THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ON CHILDREN'S READING ACHIEVEMENT AND EFFECTIVE METHODS OF INCREASING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Literacy is found to be one of the strongest predictors of academic success. Children who enter school struggling with reading, generally continue to struggle with reading throughout their schooling. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact parent involvement has on children's reading achievement. It also analyzed effective methods of increasing parent involvement. The setting of this study was an elementary school in southeastern North Carolina. This ten-week case study involved three parents and their three children who were in first grade. The parents attended workshops to learn reading strategies that increased student achievement in reading. The results indicated parent involvement increased children's reading achievement. Results also further indicated there are three effective methods and strategies needed for parents to become and stay involved in their child's learning.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the most wonderful parents in the world. Thank you

encouraging me to move to North Carolina, and setting forth on the journey I have taken. I know

it was hard to see me leave. Without your love and support I would have never made it this far.

You have always believed in me, when I had difficulty doing this myself at times. It has always

been my dream to make you proud someday. This one's for you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

      Literacy is found to be one of the strongest predictors of academic success. Children who enter school struggling with reading, generally continue to struggle with reading throughout their schooling. Therefore, students will have negative affects on their academic performance, motivation and self-esteem (Hindin, 2009). The cost of early failure in reading is exceptionally high. Learning to read is a prerequisite skill that is necessary for success in our literate society. Literacy skills are necessary in obtaining employment in an already declining United States economy.

      Strong correlations exist between the amount of text read and student achievement. According to the US Department of Education (as cited in Glenn Paul, 2004), the Reading First Guidance Draft stated, "'By effectively teaching children to read well by the end of third grade, we ensure that all students advance later to grades well prepared to achieve their full academic potential'" (p.652). However, too many children in schools across the United States are having a difficult time with student performance in reading. In 1988, Juel stated (as cited in Hinden & Paratore, 2007) there is an 88% chance that a child who struggles in first grade will struggle with reading in fourth grade (p.310). "The Nation's 2003 Report Card stated that only 31% of fourth graders are performing at or above the proficient reading level" (Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, 2006, p. 241).

      More than one-third of students enter school with considerable differences in language, initial literacy skills and motivation, which places them at an even higher risk for developing long-term reading difficulties (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009). Proficient readers have an opportunity to read far more text than poor readers at the same grade level. In 1986, Stanovich

(as cited in Hindin & Paratore, 2007) hypothesized that "Children with poor decoding skills are exposed to fewer words and fewer ideas, and subsequently the knowledge gap between them and their higher – performing peers grows in both word knowledge and concept knowledge" (p. 310). Stanovich called this the 'Matthew Effects' (as cited in Hindin & Paratore, 2007, p. 310). This is based on the notion that good, 'rich' readers use their word reading capital to read more and thus 'get richer', while less able, 'poor' readers have less reading capital to expend, and thus read far fewer words and fall further and further behind their high-achieving peers and become increasing 'poorer'" (p. 310).

Purpose of the Study

This study serves two purposes: First, the research will determine how parent involvement affects children's reading achievement. A second purpose is to determine effective methods of increasing parent participation with reading. Findings indicate the positive effectiveness of parent involvement programs within schools.

Research Questions

The research proposes to study parents' involvement with reading and the strategies they will implement at home in order to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact parent involvement has on children's reading achievement?

2. What are effective methods of increasing parent involvement?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will apply the following terms and definitions:

Elementary School: A school containing grades kindergarten through fifth grade which promotes growth in academic, emotional and social areas.

Urban: This resembles a city or a densely populated area.

Ethnic Group: A group of people to identify amongst one another through a common heritage such as physical appearance, language, common ancestry, religion, kinship, or nationality.

Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF): An assessment that measures a children's ability to segment three and four phoneme words into their individual phonemes fluently.

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF): This is an assessment that measures a children's ability to blend letters into made up words.

Running Records: This is an assessment used to establish a children's reading performance as the child reads from a benchmark book.

STAR Reading: A standardized computerized test used to assess reading skills.

Dialogic Reading: When this involves children, it is an interactive method of reading picture books with children. Adults encourage children to be actively involved in the reading process. Adults ask questions as they read, and allow the children to become storytellers.

Paired Reading: This is a reading activity that has a beginning and skilled reader reading together. The beginning reader signals the skilled reader that he/she is ready to read on his/her own. When the beginning reader needs assistance he/she signals the skilled reader.

Think Alouds: Readers think aloud as they are reading text.

Onset-Rime: The onset is the part of the syllable that precedes the vowel part of the syllable. The rime is the part of the syllable that consists of the vowel plus any consonants which follow.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three bodies of research were reviewed for this study, including, how environmental factors influenced student learning, and what impact parent involvement has on children's reading achievement, finally, literature on successful reading strategies that can be implemented at home was reviewed to find out how to increase parent involvement at school.

Environmental Factors

Demographic factors such as poverty, racial and ethnic identity, family composition, and educational level of parents affect educational performance of children. Children who are low income and culturally or linguistically diverse may not experience the types of literacy interactions that correlate with school-based reading success. According to Burchinai, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, and Howes (as cited in Downer & Pianta, 2006), "Maternal education and family income are key elements of family structure that have been associated with young children's academic outcomes, language development, and cognitive abilities" (p. 12). Along with this, efforts have been made to explain the role of parents in children's learning.

According to NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), there is evidence that children who come from low income homes experience reading failure (Hindin & Paratore, 2007). These students typically do not perform as well as students who come from higher income homes. Children who live in poverty score 27 points lower on reading tests than that of higher income homes (Hindin & Paratore, 2007). Research also indicates that children from low income homes often have difficulty learning to read. Philliber, Spillman, and King (as cited in Cassidy, Garcia, Tejeda-Delgado, Garrett, Martinez-Garcia & Hinojosa, 2004) attributed this to low-literate parents lacking the skills to support their children's efforts to gain literacy (p.479).

