current strategies.

Participants

The participants for this study were parents of students at Oakmont Elementary School (The name is a pseudonym). Oakmont is located in an urban area with approximately 39,000 people and an average yearly income of approximately $41,000 (City Data). The school houses students from kindergarten to second grade. Oakmont’s ethnic diversity is 81% White, 7% Multiracial, 6% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3% Hispanic, and 3% unidentified. Currently, 27% of the students at Oakmont are considered economically disadvantaged. Economically disadvantaged students receive free or reduced priced lunch or public assistance (Great Schools, 2006).

The kindergarten classroom at the school consisted of a morning and afternoon program. The morning class contained 21 students of which 11 were males and 10 were females. The afternoon class had 21 students of which 10 were males and 11 were females. The classroom represented a diverse set of students who came from low-middle and middle-high class families.

The participating teacher had 14 years of experience and taught at Oakmont Elementary School for 11 years. To work with parents and help her students with literacy at home, she used nightly homework booklets that the students had to complete. These booklets contained a variety
of subject material and focused on new skills learned in class. Each night, the topic varied and topics included handwriting, math, reading, or work with letter sounds. As the year progressed, these homework booklets gradually got harder. The teacher also encouraged students to read nightly by sending home books every night. Baggie books were sent home every Tuesday and Thursday. Parents were instructed to assist their child in reading the leveled books, sign the completion form, and return it to school with their child. On Monday and Wednesday, students made paper books in class and then took them home to read at night. Parents were provided with letter flashcards at the beginning of the school year and were encouraged to practice letters and sounds with their child every night. Lastly, the teacher provided sight word flash cards for students. This set of cards had new words added to it once a week. Students were expected to study these words each night and bring them to school on Tuesdays to have new words added.

Data Sources

For this research study the primary data sources were interviews with the teacher and five parents. Interview questions were developed to capture parents’ experiences working with their children at home and their experiences communicating with the teacher. A separate interview protocol was developed for an interview with the teacher (See Appendix A and Appendix B for questions). Tapes and a tape recorder were used to record the interview sessions. Recording each session enabled the researcher to generate verbatim transcripts of the data obtained. Transcribing the information allowed the researcher to analyze the data more completely.

The classroom teacher was interviewed to obtain information about her current parent involvement strategies. Her current perceptions on the effectiveness of the strategies along with her description of what an involved parent is were observed and noted.
Demographic information including age, gender, socioeconomic status, occupation, marital status, and ethnicity were recorded during the parent interviews. Information was co-constructed with parents on the underlying issues in the home environment that affect literacy activities in the home as well as the amount of time and skills that parents have. Issues among parents differed, including a parent’s educational level, employment status, or parenting status. In addition, data was gathered on each parent’s perception of the teacher’s current parent involvement strategies and on what suggestions they had in order to strengthen the home-school connection.

The interview process was completed using an active interviewing approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). In this approach, the interviewer asks questions that are specific to each participant. Therefore, interview questions varied from one participant to the next because the interviewer asked the participants questions based on their responses and experiences. A list of interview questions was available; however, they were only used as a starting point and not all questions were necessarily used. Through this active interviewing approach, the interviewer was able to probe the participant’s responses for deeper meaning and clarification of information. The approach was chosen because meaning is co-constructed between the participant and interviewer. Through this technique, more meaning was obtained because the participant was active in the process. Researchers argue that this form of interviewing goes far beyond the traditional interview. “The interview is an occasion for constructing, not merely discovering or conveying information” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 120). Therefore, it is the interviewer’s responsibility to direct the participant’s responses toward the information he or she wanted to learn. All in all, the interview is a collaboration between the participant and interviewer set up to learn and understand more information about what the participant has to share (Holstein & Gubrium).
Procedures

Contact was made with the participating school principal and permission to complete the research study was obtained. The teacher who agreed to participate was interviewed about her current parent involvement strategies. Next, she sent the provided consent letters home with her students. Parents read, signed, and returned the consent form to school indicating that they were interested in participating in the interview. The researcher chose five parents to interview based on recommendations made by the teacher. The researcher contacted the participants by phone once consent had been given. An interview date and time were set up with each. Interviews took place at different times at a local public library.

Through the parent interviews, information was constructed on the issues that parents face in the home environment that affect the amount and quality of literacy experiences in the home. The researcher collected information from parents on how often they work with their children on literacy and for how long. Information was also obtained on what literacy activities parents do with their children at home and what an average day looks like in their household. Additionally, information was constructed on how parents see themselves as a literacy facilitator and the struggles they believe they face at home that affects their ability to work with their children. In addition, the researcher obtained information from parents on how they feel about the current parent involvement strategies being used in their child’s classroom. Parents were asked about the literacy activities the teacher provides and whether they believe they are effective. Parents also gave their opinions on the teacher’s communication techniques. Lastly, parents gave suggestions on what the teacher could do differently to improve her parent involvement methods.
Data Analysis

The teacher interview and each parent interview were individually transcribed using the tape recorded during the interview. A case summary was written for the teacher and each parent including the data that were collected during the interview. Each case summary was then analyzed using holistic comparison methods and a matrix of responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The summaries were used to help understand parent involvement, the struggles parents may face, and the types of literacy experiences in relation to demographic factors. Data were also analyzed to understand how parents view themselves as a facilitator and how they view literacy in the home. In addition, the data were analyzed to find the underlying issues or difficulties that parents face in the home environment that affect the literacy activities they use. Analysis on the families’ daily routine and on the amount of reading that takes place in the home were also completed. The data were analyzed to determine what parents believe the teacher could do better to help them with literacy at home and on how they feel about the teacher’s current parent involvement and communication strategies. In addition, it was analyzed to determine each parent’s perception on the literacy activities the teacher provides. Lastly, analysis was made on the parents’ suggestions to make recommendations to teachers on how they could communicate better with parents about helping their children with literacy.

Summary

This investigation focused on gathering demographic information, home environment issues, and perceptions and suggestions on current parent involvement strategies from parents of kindergarten students. A kindergarten classroom was chosen because literacy in the home environment at this age is crucial to a developing child. The design of this study involved the use of active interviews to co-construct data on current teacher involvement strategies and on what
issues parents face that affect the literacy activities they participate in with their children. The information collected from interviews was transcribed and written into case summaries. All of the case summaries were analyzed to determine what the underlying issues are in homes and what parents believe and suggest about the teacher’s current parent involvement techniques.
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the underlying issues in the home environment that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home. In addition, this study was designed to find what suggestions parents have for teachers to strengthen the connection between home and school. The data used in this study were collected during interviews. First, the teacher was interviewed to find what strategies she currently uses to involve parents in her classroom. Next, five parents of students from her kindergarten classroom were interviewed to collect data on their home environment and perceptions as a parent. All names used in this report are pseudonyms. The constructed data were analyzed to find similarities and differences among home environments and what parents suggested for the teacher to strengthen the home-school connection.

Teacher Case Summary

Mrs. Miller

Mrs. Miller has been teaching for 14 years and has taught for 11 years at Oakmont Elementary. Her morning and afternoon classes each contain 21 students. Mrs. Miller provides a variety of activities to reinforce learning and uses a variety of communication techniques to communicate with parents.

At the beginning of the year, Mrs. Miller provided letter flashcards for students to use and practice at home nightly. She did not formally ask students if they practiced these but she could monitor progress through their work in class.

Baggie books are sent home with students two nights a week and another small paper book is sent home on the other nights. She asked parents to make a library at home to keep their books in. To ensure that parents are reading with their children, Mrs. Miller meets with students
to discuss their book and who read with them. Through this, she is able to tell who is and is not reading at home. In addition, parents are required to sign their child’s homework folder each night so that she knows they are receiving assistance at home.

She also sends home skill-word rings which contain high frequency words or popcorn words they are working on in class. In addition to the set words, she adds additional words such as color and number words. New words are sent home each Tuesday and the word rings are supposed to be returned to school on Friday. These words are also reinforced at school through small chants and songs. She also has a Popcorn Word Wall, which displays all of the high frequency words. Through assessments, she is able to see who is using and reinforcing these words at home.

Mrs. Miller always welcomes parent volunteers of past and present students. Her current parent volunteers come from different demographic backgrounds. She has single parents, high SES, and middle-class volunteers. Parents may help make copies, work with the children, or do very basic testing. There are also other organizations within the school that parents may become involved with such as LAMP or Ohio Reads.

To communicate with parents, Mrs. Miller sends home a weekly newsletter each Monday. The newsletter explains what they are learning in each subject. It also has other current events that are happening at school. She believes that these newsletters are very effective because parents can read them to find out what is happening at school. It reminds parents of dates, conference times, etc. Then if parents have questions about the information in the newsletter they can contact her for more information.

Mrs. Miller also utilizes parent-teacher conferences held once in the fall. Beyond this conference, parents must initiate additional conferences if they are interested. Oftentimes, they
try to communicate with notes or by phone before additional conferences are set. This is because of the busy schedule that both she and the parents face. She feels that the parent-teacher conferences are very effective because she always has a high turnout. She also has an open-door policy she shares with parents. Through this, parents are welcome to approach her with questions or to set up a conference at anytime. However, she has found that few parents have taken advantage of this. She frequently sends home notes with children if they are having difficulties so that parents know before the problem becomes too large. Parents seem to respond well to these notes and sometimes follow-up with questions on what they can do. In addition to the above, parents may also email, call the school or call her at home, if needed. She believes that she has regular communication with over half of the parents through phone or email.

Mrs. Miller sees an involved parent as someone who is working with his or her child at home and keeping open communication with the teacher. Involved parents are active in helping their child and assisting them with their homework. She sees some involved parents helping in the classroom, donating materials, or simply knowing when help is needed. Involved parents are there for their children when they need to be.

Parent Case Summaries

_Kathy_

Kathy, 41, is a single, white parent raising two boys, Sam, age five, and Duke, age twelve. Sam is an all-day kindergartener in Mrs. Miller’s class. Kathy is seeing significant progress with Sam since he started the all-day program in September.

Kathy grew up in Ohio and attended college at Anderson University, Indiana where she received her Bachelor’s Degree in Education. After graduating, Kathy realized that teaching was not for her and she began working in the restaurant business. Kathy began working at a
restaurant ten years ago and continues to work as a server making approximately $10,000-$20,000 a year.

Kathy believes that it is part of her responsibility to help teach her child at home. As a result, she indicates that she reads to Sam four nights a week for approximately 20 minutes a night. Each afternoon, Sam enjoys a snack after-school and then they work on homework. On the nights and weekends that Kathy works, Sam spends his time with a babysitter who will help him with his work. Sam also likes to work on his V-Smile (a small hand-held computer) which helps reinforce letter and sound recognition. Beyond reading and homework, there are no additional activities done to help Sam with reading. She has books and magazines at home for the children to use and paper and pencil. Kathy loves to read herself so she is constantly reading in front of her children.

Aside from reading, Kathy takes her children to the library about once a week. During this time, Sam enjoys playing computer games while she and Duke check out videos. Sam recently got his own library card so she is hoping that he will be able to check out some books soon.

