

Kelly Lynn Mohr

The Effect of Early Literacy Exposure in the Home on Reading Development of
Kindergarteners

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Author: Kelly Lynn Mohr

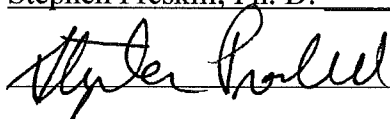
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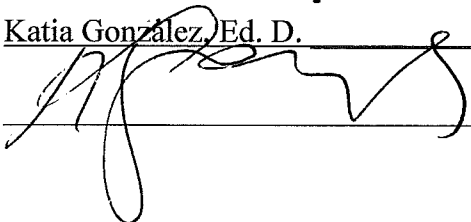
Thesis Advisor: Stephen Preskill, Ph. D. (Print)

 (Sign)

Reader: Ann Gazzard, Ph. D. (Print)

 (Sign)

Reader: Katia González, Ed. D. (Print)

 (Sign)

Abstract

Children have a variety of experiences with literacy before they even enter the classroom on their first day of school. Many children are exposed to literacy-rich environments and an assortment of print from an early age. This exposure can help them to develop early literacy skills and allow them to enter the classroom at a higher beginning reading level. The purpose of this study was to investigate the amount of literacy that children were exposed to before entering kindergarten and compare this exposure amount to their initial reading levels when starting kindergarten.

This study examined the quantity of literacy that eight different students from a regular education kindergarten classroom were exposed to at home before entering school. The parents of these students answered a ten question survey regarding specific examples of literacy experiences that their child may have been exposed to. Parents' survey results were then compared to their children's individual reading level when entering kindergarten. A positive correlation was found between early literacy exposure in the home and beginning reading levels. The students who had the highest level of literacy exposure had the highest reading levels when entering kindergarten.

This study looks to reinforce the idea that the amount of early literacy exposure introduced to children who are now in kindergarten positively affects their overall reading development.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Importance of Study

The world is surrounded by letters, labels and announcements that are displayed to the general public through print. How do the people in our society know what lane on the highway to get into, or what they are being charged for on a bank receipt? This shared knowledge is habitually presented through literacy. Literacy is the ability to read and write, and it surrounds our everyday world. Understanding a recipe, signing a document, following traffic precautions – these are all everyday activities that literate citizens often do not think twice about doing. Without the knowledge of letters, sounds and vocabulary, members of our society would not be able to communicate their ideas to one another. Literacy is present in our jobs, homes and everyday lifestyle.

How does a society become literate? Even before they are born, children begin to learn pre-reading skills through listening to the speech that is present around them. The development of language and literacy skills begins at birth. Children start to understand that words have meaning and that meaning controls actions. When a child consistently hears the word “walk”, and each time he/she hears it they are helping to take the dog outside for a walk, then this child will eventually learn that this word is equivalent to the action that happens after it is said. Children develop oral language naturally. It is often not something that needs to be taught to them through repetition and practice. Their

everyday interactions and surroundings are taken in and they habitually begin to understand themselves what things mean and stand for.

Statement of Problem

Reading is not a skill that children ordinarily can just develop without interaction. Reading is a skill that is used to take in information that is presented through written letters and words. Reading is a talent that often needs to be taught. Though teachers educate children on skills and patterns that help them to develop reading proficiency and success, children prepare to read long before they enter school. Children have interactions with letters all around them. Many children have experiences handling books and even pretending to interpret the words that are on the pages in front of them. These children who are exposed to literacy-rich environments often develop early literacy skills. These students are entering their school years having had contact with literacy. The problem is that all students are not receiving this literacy exposure in their early years. Students are entering Kindergarten with various levels of exposure to literacy. Exposure to literacy in the home can often have an impact on reading readiness and beginning reading levels.

Research Question:

The current study looks to answer the following question: How does the amount of early literacy exposure that was introduced to children who are now in kindergarten, affect their overall reading development, as measured by reading levels?

Definition of Terms

Emergent Literacy

A growing awareness of, and interest in, books and writing.

Environment

Surrounding influences and external factors influencing life and activities.

Decoding

The ability to sound out letters and words.

Letter Formation

The ability to print or write letters.

Letter Recognition

The ability to find and name a letter that is displayed.

Print Awareness

An understanding of the nature and uses of print.

