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Jane Kornfeind
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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A PARENT PROGRAM: THE INFLUENCES OF
HOME LITERACY EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCE
THE READING AND WRITING DEVELOPMENT
OF FIVE AND SIX YEAR OLD CHILDREN

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of Teacher Education
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Jane Kornfeind

May 1994

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Science, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Name	Department
<i>Irvin Peckham</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>Kathy Danielson</i>	<i>Teacher Ed.</i>

Carol Lloyd TED
Chairman

5-18-94
Date

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My husband, Ron, and our children, Shawna and Matt provided support in so many ways that words cannot begin to express my thanks.

Finally, I dedicate this project to the memory of my mother, Agnes Rasmussen. Although she was a teacher of young children for many years, she was also my "first" teacher. She was the model for the parent and educator I was to become through her love of children literature, her ability to engage her children in meaningful conversations and her determination to support her children's interests and avocations. As an educator, she worked diligently with the parents of her students to encourage literacy opportunities at home which was the seed of inspiration for this project.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a parent program designed to encourage literacy activities at home. Thirteen volunteer parents received information about literacy and learned how to implement strategies that engage their children in reading and writing activities during eight weekly workshop sessions. The effects of this program were determined by both pre and posttest differences in the children's reading and writing behavior and by comparison with a control group of children. An analysis of variance was used to compare the groups in terms of the mean scores. Parental attitudes toward literacy behaviors were documented by a pre and post-program survey of participating parents. Results suggest when parents are taught how to interact with their children in authentic literacy activities at home, the children's growth in reading and writing can be enhanced. Finally, parents who participated in the parent program now see their role as a literacy model for their children as extremely important.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables.....	vii
Chapter	
I. The Problem	
Introduction.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	3
Hypotheses.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
II. Review of Related Literature	
Overview of Chapter.....	8
Parents as Literacy Models.....	8
Home Environment.....	8
Reading Interactions.....	12
Writing Interventions.....	14
Family Literacy Needs Profile.....	17
Parent Programs to Support Literacy.....	18
Summary.....	23
III. Methodology	
Overview of Procedures.....	25
Research Design.....	25
Study Site.....	25
Parents.....	26
Students.....	27

Parent Program.....	28
Instructional Materials.....	29
Data Collection.....	29
Data Analysis.....	31
IV. The Results	
Children's Growth in Literacy.....	32
Pretest Data.....	32
Posttest Data.....	33
Parents Survey.....	34
V. Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations	
Conclusions and Limitations.....	41
Discussion.....	42
Recommendations.....	46
References.....	48
Appendices	
A. Pre-program Survey	54
Family Literacy Survey.....	55
B. Post-program Survey.....	57
Family Literacy Evaluation Survey.....	58
C. Read Aloud Books.....	60
Parent Program Handout.....	61
D. Parent Literature Resources.....	64

List of Tables

Table		Page
1	Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest Survey.....	33
2	Means and Standard Deviations for Posttest Survey.....	34
3	Pre and Post-program Survey Responses.....	36
4	Treatment Group Ranked Responses.....	40

Chapter I

The Problem

Introduction

Parents are their child's first teachers (Goodman, 1986). This gives parents the opportunity to shape their child's literacy experiences long before formal education is introduced. Because of this, as Morrow (1993) found in her studies of parents of pre-school children, successful school literacy programs strongly depend on the literacy environment found in the home.

Spiegel (1992) states, "Parental beliefs and attitudes play a large role in molding interactions between parent and child in children's reading achievement" (p.3). The literacy environment in the home, therefore, is a reflection of these beliefs and attitudes.

The issue of home literacy opportunities has been a primary educational concern in this decade. Trelease (1989) suggests that the mother, father, or another family member is the essential ingredient when children learn to read. There is evidence (Goodman, 1984; Taylor, 1993; Teale, 1984) to indicate that children who are read to on a regular basis achieve literacy sooner and with less difficulty than children not exposed to stories. These studies looked at the effects of families providing rich literacy environments, where members serve as models in literacy

activities such as reading and writing, and engage in conversation about books and print. They found a significant correlation between young children in these homes and their learning to read without direct instruction prior to formal education.

A literate society provides children with numerous experiences using spoken and written language before they ever go to school. These experiences are primarily social in nature. Much of the time spent in reading and writing activities during the early years is not focused on literacy, or learning to become literate through academically defined skills and activities. Rather, reading and writing occur as aspects of ordinary events which enable family members to organize their lives (Teale, 1986; Morrow & Paratore, 1993).

Literacy is important in all aspects of community life. To be a fully contributing member of the community, one needs to be able to read and use literacy skills in many ways required by the community (Frederick and Rasinski, 1991). To enable this acquisition, the community, in the form of family, neighbors, and schools, needs to provide a nurturing and supportive environment. Green (1992) states, "Literacy learning is a social experience because it depends on demonstration from, collaboration with, and continuous

feedback and response from other people...at home and at school" (p. x).

Though the role of parents as a child's first teacher has not changed, the time parents spend with their child has changed as the technological world has replaced parents as substitute care givers far too often (Trelease, 1989). Trelease suggests that parents recognize this problem and search for ways to affect their children's success in school by what they do at home. Since the school and home are major contributors to the acquisition of young children's literacy, this study looked at the role of parents and teachers as co-enablers in children's literacy development. Morrow and Paratore (1993) refer to this as, "research that does not have deliberate or explicit connections to the school curriculum or the school based goals. Rather, it focuses on how families use literacy to mediate their social and community lives...with the focus being on what educators can learn from and about families" (p. 197).

Purpose of the Study

The general research questions are: Do five and six year old students whose parents participate in a parent program for literacy development in the home make better gains in reading and writing than five and six year old students whose parents do not? And, does a parent program

for literacy development in the home effect a change in the literacy awareness and behavior of participating parents?

This study involved parents and children in a low-socioeconomic urban school in southwest Iowa where 35 percent of the children come from single parent homes. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a parent program designed to encourage literacy activities at home. Parents in the program received information about literacy and learned how to implement strategies that engage their children in reading and writing activities. The effects of this program were determined by both pre and posttest differences in the children's reading and writing behavior and by comparison with a control group of children which will subsequently be referred to as the comparison group. Parental attitudes toward literacy behaviors were documented by a pre and post-program survey of participating parents.