Kathy believes that her job makes it the hardest to work with her children on reading. She usually has three week nights off but works the other nights and weekends. She indicates that this makes it difficult because she is not home to help her children with their work. In addition, Kathy is currently in the process of moving her family into a new house. She said this makes it difficult to volunteer at school because she is so busy with the move. If she could change one aspect about the home environment to better help her children, she would choose to change her schedule at work.
Currently, Kathy is very pleased with the communication and strategies Mrs. Miller is using to involve her as a parent. She feels welcome in the classroom and appreciates the handwritten, personalized notes that Mrs. Miller sends home with Sam if there is a concern or something that she wants to share with Kathy. She enjoys the weekly newsletters because they help keep her up-to-date on what is happening in the classroom. She also believes that the baggie books are very effective because it gives her and Sam a book to read at night and it also allows her to see the level and types of books that he is reading. She believes that the letter cards and skill-word rings have been very effective for Sam. She indicates that he has mastered the letter cards and they continue to work on the word rings approximately once a week. She is aware of Mrs. Miller’s open-door policy but has not had the need to use it. Kathy noted that the communication for the fall parent-teacher conference with Mrs. Miller was good. She said that she was very positive throughout the conference and that it went really well. Overall, she is extremely satisfied with the communication between home and school and seems comfortable with the literacy expectations placed on her by the school.

Jane

Jane is a 31-year old, white female, who is currently married. She and her husband are raising three children: Emily, 5 years old; A.J., 3 years old, and Lynn, 11 months old. Emily is currently a student in Mrs. Miller’s afternoon Kindergarten class.

Jane and her husband grew up in Ohio. She received her Bachelor’s Degree from Eastern Kentucky University in recreational therapy and her husband attended the University of Toledo and got his Bachelor’s Degree in chemistry. Jane is currently a program coordinator at a local home for students with disabilities. Combined, the couple makes over $70,000 a year.
Jane indicated that she finds it easy to read and work with Emily because they have a routine and because Emily is excited to read. Every day after-school, Jane and Emily have an hour to work alone on homework. During this time, they do Emily’s homework and work on any other projects she may have. The rest of the evening is filled with dinner, baths, and any extracurricular activities Emily may be involved with such as dance and soccer. Jane indicated that these activities usually do not interfere with the amount of time they spend on literacy related activities. If they do, they rearrange their schedule to fit everything in. Prior to bed each night, they spend 20-30 minutes reading together. She indicated that this was a great way to wind down the night before bed. They usually read seven nights a week.

Currently, Jane does not believe that there is anything in the home environment that makes it difficult to work with Emily. Therefore, there is nothing that she would change. The only challenging aspect is that Emily is a perfectionist. Therefore, she gets easily frustrated when she does not know a word.

The family currently has numerous books available for their children to read. They have three book cases full with levels ranging from newborn through elementary, all different levels. Their collection includes books such as Dick and Jane, Disney books, and Dr. Seuss. They do not have any literacy related games or activities.

In addition to reading, Emily’s parents try to do other literacy related activities to reinforce her learning. For instance, they like to challenge Emily to pick out her “popcorn words” using the environment around her. She likes to find words on TV, while driving, or on a restaurant menu. They also like to help reinforce concepts that they are currently working on in class such as graphing.
Jane believes that Mrs. Miller is doing a great job of involving and informing parents on what is happening at school. Jane loves the weekly newsletters because they inform her of what is happening at school and what her child is learning. Through this, she says that they are able to reinforce concepts Emily is learning at school. She would recommend that the newsletters continue to be sent home.

Currently, Jane has not received any specific guidance from Mrs. Miller because Emily has not had any problems. She always feels very welcome in the classroom because of Mrs. Miller’s bubbly, nice personality. She does not currently volunteer but does like to attend the Halloween parties and other related activities if she is able to do so. Her hours at work limit the amount of time she is able to be at school during the day. She indicated that she has not gone out of the way to get to know Mrs. Miller but they both know each other on a casual basis. She believes that if Emily were having problems she would be working more with the teacher.

Jane is happy with the extra materials that Mrs. Miller provides but often these materials are too easy for Emily. She believes that the baggie books are very effective. Emily loves to read them but sometimes gets discouraged by the level that is on the back of the book. The books sent home are read during their one hour homework time together. Jane liked the idea of the letter cards but they were not useful for Emily because she already knew her letters. They used the cards to reinforce letter sounds for about a week. She believes that the skill-word rings were also a good idea but Emily usually knows the words. Therefore, she challenges Emily to spell the words so that she does not get bored.

Communication for the parent-teacher conference was effective. The conference day and time was set up at a parent orientation at the beginning of the school year. Jane believes that Mrs. Miller communicated well during the conference and focused on positive aspects as well as
improvements. Jane is aware of the open-door policy but has not needed to take advantage of it. Overall, she believes that the communication with the teacher is good and she does not see a need for a change in any area.

Rob

Rob, a 42-year old white male, is divorced and is raising Caleb, his only child, as a single parent. Caleb is a six-year-old in Mrs. Miller’s extended day Kindergarten class. Rob has full custody of Caleb during the school year. Caleb stays with his mom every other weekend and during summer vacation. Rob works days, 7am – 3pm, at a factory. His average annual income is between $20,000 and $30,000.

Rob believes that it is easy to read and work with Caleb on activities at home because it is a routine that they do every night. In addition, he believes that his work schedule makes it easy because he is home at night. After school, Caleb has the opportunity to play and eat dinner. Around 7:00, they usually sit down together to read and do homework. Caleb reviews his letters with the letter flashcards and he also practices his popcorn words. He completes the homework in his booklet and then they read together before going to bed. Caleb is not currently involved in any activities that interfere with the amount of time they spend on reading activities. In addition to the assigned work, Caleb and his dad read paper made books from school together and also read together on the weekends. On average, they read approximately five days a week for 5-15 minutes each time.

Rob believes that it is his part-time responsibility to be a teacher for Caleb at home. To help with this, they have approximately 50 books and a Leap Pad. The Leap Pad has various cartridges with books that are read aloud as Caleb is playing it. If Rob could change one aspect of the home environment to help Caleb perform better in school, he said that he would like to be
a better teacher at home. Rob also said that it is hard to work on reading activities when Caleb wants to play or when they get home late because they are out at a movie.

Rob believes that Mrs. Miller could help him better as a parent if she provided more feedback to him. Each day, Caleb brings home a behavior slip that Rob must sign and return to school. This slip tells how his behavior was for the day. Rob would like more feedback about Caleb’s academics and his behavior. He knows that he is smart but he is not sure how to help. Rob believes that the parent-teacher conference was effective because the teacher made recommendations and suggested strategies for Rob to use at home. However, Rob was not able to find some of the materials she suggested and he has forgotten what strategies he should be using.

Rob likes to read the newsletter that is sent home weekly because it outlines what they are doing in class and what is coming up. Caleb reads the Baggie Books and practices both his Popcorn Words and Letter Cards. He likes the Baggie Books because they have a lot of Popcorn Words in them, which make them easier for Caleb to read. They work with each of these every night of the week. Overall, he believes that all of these are effective and have helped Caleb with his academics.

The parent teacher conference went well for Rob because he was able to see how Caleb was doing. In addition, he liked that he was able to pick the day and time to meet. He also said that he was made aware of Mrs. Miller’s open-door policy. He said he would take advantage of it but was not given a phone number to call and he doesn’t have a computer to email. He also said he was unsure of who he would go to for a phone number.

Rob feels welcome in the classroom because Mrs. Miller is very “cheery”. However, he is not currently a parent volunteer and is not interested in becoming one because he believes he
would be in the way. However, he does like to attend fieldtrips as a parent chaperone. Overall, Rob seems satisfied with Mrs. Miller’s parent involvement strategies.

Sue

Sue is a 43-year old, white female who has taught for 20 years and currently teaches fifth grade. Sue and her husband, a coach, are raising three children. Eli, is a morning Kindergartener in Mrs. Miller’s class. Allison is a seventh grader, and Brandon a tenth grader. Their combined income is over $70,000.

As a teacher, Sue finds that it is easy to work with Eli on homework because of the structure of the homework booklets and because Eli is excited to read and learn. Each day after school, Eli is picked up from the YMCA by his mom. At home, he works on his homework before dinner while his mom is making it. She is there for him if he has a question about the work. During this time, he does the homework booklet, letter cards, and skill-word rings. Sue believes that each of these activities has been effective for Eli. He has mastered his letters and popcorn words. Therefore, he is not using these nearly as often. He continues to work on homework and reading each night. After dinner, Eli has play time and then the two of them sit down together to read. She believes that the baggie books are very effective because Eli is motivated to read them. It is important to Sue that this is a one-on-one time for the two of them to work on reading. They each read seven nights a week for approximately 20-30 minutes each time.

Sue believes that Eli has a very long day which sometimes makes it difficult to do activities together. Eli is dropped off at the YMCA at 7:45 am and doesn’t leave until 4:30. Therefore, his attention span is only about 20 minutes during his homework time. Eli is not involved in any activities that interfere with homework time but his older brother and sister often
have sporting events that he attends. This changes their schedule but homework and reading are still done as soon as they get home.

Sue believes that it is her responsibility to be a teacher for Eli at home. To help Eli with his reading, they currently play many games. Eli loves to play *Wiz Kid* along with a variety of other games. In addition, Eli has a subscription to two different magazines he reads and has a Leap Pad at home. They have a lot of books at various levels. Sue stated that she and her husband like to read a lot. Therefore, she finds that they are great role models for Eli because he is constantly seeing them read.

If Sue could change one thing about the home environment to help Eli perform better in school, she would choose to have more time to spend with Eli. While she is home in the evenings, their family’s busy schedule with two teenagers often makes it difficult. She would also like to change the types of television shows he is exposed to by his older siblings.

Sue is very happy with what Mrs. Miller is currently doing to help her as a parent. She really likes the structure of the homework booklets. She believes that the daily layout makes it easy to follow and catch up on if Eli misses a day of school. She also liked the reinforcement that the letter cards and skill-word rings provided. She was amazed at how quickly he learned them and she attributes a lot of it to Mrs. Miller’s enthusiasm for learning. Sue believes that the newsletters are very informative and allow her to see what the students are learning in the classroom.

The guidance Sue is receiving from Mrs. Miller seems to be working out very well. She indicated that her overall communication is good and that email works out very nicely. She said that Mrs. Miller is good about responding to emails right away. She feels very welcome in the classroom because of the teacher’s personality and would love to spend more time there.
volunteering. Her career as a teacher makes it difficult to volunteer during the same hours she is working. To stay involved, she sends snacks and tries to attend field trips whenever possible.

The communication for the parent-teacher conference was handled well according to Sue. She enjoyed the conference that she and her husband attended. She believes that Mrs. Miller had a variety of work samples and was able to share a lot about how Eli acts at school. She was also aware of the open-door policy but has never had to take advantage of it. Overall, Sue is very pleased with Eli’s Kindergarten classroom and teacher this year. She believes that Mrs. Miller is doing everything that she needs to be doing to involve her as a parent.