The U.S. Department of Education's (2001) Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I School*s* followed the progress of students as they moved from third to fifth grade in 71 high-poverty schools (Darling, 2005). The study also found reading scores between third and fifth grades were *50%* higher for those students who had high levels of early parental outreach than for those students who had low levels of parent outreach activities.

Discrepancies are also evident by race and ethnicity. In 2007, KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik stated (as cited in Lemonik, 2009) white children already score 26 points higher than black children on reading tests by age 9. Rather than the trend declining as students spend more time in school, performing along racial differences grows. The problem is particularly acute in urban schools with a high composition of children from minority groups and economically low-income households. The reading report cards of children nationwide indicate that children from many of the ethnic subgroups fail to read at grade level. Failure to read during the elementary school years has long-term consequences for children that include lack of self-confidence, motivation to learn, frustration that leads to problem behaviors, and dropping out of school.

According to Paratore (as cited in Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004) attempts have been made to explain how low achievement can be traced to the role of parents in children's learning (p.15). Al Otaiba & Fuchs (2006) and Wigfield & Asher (1984) (as cited in Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009) stated, "Variables in the home that contribute to the children's early literacy success may even outweigh those in the school setting" (p. 520). Parents of low-performing readers are less likely to use effective methods of reading instruction. Weinberger found that children whose parents contributed less time devoted to reading were more likely to have reading problems at school (Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, 2006, p. 242).

Parents who are low income generally do not read to their children, let alone read themselves (Cassidy, Garcia, Tejeda-Delgado, Garrett, Martinez-Garcia, & Hinojosa, 2004). In addition, if parents or other adults do not have the necessary skills for providing literacy-rich experiences or exposure to varied and extensive vocabulary, then their children will be lagging behind other students of the same age. Along with this, a positive correlation exists between the child's school performance, education and income level with that of the parent. The results of research (Centre for Education Research and Innovation, 2003; Mullis et al, 2003) confirm that children usually achieve a literacy resembling that of their parents, suggesting that there may be an "inter-generational transfer of literacy within families" (Knaflic, 2005, p. 81).

Parent Involvement

The No Child Left Behind Law passed in 2001, (as cited in Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004) has attempted to close the achievement gap between low income minority children and their peers by placing more emphasis on teacher accountability providing extended options for parents (p.15). Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2004) further went on to state, teachers, principals, and parents are required to develop a plan that ensures all students reach proficiency or above in the academic achievement standards. Schools are required to provide opportunities for parent involvement, including having parent-teacher meetings, reporting to parents their child's progress, helping parents work with their children to improve achievement, offer parents opportunity to volunteer, and involving parents in the planning and designing of school programs (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004).

Educators know students are more successful when their parents are involved in their education. Family involvement has benefits of higher test scores and grades, better attendance, increased levels of completed homework, and motivation, and a more positive attitude (Darch,

Miao, & Shippen, 2004). When parents demonstrate an interest in their child's education, that child will flourish.

Family literacy has been a focus of early childhood education the past twenty years (Huag & Doleis, 2007). Research establishes a link between literacy-enriched home environments to children's acquisition of literacy skills. In a five year longitudinal study, Senechal and LeFevre found parent involvement in teaching reading was directly correlated to emergent literacy (as cited in Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, 2006, p.242). In 2003, Livingston and Wirt (as cited in Darling, 2005) have found that children with richer home literacy environments demonstrate higher levels of reading skills and knowledge when they enter kindergarten than children with less literacy-rich environments (p. 476). Family literacy activities include reading aloud, shared reading, and making print materials available. These activities have been found to have significant effects on children's literacy learning (Huag & Doleis, 2007).

Research shows that children who see their parents read at home will be successful in their early reading (Cassidy, et. al, 2004). In addition, children's individual differences in language and early literacy skills at the beginning of school have been attributed to the quality and quantity of language interactions with their parents and exposure to print in the home environment. Children who have attention drawn to the print around them will gain the important message that print conveys meaning (Williams & Rask, 2003). Shared book reading is one way parents, early childhood educators, and other caregivers help children acquire literacy skills. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkerson (as cited in Hindin & Paratore, 2007) stated, "The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success is reading aloud to their children" (p. 312).

If parents are knowledgeable about literacy skills they can assist the child with phonics, context clues, picture clues, as well as other word recognition techniques. As families establish opportunities for children to engage with language and print through interacting and modeling with their child, early literacy skills, such as, oral language, vocabulary and print awareness and letter knowledge increase (Carter, et. al, 2009). They further went on to discuss how language and literacy skills are an essential element of young children's development, which allows them to interact meaningfully.

According to the Learning First Alliance (1998, 2000), (as cited in Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, 2006, p. 242) tutoring and home reading are two crucial components needed to produce an effective environment for reading development for at-risk readers. However, Torgeson (as cited in Hindin & Paratore, 2007) stated, studies indicate although intervention programs make noteworthy gains in word reading and comprehension, they often fail to help students achieve sufficient rates of accuracy and fluency (p. 308). Allington (as cited in Hindin & Paratore, 2007, p.309) noted the intractability of reading difficulties can be partially explained by evidence that children who struggle with reading generally receive more skill-based and decontextualized literacy instruction than their peers. These children also receive substantially fewer opportunities to engage in reading connected text. In 1988, a study by Hewison, found increased parent involvement to be more effective in increasing reading performance than small group reading instruction by a reading specialist (as cited in Resetar, Noell, & Pellegrin, 2006, p.242).

According to Lonigan and Whitehurst (as cited in Sylva, Scott, Tatsiki, Ereky-Stevens, & Crook, 2008) home based programs in terms of children's language and literacy development,

can be more effective than classroom interventions (p.437). Sylva, et al. further went on to quote Lonigan and Whitehurst in saying a:

> Home environment can be the most powerful platform because dialogic (shared) reading 'targets expressive language skills through the use of probing, practice, teaching, feedback, and repetition', and in the one-on-one context rather than small group settings, parents' use of questions and feedback can be tailored more suitably to each child and situation" (p. 437).