Hypotheses

It was expected that data collected in this study would support the following hypotheses regarding the literacy behaviors in reading and writing:

1. Five and six year old students whose parents participate in a parent program encouraging home literacy activities will show significant gains in reading and writing behaviors when compared to five and six year old students whose parents do not.

2. Parents who participate in a program designed to encourage literacy activities at home will show an increased awareness of their role as a literacy model and facilitator in home literacy interactions when compared to their awareness prior to this study.

Definition of Terms

These definitions reflect how the terms were used in this study.

1. Literacy involves using reading, writing, and speaking to communicate ideas to other people. Teale and Sulzby (1986) suggest, "Literacy is an appropriate way to describe what is called reading readiness: The child develops as a reader/writer. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop concurrently and interrelatedly, rather than sequentially" (p. xviii).

2. A strategy is a plan for accomplishing a literacy task. Reading is strategic and requires strategies; a good reader knows when reading is not making sense, and he/ or she uses a different strategy to correct the problem (Cooper, Warneke, & Shipman, 1988).

3. A pre-reading activity involves setting a purpose for reading; discussing the title, author, and illustrator; and examining the book before reading.

4. Reading aloud is used in this study to identify the parent/child interaction in which the parent is the primary reader of a book.

5. Paired reading refers to Topping's (1985) two phase technique. The first, "simultaneous reading" (p.109), has the adult reader and child reading aloud in close synchrony adjusted to the child's pace. The second phase, referred to as "independent reading" (p. 109), allows the child to read unsupported when he/or she signals to the adult that they are comfortable to do the task alone. In both phases, the adult corrects errors and models correct reading in phrases that encourage the child to read along correctly.

6. Literature discussion is a post reading activity in which the parent and child talk about the book in terms of meaning, new ideas, and prior experiences.

7. Developmental writing refers to the stages a child experiences when putting ideas into written form, starting with the first marks or scribbles on paper to communication of ideas in standard print.

8. Invented spelling is a young child's attempts to spell unknown words. This may also be referred to as sound spelling, a developmental stage of spelling in which the sounds in words are approximately represented (Nicole and Wilkie, 1992).

9. Writer's voice refers to the discovery by a young child that he or she can communicate ideas to another person when writing, drawing, or scribbling on paper.

10. Shared writing is a writing task shared between parent and child in which the child is encouraged to write the letters (phonemes) in words. The parent writes the unknown letters in the words when it appears the child is unsure or unable. Emphasis is on words and ideas that communicate meaningful thoughts.

11. Journals, logs, and dialogue journals are records of reading and writing shared between parent and child.

12. Modeling is the demonstration of a behavior by one person and the adaptation and use of it by another. Many children want to be like their parent, the most significant other person in their lives. In this study, parents will become aware of their role as a literacy model.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

Overview of Chapter

The first section reviews literature describing the relationships between home environment, parents as role models, and children's literacy. These studies include parents reading aloud and writing with their children, and engaging in meaningful conversations about these interactions. The second section deals with parent programs that attempt to educate, encourage and facilitate the home and school relationship in regard to children's literacy development.

Parents as Literacy Models

Home environment. The issue of home environment and its affect on children's literacy is not a new concept. Huey (1918), at the beginning of this century, discussed the home as the natural place for learning. He observed children imitating the spoken language, stories, and writing of their parents. What Huey detected was the act of reading and writing transformed into children's concept of play.

From the time children are aware of other people's behavior, they begin to adopt and alter what they observe to fit their needs. Topping (1985) suggests that, "modeling is the demonstration of a behavior by one person and the copying of it by another" (p. 214). He goes on to discuss

that children want to be like their parent, the most significant "grown-ups" in their life. From an early age, children pattern their play after what they see their parents do. If this behavior is reading and writing, children will emulate this behavior. Yetta Goodman (1990) refers to this as the roots of literacy, the relationship between home background and children's literacy development.

Researchers have studied factors that promote literacy development in the home. Leichter (1984) concluded that families influence literacy development in three ways: (a) interpersonal interactions, which consist of the literacy experiences shared between a child and parents, siblings, and other individuals in the home; (b) the literacy environment, which includes children's books, newspapers, magazines, paper and all varieties of writing tools; and (c) emotional and motivational climate as represented by the relationships among individuals in the family, especially as reflected in parental attitudes and desires for their children's literacy achievement.

Vygotsky's (1981) general theory of intellectual development suggests that mental functions are acquired through social relationships. This perspective supports the idea that literacy takes place in an interactive context where children construct and generate meaning from language by integrating information with what is already known.

Vygotsky (1978) described this interaction between child and adult as the zone of proximal development where social interactions provide opportunities for children to learn. Kozulin's (1990) study of Vygotsky's theories suggested that it is important to focus on "the collaborative forms of thinking in which the child's everyday concepts come into contact with the scientific concepts introduced by the adult" (p.170). The zone of proximal development will enable those psychological functions which are in the process of development and might be overlooked if the focus is on the performance of the unassisted child.

Teale's (1986) study of home background and literacy development of preschool children found that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity, have numerous experiences with written language. The study implies that reading and writing occur as normal, daily events. He also observed that home, background, and community play a significant role in the child's orientation to literature as well as enabling children to learn to read and write. Goodman and Hausser (1986) suggest that in such environments, children are not only given opportunities to learn about reading and writing, but are encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward literacy.

A complementary perspective is that of Spiegel (1992), who proposed that the richness of a literary environment has

less to do with socioeconomic status than with what parents believe, value, and demonstrate through literacy events with their children.

Research on parental beliefs (Phillips, 1987) has converged to show that parents' own achievement, beliefs, and attitudes toward education serve to guide their behavior with their children. This study suggests that parents' beliefs exert a strong influence on the children's developing literacy attitudes and behaviors.