_Cindy_

Cindy is a 32-year old, white female who is currently married and raising three children of her own as well as three step-children. Lori is currently a morning Kindergartener in Mrs. Miller’s class. Cindy provides evening day care in her home for young children. She and her husband’s combined income is approximately $40,000-$50,000 per year.

Cindy believes that it is her responsibility to be a teacher to her daughter at home. However, she finds that it is difficult to work with Lori because of her attention span. Lori has been diagnosed with ADHD and is currently on medication that Cindy finds is not working very well. Therefore, it is hard for Cindy to work with Lori because she is very hyperactive. However, they do find time to read five days a week for approximately 20 minutes each time.

After school, Lori eats lunch and then has play time for awhile. They then start her homework which takes most of the evening because it is a fight trying to get it done. For homework, she works in her homework booklet and uses the letter cards and popcorn word cards. Cindy likes each of these activities but states that they are difficult for Lori to complete because of her activity level. She really likes the baggie books because they are about the only
books that Lori will sit down and try on her own. They read these every night that they are sent home. In addition to homework, Cindy has bought some activity books for Lori to complete. They currently do these about three nights per week. Cindy would like to work with Lori more but says that it is difficult to do so because of her activity level. The family also has books in the home including those bought at school and some baby books. Cindy does not find anything easy about working with Lori and would change her activity level if one thing in the home could be changed.

Cindy believes that Mrs. Miller is currently doing a good job at involving her as a parent. She believes that the weekly newsletters are effective because they allow her to see what her daughter is doing at school. In addition, she believes that she is currently providing enough guidance by returning her phone calls promptly and meeting her for parent-teacher conferences. She thought that the communication for the conference was good and she liked seeing work samples and talking about her concerns. She feels welcome in Mrs. Miller’s classroom because she is very pleasant. She does not currently volunteer because it is difficult to do with her baby at home. They have not currently developed any strategies to make a strong connection between home and school. Cindy was unaware of Mrs. Miller’s open-door policy but thinks that her overall communication is very good. She would like to see Mrs. Miller continue to provide the amount of support that she currently has in place.

Analysis of the Home Environment

Each case summary presents different information that makes each home environment unique. However, across the studies there are some similarities that make these cases similar (See Appendix D).
Data were collected during parent interviews to determine what factors in the home environment affect the type and amount of literacy activities taking place in the home. Demographic data were collected from parents along with how often they engage in different types of literacy activities. Data were collected on the types of materials that are available in the home environment and on activities that may interfere with their work time at home. In addition, information was constructed on what parents believe makes it easy and difficult to work with their children. Lastly, information was collected on how parents felt about being a teacher for their son or daughter at home.

*Materials*

Each parent interviewed said that they had materials in the home to support their child with literacy. While each parent had materials, the amount and type of materials varied from one household to another. The parents (Kathy, Rob and Cindy) with a low yearly income (less than $50,000) seemed to have fewer books than those with incomes above $70,000 per year. In addition, two out of the three low-income parents (Kathy and Rob) were single parents. The low-income parents reported that they had books but often times these books were said to be more like young baby books. Rob has a Leap Pad available while Cindy has purchased some activity books for her daughter to use. Each parent indicated that his or her child uses these materials a couple of times per week. The parents with higher incomes (Jane and Sue) indicated that they had numerous books available at varying levels. Each of these parents said that they had bookcases full of books for the child to choose. In addition, Sue indicated that they have lots of literacy related games, a Leap Pad, and child magazine subscriptions.

Based on these families, the amount of reading materials in the home relates to the SES of the family. Both families of higher SES (Jane and Sue) reported that they have more materials,
games, and books than those families of low SES (Kathy, Rob, and Cindy). In addition, families of low SES seem to provide materials that are less authentic or allow for fewer social interactions than those families of higher SES. For example, both Kathy and Rob have electronic games for their child. This type of activity provides less social interaction than Jane who sits down to read and interact with her child each night. For these parents, SES has an effect on the amount of materials provided in the home as well as the type of materials and interactions with each. This will be explored more fully in chapter five.

*Time Spent Reading*

All of the parents interviewed want to be a teacher for their child at home. As a result, each indicated that they spend time reading with their child throughout the week. The parents who were reported as having fewer reading materials (Kathy, Rob, and Cindy) spend between five and twenty minutes, four to five days a week reading with their child. Jane and Sue who each come from higher SES homes report that they read to their child seven days a week for 20-30 minutes each time.

This study found that families of higher SES (Jane and Sue) spend more time reading with their child each week. It is also important to look at the fact that Jane and Sue each have an educational background and work day shift hours. Therefore, they may understand the importance of literacy and are able to spend time in the evenings and on the weekends reading and working with their children. On the other hand, Kathy, Rob, and Cindy each find something difficult about the amount of time they are able to spend on literacy with their child. For Rob and Cindy, there seems to be a lack of knowledge about the strategies they can use to help their child. They want to work with their child more but often find it difficult. Kathy finds it difficult to read with Sam daily because she works many nights and weekends. Therefore, she is not available to
read and work with him on a regular basis. As a result, for these families work hours and a lack of strategies contributes to the amount of time parents spend working on literacy with their children.

The amount of time Eli spends reading with his parents is limited because of child care arrangements and their family’s busy schedule. Eli, a child from a higher SES home, spends a lot of his day at the YMCA for before and after-school care. While his parents value literacy and see the importance of working with their child as much as possible, this situation does limit the amount of time they have to spend on literacy each evening. Sue even indicated that she wishes she had more time to work with Eli each night. This family faces an issue of time and because of their busy life, they often have to squeeze in reading and homework time. High SES children may spend a lot of their time in extended child care which may be semi-structured or unstructured. Therefore, these children may not be receiving the same amount of rich literacy experiences that other children may be getting at home. For example, Jane is able to be at home when her daughter Emily gets home from school. They spend their afternoon doing homework and reading together, one-on-one. If Emily were in extended child care, she would not be getting this one-on-one time with her mom. Therefore, based on these case studies, time may be a factor that affects literacy interactions for high income families.

Kathy also wishes that she had more time to work with her son on literacy and reading. Kathy’s situation is similar to Sue’s in that she would like to spend more quality time with her son. However, it is much different than that of Sue’s because Kathy has limited time with Sam because she works nights and weekends. Sam spends most evenings and many weekends with a babysitter. As a result, Kathy is not home in the evenings to work and participate in literacy activities with him. Therefore, Sam is also facing a risk factor of less quality literacy time at
home. Therefore, while low SES status homes face risk factors, high SES homes may face the same risk factors as well.

Rob indicated that he believes it is his “part-time” responsibility to be a teacher at home for Caleb. Rob does not have a college education. As a result, he may not view himself as teacher and may believe that it is not his main job. On the other hand, parents such as Jane and her husband, who have a college degree, may see themselves as the main literacy facilitator at home. This view of literacy can have a significant impact on the amount of reading activities that take place in the home. As a result, Caleb may not be getting the same literacy experience as some of his classmates whose parents view literacy differently. This difference in experience can have a large impact on the child’s performance at school.

*Additional Literacy Activities*

To reinforce their child’s learning and reading each parent indicated that he or she provides materials or does additional activities to help them. Kathy and Rob have an electronic game available for their child to play. These games reinforce letter sounds and words. In addition, Rob uses the paper-made books sent home from school and reads to Caleb on the weekend. Cindy has purchased activity books to help reinforce Lori’s learning. They currently work on these three nights a week. Cindy would like to work on them more but Lori’s attention span makes it difficult. Jane extends her daughter’s learning at home by reviewing her popcorn words using environmental print. In addition, they review and reinforce concepts that are being covered in class. Sue uses games to reinforce her son Eli’s learning at home. She indicated that they have numerous literacy related games that Eli loves to play. Lastly, Jane and Sue read to their child every night of the week which extends their reading time beyond the nights that baggie books are assigned.
All of the parents currently work on literacy activities at home with their child. However, each parent has a different activity or strategy they use to engage his or her child. The cases show that the parents of high SES (Jane and Sue) extend their child’s learning more through the use of multiple materials such as books, games, and the environment. Other parents (Kathy and Cindy) find it difficult to engage in additional activities because of work (Kathy) and the child’s personality (Cindy). Rob works with Caleb but mainly uses the materials provided by the school. Therefore, while each parent extends their child’s literacy engagement, some are extended far beyond others because of the home environment and the additional resources that they have.

Sam and Caleb are both exposed to multiple risk factors in their home environments. As a result, these factors may be affecting the amount and quality of literacy interactions at home. Kathy works nights and weekends and therefore, Sam spends most of his time with a babysitter. Sam is also being raised in a single parent home with a low yearly income ($10,000-$20,000) which limits the amount of materials and support that are available for him at home. Through these risk factors, Sam may be at a disadvantage because he is not receiving the same rich literacy experiences as some of his peers. If these risk factors were removed, Sam’s performance may improve because he would be able to spend more quality time with his mom each evening and they may have more literacy resources for him to use and engage in. Kathy has a background in education and therefore has strategies she could use with Sam if she were able to work with him more. For Sam, these factors have been limiting him and potentially putting Caleb at risk as well.

Caleb also comes from a home where multiple risk factors are at stake which may be affecting the interactions with literacy in the home. Caleb is being raised by his father in a single parent home that also has a low yearly income of $20,000-$30,000. While Rob is able to be
home in the evenings and on the weekends with Caleb, he often struggles with how to help his son with literacy activities. Caleb engages in the literacy activities provided by the teacher but his learning does not extend far beyond that. Rob does not have an educational background and indicated that he is unaware of strategies to help his son. He does provide electronic games that are supposed to help reinforce his reading skills, but he does not have many materials beyond this. As a result, it seems as though these risk factors may be affecting Caleb’s learning and the time spent on additional literacy activities at home. Caleb is not receiving the rich, extended literacy experiences that other children may have. In addition, while he is working on school provided activities, Rob may not know what strategies to use to help him. Therefore, if these risk factors were changed or eliminated, literacy interactions in the home may improve.

Kathy also indicated that she takes her son to the library once a week. However, she stated that while at the library Sam plays computer games while she and her other son check out videos. Through this, Kathy believes she is assisting her son by taking him to the library but while they are there, Sam is not interacting with books. Therefore, she seems to have an altered perspective on the benefits Sam is receiving by going to the library.

Jane and Sue who both have educational backgrounds and higher SES take their child’s learning one step farther than Kathy, Rob, and Cindy. They play literacy games and encourage their child to use environmental print to learn new words. In addition, they reinforce concepts at home that their child is learning in school. For instance, they hunt for basic sight words in the environment at home, in the car, or at restaurants. They also use the skill word rings to practice spelling words and putting them into sentences. Overall, high SES parents tend to engage in higher quality interactions. Therefore, there is a need for more parents to be informed on the
types of activities they can do with their children to support and extend their literacy development.