Research has indicated children are more successful in school when their parents are involved. When parents understand how to use effective reading strategies, students increase in their reading ability. With this being said, the next section will discuss methods to increase parent involvement.

Methods to Increase Parent Involvement

According to Morrow and Malin (as cited in Keen, 2007), the relationships between parents and educators are often considered to be most effective when they represent true relationships (p.340). Effective partnerships include mutual respect, trust, honesty, mutually set goals, shared planning and decision-making. According to Keen, evidence suggests that when teachers and parents partner together, a child's literacy development increases. A key component of a successful home school relationship appears to be the sharing of information (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004). Musti-Rao and Carledge (2004) also stated communication needs to be clear, consistent, and positive. Parents need to believe that they play an important role in their child's learning. They further mentioned this is especially important for low-income/urban parents who tend to believe it is the school's responsibility to ensure student achievement.

It is important for the home and school to work together for the good of the child. Efforts need to be made with parents to ensure home experiences increase opportunities for language growth. Children benefit when teachers and parents reinforce the same concepts and ideas (Darling, 2005). For this to happen, parents must have some knowledge of what happens in the classroom and teachers need to know what happens at home in supporting reading acquisition (Darling, 2005).

An obvious way to increase parent involvement in literacy is for educators to teach parents how to incorporate effective reading interventions at home. One effective method is family literacy workshops, which promote family involvement (Huag & Doleis, 2007). Workshops help parents build their knowledge, learn and implement reading strategies for supporting their child's literacy development. This process needs to have parents actively engaged in the learning activities so that they leave the workshop feeling confident enough that they will be able to apply what they learned at home. In order for workshops to be successful, parent attendance is necessary.

Parents also need to be motivated to work with their child at home. In order to enhance parents' motivation McClelland's theory of motivation identifies three types of intrinsic motivational needs: the need for affiliation, achievement, and power (Huag & Doleis, 2007). Without motivation, parent involvement is unlikely to follow through. Huag and Doleis (2007) also stated it is critical to develop an effective approach to maximize parents' learning experience.

Effective Reading Strategies

Teaching students to read is critical; however it is only effective when appropriate methods are utilized. The next section will discuss just a few of the many reading strategies that

have been proven to be successful. Each of these strategies can be applied by both teachers and parents that involve the five literacy components: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness.

Dialogic reading (DR) is an evidenced-based approach to shared book reading. Adults use these strategies to actively engage a child during story time. The goal of DR is for the child to become the storyteller and for the adult to facilitate, respond, and expand the child's verbalizations. For example, parents are taught to ask the child "who," "what,", "where" and "when" questions as opposed to questions requiring "yes" and "no" answers. Providing parents with examples of various effective storytelling strategies will enhance storytelling quality which encourages children to stay engaged and get excited (Huag & Doleis, 2007). Enz (as cited in Huag & Doleis), indicated that many parents are frustrated with storybook time when their children do not respond enthusiastically (2003).

In a 1988 study by Whitehurst and colleagues, it was concluded the manner in which an adult reads with a child is critical to the development of a child's expressive language and when DR strategies are combined with phonemic awareness training, there are additional positive effects on emergent literacy skills (Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi & Cutting, 2006). In another study by Whitehurt and colleagues, a posttest and six month follow-up test indicated preschool children who were consistently exposed to DR strategies when being read to at daycare or at home scored significantly higher on measures of expressive language as compared with children in the control group, who were not exposed to the DR intervention consistently (Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi & Cutting, 2006).

Think-alouds are another effective reading strategy that can be used in building comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. During think-alouds, readers say what they are

thinking aloud as they read. In a recent study, a school with only 12% of students being proficient on the state reading test reported scores increased to 21% in just six months after teachers implemented think alouds (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009). Two years later, Fisher, Frey, Lapp (2009) reported the number of proficient students increased to 47%.

Paired reading is a strategy used to increase fluency. Paired reading is an activity that has a beginning and skilled reader reading together. The beginning reader signals the skilled reader that he or she is ready to read on his or her own. When the beginning reader needs assistance he/she signals the skilled reader. According to Pickston, Hannon, and Fox (as cited in Sylva, et. al, 2008), paired reading can improve the reading abilities of poor readers more effectively than listening alone (p. 438). This coincides with Topping (as cited in Heydon & Reilly, 2007) "Paired reading projects, introduced into schools in the 1980s, also showed measurable improvements in reading skills for the children involved" (p.156).

Another reading strategy that promotes phonics and phonemic awareness is onset and rime. An onset in a syllable is the initial consonant, while the rime comprises the vowel and consonants that follow. There are numerous reasons why beginning reading instruction at the rime level may be more successful with students with, or at risk for, severe reading problems than instruction at the phoneme level (Hines, 2009). First of all, onset and rime instruction avoids short vowel confusion, which often occurs in the English language. With onset and rime there is less blending. Instead of blending each individual sound in c-a-t, a child only needs to remember the "at", which is the rime. This has less memory demands of blending sounds. Hines (2009) also found that students increased their ability to decode instructional words on average 73% over baseline. These results support research that onset-rime based instruction is effective for students who are at-risk for reading disabilities in teaching instructional words (Hines, 2009).

This chapter presented research on parent involvement and its relationship to reading achievement along with research findings of effective methods for increasing parent involvement. Research has demonstrated the impact parent involvement has on the literacy development of children. This study will add to the existing knowledge that parent involvement has an impact on children's reading achievement. Secondly, this study will contribute to the already existing knowledge that attempts to explain effective methods for parent involvement. This study will be of concern for both educators and parents. These finding may imply if parent involvement increases children's reading achievement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to measure the impact of parent involvement in first graders reading achievement. This chapter represents a description of a case study that includes a description of the research method and design, a description of the setting, participants, and instrumentation that was used. This chapter also describes the procedures used in gathering and analyzing data.