Most children discover the beginning of literacy within the family unit, their first powerful learning experience (Meek, 1992). A study by Moon and Wells (1979) revealed high correlations between reading at age seven and preschool knowledge of literacy, parent interest in literacy, and parent interactions with their child. Wells' (1986) research confirmed that the home is a powerful learning environment for parents and children to engage in meaningful conversations. Goodman (1990) expanded on this idea through her reference to how the social context of the family can foster the development of literacy in children. They learn to read and write through social interactions while the family provides the encouragement and purpose for these activities.

A study by Burns and Collins (1987) specifically dealt with the role parents play in their child's literacy

development. This study investigated the differences in home experiences of intellectually superior nonreaders and intellectually superior readers. They determined that accelerated readers (four and five year olds) were provided with experiences that were not provided to the nonreaders. These experiences dealt with the concept of print, writing using developmental spelling, reading along stories and retelling with exposure to a wide variety of environmental print. This study supports the argument that home environment and parental involvement are significant factors in children learning to read and write at an early age.

Reading interactions. Children who are frequently read to begin to understand that stories have characters, a setting, and a beginning, middle and ending enabling their understanding of what they read or hear in books (Holdaway, 1979; France & Hager, 1993). Being read to has been identified as, "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson 1985, p. 23). This statement has been referred to in numerous studies on literacy. While reading aloud is not a prerequisite for literacy development, it can be a contributor (Bloom, 1985).

Yaden, Smolken and Conlin (1989) studied early literacy acquisition and the importance of children's spontaneous

questions when parents read aloud to them at home. It was found that home storybook reading had an effect on children's development of comprehension processes. The study also found that children's awareness of print, as something different from the pictures, was encouraged by home literacy experiences.

A study by Shanahan and Hogan (1983) suggested that the parent's reading style is highly related to children's print awareness. They identified three aspects of reading that make contributions to children's awareness of print: (a) pre-reading references to access children's prior knowledge, (b) answering children's questions, and (c) the amount of time spent reading aloud. Their findings indicate that, "the more time parents spend reading to their child, the better the child did on tests of print awareness" (p.215). The significance of this study relates closely to the literacy studies by Marie Clay (1982; 1985; 1993) about concepts of print, literacy, and how children learn to read and write.

Henderson (1986) emphasized that, "print, whether in character symbols, or in alphabetic writing represents spoken language" (p. 73). He goes on to suggest that the best context for learning about print is print itself and it should be modeled for the child through conversation,

questioning and physically handling books, pointing to words and tracking texts as it is read aloud.

Holdaway (1979) reported on the impact of the literacy environment, practices, and outcomes of oral reading as a literacy event in the home. This study focused on children's independent re-enactments of stories which they heard read aloud several times. The study revealed that after adults read to children, the children then practiced reading-like behaviors which helped them discover the structures and meaning of written language. Holdaway's results suggest that storybook reading events were not only interesting and enjoyable but they provided the children with useful processes for reading.

Manning (1988) investigated the perspectives of parents who read to their children. Parents responded to a survey which focused on parental observations during oral reading, the amount of print in the home, parent's reading habits, their perceptions of the value of reading aloud to their children, and their personal experiences with reading aloud when they were children. This study indicated that parents who have developed the habit of reading to their children were aware of its many values.

Writing interactions. Children involved in literacy activities soon discover that when they write, they write things that other people read. The discovery of their

writing voice is the essence of communication through print (Hansen, 1987). Children are literally driven to learn language by their need to communicate. "They create and learn written language the same way they learn oral language, by using it in authentic literacy events that meet their needs" (Goodman, 1986, p.24).

Young children begin writing long before they attempt to get meaning from printed text. Their early scribbles and pictures are attempts to convey meaning. For the child, "literacy begins with writing. A mark, a scratch, or even a picture or sign made by one person interpreted and understood by another" (Meek, 1992, p. 18). Meek (1992) also suggests that writing makes language possible beyond speech. It creates what is to be read and therefore, readers. Clay's (1975; 1982; 1991) theories and studies with young children suggest many links between early writing activities and the skills needed to learn to read.

Morrow's (1993) work indicates that for young children to acquire skills in oral language, reading, and writing, they need models to emulate. They also need the freedom to create meaning using language and print and to be positively reinforced and guided to continue in their development.

Beginning writing was explored in a study by Teberosky (1990). Four through eight year old children's writing was linked with pictures from the environment. The children

were asked to write in response to commercial labels and pictures from newspapers, magazines and promotional texts. They could write ads, slogans, news or whatever the cutout suggested to them. From the written responses, she examined the children's products and classified them into two categories: presentation and definition of the objects, and persuasion for using the object. As the researcher hypothesized, by the end of the school year, the students' responses surpassed the level of simply naming/labeling the objects in the pictures. This study emphasized the importance of allowing children to have diverse models of written text to stimulate and encourage written language that holds meaning for the young writers.

A study by Burns and Casbergue (1992) investigated the interactions between parents and young children between the ages of three and five. The study looked at the relationships among the way information was exchanged using oral dialogue, the types of information, and the nature of the children's writing in response to the interaction. The results suggest that a higher level of parental control was associated with conventional looking products. Lower level parental control was associated with children being more creative and adventurous with words and message content in a product that looked child made. They concluded that educators need to work with parents of young children to

educate them about emergent literacy and "the importance of allowing children to initiate and occasionally control experimentation with all aspects of written language" (p. 309).

Family Literacy Needs Profile

Educators have known for years that children enter school with varying literacy experiences because of the availability of reading materials and activities that foster attention to print (Goodman, 1986). Some parents begin reading to their children in infancy and continue to provide speaking, listening, and writing experiences through the developmental years. Other children, many of whom are from lower socioeconomic status families and single parent homes, do not receive these experiences at home (Shinn, 1978). As a result children enter school at different developmental levels and may have difficulty listening to stories and participating in discussions about print (Francis, 1977). This is not to suggest that parents who do not read and write with their children are not concerned with their welfare. Wells' (1986) work with regard to the role of parents in their child's language and literacy development found that mothers from all backgrounds were teaching their children many things through everyday conversations.