**Homework**

Each night of the week students are assigned homework that is to be completed for the next day. All of the parents indicated that they have a daily routine in which homework is completed. Kathy, Jane, and Sue help their child do homework when they arrive home for the day. Rob works on homework with Caleb after dinner and Cindy begins homework with Lori in the afternoon. Parents (Kathy, Jane, Rob, and Sue) indicated that homework time takes less than one hour to complete. Cindy indicated that the homework begins in the afternoon but takes most of the night to complete. This is because of Lori’s short attention span.

All of the parents believe that the provided homework is effective for their child. No one indicated that it took too long to complete and many parents (Kathy, Jane, Rob, and Sue) found that it was best to have a scheduled routine in which to complete it. Cindy has the most difficulty because of Lori’s short attention span; however, she always makes sure that the homework is completed.

**Easy Aspects of the Home Environment**

The parents were asked “What part of the home environment makes it easy to work with your child on literacy activities?” The parents’ responses were varied but similar in some ways. Three of the parents (Kathy, Jane, and Sue) found that their son or daughter’s attitude makes it easy to work with them at home. They indicated that their child is motivated and eager to learn which makes homework and activity time easy. In addition, parents (Kathy, Jane, Rob, and Cindy) found that there were no outside extracurricular activities that interfered with the time they would spend on activities. Also, Jane, Rob, and Sue found that being home at night and
having a routine homework and reading time makes it easier. Cindy found that there is nothing that makes it easy to work with her daughter at home.

A scheduled routine makes it easier for parents to work on literacy with their children. In addition, a child’s attitude affects his or her motivation which was found to be a large contributor to an easier home learning environment. Lastly, the amount of outside extracurricular activities impacts the home environment and it was found that the fewer the activities, the easier it is to engage in literacy at home.

**Difficulties in the Home Environment**

In addition to finding what made work time easy, parents were asked, “What aspect of the home environment makes it difficult for you to work with your son or daughter on literacy activities?” Each parent had a different reason on what aspect of the home makes it difficult to work with his or her child. Kathy indicated that she has to work most nights and weekends. Therefore, this makes it difficult for her to work with Sam because she is often not home in the evenings to do so. Jane finds that there is nothing that makes it difficult to work with Emily at home. On the other hand, Rob finds that it is difficult because he is unaware of strategies that he can use to help Caleb. While strategies were suggested to him at a parent-teacher conference, he has since forgotten what they were. Sue finds that when Eli has long days it is often difficult for him to work. If he is tired she finds that his attention span is only about 20 minutes long. In addition, his older siblings often have sporting events. This makes it difficult because homework must be done after the event is over. This is often late which makes it harder for the two of them to work. Lastly, Cindy finds that she has difficulty helping Lori at home because she has ADHD. Therefore, she has a short attention span and has difficulty focusing on her work.
Each of these parents found a different aspect of the home environment difficult. However, two of the parents (Kathy and Sue) allude to the fact that time is an issue depending on work and school hours. Rob and Cindy both face difficulties in what strategies they should be using to help their child at home. They both want to help their children succeed but are unsure of what strategies to use.

*Changing the Home Environment*

During the interview, parents were asked what aspect of the home environment they would change to help their son or daughter perform better at school. Four out of five parents had at least one aspect they would change. Kathy would change her work schedule from nights to days so that she could be home in the evenings to work with Sam. Rob said that he would like to become a better teacher at home for Caleb. He said that he knows he is smart but he does not know how to bring it out of him. Sue said that she would like to be able to spend more time with Eli at home. She does not work in the evening but is often busy with activities for her other children. In addition, Sue said that she would like to change the amount of television Eli is exposed to. With older siblings, he often sees shows that she wishes he would not. Cindy would like to change the activity level of her daughter who has been diagnosed with ADHD. She indicated that Lori is currently on medication; however, it does not seem to be working. Lastly, Jane found that there was nothing she would change to help her daughter more. She believes that everything in the home environment is good and that Emily is performing well in school.

*Parental Roles in Literacy*

All of the parents interviewed served as the main literacy facilitator for their child at home. Four out of the five parents were female and shared no indication of males serving as literacy facilitators. One parent, Rob, serves as the main facilitator for his son because he has
primary custody of Caleb. Within this study, clearly females serve as the primary model and facilitator of literacy at home.

Analysis of Parent Perceptions on the Home-School Connection

During each interview, parents were asked what they thought about the activities the teacher provides for students to help them with literacy at home. Parents were also asked what they thought about the teacher’s different forms of communication. Lastly, parents discussed what they would like the teacher to do differently to help them better as a parent (See Appendix D).

The following activities were introduced to parents at open house at the beginning of the school year and were also discussed at parent-teacher conferences in November. During this time, parents had the opportunity to ask questions about the use of these materials. Mrs. Miller periodically reminds parents to use these materials in her weekly newsletter. All of the parents understood how they were supposed to use the materials and believed that the use of these materials was adequately explained to them.

Baggie Books

All of the parents interviewed like the baggie books that the teacher provides for students throughout the week. Kathy indicated that she likes the books because it helps her see what level Sam is currently reading at. Jane stated that Emily really likes to read them. However, she indicated that she sometimes gets frustrated because of the level that is written on the back of the book. Rob finds that it is helpful to read the book while practicing the sight word flashcards. Sue finds that the books are really important and she makes time to sit down with Eli to read these books together. Lastly, Cindy likes the books because she believes that they are the only books that Lori will sit down to read on her own.
All of the parents are comfortable with the use of baggie books. However, Jane indicated that she is confused about how the baggie books are assigned. She and her daughter notice that the level on the back of the book often fluctuates.

**Letter Cards**

Out of the five parents interviewed all of them have used the letter cards in some way. However, not all of the parents believed they were useful for their child. Kathy stated that Sam knew his letters but he did not know that A was A or B was B. Therefore, these letter cards helped him distinguish letter names and actual letters. On the other hand, Jane found that Emily was “way above” the letter cards. As a result, they used the cards to work on letter sounds the first week. After that, she believed that the cards were “a waste of time” when Emily already knew them. Rob found that it has helped Caleb while Sue said that Eli will still go through his letters every once in awhile. Lastly, Cindy likes the letter cards because Lori will sit down to use the cards and try to pronounce the word that corresponds to the letter on each.

**Skill Word Rings**

Of the parents interviewed, all of the parents use the skill word rings with their child. However, depending on the level of their child’s reading, some of the parents have stopped using the cards and others have been using them to extend their child’s learning. Kathy found that the word rings really helped Sam learn his popcorn words. She believes that he is doing well with them and wishes his older brother who is a struggling reader could have had the same opportunity. Jane has begun to use the word cards in a different way. Emily has mastered the popcorn words and now uses the cards to work on the spelling of the words. She indicated that they do not review the words because it is boring for Emily. Therefore, Jane has used her literacy knowledge to take her daughter’s learning above and beyond what is expected. Rob found that
the word cards have helped Caleb a lot. In fact, they have reviewed them so much that Caleb has memorized the order of the words. Sue was impressed with how quickly her son caught onto the words. She attributes a lot of his learning to the work that Mrs. Miller has him do in the classroom. She liked to use the cards with Eli but no longer does because he has mastered them. Finally, Cindy stated that she likes everything the teacher does. However, she finds it difficult for Lori to sit down and focus on the task at hand.

*Weekly Newsletters*

Each of the parents interviewed really like the weekly newsletter that is sent home every Monday. All of the parents find the newsletter to be effective because it allows them to see what their child is doing for the week. In addition, it also allows them to see what they had worked on the previous week. Jane finds it especially helpful because she uses the information to reinforce the concepts at home that her daughter is learning in school. Overall, parents find that it is a great way to learn about what their child is doing for the week.

*Parent-Teacher Conferences*

All of the parents interviewed believed that their parent-teacher conference went well. Jane and Rob were pleased that they were able to pick their own time slot for the conference. Kathy found that the communication was very good. She found that Mrs. Miller was very positive about Sam’s work in the classroom. Jane found that the conference was really easy because Mrs. Miller simply reviewed what was happening in the classroom and how Emily was doing. Rob indicated that the information he received at the conference has helped Caleb improve in some academic areas. Sue loved hearing what the teacher had to share about Eli at school; she wishes that the school would offer both fall and spring conferences. Lastly, Cindy
believed that the conference went well overall. She stated that Mrs. Miller helped ease some of the concerns she was having about Lori’s performance at school.

Communication during the conference seemed to consist of the teacher talking mostly to the parents. While the teacher did most of the communication, parents still had the opportunity to ask questions or share concerns that they may be having. However, parents were not explicitly asked about the difficulties they face at home when working with their child.

*Open-Door Policy*

Four out of the five parents interviewed knew that Mrs. Miller has an open-door policy. However, of these parents, no one had taken advantage of the policy. Cindy was not aware of the policy and was unsure of what it was.

While four out of the five parents are aware of the policy, it appears as though they may not feel a need to use it. While this is the case, it seems as though some parents may need to take the initiative to meet with the teacher to discuss concerns they may be having. For example, Rob has concerns over what strategies he should be using to help Caleb at home. However, he had not contacted Mrs. Miller to discuss this. Based on these cases, parents are aware of the policy but may be naive about the benefits they could gain from meeting with Mrs. Miller.

*Feeling Welcome in the Classroom*

All of the parents interviewed feel welcome in the classroom. Each indicated that it was part of her personality that made them feel this way. For instance, parents stated that she was bubbly, nice, cheery, enthusiastic, and pleasant. Jane said that “You never feel like you’re bothering her if you have a question or you just come in.” Sue stated “I absolutely feel welcome in the classroom. Well, it’s just she’s Mrs. Miller! Her smile, her enthusiasm. You’re just there; you’re a part of it.” Overall, all parents feel welcome in her classroom.
What the Teacher Can do Differently to Help Parents

Each of the parents interviewed were asked what they would like the teacher to do differently to help them better as a parent. Four out of the five parents believe that she is doing everything that she should be doing to help them as parents. However, Rob would like more feedback from the teacher on Caleb’s behavior and academic performance. He is not sure how this feedback would be done except for maybe notes sent back and forth between home and school. Parent suggestions for Mrs. Miller were limited and therefore, further suggestions will be discussed by the researcher in chapter five.

Overall Communication

All of the parents interviewed believe that communication with the teacher is easy and none of them have had difficulties contacting her. Kathy indicated that she has not had any problems with communication. Jane knows that she can contact her and expect her to follow through with whatever she has asked. Rob finds the communication to be easy. He usually sends notes in the folder his son brings back and forth to school. Sue finds that email is the easiest because she is able to put everything into one message. She thinks this form of communication is one of the best because Mrs. Miller is then able to get back to her whenever she has a chance. Lastly, Cindy has contacted her via phone. She indicated that Mrs. Miller calls back quickly after a message is left.

Discussion of Results

The home environments of each of the parents interviewed revealed a relationship between SES, the amount of materials, and time spent reading. Each household contains different materials and parents with a higher yearly income seem to have more materials for their children than parents with a low yearly income. All parents expressed a desire in helping their child with
literacy despite their income level or work schedule. All parents spend time reading and working with their children but the amount of time varies from one family to another.