Research Method and Design

This research study involved a ten-week case study that included three parents and three students from a first grade classroom. These participants attended workshops to learn effective reading strategies that can be implemented at home to increase student achievement in reading. The workshops took place one day a week after school for thirty minutes. There were ten workshops. During each workshop, I demonstrated one reading strategy to all three of the parents. There were ten strategies, two different strategies for each of the five components of literacy: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Once the strategy was modeled, the students entered the room for the parents to implement the new reading strategy.

Throughout the study, I gathered and analyzed qualitative data. Qualitative data was collected from the pre and post interviews from both the parents and the students, parent reading logs, and a final conclusion sheet completed from parents. I also compiled field notes from the workshops, classroom observations, as well children's perceptions of strategies implemented at home.

A qualitative case study will be used in order to investigate a "group by collecting

extensive data" (Slavin, 2007, p.143). The interviews created data that was "potentially richer

and more complete than that which can be obtained from a questionnaire" (Slavin, 2007, p. 111).

Using this approach also allowed me to triangulate that data from three sources, in order to

determine if parent involvement impacts children's reading achievement.

Setting

The rural school district where the study was conducted is located in southeastern North

Carolina. In 2009, School Matters reported the school districts' student population as 3,264

students. The district is classified by the state as a low wealth, high poverty district with

60.9 % of the students coming from economically disadvantaged homes. The racial

demographics of the district are approximately 35.9 % White, 42.5 % African American, 14.5%

Hispanic, 1.0 % Asian/Pacific Islander and 3.9 % American Indian.

Smart Elementary School (a pseudonym) has a student population of 608 students in

grades preschool through first. Of this population, 27 % of whom are white, 37.7 % are Black,

26.3% are Hispanic, 4.8 percent are American Indian and 4.2 percent are multi-racial. The

students who qualify for free and reduced meals are 67.9 percent (School District, October

2009).

The administrative staff of Smart Elementary School consisted of one American Indian

female principal and one White female assistant principal. There were a total of 44 licensed

classroom teachers and resource positions. Resource positions include an Academic Enrichment

(AE), Exception Children (EC), English as a Second Language (ESL), music, art, computer, and

a physical education teacher. There were 36 additional support staff such as teacher assistants,

media coordinator, secretary/bookkeeper, receptionist, and nurse employed at the school.

For the most part, students were heterogeneously grouped in each classroom. Learning disabled students were in an inclusion setting for all of their subjects and receive additional services in accordance to the specifications of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Students who were below grade level in reading received additional intervention from support staff members during a designated time set by their classroom teacher.

In compliance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, I applied for and received consent to conduct this study at Smart Elementary School. I also received written consent from the principal at Smart Elementary School to recruit study participants, conduct interviews and workshops, conduct informal classroom observations, and collect test data.

Description of Subjects and Sample Selection

I gathered a sample of parents and students from a first grade classroom at Smart Elementary School based upon their willingness to participate. I chose the three participants purposely for this study, because of the all three students were non proficient in reading and were low-socioeconomic status. I contacted the participants by telephone. During this time, I informed participants their participation in both the interviews and workshops were completely voluntary and they were able to end the study at any time, without any obligations.

A total of six participants from a first grade classroom participated in this case study: three parents and three students. The participants were from the same first grade classroom. There were two Black female students and one Multi-Racial male student. All three students were low income based upon their qualifications. Two of the parents for the students were Black females. The other parent was a White female.

The first student, Student A, was a Black female. She comes from a single family household, with just her mother raising her and her older sister. Her mother, Parent A, was a Black female. Student A was brought before the retention committee last year; however she was promoted to first grade.

Student B was a Multi-Racial male who was retained in kindergarten. He has been diagnosed with Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and takes medication. He was brought before the School Based Assistance Team (SBAT) that recommends students be tested for special education. However, it was decided no further testing would be pursued. He has two older brothers who are in special education. Parent B was a single, White, mother raising all three children while she works full-time.

Student C was a Black female student. She was diagnosed with ADHD; however she does not take medication. She was also brought before the SBAT committee, and it was decided she would also not receive further testing. She has an older brother who is in special education and a younger brother in kindergarten. Parent C was a Black single mother who works full-time as well.

I created a consent form to explain the objectives of the study, data collection procedures, privacy information, and requirements of the participants. Parents and students that volunteered to participate signed the consent form. When all the forms were signed at the meeting, parents choose a convenient time to individually complete the pre-interview questions regarding their involvement of reading with their child at home. Students completed their pre-interview questions individually in class while I read the questions aloud.

Instrumentation

There were four instruments created and implemented throughout this study: *Parent Interview* questions (see Appendix *Reading* B) and *Student Interview* questions (see Appendix C) are face-to-face interviews I created. These were used prior to the study as well as at the completion of the study. The *Reading Log* (see Appendix D) was a form parents completed each night after implementing reading strategies. *Final Conclusions* (see Appendix E) was a sheet used to gather parents' final thoughts regarding the reading strategies they were implementing at home.

Face-to-face interviews were used for data collection, because it allowed me to collect a vast amount of information during a short amount of time. The face-to-face interviews provided the participants an opportunity to clarify their responses. I also took notes during the interviews in order to clarify parents' responses. The *Reading Logs* were used throughout the ten week study. These reading logs provided communication between the parents and me. Each night the parents indicated the effectiveness of a particular strategy implemented at home. Parents were provided an opportunity to comment or ask questions on a daily basis through the use of these reading logs.

The *Final Conclusions* sheet was given to parents on the final workshop day. This was useful in determining parents overall thoughts of strategies implemented at home. It helped me to have a better understanding of how parents felt at the conclusion of the research study.

Field notes were written based upon observations made throughout the study. Each morning I asked students questions regarding reading strategies their parents were implementing at home. Field notes were taken during workshops, as well during classroom observations of students reading.