What is the variable that allows some children to come to school prepared to build on an existing literacy

foundation and other children who are not? Warren, Pratter, and Griswold (1990) propose that although parents are interested in providing literature experiences for their children, societal changes in the family unit have reduced the time that some parents have to interact with their children. Statistics show a steady increase in the number of working mothers as well as single parent homes. In 1950 only 12 percent of women with children under the age of six were working outside of the home. The 1980 census figures revealed that 62 percent of mothers with school age children were in the work force (U.S. Census, 1993).

Parent Programs to Support Literacy

Educators agree that schools cannot be successful without parental support, and because of this, involvement programs now exist in nearly every school in the United States (Smith, 1991). Teachers have a major leadership role in designing and implementing arrangements that promote continuity between family and school. As a result of systematic involvement plans, parents discover ways they can support their children's literacy development (Swick, 1991).

Mason and McCormick (1983) investigated a home intervention program. The focus of this program was on guiding parents to read with their children as a natural learning process using simple illustrated stories. Parents who volunteered to participate in the study were given books

and guidelines for using them. One group of parents received additional packets of books on two separate occasions. Another group received material and books only during the initial screening. Each group was followed through kindergarten where comparisons were made with children who did not receive books. The study looked at the effects of storybook reading at home on children's performance in reading, letter name knowledge, and spelling. The results did not give clearly defined differences, which the researcher contributed to the confounding effect of participation as indicated in parent questionnaires. However, the study did suggest the potential for increasing children's print awareness through home interventions.

Differences among children as a result of socioeconomic status has been recognized by educators and researchers for some time. The Intergenerational Reading Project (France and Hager, 1992) was a program designed to work with low-income minority families. It consisted of a series of workshops where parents and their pre-kindergarten children together read predictable pattern books. Parents were expected to read aloud with their children at home between weekly sessions using workshop materials and strategies presented by the workshop leader. The results indicated that student achievement improved in the area of listening comprehension. There were also significant changes in the

literacy awareness of individual parent participants in the program.

A study by Owens (1992) looked at adult behaviors toward reading aloud to first grade children. She found that mothers assume primary responsibility for reading aloud to children. Marital status and educational background also affected the frequency of reading aloud, where single mothers read aloud less than married mothers. Parents with less education also chose not to engage in read aloud events as frequently as parents with higher educational backgrounds.

Meek (1992) suggested that parents as supporting adults who care about their child's literacy, need to learn about reading and writing as the child learns to read and write. This initiative involves forming an equal partnership between the child, parent, and teacher.

Soiferman (1991) investigated the effectiveness of a parent program designed to teach parents how to read to their low-achieving children. Parents were asked to read with their children daily using skill techniques learned in parent workshop sessions. Student reading was evaluated using standardized measures for word recognition and comprehension. Questions remain on changes in literacy behavior when the program's outcome is reached through emphasis on isolated skills. An alternate view comes from

Heibert's (1986) characteristics of successful home literacy programs. She suggested that home experiences reflecting natural learning rather than a didactic skills model will have a greater impact on the literacy behavior of parents and children.

Logsdon, Taylor, and Blum (1988) conducted a two year study that incorporated a parent program designed to increase the participation of parents of low-income urban elementary school children using instructional activities that utilized daily family events to reinforce reading skills. Activities were designed with regard to the input from the parents as well as needs assessment data. Phone interviews were conducted to gather information regarding the kinds of reading materials available in the home and the amount of time children spent reading and writing with family members. The authors reported that the project was plagued with problems dealing with a wide variety of issues including budget cuts and parents', students' and teachers' perceptions. The qualitative aspect of the evaluation determined that there were positives aspects of the program for parents who fulfilled the agreement to participate.

A study reported by Heath (1985) investigated the effectiveness of parent/child paired reading. The project was designed to teach parents a simplified paired reading strategy, "reinforcement technique" (p. 119). Parent

training was an integral part of this study because parents were responsible for working with the children. The findings indicated that children in the paired reading situations made better gains in reading during the study than children not given the paired reading opportunities. Heath suggested that student reading gains were influenced by parent involvement and training.

According to Topping (1985), "for many parents, anxiety about their child's progress is accompanied by feelings of inadequacy, frustration and tension" (p. 26). A parent program designed to enable parents with the knowledge and skills to work with their child becomes a partnership between the parent and the school; one that recognizes that the parent is a major influence. In this partnership model, they are an integral part of the educational process, contributing members who have a voice in their child's education.

There are considerations for getting a parent involvement project started which focus on clear guidelines and effective training. Topping's (1985) work with parent training workshops suggests that programs include verbal instruction, modeling literacy behaviors, prompted practice, opportunities for feedback and reinforcement, independent practice, reinforcement, and monitoring. He also cautions

that while parent involvement projects need to be carefully planned, flexibility and encouragement are highly desirable.

The Parent Intervention Program, PIP (Kiah, 1992), was an informal study where the researcher's purpose was to design a program that would take advantage of the time children and parents were spending together reading. Parent information regarding the benefits of reading with their children as well as specific strategies to enhance reading experiences were provided in the program. The results indicated improved reading scores as measured by miscue analysis in word recognition accuracy and decoding. Observations by the teachers and parents reported improved reading fluency and attitudes about reading.

Swinson (1985) reported on a study that encouraged parents to listen to their children read. He concluded that educators must actively involve parents in the many different aspects of school life, including learning about the importance of home literacy activities and children's literacy development.

Summary

The issue of children's literacy development in reading and writing is one many researchers continue to address. Results from quantitative and qualitative studies indicate the positive influence of home environment and parents involvement with children in reading and writing activities.

Questions remain on the bias of parent volunteers samples. It was generally unclear how parents reported their involvement without being influenced by what they thought the study expected of them. Researchers also felt more studies were needed to establish further credibility of their theories and assumptions regarding developmental learning practices, literacy acquisition, and parent involvement projects.

Chapter III

Methodology

Overview of Procedure

This study examined the effects of a parent program designed to facilitate literacy events at home. This chapter will discuss the methods used in this study. Included are descriptions of the research design, study site, parents, students, parent program, instructional materials used in the program, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

A 2x1 design was used to determine the effects of a parent program on growth in reading and writing behaviors. A Likert-type scale was used as a pre and post program survey to determine changes in parents' literacy awareness and behaviors.