A few of the parents (Kathy, Jane, and Sue) stated that their child’s attitude made it easy to help them learn. Each parent interviewed indicated a different reason on why it was difficult to work with their child. Parents then indicated that they would like to change each of these aspects to help their son or daughter perform better in school. Working nights and weekends, knowledge of strategies, time in the evenings, and the child’s personality were all indicators of what makes it difficult to work with their children. Four out of the five parents would change this aspect of the home environment to help their child.

All parents seem to like the weekly newsletters and baggie books. They liked knowing what the students were doing for the week and thought the baggie books were effective for nightly reads. While all parents believed the letter cards and skill word rings were good, some students have not used them because they have mastered the skills. However, some parents started to extend their child’s learning through the use of the cards.

Overall, it seems as though parents are pleased with the communication techniques the teacher is using. All parents feel welcome in the classroom because of the teacher’s personality and all believed that the conferences were effective. All but one parent was aware of the open-door policy. Four of the five parents have no suggestions for change while one would like more feedback on his child’s performance. Lastly, all of the parents believe that communication with Mrs. Miller is good; however, each parent tends to communicate in different ways.

Summary

The data collected during five parent interviews were analyzed at the conclusion of the data collection period. Each aspect of the home environment as well as parent perceptions on the
classroom teacher’s strategies and communication were studied. Similarities were found in many areas; however, each parent differed in the type of materials they provided and on the amount of time they spend reading with their child. In addition, all parents identified different aspects of the home that make it hard for them to work with their child.

Parents seem satisfied with the weekly newsletters and baggie books. While no parents disliked anything, there were some differences in attitudes toward the letter cards and skill-word rings. All of the parents feel welcome in the classroom and each believed that their parent teacher conference was effective. Overall, parents had different responses to the open-door policy, what the teacher could do differently, and her overall communication.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parent involvement is critical for children’s development in the early years of their lives. If children are given the proper support, they are more likely to be successful readers throughout their years in school (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). In addition, it is important for teachers to understand the home environments from which their students come so that they are able to make a better connection between home and school (Edwards, 1995). This research study was designed to look at the home environments of early readers and parent perceptions of the teacher and the activities and support she provides. The study explored the following question: “What issues do parents face that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home, and what do parents suggest for teachers to strengthen the home-school connection?” This chapter summarizes the study, explores the implications of the findings, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

Parents, regardless of gender or SES, want to help their children learn; however, there are aspects of the home environment that often make it difficult for them to do so (Finn, 1998). It is important to understand these aspects of the home environment because literacy interaction between the parent and child is important because it relates to a child’s success in school (Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Teachers must also learn to understand the home environments their students come from to provide strategies and communication techniques that meet the needs of each family (Dandridge et al. 2000).

This study was designed to determine what aspects in the home environment make it difficult for parents to help their early readers. It was also designed to find suggestions parents have for the teacher to improve home literacy activities and communication between the home
and school. A kindergarten classroom was chosen for this study and parents were chosen to be interviewed based on recommendations made by the teacher. Once interviews were completed, interviews were transcribed and case summaries were written. The data were then analyzed using holistic comparison of cases and a matrix of responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The findings from each interview indicate that there are aspects of the home environment that affect the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home. The interviews revealed that factors such as socioeconomic status, working status, educational background, and time all affect the amount of parent involvement that is taking place in homes. However, each parent noted the importance of literacy despite their SES or educational background. Findings also revealed that each home environment is different and therefore parents find that some aspects are easy such as a routine time to read. Other parents find it difficult because of their job, lack of time, or knowledge of the strategies.

Information shared during the interviews indicated that overall, parents are happy with the literacy activities the teacher is providing for work at home. Across the board, parents are very happy with the baggie books provided by the teacher. While parents did not show negativity toward the letter cards and skill word rings, a few parents did indicate that their child had mastered them or said they got bored using them because they were too easy. It appears that the word rings and letter cards are useful but can be limiting for some parents and children. Therefore, it seems as though these parents could be engaging in deeper literacy activities with their child if a different set of tools was provided. Perhaps additional sets of tools could be provided to enrich the learning of advanced readers. Activities may include word family games, books on tape, or more advanced sight word games. Through the addition of these tools, teachers would be working to meet the needs of both advanced and remedial readers.
All of the parents interviewed are pleased with the communication and parent involvement strategies the teacher is currently using. All of the parents interviewed feel welcome in the classroom and feel that the teacher’s communication via newsletters, phone calls, and emails are effective. However, each parent felt most comfortable using different forms of communication. Only one parent had a suggestion for the teacher to provide more feedback to him at home. Overall, each parent was happy with her overall communication between home and school.

Home Environment Conclusions

Socioeconomic Status, Parenting Status, and Educational Level

While all of the parents are content with the amount of support they are providing their child, the parent interviews revealed that there are issues in the home environment that affect the amount of literacy interaction that is taking place in the home. The interviews revealed that parents with lower SES had fewer materials and resources available for their children than parents of high SES. For example, Kathy (low SES) indicated that they had magazines, books, and paper and pencils. On the other hand, Sue (high SES) shared that they have bookcases full of books, magazines, literacy games, and books in every room of the house. This finding is reaffirmed by Finn (1998) who states that “Many households, especially low-income or minority homes, have few books in total and even fewer that are appropriate and interesting to children” (p. 22). While SES affects the amount of materials in the home, for these families it had no effect on their desire to help their children with literacy. All of the parents in this study expressed an interest in helping their child be successful. However, for some parents, issues of time, materials, or strategies made it difficult. Overall, this study found that SES affected the amount and type of materials provided; however, SES did not affect the parent’s interest in helping their child.
In addition, the interviews revealed that all parents want to be a teacher for their child; however, low SES parents spend fewer days and fewer minutes reading with their children than parents of higher SES. For example, Kathy works nights and weekends and therefore spends less time reading and interacting with Sam because she is not home to do so. Research by Finn (1998) and Leseman and de Jong (1998) has shown that working class parents and low SES families often face difficulties in the home environment that affect the amount and quality of time they are able to spend with their children. On the other hand, parents of higher SES, with an educational background (Jane and Sue) reported reading with their children seven days a week for approximately 20 minutes each sitting. Jane and Sue, the same two parents who reportedly read with their children every night, also indicated that their children have mastered their letters and popcorn words. Adams (1990) found that children who are read to for about 30 minutes every night will have acquired many hours of print exposure before kindergarten even begins. Therefore, he argues that these students are more likely to understand the phonemic structure of language and will be able to easily recognize letters. On the other hand, Neuman (2003) found that children with low socioeconomics and demographic risk factors often have limited experiences with books which often inhibits their reading progress. Kathy, Rob, and Cindy indicated that their children continue to work with their letter cards and skill word rings on a nightly to weekly basis. Perhaps these children were not exposed to print as much as those children of higher SES. Sam and Caleb are also exposed to multiple risk factors in the home including low SES, single parenting, and working class status. Neuman believes that children with multiple risk factors are likely to have fewer literacy opportunities which can lead to lower academic performance. According to these findings, SES and educational background relate to the amount of materials in the home environment as well as the amount of time spent reading.
The issue of time may be an up-and-coming risk factor that children of high SES may face. For example, Sue’s family is extremely busy in the evenings with activities and sporting events for her older children. As a result, Eli often completes his homework while dinner is being prepared or after they get home from various activities in the evening. While high SES parents care about their children and value literacy, their busy lives may make it more difficult to spend quality time with their children on literacy activities. In turn, this may affect their child’s school performance and be a risk factor that parents and educators need to be aware of.

These studies also show that parent’s with a high level of education extend their children’s learning while parents with little or no educational background do the basics. For example, Rob indicated that he works on the activities and homework provided by the teacher and provides electronic literacy games for Caleb to engage in. It is important for Rob to work on these activities with his child; however, they do not extend Caleb’s learning far beyond what the teacher asks. Linder and Foote (2002) found that literacy in the homes of minority and disadvantaged families is often viewed and valued differently. In addition, they argue that literacy is often used for different purposes at home than at school. For instance, they may only read at home when it is necessary such as reading a newspaper ad or a recipe. Reading for entertainment is not necessarily viewed as important (Linder & Foote). Therefore, Rob and Caleb may be reading together to complete what is asked of them but not completing anything beyond that. On the other hand, Jane, who has a background in education, extends her daughter’s learning by using additional strategies and activities that extend the activities provided by Mrs. Miller. As a result, these cases show that a parent’s education does affect the type of interactions they engage in with their child.
Additional Literacy Activities

The cases show that each parent extends their child’s literacy engagement; however, some experiences are extended more than others because of the home environment or type of materials provided. All of the parents interviewed indicated that they provide additional literacy experiences for their children. However, Kathy and Rob provide electronic games as one of the main extra activities. These electronic games do not involve interaction between the parent and child and thus strategies are not being used that would enhance their literacy skills. While the games are providing practice with reading skills, they are not providing the same authentic experience that takes place in human interaction. Lynch et al. (2006) found that “Parent-child interactions are crucial because research has shown links between parent-child literacy activities and children’s success in school” (p. 1-2). In addition, the Vygotskian theory says that children learn through social interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978) and a difference in social interactions can lead to differences in performance (Leseman & de Jong, 1998). Therefore, while there may be some value to the electronic games, they should not be substituted for social interaction. This is because less human interaction may be affecting these children’s success in reading.

Rob also used the paper made books that were sent home from school and read to Caleb on the weekend. Cindy provided additional activity books for Lori. These parents are doing what the teacher asks but may not have the knowledge or strategies to develop activities that extend beyond the classroom. As a result, basic reading skills are being reinforced at home which means that there are fewer high quality literacy interactions and activities taking place. These activities are important for young children but they do not broaden what is expected of the classroom teacher. Baker (2003) suggests that the quantity and quality of literacy activities in the home
relates to a parent’s educational and income level. Therefore, while literacy may be practiced in all homes, in many homes it may be basic literacy skills. In other homes, children may be exposed to higher level literacy because these parents may have more education and therefore have an idea of additional strategies and activities to use. Parents without experience or little education may be unaware of any additional literacy activities to implement beyond the basic activities provided by the teacher. The cases provide two examples of high income, educated parents who extend their children’s learning. Jane and Sue extend their children’s learning by playing a wide variety of literacy games and extending learning experiences with class provided activities. Through these examples, Emily and Eli are both receiving higher level literacy experiences beyond the activities provided by the teacher. Through these cases, it was found that all parents engage in additional literacy experiences but some involve higher level literacy than others.

Difficulties in the Home Environment

Information from the interviews shows that four out of five parents have at least one aspect of the home environment that makes it difficult to work with their child. As a result, these parents find that they would like to change this aspect to help engage their child at home and improve his or her reading performance.