Data was also collected from five reading assessments administered prior to the parent workshops and at the completion of the workshops. The five reading assessments included: Running Records, STAR Reading, Nonsense Word Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, and the Dolch Sight Word list. Field notes were taken throughout the study.

I compared the results from the parent and student interviews, parent reading logs, final conclusion sheets, field notes with the children's reading assessment scores. Using these multiple methods of collecting data helped triangulate the data in order to improve the dependability of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure consisted of three phases. The first phase included the initial interviews involving parents and students before the study began. The second phase took place throughout the entire study. This phase included field notes taken from classroom observations and workshops. The final phase occurred once the study was completed. This phase consisted of interviews from both parents and students at the conclusion of the study, as well as the completion of the *Final Conclusions* sheet. At this point, I compared pre-and post-reading assessment scores to determine if there was a change in scores.

The first phase of data collection consisted of the *Parent Interview* questions that were used to identify the knowledge and amount of reading strategies parents currently used at home. In addition, the *Student Interview* questions assisted the researcher in determining the child's perception of how much parents were involved with helping them read at home.

During this phase data was collected from the five reading assessment: Running Records, STAR Reading, Nonsense Word Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, and the Dolch Sight Word List. Each of these tests measured the five components of literacy: comprehension,

vocabulary, fluency, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Running records measure students

comprehension based upon their reading level. STAR Reading is a computerized program that

assesses students reading level based upon children's vocabulary knowledge. Nonsense word

fluency (NWF) is a test used to measure a children's awareness of phonics by calculating how

many words per minute a child reads. A phoneme segmentation fluency test (PSF) measures

children's phonemic awareness. The Dolch Sight Word List assesses whether students recognize

high frequency words. The tests were given at the beginning of the study in order to set baseline

scores. Once the parent workshops were completed, the same five tests were administered again

in order to determine a possible difference in scores. These tests were used to measure the

growth students made in reading over the length of the ten week study.

The second phase of the data collection was done by informal observations during class

as well during the workshops. Field notes were used during this phase, because the researcher

recorded notes each morning regarding the children's perception of their parents implementing

reading strategies. I also recorded the interaction of parents and students throughout the

workshop. I observed parents' understanding of the model as they demonstrated the use of

strategies so that I knew they could apply them at home. During this phase, parents completed a

Reading Log, which allowed them to make comments or questions regarding the strategy they

implemented at home. I took notes based upon the responses from the participants in the reading

logs.

The final phase took place at the conclusion of the study. After the study was completed,

each student and parent interview was re-administered. The responses from these interviews

were collected and compared with the pre-interviews. A *Final Conclusions* sheet provided

parents an opportunity to express their final thoughts. During this phase, the researcher collected and compared pre-and post-reading assessment scores.

Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data was to read and reread the vast amounts of data collected. The procedures for analyzing the data included: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; and (c) examining the data to answer the research questions identified in the introduction of this research study.

To begin with, I wrote any reoccurring themes and trends that emerged from the data. All the date was coded according to categories determined by the researcher after reviewing the data. I used a code and re-code strategy. I took a few days break to go back and look at the data collected to ensure dependability of the study.

Concept mapping, highlighting, and index cards were used to sort through the data and put in categories. Codes and themes were counted. The data was reviewed on an ongoing basis to see if there was a need to re-interview participants to clarify their perceptions. Pre-and post-reading scores were compared to determine any changes in scores. Common themes were the focus of this narrative. An audit trail was used and included in this narrative to improve the study's conformability. In addition, the study was compared with other studies to enhance transferability. In the end, I created a narrative to describe how parent involvement impacts children's reading achievement, along with describing effective methods to increase parent involvement.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections to present findings related to the two main research questions investigated in this study. The first section will answer the first research question and will include data analysis from face-to-face parent and student interviews, and field notes based upon observations of parents and students. The second section will answer the second research question and includes an analysis of informal observations, field notes, and reading logs. A final parent interview was administered at the final workshop session in order to gather additional data regarding the effectiveness of the strategies which were implemented throughout the research study as well. At the end of the study pre-post reading assessments were compared to determine any changes in scores.

Research Question One

What is the impact parent involvement has on children's reading achievement? Parents involved in the study completed face-to-face pre-and post-interviews.   Parents were asked to answer ten multiple choice questions regarding their involvement in reading activities at home. Students involved in the study answered nine multiple choice questions regarding parent involvement in reading activities at home in pre-and post-face-to-face interviews. Responses to the items appearing on both these data collection instruments were selected from the interviews and analyzed. Field notes were written and analyzed based upon observations I made during parent workshops, as well as during observations of student readings. Reading tests also indicated whether children's reading had improved over the course of the study.

Data from the face-to-face parent interviews were compared to determine if reading activities at home had increased. On the first question, parents A and C responded to both the

pre-and post-interview questions stating they spend 15 minutes or more reading to their child each night. Parent B indicated during the pre-interview they read only ten minutes. This increased to more than 15 minutes on the post-interview for Parent B. All three parents indicated their child reads more than 15 minutes each night on both the pre- and post- interviews. All the parents on both the pre- and post- interviews indicated they have books available, read with their child, and discussed the meaning of stories. On both pre-and post-interviews, parents also stated they discussed pictures, their child discussed pictures, and their child looked at pictures to tell a story. Parents A and B stated they ask their child what words mean on both interviews. Parent C said she did not ask questions before the study, but answered "yes" she does ask questions on the post-interview. The pre-and post-interviews indicated all the children ask their parents what words mean. All the parents said they asked their child what was happening in the story in both pre-and post-interviews. The results from the pre-and post-face-to-face interviews suggest there was not a significant change in reading activity due to parents participating in the workshop.