Study Site

The school targeted for this study is an elementary school in the midwest. It was a pre-kindergarten through sixth grade building with an enrollment of approximately 500 students. The primary language was English with five percent of the students receiving ESL (English as a second language) service. The building was in a low socioeconomic area where 67.1 percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced meals. The percentage of youth

affected by Aid to Dependent Children was 25 percent (state average was 15 percent). From this general population, approximately 113 five and six year old students were enrolled.

Parents

The parents in this study had a five or six year old enrolled at the school site. They were invited by their child's classroom teacher to participate in a parent program designed to help parents engage in meaningful literacy activities at home. The invitation accompanied a literacy survey distributed at the fall district parent/teacher conferences. Thirteen families were selected from this group on a volunteer basis.

As volunteers, thirteen parents participated in eight weekly sessions. Six parents attended all of the sessions, two missed once, four missed twice, and one missed four sessions. The commitment to this program was evident in that 92% attended all or missed two or fewer times. The parent who missed half the sessions continued to participate through phone conversations and after school visits to get books and materials.

In addition to the workshop content, parents were provided free baby-sitting services and unlimited opportunity to check out books and materials for home literacy activities. Participants were also given

children's books as a weekly incentive to fulfill their commitment.

Students

Children in this study included five year olds enrolled in extended day kindergarten classrooms and six year olds enrolled in ungraded primary classrooms made up of six and seven year old children. The average teacher pupil ratio in the kindergarten and primary classrooms was 22:1, with a teacher assistant in classrooms approximately four hours daily.

Available services for these children included a full time guidance counselor, a speech clinician, physical education, music and art instruction, as well as two Chapter 1 teachers serving 26 percent of the six year old population. There was also a full time special education teacher serving students in the classroom combined with minimal pullout services.

Kindergarten children were placed in the extended day program primarily on parent request. Consideration was also given to kindergarten developmental needs based upon assessment. Ninety percent of the students qualified for free and reduced meals.

The six year old children were assigned to one of five primary classrooms serving six and seven year old children. Developmental learning was the focus of the primary program

which allowed for individual student needs. Seventy-eight percent of the six year old students qualified for free and reduced meals.

Parent Program

During an eight week period, the parents met weekly for 90 minutes with this researcher. Each weekly workshop focused on an aspect of literacy including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Each workshop had four components.

1. Weekly debriefing of the past week's experiences and questions shared.

2. A focused literacy activity that provided parents with information to be practiced at home.

Week one - Pre-reading and reading aloud

Week two - Literature discussions and effective listening

Week three - Paired Reading

Week four - Developmental writing and shared writing

Week five - Writing a literature response

Week six - Functional writing and how writing enables children's growth in reading

Week seven - Modeling literacy behaviors

Week eight - Life long partners in learning; resources for literacy activities

3. A strategy session that provided participants the opportunity to practice the modeled behavior that was introduced.

4. Small or large group sharing; a preview of the next workshop.

Instructional Materials

Books used during the workshop included storybooks, folk and fairy tales, nursery rhymes, predictable pattern books, poetry, wordless picture books, and primary information books. (A complete list of books used is included in Appendix C.)

Writing materials were provided for shared writing activities. A separate notebook was provided for parents to log books read, to record observations of literacy interactions at home, and to take notes during the workshop sessions.

Adult reading material was available for participants about parenting and literacy activities to be used at home. (The complete list is included in Appendix D.)

Data Collection

The Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) was used to measure student gains in literacy. The five subtests included (a) letter identification (LI), (b) concepts about print (CAP), (c) word test (WT), (d) writing vocabulary (WV), and (e) dictation test (DT). Pre and posttest surveys were

administered individually by teachers who worked with the children. These include the classroom teachers and Chapter 1 teachers. The pretest survey was given during the week prior to the first parent workshop. The posttest survey was administered during the week following the last workshop. The testing environment was in a room where lighting was appropriate with minimal noise interference. Each testing situation was audio-taped.

A comparison group consisted of five and six year old students in the same classrooms, whose parents did not participate in the parent program. Characteristics of the comparison group paralleled those of the treatment group in terms of age, classroom teachers, and educational services provided.

Parent pre and post-program surveys were used to assess changes in literacy attitudes and behaviors (Appendix A and B). Both surveys were written by this researcher. The pre-program survey was administered to parents of five and six year old students at district parent/teacher conferences. If parents had questions regarding the survey, or found the reading and writing difficult, the teacher would assist them. The post-program survey was administered to parents at the last workshop by this researcher.

Data Analysis

Raw scores from the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) subtests, of letter identification, concepts about print, and word test, writing vocabulary, dictation test, were used to assess literacy growth in reading and writing behavior. The pre and posttest scores were compared to data gathered from the comparison group of students through five 1x2 ANOVA's.

To check inter-rater reliability of subtest scores, an independent judge, a reading clinician trained to administer the instrument being used, analyzed 25 percent of the total surveys using audio-tapes randomly selected from the sample.

An alpha level of .05 was used to accept this hypothesis: Five and six year old students whose parents participate in a parent program encouraging literacy activities at home will show significant gains in reading and writing behavior when compared to five and six year old students whose parents do not.

A qualitative analysis was conducted on the pre and post-program surveys to determine if parents participating in a program designed to encourage literacy activities at home would show an increased awareness of their role as a literacy model and facilitator in home literacy interactions when compared to awareness prior to the study.

Chapter IV

The Results

Children's Growth in Literacy

This section will discuss the results of data collected to determine if five and six year old students whose parents participated in a parent program encouraging home literacy activities showed gains in reading and writing behavior when compared to five and six year old students whose parents did not. Additionally, this section will discuss if parents who participated in the program had an increased awareness of their role as a literacy model and facilitator in home literacy interactions when compared to their awareness prior to the study.

Pretest data. Data collected from the pretest of the comparison and treatment groups were used to determine if the groups were similar before the parent program. The means and standard deviations of the subtest scores from the pretest survey are reported in Table 1.

