

A Correlation of Parent Involvement and First Grade Reading Achievement

By

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Abstract

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Some children succeed in school while other children struggle. One important skill in succeeding in school is reading. Some children come to school with early literacy skills and a few already know how to read. Other children cannot seem to grasp early literacy skills and struggle when it comes to reading. The purpose of this study is to find out if a correlation exists between a first grader's reading level and the amount of time parents are involved with their child in literacy activities at home. Data will be collected from three first grade classrooms at the Tomahawk Elementary School. Children will be assessed at the beginning and end of first grade to find out their instructional reading level through a Developmental Reading Assessment. Parents will record the amount of time they spend reading and discussing literature with their child.

The results of this study will show whether a correlation exists between a child's reading level and the amount of time parents and children spend together in literature at home. If a correlation exists, this study could be used to encourage parents to spend more time with literature in the home to improve a child's reading level.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Reading is vitally important to school success. Poor readers at the end of first grade will remain poor readers throughout elementary school (Stein, Johnson, & Gutlohn, 1999). Children who do not have good reading skills in first grade have almost a 90% chance of remaining poor readers through fourth grade (Chard & Kameenui, 2000). Our primary elementary children need to develop a strong base of early literacy skills in order to reach grade appropriate levels of reading achievement. Progress can be made along the way but struggling readers may never be able to catch up to successful peer readers. School success is dependent on understanding and properly using literacy (Pellegrini & Charak, 1997). Without acceptable reading achievement, a child faces many struggles down the road to school success. Success or failure in life overall can be determined by the ability or inability to achieve literacy (Calfee 1997).

Early literacy skills are learned through exposure to good literature. Most good readers come to school with extensive background information on literacy. Background information is used as a reader tries to decode and understand text. A reader who knows background about the type of character or situation in a piece of literature will be able to draw upon that background information to understand the text. Much of this background comes from having been read to at home. Children are able to expand their backgrounds through exposure to literature (High, LaGasse, Becker, Ahlgren, & Gardner, 2000). Children develop many important early literacy skills through hearing and discussing literature.

Early literacy is focused on strongly in preschools and in the primary grades through literature. Teachers and parents are encouraged to read to their children often. “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (Kupetz 1993, pg. 30). Early and continued exposure to literature is beneficial to children and their success in learning to read.

Reading does not happen automatically in kindergarten, in first grade, or at any other time. Early literacy skills are the building blocks that take years to build up. According to Kupetz, many people think that reading happens in first grade because this is when a child’s first “real” reading class begins (1993). Educators know very well that learning to read is a process. Many literacy building blocks need to be put together in order to be successful at reading.

Many theories are available on how to best teach reading. No one right strategy has been found to teach a whole class how to read. Every child is unique and may need to be taught different strategies at different times to become a successful reader. There are many factors that enable some children to be successful at reading. One key factor in learning to read is the amount of time children practice what they already know about literacy (Lancy 1997). Many reading strategies are introduced and learned at school. The school provides many learning opportunities to develop reading strategies. These reading strategies need to be practiced and reinforced both at home and at school.

Parent involvement has been shown to increase the likelihood of success in school. Families contribute greatly to a student’s achievement (Calfée 1997). The challenge arises when parents see the situation differently. Some parents feel they do not

have time to read at home. They feel the teacher should be held responsible for literacy exposure and practice. Actually, many individuals play important roles in a child's ability to learn how to read. Teachers cannot be solely responsible for a child becoming a successful reader because a teacher has not grown up with the child. Parents have opportunities to share many things with a child. Parents have opportunities with a child that a teacher cannot provide in the classroom (Kupetz 1993). Critical periods for early literacy development start around the age of three and go until about the age of nine (Calfee 1997). Most children have not entered school at the beginning of this critical phase. Parents are the adults that can make a difference at this point in a child's development. Neither parents nor teachers can be held solely responsible for teaching a child to read, but many benefits can be achieved when they work together.