Sight Word

Any word that is known by a reader automatically.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Environmental Print Awareness

While developing oral language is a natural process, learning to read is not. According to Ontario (2003), children must be taught to understand, interpret, and manipulate the printed symbols of written language. One way that children develop these early literacy skills is through the use of letters and words that surround them in their everyday environment. Young children can be taught the concept of print early on through encounters that they have with their environment. “Environmental print is the print found in the natural immediate setting of children, which includes logos, labels, road signs, billboards, clothing labels, coupons, newspaper advertisements and fast food paraphernalia” (Kuby, 1994, p.1). When children first come across print, they are not conscious that the symbols they are viewing represent spoken language. Most children are merely just attracted to the new item for its color, size or originality. Children may see the same print every day, as they ride in the car with their parents to work or as they look at a newspaper article framed on the wall in their living room. According to McGee and Richgels (2000), children’s early encounters with environmental print, words, and other graphic symbols found in their surroundings are among their first concrete exposures to written language. “Young children are exposed to environmental print from



an early age” (Kurby, 1994, p.2). From these experiences, children then begin to learn that words convey meaning. Kassow (2006), agreed with this idea stating that, the value of children recognizing environmental print is that they are beginning to understand that print means something. Through interpreting environmental print, children are attempting to make sense of the world around them.

As children begin to comprehend the idea that words convey meaning, they develop concepts about books, newspapers and other print in their environment. According to Kuby (1994), more advanced concepts about print emerge as children are exposed to more print and develop understandings. Children take what they see and relate the images to letters and sounds. They then comprehend that literacy is all around them. According to Kassow (2006), print in the environment offers opportunities for children to view and engage with many different forms of historical, cultural, and contextual meanings. “Community can be a tool to help children read words in their world” (Kassow, 2006, p.1). Kassow (2006) also stated that in print-rich environments young children are continuously interacting with, organizing, and analyzing the meanings of visible print. “Studies of environmental print indicate that children do develop concepts and construct knowledge about the functions and uses of print through engagement with print in their everyday environments” (Kassow, 2006, pg 1).

Children are guided to this comprehension through the people in their environment. Parents point out environmental print and help children develop early

literacy skills. A child would not know that McDonald's starts with the letter "M," if their parent did not mention it every time that they drove by McDonald's. It is this constant repetition that helps children to develop to the point that they themselves can turn to their parent and say, "McDonalds! M."

There is much focus in the education world on the immediate introduction of reading to children at an early age. But, for most humans, their first interaction with reading was not through a book. According to Clay (1993), children typically read print from their environment before reading print in books. Kuby (1994) stated that children are generally able to recognize environmental print before they are able to read print in books. According to Bryant & Goswami (1990), when children begin to develop print awareness skills, they read logographically, that is, by remembering visual cues and symbols in or around the words. This is why picture cues are often given to struggling readers in school, as the picture helps them to comprehend and remember what the word stands for. It is much easier for children to be able to remember the letter "M" when they can relate the letter to the picture that they have in their head of the McDonald's logo and arch. According to Kuby (1994), when first being introduced to environmental print, children are initially dependent on the label or logo associated with the word. As their understanding of print and phonetic skills necessary for reading increases, they gradually begin to read words presented separately from the logo. "One of the most important cognitive achievements of early childhood years is the ability to understand and use symbols" (Kassow, 2006, p.2).

Before Entering Kindergarten

According to Lovelace and Stewart (2007), the home environment in children's early years provides them with the opportunities to acquire early literacy skills. The everyday things that parents do and have around the house can work to have an impact on their children's future skills in reading. "Letter recognition is determined mainly by how many times a child has seen the letter in print" (Lovelace & Stewart, 2007, p.17). Children that grow up in an environment where print is constantly noted, often develop a strong vocabulary base from a young age.

Children who develop this base are often able to name many letters and items. This ability can often make reading an easier task for them. Treiman, Tincoff & Richmond-Welty (1996) stated that letter-name knowledge helps children connect print to speech. Children who know the names of the letters may be able to notice relations between letters in spellings and letter names in the pronunciation of some words, and then begin to understand the sound-symbolizing function of letters in spellings. For example, take a child that comprehends the sounds of the letters "B" and "D," because his first name begins with a B and his last name begins with a D. This child could have been told by his parents, "your first name is Brian, which starts with a B." "Your last name is Davis, which starts with a D." This child over and over will hear these sounds and will be comfortable with the sounds that he knows that these letters make. This child

could then come across a word that looks like Brian and comprehend that it may also make the same B sounds that Brian makes.

Also according to Trieman, Tincoff & Richmond-Welty (1996), pre-readers can form systematic connections between print and speech when those connections are based on a type of knowledge that they do possess, which is knowledge of the names of the alphabet letters. These children are often then able to take this knowledge of what they have seen in their environment and use it to begin succeeding at reading. Allowing children a base knowledge of letters gives them information to use when they begin to connect print to speech. Castles (2009), agrees that knowledge of letter-sound correspondences underpins successful reading acquisition. Castles (2009) stated that prior letter awareness or prior phonemic awareness directly assists preliterate children in then learning letter-sound correspondences.