The analysis of variance revealed no significant differences between the comparison and treatment groups on any of the subtests: letter identification ($F=.85$, $df=1,26$, $p=.77$), concepts about print ($F=.85$, $df=1,26$, $p=.37$), writing test ($F=1.56$, $df=1,26$, $p=.22$), writing vocabulary ($F=.43$, $df=1,26$, $p=.52$), dictation test ($F=.29$, $df=1,26$, $p=.60$).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest Survey^a

	LI	CAP	WT	WV	DT ^b
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Control Group ^c	33.86 (18.72)	8.78 (4.93)	.71 (.73)	4.50 (4.50)	9.14 (7.15)
Treatment Group ^d	35.71 (14.71)	10.29 (3.56)	2.29 (4.09)	5.57 (4.09)	10.71 (8.28)

^aTotal possible scores for each subtest are as follows:

LI, 54; CAP, 24; WT, 20; WV, open; DT, 37.

^bLI=Letter Identification, CAP=Concepts About Print,
WT=Writing Test, WV=Writing Vocabulary, DT=Dictation Test

^cn=14

^dn=14

Posttest data. Since there were no significant differences between groups on any of the pretests, an ANOVA was conducted on the posttest scores of each subtest. These results were used to determine the effects of the parent program on the literacy of students whose parents participated. The means and standard deviations of the subtests scores from the posttest survey are reported in Table 2. The table indicates the comparison and treatment groups had mean score differences with the treatment group showing higher gains.

The analysis of variance for the posttest survey showed significant differences between two of the tests, the writing test ($F=5.5$, $df=1,26$, $p<.01$), and the writing vocabulary ($F=5.47$, $df=1,26$, $p<.03$). The mean differences on the following subtests failed to reach significance: letter identification ($F=1.25$, $df=1,26$, $p=.27$), dictation test ($F= 2.32$, $df=1,26$, $p=.14$), and concepts about print ($F=3.84$, $df=1,26$, $p=.06$) which is approaching significance.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Posttest Survey^a

	LI	CAP	WT	WV	DT ^b
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Control Group ^c	42.35 (16.12)	14.86 (4.61)	1.71 (1.38)	13.29 (11.32)	18.79 (12.34)
Treatment Group ^d	47.93 (9.34)	18.14 (4.26)	4.86 (4.20)	23.79 (12.42)	24.43 (6.37)

^aTotal possible scores for each subtest are as follows:

LI, 54; CAP, 24; WT, 20; WV, open; DT, 37.

^bLI=Letter Identification, CAP=Concepts About Print,
WT=Writing Test, WV=Writing Vocabulary, DT=Dictation Test

^c $n=14$

^d $n=14$

Parents Survey. The pre and post-program survey provides data reported by parents before and after the treatment/parent program. Responses from the non-participating parents were similar to those of the participating parents prior to the parent program. All items on the pre-program survey indicate similar responses between the control and treatment groups with none varying more than three.

The goal of the qualitative analysis was to portray any changes in parents' interactions with their children during literacy events that resulted from participation in the parent program.

Table 3 presents the data collected from pre and post-program surveys. The response items represented on this table match items 1, 3, 4, and 5 on the pre and post-program surveys (Appendix A & B). There are some group differences indicated by the responses on the post-program survey and are reported individually. The following information deals with responses on the post-program survey from the thirteen parents participating in the parent program.

Table 3

Pre and Post-program Survey Responses^a

Survey Item	Comparison Group	Treatment Group Before	Treatment Group After
Home reading frequency			
• Daily	1	1	6
• Few times a week	10	10	7
• Few times a month	2	2	-
• Seldom	-	-	-
Parent reading behavior			
• Newspaper, magazines	11	11	12
• Books	8	9	10
• Work	3	2	4
• Other	-	1	6
Reading material			
• School	6	7	13
• Public library	4	3	3
• Own	13	12	12
• Other	-	1	1
Child's writing interest			
• Talks about writing	5	2	9
• Requests materials	6	9	13
• Shares, displays work	8	9	11

^aThirteen parents in each group completed the survey. The first item is the only one reported on this table requiring a single response.

The first item dealt with the frequency of home reading activities engaging parents and child. Parents reported

they read children's books a few times each week, with five parents increasing this activity to reading children's books daily with their child.

The second item, and not reported on the table, addressed the issue of who read to the child at home other than the participating parent. Parent responses indicated that parents, grandparents, and siblings who read with the child remained constant over the study period.

Item three addressed the reading behaviors and circumstances in which children observe the parent reading at home. The treatment group parents reported that their children had more opportunities to observed them in functional writing than before the program. Parents cited "other" on the survey with the greatest change, and recorded these activities as reading mail advertisements, sorting coupons, preparing tax returns, reading recipes, and reading letters.

Item four on the survey asked where parents acquired the books for home reading activities. All parents in the program responded that school was a source for books during the program.

Item five attempted to ascertain how children show an interest in writing at home. The greatest change reported by the post-program survey for this item was that parents observed children's talk about writing increasing from 15%

to 69%. There were also increases in other responses to this item which included children requesting writing materials and their desire to share and display writing products.

Item six addressed parent writing behavior. The survey indicated that the parents of the treatment group children now believed their children had more opportunities to observe their parents in functional writing activities. Increased responses were greatest in the areas of personal writing in the form of thank you notes, letters and diary writing, changing from 61% on the pre-study survey to 100% response on the post-study survey.

In response to item eight on the pre-program survey, parents from both groups reported various activities they thought helped their child in school. These included use of flash cards, playing school, games, computers, doing homework, and family trips. On the post-program survey, the treatment group was asked to describe a literacy interaction where the parent observed the child doing something better now than before the parent program. Parent responses were grouped into the following categories with the number of parent responds shown in parentheses: read independently (7), read in pairs (3), discussions about books read (3), writing (5).

There were a variety of responses reported by the treatment group regarding item eight on the post-program survey. Parents were asked to identify the most valuable thing they learned from the parent program. Their responses include learning about developmental stages with regard to children's reading and writing, shared reading, reading aloud, and sharing ideas from the stories, reading aloud, taking time to share books and literature activities, "Making it a priority," everyday writing activities that can help improve reading and writing skills, and children's awareness of parent's reading and writing behavior at home.