When parents are involved in the education process they learn how to help their children. Not all parents know exactly how to help their child develop strong early literacy skills. It is through partnerships with teachers and schools that parents are empowered to help their children succeed at reading. Some parents involve their children in rich literary experiences, while other children are not given this important early background. It is important for parents to understand what children need in regards to early literacy. Many positive effects of parents reading to their children have taken place before children begin school. Other positive gains are made through support from parents during the primary years of school. Reading to a child at any time positively affects a child's reading achievement. Young children learn about literacy through listening and discussing literature. Once children begin school, it is their participation in reading that appears to be positively related to their reading achievement (Lancy 1997).

Parents are needed throughout the early years to help their child develop. Children's needs regarding early literacy change as a child gets older. Parents are first needed to help develop early literacy and later to provide opportunities to practice reading strategies.

Researchers have covered the urgency of early literacy, key elements to reading success, and the importance of parent involvement. Some research provides evidence of a correlation between being read to and reading achievement. Other research has proven that it is the discussions around literature and the vocabulary development that is correlated with reading achievement. With more research on the correlation of early literacy in the home and a child's ability to be successful at reading, parents and teachers can work together to provide each child the opportunity to be a successful reader. Currently teachers do what they can in the classroom to teach reading and parents do what they can at home to promote reading. Parents and teachers need to understand the important role each has in promoting literacy and helping children learn to read. When teachers and parents work together with children to develop early literacy it is the children who will benefit and especially their ability to read.

### Research Hypothesis

A review of literature shows that early literacy development is directly affected by home literacy experiences. Studies have also shown that increased parental involvement increases the likelihood of success in academic areas of school. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that a child's first grade reading achievement level will increase with the amount of time parents spend on early literacy experiences.



### Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of correlation between the amount of time spent at home with literacy experiences as measured by hours on a monthly take home calendar and reading achievement measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment for first graders at Tomahawk Elementary School.

### Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this research project will be that there is no statistically significant correlation between the amount of time spent on literacy at home and level of reading achievement for first graders.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

Reading is a broad field of study. Research has been done on the beginnings of early literacy, key factors that effect early literacy development and the importance of early literacy. Reading achievement is the ultimate goal of early literacy. The role of adults in reading achievement, importance of early literacy in learning to read, skills needed to read, and why some children struggle with reading have all been researched. Research has also focused on parental involvement in education and its positive effects.

#### Early Literacy

Early literacy begins long before children come to school. It actually begins when young children begin to use oral language. Interactions with adults will facilitate the development of these important oral language skills. The best way to develop oral language skills is through one-on-one language interactions with adults (Rush 1999). Children need adult interactions to learn about our language. Our language system is very complicated. We cannot expect a child to read if they first are not able to use our language orally. Positive home environments where parents spend time talking with their children can help promote these important oral literacy skills in children. Parent reading to young children is associated with enhanced language development (High, et al., 2000). Early oral language development is key in a child's early literacy development. Oral language is developed through both individual oral discussions with adults and through shared book reading.

The early childhood period up until about age eight is often referred to as a window for learning early literacy. It is important for children to gain early literacy skills during this window of opportunity. “If a child receives help in kindergarten or first grade, that child has a 90 to 95 percent chance of becoming a fluent reader. In the United States today, approximately 2.8 million students have been identified as having a learning disability. Of these, 90 percent have trouble reading” (Collins 2000). Young readers need support and experience with literature. The degree of caregiver involvement, rate of language interactions, and participation in early literacy activities are all related to literacy and language development (Morrow 1999). The more quality experiences a child engages in with literacy the more chances the child will have to learn important early literacy skills. Early literacy development is important because it begins early and then continues throughout life.

A main focus of the Goals 2000 initiative is that “all children in America will come to school ready to learn” (Rush 1999). Attention is being focused on preschool aged children. Schools are expecting children to have an understanding of early literacy by the time they enter school. “A preschooler’s ability to recognize and name letters of the alphabet; their general knowledge about text; and their awareness of phonemes are the biggest predictors of successfully learning to read” (Adams 1990). These are skills that successful early readers bring with them to school. These important skills are learned through experiences with adults before children enter school.