However, not all children have the same background going into kindergarten. According to Baker, Scher and Macklet (1997), individual differences in print exposure are already present before any formal education, as parents vary in the upbringing of their children. Parents are the child's first teacher. Some children may enter kindergarten with prior background knowledge of all the letters and their corresponding sounds, while others did not have the same exposure. Some parents may go out of their way to drive by a Fire Station and note to their children, "look at all the fire trucks. Fire starts with F." Other parents may not and their child may not have the same background. This background and awareness often leads to the development of early reading skills.

Why Before Kindergarten?

According to Ontario (2003), early reading skills are essential tasks that need to happen even before children's first years of school. If children enter school with print and letter awareness, they may then be ready to use these skills to become readers.

According to Lovelace and Stewart (2007), early readers were significantly more likely than non-readers to have caregivers who read magazines and newspapers, watched more television and provided more help in areas related to learning to read. Some of these areas include discussing letter sounds, helping with spelling and identifying words.

These children had precise exposure to print and it was evident in the knowledge that they carried over into kindergarten.

Elliott and Olliff (2008) analyzed the prerequisite skills for specifically focused on the progression of young children's emergent literacy and letter recognition skills through developmentally appropriate instruction. The results suggested that the time before entering kindergarten is crucial. "Children who have had exposure to print and letters enter school with larger vocabularies and more advanced comprehension skills than their peers who grow up in poorer home literacy environments" (Bus & Pellegrini, 1995, p.18). Instead of spending the beginning of kindergarten working on letters and letter sounds, these children focus on specific literacy skills and decoding. These children could possibly already begin school ahead of the game. According to Kuby

(1994), children's responses to environmental print are the direct outcomes of their prior experience with it. Academically at-risk preschoolers recognized significantly fewer environmental print logos than did their academically advantaged peers.

According to Castles (2009), knowledge of letter-sound correspondences leads to successful reading attainment. Castles looked into whether either prior letter awareness or prior phonemic awareness directly assists preliterate children in learning letter-sound correspondences. He found that children who had prior letter awareness not only had stronger letter-sound correspondences but learned letter-sounds that they were unaware of at a faster rate.

Future Endeavors

According to Ontario (2003), children who successfully learn to read in the early primary years of school are well prepared to read for learning and for pleasure in the years to come. They often start kindergarten on a path and continue moving forward with a love for reading. Lovelace and Stewart (2007) found that young children's language abilities contribute to later literacy achievement. Children often get frustrated when they don't understand a task in school. This may lead to them disliking a certain topic, and then sooner or later disliking school as a whole. Many times the task that frustrates them most is reading. As the years pass in school, reading takes over the classroom. Time spent reading increases and every subject includes literacy. Social Studies period becomes reading aloud in class, Science projects surround reading the

textbook and Math is full of word problems. These struggling children often start to avoid the task and then fall behind. According to Bus and Pellegrini (1995), 64% of the children who are exposed to print will be the more proficient readers at school compared with only 36% of children who are not exposed to print. The amount of early literacy exposure provided to children at a young age can often impact their reading proficiency later on in life.

Mol (2011) explained how children who are more proficient in comprehension and technical reading and spelling skills read more and were exposed to more print at an early age. As a result of this early print exposure, their comprehension and technical reading and spelling skills improved more with each year of education. Moderate associations of print exposure with academic achievement indicated that frequent readers are more successful students. In this article, moderate associations of print exposure were defined by the number of times that parents made note of certain instances. Levels were chosen through a number scale that reflected parents survey results. Parents were asked questions about what they do at the grocery store, in the kitchen and while driving in the car. There were also many questions about the materials and experiences that children have at home. The study looked to analyze a large variety of ways that children could have been exposed to literacy. The results also concluded that children who are exposed to print and whose parents promote literacy at home have more proficient

literacy skills. These skills can help to make them enjoy reading more and improve as readers as the years go on.