The social learning aspect of the program was addressed in the post-program survey. Parents were asked to rank their responses from 4-1 (most to least important) in response to the question dealing with how they viewed working with other parents in the workshops sessions. Results are presented on Table 4. Nine of the thirteen parents responded that developing new friendships was not a high rank. Learning about literacy experiences other parents have with their children was considered a benefit by more than half. All of the parents indicated that sharing their own literacy experiences with other parents was important with no low responses. Eight parents responded that the group collaboration they experienced in the

sessions might lead them to sharing their ideas with other parents who did not attend the workshop.

Table 4

Treatment Group Ranked Responses^a

Benefits of working with other parents in workshop sessions

Responses	4	3	2	1
Developing new friendships	4	0	4	5
Learning about literacy experiences other parents have with their children	3	4	1	5
Sharing my own literacy experiences with other parents	4	3	6	0
Sharing my ideas with other parents who did not attend the workshop	2	6	2	3

^aThirteen parents responded by ranking choices, 4-1 from most to least important)

Chapter V

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Conclusions and Limitations

Parents promote literacy for children through a wide variety of language and print experiences. Through these experiences parents teach concepts about print and spoken and written language, and they model the importance of using literate behaviors in daily functional activities.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a parent program designed to encourage literacy activities at home. Related research is replete with data about programs where parents and children engage in literacy activities. Many studies reviewed by this researcher supported the value of the parent's role in their children's literacy growth (eg. Leichter, 1984; Manning, 1988; Morrow, 1993; Teale, 1986). This study adds to the data that reflected their findings on the parent's view of their role and is addressed in the parents' responses in the post-program survey.

The failure of this study to show statistical differences in all the reading and writing measures can be attributed to confounding variables. The most probable would be the short duration of the project. This could include the length time (8 weeks) parents engaged in literacy activities with their children, and this short time

span between pre and post-testing. Most studies that investigate children's literacy growth are for an extended period of time lasting a year or more. This allows for a clearer account of actual changes in literacy behaviors.

Another possible confound is the sample size. With a relatively small sample, it is more difficult to demonstrate significant differences between groups.

A final confound considered by this researcher was the test used to assess literacy. It may not have been sensitive to short-term growth, or sensitive to the types of literacy activities taught in the workshop lessons.

Discussion

The convenience of the study site seemed to facilitate parents' participation. As a neighborhood school, it was easy for most parents to walk regardless of the weather. It was also convenient for parents to bring their children to a facility designed to accommodate childcare. There was a blizzard on the night of the third session, yet twelve of the thirteen parents attended. When questioned about their tenacity, two responded, "We only live a few blocks so we just bundled up for the walk."

The parents who participated in the program were very committed. Though the parent program covered the planned topics, the order was rearranged in response to parent comments and questions each week. This researcher kept a

journal documenting anecdotal comments, observations, and attendance. This record supported the research that suggests that parents are interested in learning how to help their children (Morrow, 1993; Manning, 1988; Phillips, 1987; Wells, 1986).

The following comments reveal a picture of their experiences and feelings during the eight week parent program.

"If I were gone, I'd be thinking about what I was missing, so I don't intend to miss a workshop."

"What will we do with our Monday nights when this is over?"

"I'm so glad I can bring the boys and know they are having a good time while I'm doing this."

"She reads to anyone who will listen and even those who won't, like the baby. I think it's the books that I'm bringing home. She can actually read most of the words."

"He didn't like some of the books I brought home last week. I'm finding out he has definite likes and dislikes in reading material. We actually made a list of books that I'm supposed to look for!"

"The boys tell me when I'm reading too fast now. They like to have a say in what I read and how I read it; you know, expression and all."

"I see what you mean when he (the child) has his letters running together. He will draw a picture and write a sentence. I still can't read it completely, but when he read it I could see how he was using the right letters to make the words."

"The kids see me writing all the time. Could I bring my poetry journal to share with the group?"

"My girls love to write, but I didn't realize I could be doing more to help them. I thought reading stories every night before bed was the thing that a 'Good Parent' did. Now that I write with them, our bedtime stories are sometimes our own."

"We had so much fun writing a 'shared story' but I think I did too much of the writing. I guess it didn't matter because the ideas were all his (the child)."

"I can see how much she (the child) has grown just by our reading and writing with her at home."

In addition to the parent comments, there were several journal entries regarding student comments that were a reflection of the parent program. The comments were made

during school hours when the children were in class, before school, or during unstructured time such as recess and lunch. They were noted by classroom teachers, teacher associates, and this researcher:

"I love it, I love it, I love it, I do!" [Teacher responds "What do you love?" to the child, knowing that the source of her speech was from a familiar children's book (Gelman, 1977) her mother had received at the parent meeting the night before.]

"Oh, you know, the spaghetti book. Mom said if she had to read it one more time she would go crazy!"

"Mrs. K., I have a joke for you. Do you know why elephants wear purple suspenders? To hold up their trousers. of course." [An exact quote from a book (Ziegler, 1992) his mother received at the previous workshop.]

"My mom rented a video with three Maurice Sendak stories. I read along with the tape from my own book you gave mom last week. Now I don't need any help on the words."

"Mom and I play a game with the Post-it notes. I can read all the words she puts up around the house on things. She can't fool me!"

"Mom and I wrote a story and it's really great. Can I read it to the class when I get the pictures all done? Maybe I could even go and read it to my brother's class."

The children whose parents participated in this project were enthusiastic because their parents were doing things for them. The parent program became a family night out which included elements children enjoy: food, play and presents in the form of books, pencils, journals, and the promise that the remainder of the week would involve activities shared with Mom or Dad.

Recommendations

Based on the data from this study, there are several recommendations to be made.

For beginning readers and writers, schools should consider providing opportunities for parents to learn about the importance of involving their children in literacy activities at home. The program design from this study could be used as a model for schools to facilitate parent programs. Programs would involve parents by using cooperative groups to share, encourage and practice reading and writing strategies to be used at home. It would also be recommended that parent involvement projects be ongoing, allowing parents to participate at their convenience and need. Parents involved in this study hinted at the

importance of sharing what they learned with friends. Because of this, a recommendation can be made to include parents as leaders as well as participants in parent programs that encourage literacy activities at home.