### Reading Achievement

Success in reading depends upon a child’s knowledge about early literacy and reading. Children need pre-reading skills that include knowledge about books and print

before they are able to pick up a book and read. Children learn many important things about reading before they come to school through experiences with literature. Some children even learn to read before they come to school. Most of these children have not had formal reading instruction but were immersed in literature and literature rich environments. These children learned to read because they developed early literacy skills through being read to and having access to books (Adams 1990). It is acknowledged that linguistically rich home environment contribute more powerfully to the early development of critical early literacy skills than excellent preschool and kindergarten classrooms (Jordan, Snow & Porche, 2000). Formal school instruction can help children develop into readers but involved parents greatly increase the chances of school success.

Reading aloud to children promotes language development, early literacy and a love of books. By hearing books, children develop language and vocabulary. Children learn the new vocabulary through the rhythmic and repetitive patterns in children's books. The patterns help children learn vocabulary through object-word associations. Learning language skills and vocabulary aid in the development of higher levels of early literacy. The development of oral language and an increase in vocabulary can be learned directly from shared book readings. Children learn to enjoy the reading experience because it is fun and interesting. The children are actually learning through playful interactions with books. This playful way of learning from books is a step towards learning early literacy skills (High, et al., 2000).

Certain skills are necessary for reading. Some of these skills are taught easily and directly in instructional situations while other skills are learned through social interactions with books (Wade & Moore, 1996). Many reading skills are learned through

conversations and discussions about literature. Early literacy skills such as book orientation, ability to listen, ability to turn pages, and print recognition are fostered through shared book readings. Through practice and repeated readings of books, children learn social behaviors that aid their interest in literature and development of early literacy skills (Wade & Moore, 1996).

In order to read, a reader must be able to process text and understand its meaning. Quick text processing is a necessary skill in reading. Reading is accomplished when we can “visually process virtually each and every letter of the text. Our eyes pass over the words or the text and our minds automatically and rather irrepressibly translate the spellings of the words into pronunciations” (Adams 1990, pg. 3). Many poor readers have not developed this type of quick processing yet. This quick processing needs to come naturally when reading. Reading is more than just reciting words. Real reading includes understanding and interpreting the messages of the text (Kirk 2001). Reading is really a complex task that involves using many strategies simultaneously. Readers must be able to use all of the necessary reading strategies to decode the text in a meaningful way.

Primary grade teachers have a very important job of teaching early literacy and teaching children how to read. A child’s future in regards to reading is often established in the primary grades. “The long term effect of primary grade instruction is evident in a .80 correlation between achievement in third grade and eleventh grade (Denti & Guerin, 1999). Primary teachers need to assess and meet the needs of children early in their school years because success in reading by third grade depends upon it. Skilled teachers use a variety of approaches all at the same time to teach reading because all children learn

to read differently. According to Kines, “There is no single method for teaching every child to read” (1998, p.59). Research shows that reading approaches that incorporate phonics have been found to lead to higher proficiency skills in word recognition and in spelling (Fitzsimmons 1990). The phonics approach to teaching reading is often integrated into many other approaches to teaching reading. The combination of using whole group, small groups, pairs, and one-to-one instruction is beneficial. Children learn best when they are taught through a variety of developmentally appropriate activities. A variety of groupings and activities are the best way to teach a classroom of beginning readers (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999). Many primary teachers use a combination approach to teach reading to meet the needs of all their students.

Some basic skills are needed by children learning to read. Experiences with oral language and experiences with written language are at the base of beginning reading skills. Children need to not only have an understanding of both but be able to make the connection between the written and spoken language. Basic reading instruction includes teaching the alphabet and related alphabet skills. Children must also develop phonological awareness. Teaching vocabulary skills is another building block in learning to read (Rush 1999). These are just some of the basic skills used in learning how to read.