Kathy found that working nights and weekends was difficult because it limits the amount of time she is able to help Sam. While Kathy believes that she and Sam spend enough time on literacy activities it seems as though the amount of time she spends with him is limited because of work. Therefore, Kathy may think she is providing enough assistance when in reality Sam may actually need more support. However, Kathy is doing all that she can to support Sam in the time that she has. Dever and Burts (2002) found that parents are often busy providing the basic
needs for their children, which leaves less time for them to assist them with school work. In this instance, Kathy is forgoing time with Sam in the evenings and on weekends to provide an income for her family.

Rob found it difficult to work with his son Caleb because of his lack of reading strategies. Rob stated that he wants to help Caleb and he knows Caleb is smart but he does not know how to bring it out of him. Rob talked to Mrs. Miller at parent-teacher conferences and she shared strategies with him. However, he has since forgotten them. To help Caleb, they currently read and work on homework together. He said he wants to be a better teacher but he does not know how. This situation confirms research by Finn (1998) who found that many parents think that they lack the skills needed to help their child with literacy. In addition, Baker (2003) found that parents often do not have the skills they need to assist their struggling reader. As a result, it is important for teachers to understand that parents do not always know how to help their child. Teachers need to provide advice to parents, host workshops, and have materials available for students to use (Baker). Advice and information can be given to parents at open house, conferences, or through scheduled meetings. Teachers can work to create a network between the home and school where communication is open and on-going. In addition, workshops on literacy can help parents understand practices and strategies they can use to assist their child at home. It is also important for teachers to provide materials because not all homes have quality literacy tools. As a result, interactions may be enhanced if the tools are provided by the teacher. Through these strategies, parents should gain the knowledge needed to help support their child’s literacy at home.

Even though Sue comes from a home with high SES, she finds it difficult to work with her son Eli because of her family’s busy schedule. While she does not work at night, they are
often busy with activities involving her other children. Oftentimes Eli works on his homework while Sue is preparing dinner. This shows that because their life is so busy, Eli must be more independent and work on his homework during the time they are at home. Even though Sue’s family is extremely busy, it is important to Sue that Eli completes all of his work. Therefore, she assists Eli while she is busy working on dinner. She also insists that she and Eli sit and read together every night. Therefore, even when they get home late they still complete his work because she thinks it is important and because Eli knows that it has to be done. In addition, Sue finds it difficult that she is not able to spend time volunteering in Eli’s classroom. She would love to help out but is unable to do so because she is a school teacher. While Sue is not actively involved in her son’s education at school, it does not mean that she does not care. Linder and Foote (2002) reaffirm this notion by stating “We cannot assume that parents who are not involved do not care” (p. 14). They argue that most parents do care and want to be involved but often have other commitments that may make it difficult. Sue is a perfect example of this because she is highly supportive of her son’s education at home; however, outside activities and work sometimes get in the way. It is also important to note that home literacy can be difficult for parents of both high SES and low SES. Home literacy is not just challenging for working class, single parents but also for those high SES families who have fulltime jobs and a busy family schedule.

Cindy indicated that Lori’s activity level makes it very difficult for them to work on literacy activities at home. Lori has a very short attention span and is often distracted during homework time. As a result, Cindy finds that it often takes all afternoon and evening for Lori to finish her homework. She would like to work more with Lori but says it’s too difficult because of her attention span. Cindy found that nothing is easy about working with Lori. As a result, the
interview revealed that she is very frustrated when it comes to working with Lori. She wants to help her daughter succeed but does not currently have any strategies that will help Lori stay focused on a task. Cindy has not sought help from Mrs. Miller nor did she say that Mrs. Miller had provided suggestions for her. Lynch et al. (2006) found that for children to be successful early readers, parents must become knowledgeable about literacy and learn strategies to help their children succeed. This situation shows that there is a need for better communication between home and school. Mrs. Miller has not recognized that there are issues at home and therefore she has not provided support to Cindy that would help her work better with Lori. At the same time, Cindy has not approached Mrs. Miller to learn about new strategies that may help her daughter. Paratore (2002) argues that parents and teachers must create partnerships in order to make a connection between home and school. Through this, it is hoped that teachers can learn more about the home environment of their students and parents can learn strategies to help their sons or daughter succeed.

Overall, each family faces something that makes it hard for them to engage in literacy with their child. As a result, it is important for educators to understand what is happening in the homes of their students (Edwards, 1995). Research by Dandridge et al. (2000) suggests that educators need to work to increase the home-school connection. It is important for teachers to understand the various factors that affect literacy and learning in home environments. Teachers need to understand families’ busy schedules, the difficulties parents face while working nights and the struggles parents may face when their child has been diagnosed with a certain condition. Understanding these issues will allow teachers to provide activities that meet the needs of families who are busy. They will also be able to provide suggestions and strategies that parents can use to help their child succeed. Teachers need to remember that most parents are not
educational experts and therefore may struggle on how they can best help their child (Nieto, 1996). Consistent communication between teachers and families will allow teachers to understand what is happening in homes. This communication should be two-directional and involve the teacher and parent sharing information with one another. In addition, this communication should take place on a regular basis and not only at the scheduled parent-teacher conferences. This two-way verbal communication will allow teachers to understand each family’s home environment and as a result, they will be able to better meet the needs of all students in their classroom.

**Parental Roles in Literacy**

As these cases demonstrate, mothers serve as a primary facilitator when they are living with their child. None of the mothers talked about the father helping or participating in literacy with their child. On the other hand, Rob, a single male, is the main literacy facilitator for Caleb. In this case, he was the only involved father because he has primary custody of Caleb. Therefore, this case demonstrates that in the absence of a female, a male stepped into the role of a primary facilitator. A powerful implication of this study is that fathers need to be more involved. Both the father and the mother serve as role models for their children and therefore it is important for both to take an active role in their child’s education. Children are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward reading when it is viewed and valued by both members of the household (Paratore, 2002). Therefore, home literacy opportunities can be increased significantly with more meaningful participation from the other parent. Overall, it is important for parents and educators to understand the role a father can play in literacy. Through this understanding, it is hoped that fathers will become more involved and serve as models and facilitators of literacy for their children.
Parent-Teacher Collaboration Conclusions

*Teacher-Provided Literacy Activities and Materials*

Research has found that teachers often ask parents to read and work with their children on literacy but then they do not provide books or materials to do so (Baumann et al. 2000). Oftentimes this makes it difficult for parents who have little to support their children at home. Data collected during the interviews revealed that the teacher does provide a variety of literacy activities for families to use. All of the parents interviewed were highly responsive to the baggie books. Research by Dever and Burts (2002) found that it is important for educators to provide literacy activities for parents so that they are able to support their children’s learning at home. In addition to baggie books, Mrs. Miller also provides letter flashcards and word skill rings. The cases revealed that parents had mixed feelings about these. All of the parents liked them; however, Jane and Sue found that their children have mastered them and therefore do not use them much anymore. As a result, the teacher seems to be providing literacy activities without receiving feedback from parents on whether these activities are helping their children. Baker (2003) believes that it is important to build a two-way relationship between home and school. In this classroom, the teacher is providing activities for the parents and the parents are doing them at home. However, the activities provided seemed to be geared toward remedial readers and therefore are not engaging to the strong readers in the classroom. As a result, it seems as if the connection between the home and school is weak. If the relationship were stronger, the teacher would know that the letter cards and skill word rings are too basic for some students and she could provide additional activities for them. Not only is the teacher not requesting information from the parents but the parents are not sharing information with the teacher. Therefore, the
communication between home and school is lacking in some areas even though the parents and teachers may not realize it.

*Newsletters*

The teacher currently provides weekly newsletters for parents to inform them on what is taking place in the classroom; however, these cases demonstrate a need for more continuous communication between the home and school. Research by Lynch et al. (2006) found that “Building a bridge between home and school literacy activities may support young children’s literacy achievement” (p. 13). Through the use of the newsletter, the teacher is building a one-way bridge from school to home. This one way bridge that is being built is simply not enough. Traffic along this bridge must move in both directions to create a strong link between home and school activities. Currently, the parent is responsible for using the information in the newsletter to make the connection back to school. While this seems to be happening in some of the homes, it is not happening in all of the homes. For example, Jane reads the newsletter to find out what her daughter is doing in school. She then takes the concepts they are learning about and reinforces them at home through different activities. Through this, Jane is helping to connect Emily’s learning experiences at school with home. While this is ideal, it is not the typical situation. None of the other parents indicated this type of activity. It is important to note that it is not necessarily because these parents do not want to help their children but because they may not think about it or may not know how. Research by Edwards (1995) found that parents want to help their children but often do not know or understand school-based practices. Therefore, the home-school connection may not be fully engaged because the teacher and parents are not working together in an effort to connect home and school learning. To make this connection stronger, teachers may include questionnaires or surveys in the newsletter that parents would be
asked to respond to and return. This would allow the teacher to receive feedback from parents about questions they may have in the classroom or specific questions about strategies or activities for their children. Through this method, teachers and parents would be working together to create stronger ties between home and school learning.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

While all of the parents are happy with the conferences that are currently held each fall, the cases revealed that parents may be interested in meeting more with the teacher. For example, Sue indicated that she wishes there were more scheduled conferences throughout the year. She loves hearing about how her son is doing and she believes that only meeting once with the teacher makes it difficult. In addition, Rob found that he has forgotten the strategies Mrs. Miller shared at his fall conference and he would like to discuss them again. While both of these parents have an interest in meeting with the teacher, neither one of them have initiated a conference. Both were even aware of her open-door policy and feel very welcome in the classroom but neither one of these parents has initiated contact. Sue gave no indication on why she has not scheduled a conference but Rob said that he was unsure of how to reach the teacher. In this situation, more consistent, personal communication between the teacher and parent may reveal that they are interested in a conference. In addition, creating a system where the parent feels welcome to call the teacher is important too. The time commitment of a conference may also affect the parent's willingness to schedule a conference. Finn (1998) found that time commitments and work often affect families and their ability to be involved. All in all, it appears that parents may be looking for additional feedback or assistance but are not seeking it out or asking for it.
The cases show that during the parent teacher conferences the teacher shared information about each child but parents were not necessarily asked to share information. Parents asked questions and responded to what the teacher had to share. However, parents were not asked to share anything about themselves or their child. Perhaps the parent teacher conferences should be structured so that the parent and the teacher have an opportunity to share information with one another. Through this, teachers are going to learn more about their students and what is happening at home. As a result, teachers are going to be able to provide more assistance, suggest strategies, or develop a plan to work better with each family. For instance, Cindy had concerns about her daughter’s performance at school. Therefore, during the conference, she asked Mrs. Miller about her concern. Mrs. Miller shared that everything was going well in the classroom and that Cindy should not be concerned with her daughter’s performance at school. At this point it would have been helpful for Mrs. Miller and Cindy to discuss Lori’s behavior at home. Through this, Mrs. Miller could have learned that Cindy is having difficulties and could have provided suggestions and recommendations to her that would be useful in helping Lori focus more at home. It is important for teachers to talk to parents to learn what is happening at home (Edwards, 1995). Therefore, it is imperative to look at the structure of parent-teacher conferences to understand the importance of not only the teacher sharing information but the parent sharing information as well.