Data from the face-to-face student interviews were compared to determine if reading activities at home increased. Student A indicated "yes" there were books available at home on both the pre- and post- interview questions. Students B and C said "no" there were not books available at home before the study, but then answered "yes" there are books available in the post-interview. All three students indicated "yes" they read "a little" on both the pre-interview questions. This response changed to "a lot" on the post-interview for all three students. All three students stated their parents do not ask them what the story or words mean on the pre-interview questions. On the post-interview, students indicated "yes" their parents ask the meaning of a story as well as the meaning of words. On the pre-interview students said "no" that their parents do not ask them about pictures or what was happening in stories. This response

changed to "yes" on the post interview for all students. The overall results from the data

collected from the pre-and post-student face-to-face interviews showed more parent involvement

after the parents attended workshops.

Field notes were written based upon informal observations at workshops and during

classroom while students read. Data from both pre-and post-reading assessment scores and

observations were analyzed for each individual child in the study. The tables below show

individual reading assessment scores. The assessments include: Running Records, STAR

Reading, Nonsense Word Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, and the Dolch Sight Word

List.

Table 1. Student A Reading Assessment Scores

	Pre-Reading Assessment Scores	Post-Reading Assessment Scores
Running Records	3-4	9-10
STAR Reading	.4	1.7
Nonsense Word Fluency	44	82
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	35	77
Dolch Sight Word List	59	220

Table 2. Student B Reading Assessment Scores

	Pre-Reading Assessment Scores	Post-Reading Assessment Scores
Running Records	1-2	5-6
STAR Reading	.5	.9
Nonsense Word Fluency	29	50
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	26	77
Dolch Sight Word List	24	220

Table 3. Student C Reading Assessment Scores

	Pre-Reading Assessment Scores	Post-Reading Assessment Scores
Running Records	1-2	5-6
STAR Reading	.1	.9
Nonsense Word Fluency	19	56
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	22	77
Dolch Sight Word List	8	220

The reading assessment scores indicate an overall increase. Student A has made significant gains in all areas as seen in Table 1. According to Running Records and STAR reading, Student A was reading at grade level for mid year in first grade according to Running Records and STAR Reading. The Nonsense Word Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency assessments indicate Student A was on-track for mid year in first grade. The benchmarks for first grade is recognize 220 sight words by the end of the second quarter. Student A had accomplished this.

Students B and C have made progress in their reading ability as shown in tables 2 and 3. According to Running Records and STAR reading, Students B and C are not reading at grade level for this time of year. Both Students A and B are on-track for the Nonsense Word Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation assessments. Both of these students also met the benchmarks for sight words for this time of year. Even though Students A and B are not proficient in all areas, both their parents and I have seen an improvement in their reading ability in each of the five literacy components, which will be discussed below.

The parents and I noticed an increase in phonics and phonemic awareness for all students.

This was evident to me as I worked with students during guided reading groups. Students isolated individual sounds as they tapped out letters with letter tiles. Students applied correct sounds to letters as they read words in their daily reading. They blended letters together as they read words. Not only has phonics and phonemic awareness increased in their reading, but writing as well.

Parents noted a change as well. Parent C was quoted as saying, "She can spell better and read a whole lot better". Parent A indicated her child "did not know anything about reading or writing, but now that's all she loves to do, because she is so much better at both". In addition, I noticed an increase in the number of correctly spelled words on spelling tests each week. In daily writings, all three students write correct letters in words for middle and ending sounds. This was a difficult task for all three of the students before the study began.

As far as fluency, all three students had an increased in this skill. Due to the automaticity of sight words they developed during the study, students did not have to slow down to figure out words when they read. Student A had the more significant increase in fluency. Part of this can be attributed to learning all the sight words early on in the study. The other two students secured their knowledge of sight words at the end of the study, and were just beginning to develop fluency.

All students had an increase in comprehension. Parent A indicated they had a "successful day, because she was able to remember everything in the story". Parent B noted her child remembered the characters and the setting. Students A and B had the most increase in comprehension. They were able to give details about the characters, setting, and events. Student C was just beginning to summarize what happened in the story, but was still improving with comprehension.

Vocabulary knowledge was increased for all three students. Student A was able to explain the definition for "amazing words", which are vocabulary words for our weekly story. Students B and C were able to remember and use more "amazing words" than they had prior to the study began.

In addition to the academic gains students made, students became confident and interested in reading in comparison to the beginning of the study when they would avoid reading. One of the major patterns I noticed was an increase in the children's enthusiasm to read. The students appeared more confident to read, even though they made mistakes. Not only did students want to read during their guided reading group, they wanted to read to their peers in class. Along with this, Students A and B, who were car riders, asked if they could come to class early to practice their sight words. Some mornings they arrived thirty to forty minutes prior to school starting. Before student A secured all her sight words, she came to school each day successfully learning a new list of sight words. She told me she "knew the sight words, because she practiced them with her mom and she was ready to be tested". Student B asked to be tested on sight words in the mornings. He also wanted to stay after school and practice sight words while he waited for his mother to pick him up.

Research Question Two

What are effective methods of increasing parent involvement? After reviewing field notes, reading logs, and the final conclusion questions, I concluded the following results. All three sources of data indicated a trusting relationship, parents need to be motivated, and effective strategies must be used in order for parents to become and stay involved in a parent involvement program.

Parents indicated they had trust in the teacher. It was obvious they trusted me, because they tried these strategies and stayed with the program. The parents indicated the small number of participants allowed the parents to feel comfortable in communicating with the teacher during the workshops, which helped form our relationship. This coincides with Morrow and Malin (as cited in Keen, 2007), the relationships between parents and educators are often considered to be most effective when they represent true relationships (p. 340).

I have found a second effective method, which agrees with research. Parents need to be motivated. In Huag and Doleis (p. 87) stated, without motivation, parent involvement is unlikely to follow through. Observations and field note indicated parents were motivated to be involved since all the parents completed the program. There were times the parents were not able to attend; however for the most part parents had called and rescheduled a time. Results indicated parents saw results, and wanted to continue to implement reading strategies with their children. Even after the program, two of the parents keep in contact with me at least once a week. Parent A and Student A moved to another school district; I am still in contact with both of them.