With all of the time and effort educators are putting into teaching children how to read, some children are still failing. Children from homes where poverty is an issue have a greater chance of reading lower than average through primary and secondary education (Rush 1999). Not all educators and researchers agree with this. According to Adams, reading potential is not related to poverty alone. Reading achievement, Adams feels, is

more directly related to the experiences and knowledge gained about literacy before the child began school. Adams states that low socioeconomic status is not the cause of struggling readers but that a combination of immaturity and family life usually are the key reasons a child may be struggling in reading (1991). D.M. Snodgrass feels that parent participation with a child is more important in a child's school achievement than a parent's socioeconomic status (1991). A parent from any socioeconomic group can provide a young child with important early literacy experiences. Parents can be helpful or detrimental to a child's early literacy development regardless of socioeconomic conditions.

Some children are successful at reading and other children seem to be unable to pull all of the necessary skills together to read. "The reasons why children do not read may be as individual as the approaches needed to develop successful readers" (Kines 1998, p. 60). According to Teale, the development of early literacy is the result of children's involvement in reading activities mediated by more literate others in the child's life (1982). Children learn through the social interactions of a read aloud. A child needs social interactions around literature in order to develop early literacy and become a successful reader. The key to reading success is not easy to pinpoint but home literacy does play a vital part.

When a child lacks the early social interactions developed around literature, the child may need an early intervention plan. Denti and Guerin call for two important elements to be involved in any intervention program. First, a reading program must stress literacy instruction in kindergarten through second grade. The goal of the intervention program should be successful reading by grade three. Secondly, parent

involvement must be increased (1999). Adams suggests families get involved in early literacy by reading aloud to their child, choosing enjoyable books together, discussing books, visiting the library, and modeling good reading (1990). Parent involvement is important and is associated with higher achievement (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). When a child struggles learning how to read the primary grade teachers and the parents must work together to create a successful intervention.

### Parent Involvement

Reading aloud with children is important for building early literacy skills. Children who have been read aloud to are more likely to become successful readers than children who have not been read to (Adams 1990). Some children from poor social and economical families lack environments that promote language and literacy. These children are at risk for failing to develop essential literacy skills (High, et al., 2000). Children who are read with learn what it means to read and how the reading process works. According to Rush, the most significant contributions in a child's early literacy development are the amount of book sharing and number of related book activities a child has had experience with. Rush also found a correlation between the amount of caregiver involvement in shared activities with a child to the age at which a child could successfully name and recognize letters (1999). Parental involvement in early literacy development is a necessary key in successfully learning to read.

Parents impact a child's success in school. "Children who have parents that participate in their schooling have better attendance, have more positive relationships towards school, and achieve at higher levels" (PTA Issues: Standards for Parental Involvement in Education, 1997, p.19). Parental involvement makes a substantial



difference in a child's education. Positive relationships with parents give children the support they need to be successful in school. Children are affected by the relationships they have with their parents. Children work harder to achieve in school when they know they have parental support. Parents who support their children and become involved in their lives and interests have children who strive to succeed in school (Snodgrass 1991).

Families that make reading a priority in their home are doing their children a favor. Currently, fewer than 50 percent of families have parents that read in their spare time, read to their children, or discuss literature with their children. Children who come from homes that lack this important reading background are at a disadvantage when it comes to reading achievement (Hanson 1998). A parent's involvement in reading is an important factor in school achievement (High, et al., 2000). Families who read for pleasure are associated with having children being higher achievers in school (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001).

Children often have similar habits and form similar values according to the family they grew up in. Different families place importance on different aspects of their lives. Children who come from families where reading is a priority often feel reading is important. According to Hanson, "if having a family is a priority, then raising educated children should be the next most important thing" (1988). Exposing children to literature and helping them develop early literacy is all a matter of priorities. The basic building block to a child's success in school is strong family support. Three family characteristics that promote student success are (1) a structured and supportive family life with warmth and caring; (2) modeling of high expectations for behavior; and (3) active participation as

a family system (Blunkett 2000). A child's life is effected by the environment and therefore often carry the same values and attitudes as the parents the live with.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The following section will describe the procedures used to find a correlation between the amount of time children spent at home on early literacy and their reading achievement level at the end of first grade. This chapter includes information on the subjects, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis.