*Changes in the Home-School Connection*

Throughout the interviews, data were collected on what parents would like the teacher to do differently to strengthen the connection between home and school. Data revealed that four out of five parents have no recommendations for change. However, Rob indicated that he would like more feedback regarding his son’s academics and behavior. While Rob would like more
feedback, he has not asked Mrs. Miller for it. At the same time, Mrs. Miller has also not
recognized that Rob would like more feedback. Perhaps if there were more consistent
communication, Rob would feel more comfortable asking for help and Mrs. Miller may
recognize Rob’s indication of more feedback.

While parents had no direct suggestions for the teacher, the research suggests that there
are a number of things that could be strengthened or improved. Despite the best intentions of the
teacher and parents, they cannot always see what they are immersed in. Since they are so
immersed in their current practices, they do not have the ability to critically reflect on what is
and is not happening between the home and school. As a result, they may not always see what
needs improved to strengthen the home-school connection.

*Overall Communication*

Data collected during the interviews revealed that parents were satisfied with the
communication that is happening with the teacher. However, it seems as though most of the
parents are on their own when it comes to helping their child with literacy. They seem to be
doing what the teacher expects but have no consistent communication with her about what is
happening at home. This is often difficult for parents because they do not know if what they are
doing fits what the teacher expects. In addition, they are unsure of whether their child is average,
above average, or below average. Therefore, they are on their own trying to make sense of the
literacy world as they know and understand it. This can be difficult for parents and could be less
challenging if there was more communication being done with the teacher.

The cases demonstrate that all forms of communication between the parents and teachers
are effective; however, communication may only be happening at the most basic level. All of the
parents use a different form of communication; however, each is happy with how quickly Mrs.
Miller responds. While data reveal that communication is good, it seems as though communication is very basic. Edwards (1995) argues that teachers cannot do it alone. She argues that parents and teachers must work together to create a working relationship between the home and school. Currently, Mrs. Miller and the parents communicate but only when a pre-set conference has been scheduled or when there is a need to do so. For example, when Rob thinks there is an issue with his son Caleb he will send a note to school to receive feedback on how he is doing. On the other hand, Cindy believes there are issues with her daughter’s behavior but has not taken advantage of meeting with the teacher for advice. These examples show that there is communication in the classroom but it is not consistent, on-going communication.

Communication is simply done on an as-needed basis. Rasinski and Padak (2004) argue that communication between the teacher and parent needs to be consistent and may be done through newsletters, meetings, and personal contact. They argue that this communication must be meaningful and go beyond the activities the teacher usually provides. Overall, the basic communication that is happening in this classroom is good but teachers and parents should work together to make it more consistent and on-going.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Home-School Literacy Connection

Parents

A rich home literacy environment helps children develop into successful readers and writers (Morrow, 1995). As a result, it is recommended that parents provide activities for their young children that help reinforce and enhance their literacy skills. Oftentimes teachers provide activities and materials for parents to use at home with their children. These activities are important to complete; however, it is suggested that parents go above and beyond these school provided activities. Parents may play literacy related games such as sight word Go Fish, Bingo,
or Memory. They may also play games that reinforce letters and letter sounds. Parents may take their child to the library to check out books, provide a wealth of age-appropriate reading material, and read to their child on a daily basis. If parents are unaware of strategies to use with their child, it is recommended that they meet with the classroom teacher to discuss ideas and activities. Parents who work with their child on a daily basis are helping to create successful readers (Evans et al. 2000).

Parents should also create a literacy network amongst themselves in the classroom. Through this network, parents will be able to share activity ideas or strategies that will help their child. This network would be useful for parents who lack ideas or knowledge about literacy. Parents with more literacy experience may mentor parents who feel they lack the knowledge or skills needed to help their child. Many parents may not realize that they have the skills or lack the skills that are needed to help their child be successful. As a result, teachers must become knowledgeable on the skills parents possess in order to set up a literacy network in the classroom that would be helpful for all parents. Once paired up, parents could have their children work together on various literacy skills. Students are often good role models for one another and parents can be good role models for each other as well. This literacy network would help parents assist their child but would also help build a strong parent involvement team in the classroom.

Another suggestion is for parents to have consistent communication with the teacher. Consistent communication would allow teachers to learn about the home environment practices of parents and allow them to create strong literacy networks in the classroom. In addition, ongoing communication between home and school will help to establish a supportive relationship where parents will feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing information (Edwards, 1995). Through this, parents may share the difficulties or struggles they may be facing at home.
Teachers will then be able to provide assistance or advice in order to minimize the struggles. Also, through regular communication, teachers will be able to better recognize the needs of families and provide appropriate suggestions or modifications of activities. Parents should ask for advice when they are unsure of an activity, strategy, or situation. Through these recommendations, parents and teachers can establish a working relationship in an effort to make connections between home and school.

*Teachers*

Literacy practices in homes are often different than those in schools and therefore teachers must learn about their students’ home environments to provide literacy materials and activities that meet the needs of all families (Linder & Foote, 2002). A recommendation for teachers is to learn about the home environment of each of their students through parent surveys, questionnaires, or interviews. Teachers may also ask parents what they would like assistance with to make it easier for them to work with their child. In fact, the weekly newsletter could include a feedback questionnaire. Through this teachers will be able to better understand what is happening in homes and what types of activities will best meet the needs of the families in their classroom.

Another recommendation for teachers is to establish relationships with all parents and engage in consistent communication with each. The parent and teacher should talk regularly to discuss concerns, strategies, or questions surrounding the student. Through this, teachers will be able to learn more about their students and the successes and hardships they face throughout the entire school-year. Regular, weekly communication from the home to school will also allow teachers to receive feedback from parents on the activities and parent involvement strategies that are currently in place. Communication may be done in various ways such as notes, email, or
phone but would be best to involve face to face communication as much as possible. Through this, teachers will be able to provide activity modifications or extensions to best meet the needs of all students.

An additional recommendation for teachers involves communication during parent-teacher conferences. Communication during conferences should be two-directional. Thus, teachers should share information with parents and parents should share information with teachers. A suggestion is for teachers to ask parents about their home environment and on any concerns they may have regarding literacy activities or their child’s performance. Teachers could make follow-up phone calls after conferences are complete to see if parents have any questions about what was suggested. Through this, the teacher and parent will be able to learn more about each environment and how they can work together to strengthen it.

Further recommendations include hosting literacy workshops and providing parents with literacy activity ideas and strategies. Teachers must realize that parents are often not skilled themselves and therefore they should provide advice to parents and host workshops for them to learn new strategies (Baker, 2003). Workshops may be done in a series starting with basic literacy information and important skills that students need to have. It may work up to giving strategies and activities to use to help developing readers at different stages. In addition, it is suggested that teachers provide weekly activity ideas in parent newsletters that are sent home. Through this, parents and teachers can work to make a better connection between the learning that is taking place at home and school.

A last suggestion is for teachers to encourage parent involvement in their classrooms and parent involvement at home. Inviting parents to be a part of the classroom in different ways will allow more parents to become involved in their child’s education. For example, not only asking
parents to be volunteers in the classroom but also asking parents to send in special materials may help them feel more involved. Special materials may include items for an educational field trip or an activity center in the classroom. It is also important for teachers to encourage parent involvement at home. Teachers should ask parents to support their child with literacy activities provided by the teacher. They should also encourage them to go above and beyond what is expected by doing additional activities to reinforce their child’s learning.

*Administrators*

The first recommendation for administrators is to learn about the demographics of their school district. Through this, they will be able to better understand the types of literacy that may be occurring in homes. Understanding the home environments of students will allow administrators to create an academic environment that respects the various home environments of students (Dandridge et al. 2000). Through this understanding, administrators will also be able to support teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of all students with varying backgrounds and abilities.

Another suggestion is that administrators encourage parent involvement within the school. Administrators could assist teachers in developing workshops and programs that inform and involve parents on the activities happening in school. They could also help develop literacy workshops that would inform parents on the importance of literacy and different strategies they can use to help their son or daughter with reading.

*Teacher Educators*

Another recommendation that emerges from this study is that teacher educators stress the importance of parent involvement to their students, who will soon be teachers. Educators should discuss home environments and demographic factors that may affect the amount of parent
involvement. In addition, educators need to stress the importance of establishing relationships with parents to make a strong connection between the home and school environment. These relationships should involve regular communication between the parent and teacher. Future educators should also understand the importance of getting to know their students and the struggles and hardships they may or may not face at home. Understanding these issues will allow educators to better meet the needs of students and their families. Teacher candidates could conduct interviews with parents to see how they feel about the home literacy activities provided by the teacher and his or her communication and parent involvement strategies. They could analyze and compare the data they collect to see what parents value and what they would like teachers to change. Through this, teacher candidates would be able to learn first hand what makes parents feel involved and what can be done to increase parent involvement.

It is also important for pre-service teachers to learn about the strategies and materials they can provide to parents to help their children with literacy. Materials such as baggie books and word or letter flashcards help reinforce learning at home. However, it is important for future educators to understand that these materials are simply not enough. Teachers must evaluate the home environment and skills of each student in order to provide materials, activities, and strategies that will meet the needs of all families.

Recommendations for Further Study

Researchers should continue to study the issue of parent involvement and should offer suggestions to parents and teachers on how to strengthen the relationship between home and school. It is important for researchers to look at the home environment factors that affect literacy at home and offer suggestions on how to minimize these factors. A suggestion for further study includes studying high SES homes where time may affect the amount and quality of interactions
that are taking place. In addition, researchers should continue to study fatherhood and how a father’s role in literacy relates to a child’s performance. It is also important for researchers to look at the communication that takes place between teachers and parents and offer suggestions for teachers on how they can better communicate with parents. In addition, it would be valuable to study how teachers are assisting parents and what activities they provide. Research should continue on how teachers can best inform parents on literacy activities and strategies. Through these studies parent involvement in literacy should continue to develop in hopes that all parents will learn new strategies to help improve their child’s reading performance.

Summary

The results of this study show that there are significant factors in the home environment that affect the literacy activities taking place. It also revealed that there is a need for more ongoing communication between the home and school. This communication should be two-directional in that the educator and teacher share information and ideas on a regular basis. Through this, teachers and parents can work together to develop partnerships that will allow the teacher to understand what is happening in homes and allow the parent to understand what is happening at school. They can then create ties between what is happening at home and school to develop a stronger home-school connection. This partnership will also allow teachers to learn about their students’ home environments and assist parents by providing strategies, activities, and recommendations. It is hopeful that through these recommendations, parents and teachers can begin to create stronger connections between the home and school because parent involvement is an important aspect of a child’s education.
References


APPENDIX A

Teacher Interview Questions
Appendix A

Teacher Interview Questions

1. What do you do to get parents involved?
2. How do you get parents involved?
3. What are your perceptions on the success of your parent involvement strategies?
4. If your parent involvement strategies are not working why do you continue to use them?
5. Describe parent involvement. What is an involved parent?
APPENDIX B

Parent Interview Questions
Appendix B

Parent Interview Questions

1. Do you find it hard to find time to read or work with your child on reading activities? If so, why?

2. What aspects of your home make it difficult for you to work with your child?

3. What is your child’s after-school routine like?

4. What does an average evening in your home look like?

5. What activities are your child involved in that interferes with the time you spend on homework and reading activities?