A third strategy is to teach parents effective strategies. Results coincided with research that stated parents are more likely to participate when they understand why and know how to implement strategies. Huag and Doleis also stated it is critical to develop an effective approach to maximize parents' learning experience (2007, p. 88).

Parent A said the following:

It's been so many years since I have been out of school, but working with my child has taught me something new everyday. I never knew there were so many short cuts and strategies on learning how to read and write.

All the parents said they understood the importance of each strategy, and knew these strategies needed to be implemented daily for their child to learn to read. I learned when parents felt comfortable with teaching a strategy they were be more likely to try this strategy with their child at home.

Not only was it important for a relationship to be built with the parents, but a relationship must be established with the children as well. All three children indicated they felt I tried to help them be a better reader. Student A said, "I like going to you, because you are nice and teach me to read." It is obvious students like working with me, and know I care. This was clear when they wanted to stay after school or when they asked, "Can you work with me tonight?".

Field notes from observations of students and student interviews noted whether reading strategies were being implemented at home as well as at school. Each of the reading strategies presented to parents were all strategies I modeled and discussed in class with students. Results indicated three reading strategies were the most effective: dialogic, picture walks, and picture dictionaries.

The dialogic reading strategy was one of the first strategies the researcher introduced to parents. This strategy, as indicated by the parents, was an effective method that could be implemented for each book throughout the study. All three students said their moms asked them questions. Student A said, "My mom asks me what I think will happen in the story". Student B said, "My mom asks me a lot of questions when I am reading." Student C said, "We talk about the book". These examples support parents' comments in the reading logs.

Parents indicated a significant increase in student and parent interaction while reading. Parent C said she is, "listening, paying more attention and guiding her". These findings coincide with research by Huag and Doleis (2007), when they said providing parents with examples of

various effective storytelling strategies will enhance storytelling quality which encourages children to stay engaged and get excited. She is also more "patient and our bond has even gotten better. Thank you Miss ....". Parents felt this strategy was effective, because parents indicated they were taught how to ask their child appropriate questions that would support their reading. This agrees with research by Huag and Doleis in 2007 when they said parents are taught to ask the child "who," "what,", "where" and "when" questions as opposed to questions requiring "yes" and "no" answers when they use a dialogic reading strategy during story time. The parents in the study further indicated the students had an increase in their retention of the details of the book including characters and setting. They were also better able to retell what happened in the story. Parents believed the students had a better understanding of summarizing and explaining the main idea of a book. Before this strategy was used, parents indicated their students were unable to tell the main idea or details of the story. This was in agreement with my observations of children's reading ability. Therefore, my findings in the classroom coincide with that of the parents' observations at home.

A second strategy was a picture walk. All three students indicated their moms began a story by looking at the front cover and asking who the characters were and what the setting of the story was. All three of the children said their moms asked questions about the pictures. Parent C said a picture walk was effective for her child, because "it allowed her to see what she was reading first". As I read with students, I also observed students opening up to the first page and eager to share what was happening. All three students wanted to tell what was happening in the pictures during guided reading groups in class.

Another effective strategy was the picture dictionary. This was a book I created that consisted of "amazing words", which were the vocabulary words for the weekly story. Students

wrote a sentence and drew a picture using an amazing word. At the end of the week, students turned in their completed dictionaries for me to check for whether they were completed accurately. I observed an increase children's retention of "amazing words" and applying these new vocabulary words in daily writing. Student A said, "My mom asks me what the words mean, and then I have to use it in a sentence".

Overall, I knew parents were implementing strategies because all three students gave examples of how their moms are implementing the strategies. It was apparent phonics and phonemic awareness strategies were being used at home. Students and parents noted their child covered endings with their finger so that just the base word was left when reading a difficult word. This indicated the students were remembering what was taught during reading lessons at school with what was reinforced at home. The students also completed homework by circling particular vowel and letter patterns in their decodable paper books at home each night. This reinforcement of practicing what was learned at school was being carried through at home. This in turn helped students in becoming more aware of what sounds letters make when they read other books. For example, Student A indicated "there's a short u word" and so forth. In addition to reading, the students remembered letter patterns when spelling words. Numerous times I noticed a transfer of knowledge between what was learned in reading instruction and demonstrated through writing.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this research was to study parent involvement and effective methods of increasing parent involvement to determine if there was an impact on children's reading achievement. The data reveals parent involvement using effective reading strategies will impact children's reading achievement. Although not all the children's exhibited significant gains in

test scores, the students reading scores have all increased. Not only have their scores increased, but the parents and I have noticed an overall increase in their daily reading, which I consider to be most important.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter four presented the findings from a research study on parent involvement and effective methods to increase parent involvement in a first grade classroom. This chapter will discuss the study's implications, recommendations, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Implications of the Findings

Research question one asked *What is the impact parent involvement has on children's reading achievement*. The findings presented in chapter four suggest parents' involvement had an impact on children's reading achievement. This was noticed by the parents as well as by me through daily observations. All three students had an increase in reading assessment scores and had improved reading skills. The students involved in this study have become more motivated and interested in reading. Part of this, I believe is the fact that students have gained confidence. This also could have also been the result of children's realizing their parents have taken an active interest and are more involved in their reading. Since the research took place in a ten week period, this helped improve the study's credibility.

After analyzing the data to answer research question two, *What are effective methods of increasing parent involvement.* I have learned parents need to be motivated and actively involved in implementing effective reading strategies. Parents need to implement these strategies daily, and be taught how to use these strategies properly in order for them to help children succeed in reading. Also, the parents and teachers need to develop a trusting relationship. I do not feel this study would have been as successful if the parents and I had not developed a bond, and an understanding that we are working together as partners. This was a

learning experience for all of us, and parents needed to believe and trust in me in order for this study to be successful and benefit their children.