#### Subjects

The study was conducted in a small rural town in the mid-west. The project took place at an elementary school in Tomahawk, Wisconsin that educates around 700 students. Three of the five sections of first grade were chosen for possible subjects. One of the classrooms chosen for my study was a full inclusion classroom containing 15 students, another classroom with 20 students was team-taught by two teachers, and the other was a self-contained classroom with 15 students. All of the children that participated in the study were first graders between the ages of six and eight. Of the two first grade sections not participating in this study one was another full inclusion classroom with 15 students and the other was a self-contained classroom with 15 students.

#### Instrumentation

Data on reading and comprehension for each subject was collected through the Developmental Reading Assessment. The Developmental Reading Assessment assesses a child's reading and comprehension. Each child that was assessed read an unfamiliar book and orally answered specific questions about the story. The child's miscues and

correct answers to the questions were recorded on a form included in the assessment kit. Each question about the book that was answered correctly gave the child one point. The number of miscues made and the number of points earned for the comprehension questions were correlated to obtain an instructional reading level for each student. Each of the books in the kit was rated with a number one through forty-four. A child continued to move up the progression of books until a book was found that matched the child's instructional reading level. The book number that was found to be the instructional reading level for each child was recorded as the child's reading achievement level.

Data was also collected on the amount of time each child spent at home engaged in literature. A calendar was sent home during the month of April for parents to record how much time they spent each day with their child engaged in literature. The parents could read to their child or their child could read to them. The total number of minutes of reading for the month was recorded for each child.

### Procedure

This research project was discussed with parents at parent and teacher conferences in January. Parents were given a consent form to read and sign if they agreed to have their child participate in the research projects. The research project was explained verbally and in writing. Questions were also answered during this time and throughout the project. The calendar for the month of April was explained and sent home at the beginning of April. Parents filled out the amount of time they spent with their child on literacy experiences. Literacy experiences were explained to mean the time spent reading to each other or the time spent discussing the story. The completed calendars

were returned at the end of the month. The number of minutes each child spent reading and discussing story elements during the month were counted and recorded.

Another part of the data was gathered in September and again at the end of May. Each child was individually assessed to determine his/her instructional reading level attained by the beginning and end of first grade according to the Developmental Reading Assessment. Each child was individually assessed twice during the year and the instructional reading levels were recorded.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

#### Introduction

This chapter will explain the results of the data analysis and review the research hypothesis of this study.

#### Data Analysis

The beginning and end of the year reading levels of first graders and the amount of time parents spent at home involving their child in literacy was analyzed using the Pearson r Correlation Coefficient. When the Pearson r Correlation Coefficient was run on the results of this study a two tailed correlation graph was developed. The results showed a highly significant correlation of  $r=.065$ ;  $p=.001$ .

#### Research Hypothesis

The null hypothesis that stated there would be no statistically significant correlation between the amount of time spent on literacy at home and the level of reading achievement for first graders was rejected.

A review of literature show that early literacy development is directly affected by home experiences. Studies have also shown that increased parental involvement increases the likelihood of success in academic areas of school. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that a child's first grade reading achievement level will increase with the amount of time parents spend on early literacy experiences. As a result of this study, the research hypothesis was found to be significantly correlated.

## Conclusion

The chapter gave an overview of the results of this study. The research hypothesis was found to be significantly correlated and the null hypothesis was rejected.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the conclusions and recommendations for reading achievement based on the data gathered and the review of literature done for this project.

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

Reading readiness starts early in a child's life. Parent involvement with literature during the early childhood and primary school years aide a child's reading achievement. Children need time and support while learning about books and learning to read. Parent involvement in literature includes shared reading experiences and literature discussions. Parents should read to or listen to their children read as often as possible, preferably everyday. Parents should not only share reading experiences with their children but should also discuss the piece of literature throughout the shared reading experience. Children's reading progress as shown through this study and the review of literature is significantly correlated to the amount of time parents spend engaging in literature with their children. The more time parents spend engaged in literature with their children the better prepared these children will be to succeed at reading.