6. What types of activities do you currently do to help your child? How often do you and your child do reading activities? How long?

7. What makes it easy to work with your child on literacy activities?

8. What types of reading materials do you have at home?

9. How do you feel about being a teacher at home for your son/daughter? Do you feel it is part of your responsibility? If not, whose is it?

10. If you could change one aspect of your home environment that would help your son/daughter perform better in school, what would you change?

11. I want to help you work better with the teacher. What can the teacher do to help you better as a parent?

12. What guidance are you currently getting or not getting from the teacher?

13. What would you like the teacher to do differently?

14. What would you like the teacher to do the same?

15. Have you currently developed strategies to work with your teacher to make a strong connection between home and school?

16. Your child’s teacher says that she does ____________. How do you feel about this? Is it helpful?
   - Newsletters
   - Skill Word Rings
   - Baggie Books
   - Parent-Teacher Conferences
   - Letter Flash Cards
   - Open-Door Policy
APPENDIX C

Parent Consent Letter and Form
Appendix C

January 2007

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a student at Bowling Green State University in the Graduate Reading Program. I am currently doing a research study on reading in the home. The purpose of my study is to find out what reading related activities you are currently doing with your child and the factors that make it difficult to work with your child. In addition, I want to know how you feel about the parent involvement strategies currently being used by your child’s classroom teacher. This study will help teachers and parents by helping them create a stronger home-school connection. By doing this interview, you will be able to look at your personal experiences with your child’s reading as a parent.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to be in this study. If you are interested in being in the study, I am asking you to fill out the attached form, sign it, and return the slip to your child’s classroom teacher. Three to five people will be selected. If you are chosen, you will be contacted to meet with me one-on-one to discuss your view on the home reading environment. The interview will take place one time and should take about one to two hours to complete. Once you have signed the form and returned it, we will discuss times that you are available to meet. When the interview is complete, your participation in the study will be over.

Please be sure that all of the information you share will remain private. The interview will be taped for use by me, the researcher. Transcripts of the interview will be included in my thesis; however, a fake name will be used if necessary. Tapes will remain in a locked file and will be thrown away at the end of this study. The tape will not be shared with anyone else. No personal information or names will be shared; only results from the study.

If you choose to be in this study it would be helpful. However, participation in this study is voluntary. Please keep in mind that the likely risks to you are no greater than those in daily life. By completing the form; you are agreeing to be in the study. If your form is not returned within one week, I will contact you by phone to see if you are interested. If at any time you would like to be taken out of the study, please contact Kristin Brown or Dr. Timothy Murnen at the numbers listed below.

If you have any questions about this interview study, I may be contacted at knbrown@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my chairperson, Dr. Timothy Murnen at tmurnen@bgsu.edu or (419) 372-7983. If you have questions or concerns about your rights, please contact the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at hrsb@bgsu.edu or (419) 372-7716. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kristin N. Brown
Graduate Student
Bowling Green State University
Consent Form

It has been explained to me that by filling out the form and signing below, I am agreeing to be in this study. If I am selected, I have been informed that I will be contacted and asked to participate in a one hour interview.

*Please keep the letter for your records and return only this consent form.

______________________________
Your Full Name

______________________________
Phone Number

The best time of day to contact me at the number listed is:

O Morning
O Afternoon
O Evening

______________________________   _____________________________
Signature        Date
APPENDIX D

Matrix of Parent Perceptions and Suggestions
## Parent Responses to:
Literacy Activities and Newsletters Provided by the Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Baggie Books</th>
<th>Newsletter</th>
<th>Letter Cards</th>
<th>Skill Word Rings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>“Those are great because it kind of keeps him on the right track and then I know what to pick out for him when we come to the library.”</td>
<td>“I really enjoy those because I then know what is expected of him and what they are starting to do.”</td>
<td>“Those were very helpful, especially for Sam because he knew his alphabet but he didn’t really know that A was A and B was B. He was having trouble with that. So once we started using those, it just clicked.”</td>
<td>“He is doing very good with those. It is very helpful because I know with my older child he didn’t have those brought home in that fashion and I think he has trouble, I mean he’s a problem reader anyway. I don’t know if it would have been beneficial for him to have that but it’s really helping Sam out a lot. We usually get to the words once a week.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“Oh yes! Emily really likes reading those and I know that there are different levels. I don’t know if she moves them up or back but that kind of frustrates Emily because she says ‘Well I read a level 4 and now I’m on a level 3’.”</td>
<td>“I think she does a wonderful job because she sends the weekly newsletters home at the beginning of the week. They tell you what you should be looking for and what the homework is that’s coming home, making sure you’re seeing it and that it’s not disappearing on the school bus. I think it’s good that we have that communication every Monday so that we know what she is going to be doing that week. We can also help reinforce the skills at home. If we know they are working on spelling or graphing then we can try to work on graphing too. Like, count these and how would you graph that.”</td>
<td>“Emily was way above those so we really didn’t use them much. Like the first week we worked on sounds like “what letter does B make” and things like that but she basically knew all of those. It was kind of a waste of time for her to use them when she really already knew them.”</td>
<td>“Emily has them all down. Because she can pick them out herself, out of the newspaper, out of everything, so she has them all down. We’ve been working on spelling the words instead of just reading the word. I’ll flip it over and if it’s the word like I’ll have her spell the word like. That sort of thing. We’ll use it for that instead of just reading. We do this because she gets bored otherwise.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>“Yeah, he’s reading those. We do those with the flashcards then when we go to bed and he’ll read it back to me.”</td>
<td>“Yes I think it’s effective. What they’re going to be working on, what they’ve been studying, what they’re gonna get deeper into that week.”</td>
<td>“Yeah, it has helped him.”</td>
<td>“Well it has helped a lot. The thing is I need to take them out of the ring, switch them around because he has gotten to know the order.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>“I am right there with him with the baggie books. Those are really important books that he sits down with me.”</td>
<td>“Yes. Miller’s Words. It kind of outlines what is going on in the classroom. It keeps me in touch. She’s always inviting parents in to help with this, and help with that. She is very organized.”</td>
<td>“He’ll still go and grab his ring of letters and he’ll go through those for me.”</td>
<td>“I couldn’t believe how quickly he caught onto those popcorn words. I think that’s because Mrs. Miller makes such a big deal about it in class and really motivates the kids to want to get this done. But he brings these things home and he will go through them. I haven’t seen them in awhile but I think it’s because he has mastered what he needed to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>“I like them and that’s about the only book that Lori will sit down and try on her own.”</td>
<td>“I like them. So I know what they’re doing for the week.”</td>
<td>“I like them because she, she’ll sit down and try to do the cards too, there’s words on them too so she’ll try to pronounce the words.”</td>
<td>“I like, but it’s hard with her. I like everything she does with her but it’s just a little rougher to do it with Lori. She’s on medication and they keep changing her medicine so there’s nothing that’s really helping her yet.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The matrix includes responses from parents on how they feel about the literacy activities and newsletter the teacher provides.
## Parent Responses to:
**Communication and Parent Involvement Strategies Provided by the Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Parent Teacher Conferences</th>
<th>Open-Door Policy</th>
<th>Feel Welcome</th>
<th>Teacher to do Different</th>
<th>Overall Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>“I think she was very positive about Sam’s participation in class and stuff like that. I was really glad about that especially because of all of the life changes he has been having. Communication was very good.”</td>
<td>“Yes I was aware. I haven’t needed to take advantage of it”</td>
<td>“Yes.”</td>
<td>“There isn’t anything.”</td>
<td>“I haven’t had any problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“Setting it up was done at a parent-orientation at the beginning of the year. You signed up for your own time slot. During the conference, it was real easy because Emily doesn’t have any problems so she just went over what she’s seeing, what she’s testing. Behavioral wise she has come a long way with self-esteem she was saying. But that was like the only thing she had to improve on.”</td>
<td>“She explained that to us. No we have not taken advantage of it.”</td>
<td>“Oh yeah. I think it’s just her personality. She’s just a bubbly person, such a nice person. You never feel like you’re bothering her if you have a question or you just come in.”</td>
<td>“I don’t really think. I mean Emily doesn’t really have any problems so what she is doing right now is working.”</td>
<td>“I know I can contact her. If there is a time that Daisies meet right after school, I just send a note and she makes sure that Emily gets to where she is supposed to be.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>“Seems to of helped in a few areas. He’s doing a lot better at knowing his letters when he sees them. Then I sent some of that stuff down with him when he went to his moms for the summer. So they was working with him down there too. You also got to pick a time, which was kinda cool.”</td>
<td>“Yeah, I’m aware but I never got the phone number that day. She was like, well just call me or email me. It was like; well I don’t have a computer so that’s out. It’s like how do we get a phone number? I didn’t see anything in any of the books we got. I don’t know if I had to ask her or the principal or the office.”</td>
<td>“Well yeah. She’s pretty cheery. Usually tells you what they’re doing that week and stuff.”</td>
<td>“I would say more feedback but I don’t know how it would be done other than little notes between each other.”</td>
<td>“Easy. Usually just do notes or something. Because we got these folders and these folders in their backpacks, I just paperclip a note in there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>“I enjoy that time. My husband and I both attended. Mrs. Miller had a lot of work samples to share and it’s fun because we can’t be in the classroom with Eli and we really don’t know what he’s like when he’s there. So to see the work samples and what he’s thinking, and how he’s writing, it’s just so much fun. I enjoyed that. I wish we had fall and spring conferences and not just fall conferences. I know we’ll be getting more of the work samples and she’s collecting and doing portfolios and that will be a lot of fun to have. I wish that before he left her that we could sit down.”</td>
<td>“Yes, I was aware. I haven’t needed to. Nope.”</td>
<td>“Oh, I wish I could spend more time. Umm, when I’m there, I absolutely feel welcome in the classroom. Well, it’s just she’s Mrs. Miller! Her smile, her enthusiasm. You’re just there; you’re a part of it.”</td>
<td>“No. I am so pleased with how this kindergarten year is going for Eli.”</td>
<td>“Email is the easiest because it allows her to do it on her time. Also, that way I can put everything I need in one message and she can get back to me when she can. I know before school and after-school are crazy, precious moments.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>“Good. She just showed me the work Lori’s doing and explained everything to me. That’s when I had concerns about, because she’ll do more at school then she’ll do at home. When she’s not doing it at home then I don’t think she can do it but she’s doing it at school.”</td>
<td>“No.”</td>
<td>“Yes. She’s so pleasant.”</td>
<td>“No, I think she’s doing good now.”</td>
<td>“Good. I called her yesterday and she called me back within 10 minutes.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The matrix includes responses from parents on how they feel about the communication and parent involvement strategies currently being used by the teacher.