It would also follow that schools should consider developing programs for parents of older children. As children develop proficient literacy skills, parent programs can provide families with ideas for home interaction activities that will encourage the child to continue making literacy growth.

Recommendations for further study related to this investigation include continued observation of the students involved in this project to assess for long term effects of the parent program. Data should also be collected from parents at a later date to observe long term behavioral changes regarding home literacy interactions.

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APPENDIX A
PRE-PROGRAM SURVEY
FAMILY LITERACY SURVEY

Appendix A: Pre-program Survey

Group_____

FAMILY LITERACY SURVEY

Please complete and return to you child's teacher.

Circle the word or phrase that best reflects your situation.
(May select more than one unless noted)

1. How often do you read to your child? (Select only one)

daily a few times a few times seldom
 each week each month

2. What other family members read to your child?

spouse siblings grandparents other_____

3. What are the circumstances your child might see you reading at home?

newspapers books work other_____
magazines

4. Where do you get the books you read with your child?

school public library own other_____

5. How does your child show an interest in writing at home?

talks about ask for shares writing seldom
things you writing and wants to shows an
are writing materials display interest

6. What kinds of writing might your child see you doing?

thank you grocery list professional seldom
notes bills work related observes
letters signs
diary

7. When you were a child, did your parents read to you?
(Select only one)

often Occasionally seldom other_____

8. Describe one activity your family enjoys that you think will help your child in school.

APPENDIX B
POST-PROGRAM SURVEY
FAMILY LITERACY EVALUATION SURVEY

Appendix B: Post-program Survey

FAMILY LITERACY EVALUATION SURVEY

Please complete and return to the workshop instructor.

Circle the word or phrase that best reflects your situation.
(May select more than one unless noted)

1. How often did you read to your child in the last eight weeks? (Select only one)

- daily a few times a few times seldom
- each week each month

2. What other family members that read to your child?

- spouse siblings grandparents other_____

3. What are the circumstances your child might see your reading at home?

- newspaper books work other_____
- magazines

4. Where did you get the books you shared with your child in the last eight weeks?

- school public library own other_____

5. As a result of attending the parent literacy workshop, how does your child shown an increased interest in writing with you at home?

- talks about asks for shares writing seldom
- things you writing and wants to shows an
- are writing materials display interest

6. What kinds of writing might your child see you doing at home?

- thank you grocery lists professional seldom
- notes bills work related observes
- letters signs
- diary

7. As a result of this work shop, how important do you see your role as a literacy model to your child?
(Select only one)

extremely very moderately not very
important important important important

8. Describe a literacy interaction between you and your child where you observed them doing something better than before you started the workshop.

9. Describe the most valuable thing that you learned from the workshop.

10. Did you find working with other parents in this workshop to be helpful?

If your answer was yes, please respond to the following by ranking 1-4 in order of importance to you:

_____ Developing new friendships

_____ Learning about literacy experiences other parents have with their children

_____ Sharing my own literacy experiences with other parents

_____ I could share my ideas with other parents who did not attend the workshop

11. Tell what you think could be done to improve the workshop for future participants.

APPENDIX C
READ ALOUD BOOKS

Appendix C: Read Aloud Books
Parent Program Handout

Charlie Anderson by Barbara Abercrombie*

The Jolly Postman by Janet and Allen Ahlberg

Toad School by Julie Bellows*

A Bear Called Paddington by Michael Bond

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel by Virginia Burton

Fortunately by Remy Charlip*

That's Good! That's Bad! by Margery Cuyler*

Corduroy by Don Freeman*

Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag

More Spaghetti, I Say! by Rita Golden Gelman*

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Don't Forget the Bacon! by Pat Hutchins

There's a Nightmare in My Closet by Mercer Mayer*

Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McClosky

Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne

Little Bear by Else Minarik

Tiki Tiki Timbo by Arlene Mosel

Sam, Bangs & Moonshine by Evaline Ness

Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter

Don't Forget to Write by Martina Selway

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein*

Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobdkina

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad

Day by Judith Viorst

Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber

The Napping House by Audrey Wood

Charlotte's Web by E.B.White

Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

Random House Book of Poetry

Why Do Elephants Wear Purple Suspenders? by Judy Ziegler*

Poetry by Arnold Adoff

Books by Ted Arnold

Books by Frank Ash*

Poetry by Brod Bagert*

Books by Norman Bridwell

Books by Marc Brown

Books by Jan Brett*

Books by Eve Bunting*

Books by Eric Carle

Books by Beverly Cleary

Books by Barbara Cooney

Books by Ronald Dahl

Books by Tommie DePaola

Books by Lois Ehlert

Books by Mem Fox

Books by Patricia Reilly Giff

Books by Russel Hoban

Books by Ezra Jack Keats*

Books by Steven Kellogg

Just So Stories by Rudyard Kipling

Books by Arnold Lobel

Books by James Marshall

Books by Bill Martin Jr.

Books by Mercer Mayer*

Books by Robert Munsch*

Books by Bill Peet

Books by Patricia Polacco

Poetry by Jack Prelutsky*

Books by Maurice Sendak*

Poetry by Shel Silverstein*

Books by Dr. Seuss

* Books shared during workshop sessions

APPENDIX D:
PARENT LITERATURE RESOURCES

Appendix D: Parent Literature Resources

- Clay, M. M. (1987). Writing begins at home.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann.
- Cullinan, B. E. (1993). Let's read about: Finding
books they'll love to read. NY: Scholastic Inc.
- Cullinan, B. E. (1992). Read to me: Raising kids who
love to read. NY: Scholastic Inc.
- Nicoll, V. & Wilkie, L. (1991). Literacy at home and
School: A guide for parents. NSW, Australia:
Primary English Teaching Association.
- Stoner, M. (1987). Reading at home and at school.
(No. 0880-4). Washington, DC: National Education
Association of the United States.
- Trelease, J. (1989). The new read-aloud handbook.
NY: Penguin Books.