Parent involvement in reading development should be further studied to find the key elements for parents to focus on to help their children succeed at reading. All parents should be given access to this information and to a variety of books to share with their children. Most importantly parents need to be encouraged to spend time daily and be involved in literature daily with their children.



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## Appendix A

## HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Dear Families,

Hi! My name is Denise Peissig. I am a first grade teacher at Tomahawk Elementary School. I am working on my master's degree through the University of Wisconsin – Stout. I am currently gathering data for my research paper. My research paper will be based on first grade reading achievement and parent involvement. I will be researching the amount of time first graders spend engaged in literature at home.

I am requesting your help in gathering this information. First, I need your permission to use your child's reading level according to the Developmental Reading Assessment from the beginning of first grade and the end of first grade. Secondly, I am asking you to fill out a reading calendar for the month of April. The reading calendar will have a space to record the number of minutes you spend each day reading to your child or having your child read to you. Please be accurate in your recording and turn in the calendar at the end of the month. The calendars will be sent home at the beginning of April. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and will have no effect on your child's reading grade. You may stop participation in this study at anytime. Your child's name will not be used in any part of my paper. Your cooperation, time and effort are greatly appreciated. I would be happy to share the results of my study when it is completed.

Sincerely,

Denise Peissig

.....  
Denise Peissig has my permission to use the reading calendar I filled out for the month of April. She also has my permission to use my child's first grade, beginning of the year and final, reading level in her research paper.

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(Parent Signature)

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(Date)

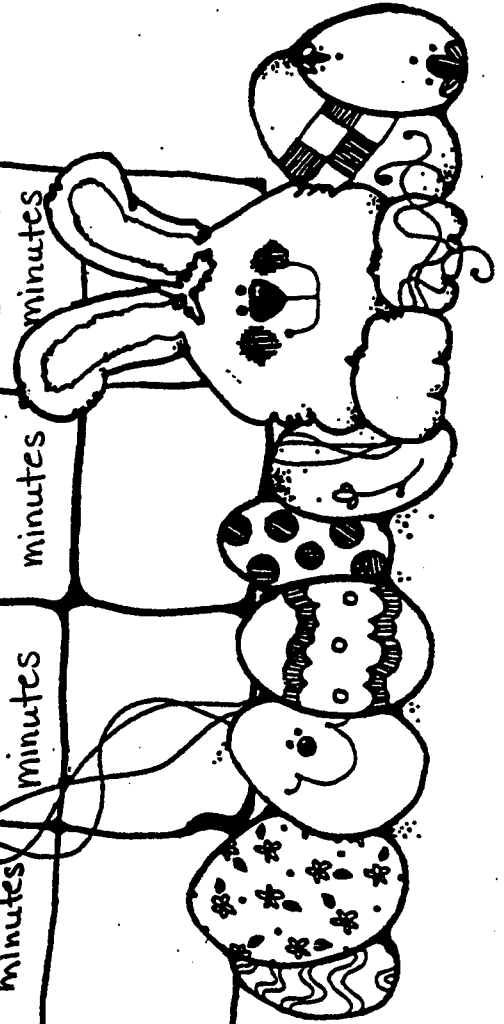
Appendix B

Reading Calendar

\_\_\_\_\_ 's Reading Log

# April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 minutes	2 minutes	3 minutes	4 minutes	5 minutes	6 minutes	7 minutes
8 minutes	9 minutes	10 minutes	11 minutes	12 minutes	13 minutes	14 minutes
15 minutes	16 minutes	17 minutes	18 minutes	19 minutes	20 minutes	21 minutes
22 minutes	23 minutes	24 minutes	25 minutes	26 minutes	27 minutes	28 minutes
29 minutes	30 minutes					



Total minutes \_\_\_\_\_