Recommendations

Smart Elementary School serves a population where many of the children live in poverty, 60.9%. Therefore, there is a pressing need for the school's teachers to be able to meet the needs of struggling learners. It is my recommendation the entire staff throughout the school system learns the importance of parent involvement in children's education. I also recommended staff development is provided for all staff members to learn effective strategies for a parent involvement program. Each grade level or department could focus on effective strategies they identify to meet the needs of their families and children. Setting this as a staff goal will prevent random implementation of parent involvement efforts. I believe with more training and full implementation of a parent involvement program more growth will be shown by the students. Once staff members complete staff development, I would recommend each school in the district implement a parent involvement program, whether it is literacy night or another program based upon a school's need. Schools and local universities could use this study to help guide staff development on this topic as well. This study will also further parent knowledge of how they can become involved in their child's education and provide them with the necessary skills to help their child succeed.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are inherent in the study. The study is restricted to one elementary school in a small rural school system. Generalizations cannot be made for other grade levels or other elementary schools. An additional limitation of the study was the selection of participants. The sample of parents, particularly for the classroom observation component of

data collection, was very small. A small sample prevents the researcher from making broad generalizations about the results.

Since data was collected with interview questions, the responses were dependent on the subjective attitudes and perceptions of the participants involved. This was seen in the parent responses. For example, most of the responses were the same on the pre and post interview questions. The parents indicated they were already reading with their children, implementing many of the strategies, and had reading materials at home. The responses of the children did not match their parents, because the students said they "no" to many of the responses. Subsequently there were some discrepancies between the parents' and children's responses. There were also discrepancies with the pre face-face parent interview and that of the final questions. The final questions indicated parents were implementing strategies due to the workshops. However, the pre interview questions said they were already using strategies. Some of this may have occurred due to the fact the parents may have been not felt comfortable answering the questions since I am their child's teacher.

All three students had also received extra intervention through the reading teacher after the research study began. In addition, Students A and B stayed after school a few nights a week to work on sight words with a teacher assistant. I also worked with students on occasion in the mornings and afternoons. Some of these gains the students made could have been attributed to the extra intervention they had received. However, I do feel the increase in parent involvement has definitely had a positive impact on children's reading achievement.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. This study might be repeated using a larger sample such as an entire school using observations, and achievement scores for an entire school year to see if the data and

results would be the same.

2. A study might be conducted in middle or high school grades to determine if
   knowledge and use of effective strategies by teachers has an effect on the reading
   achievement.

3. A more detailed study might be conducted to determine exactly what kind of impact
   a parent involvement program has on a particular group of students over an extended
   period of time.

4. This study might be repeated in an urban elementary school in order to determine if
   similar results occur.

Summary

Parent involvement in their children's education has been a topic discussed for years. At times schools blame parents for not being involved and the same time parents blame schools. However, finding new ways to reach parents will assist parents with tools necessary for helping their child succeed. Many parents are working full-time and raising their children on their own. By implementing a parent involvement programs in schools today the learning environment is transformed into a place where parents and schools are working together as a team. This in turn encourages and motivates students to achieve because they believe their parents and teachers care. It is my opinion that continued research on the topic of parent involvement and impact on children's reading achievement will prove beneficial to the education field for years to come.

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Workshop Agenda

5 Components of Literacy
- Comprehension
  - Phonics
- Phonic Awareness
  - Vocabulary
  - Fluency

Week 1 – Introduction / Pre-Interviews and Consent
Vocabulary – *Conversation*

Week 2 – **Comprehension** - *Dialogic Reading*
* Predicting
* Main Idea
* Picture Walk

Week 3 – **Phonics** – *Blending and Tapping*

Week 4 – **Phonemic Awareness** – *Songs and Rhymes*

Week 5 – **Vocabulary** – *Picture Dictionary /* Amazing Words

Week 6 – **Fluency** – *Paired Reading*

Week 7 – **Comprehension** – *Think Alouds*

Week 8 – **Phonics** – *Onset-Rime /* Word Families

Week 9 – **Fluency** – *Echo Reading*

Week 10 – Conclusion / Post-Interviews / Conclusions Sheet
Phonemic Awareness - *Literacy Games*

Parent Interview Questions

Name: _____   Date: _____

1. How much time do you spend reading to your child each day?

    a) never   b) 5 minutes   c) 10 minutes   d) 15 minutes or more

2. How much time does your child spend reading to you each day?

    a) never   b) 5 minutes   c) 10 minutes   d) 15 minutes or more

3. Are books available at home for your child?

    a) yes   b) no

4. Do you talk to your child about the meaning of a story?

    a) yes   b) no

5. When you read do you ask your child questions about the pictures?

    a) yes   b) no

6. Does your child ask questions about the pictures?

    a) yes   b) no

7. Does your child look at the pictures and tell a story?

    a) yes   b) no

8. Do you ask your child what words mean?

    a) yes   b) no

9. Does your child ask you what a word means?

    a) yes   b) no

10. Do you ask your child what is happening in the story?

    a) yes   b) no

APPENDIX C

Student Interview Questions

Name: _____   Date: _____

1. Are books available at home?

    a) yes   b) no

2. Do you read to someone at home?

    a) yes   b) no

3. How long do you read at home?

    a) never   b) a little   c) a lot

4. Do your parents read to you at home?

    a) yes   b) no

5. How long do your parents read to you at home?

    a) never   b) a little   c) a lot

6. Do your parents talk to about what a story means?

    a) yes   b) no

7. Do your parents ask you questions about the pictures?

    a) yes   b) no

8. Do your parents ask you what words mean?

    a) yes   b) no

9. Do your parents ask you what is happening in the story?

    a) yes   b) no

Reading Log			
Week 1			
	Time Spent Reading	Was the strategy successful? (Please explain)	Comments / Questions
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Final Conclusions

1. What strategy did you feel was the most effective?

2. Why do you feel that strategy was effective?

3. How are you more involved in your child's reading?

4. What improvements have you seen in your child's reading / writing?

5. How have these strategies helped you as a parent in being involved?