Specific Parent Involvement

According to the International Reading Association (2002), a way to bridge home and school literacy contexts is to involve families in literacy activities with their children. “The use of environmental print during parent-child interactions provides a meaningful way to expose children to literacy concepts like letter shapes and letter sounds” (Elliot and Olliff, 2008, p.553). Often times, many parents do not realize how to incorporate literacy activities into their everyday life. Many parents feel that they are too busy or think that they need to buy an expensive literacy package. According to Kuby (1994), environmental print may encourage parent-child interactions to be more informal and eliminate the need for the parent to purchase or prepare any special educational materials. Parents can be advised to things that they can do while they are already at the park or already in the shopping mall. The use of environmental print can give the parent and child many opportunities for spontaneous learning experiences. It can also be something as small as letting the children help send out Christmas cards or write the grocery list for the week. According to Kuby (1994), when children are guided by parents to attend to letters, signs and labels, they are being given opportunities to read, spell and print words. They learn essential educational elements of reading before entering school. According to Clay (1993), through early joint activities such as drawing and forming letter shapes in

a variety of ways, children are able to increase their awareness and use of print, which, in turn, encourages them to examine their writing and ask “what does this say?” Children often get so much out of opportunities that include literacy exposure when the print or topic gets them asking questions. Taking the time to point out the environment takes only a few seconds but can make the world of a difference. According to Lonigan (2011), parents who make note of things that they pass while they are driving are allowing children opportunities to learn from their environment. According to Kassow (2006), parents can encourage their child’s curiosity and learning by following the child’s lead and answering questions the child has about print. Parents can take “literacy walks” with children, pointing out signs and print seen in the community and discussing the colors, pictures, and numbers. Kassow (2006) also stated that parents can ask their child, “What does this say?” but should not worry if their child is not able to identify the print. Instead, parents can talk about the letters and tell the child what it does say.

According to Kuby (1994), in addition to the learning of letter names and sounds, early literacy awareness helps to develop the child’s writing growth. In recent years, attention has shifted towards the important role of writing activities in facilitating the development of emergent literacy skills in young children. This is often an advantage of literacy awareness. The focus is often so much on reading, but early literacy in the environment can also lead to strong writing skills. Being able to recognize letters and their corresponding sounds will allow children to have an easier time breaking down

words and becoming an overall better writer. Also, through writing they can begin to become emergent writers through practicing to draw these symbols, letters and words.

Is It Truly Print Awareness?

Children begin to demonstrate symbolic recognition around the age of two. DeLoache (1991) stated that children acquire language and master symbolic artifacts through their culture. According to DeLoache (1991), children's ability to recognize a symbol depends on the characteristics of the symbol itself and the context of the situation. Bialystok and Martin (2003) studied young children's development from representational to symbolic thought for print by investigating whether children who have learned letters also understand that letters are the symbols through which print reveals meaning. To accomplish this, the researchers conducted a study with children who were four and five years old. During this study children were presented with a word on a card, such as "dog," and then the card was placed beside a toy dog. The card is then placed next to a toy house. The children were then asked what the card says. If children understand that print is symbolic they will know that the card says "dog," no matter where it is placed. Bialystok and Martin (2003) found that children consistently named the picture closest to the card. Thus, if the card was next to the dog, children said "dog," but if the card was placed next to the house, children said "house." These studies demonstrated that children consider print a reflection of the context rather than knowing that print is a symbol (Bialystok & Martin, 2003).

Masonheimer, Drum, & Ehri (1984) examined the environmental print reading skills of preschoolers who demonstrated “expertise” at reading signs and labels. Masonheimer, Drum, & Ehri (1984) looked to determine if these “experts” would notice differences in letter alterations of the familiar signs and labels. Masonheimer et al. (1984) hypothesized that if skill at reading environmental print was a precursor of reading, the skills of the “experts” should not decline much with the removal of context cues. None of the children who participated in the study had received formal reading or alphabet instruction at school. Participants included 228 preschoolers, ranging in age from 2 years old to 5 years old. Very few of these preschoolers had any word reading skills and it was determined that word reading skills do not evolve from environmental print reading skills. The researchers also focused on whether subjects would attend to or ignore letters in familiar labels when reading the labels. As in other studies, Masonheimer et al. (1984) found that children who were considered to be “readers” focused on letters and “pre-readers” ignored the letters and “read” the environment. The study suggested that perhaps the lack of a relationship between environmental print awareness skills and word reading skills is due to the fact that a child does not need to look beyond the contextual cues of the environmental print to be able to identify the information.

Kassow (2006) also illustrated the difficulty in establishing a relationship between environmental print awareness skills and reading skills. Kassow examined the pre-reading and oral language skills of 33 kindergarten children from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds. Results indicated very weak and non-significant

relationships between environmental print and other measures of early reading and writing ability. The study suggested that environmental print is a poor predictor of later reading achievement. Kassow (2006) noted that the ability to recognize signs and labels which develops early in all young children from literate environments, is found in children from racially, linguistically, geographically, and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and does not necessarily lead to other reading skills, such as decoding. According to Kassow's research, while environmental print awareness is an emergent literacy skill that develops in all children, it may actually be very low in the hierarchy of emergent literacy skills. Kassow (2006) was not able to conclude if or how environmental print awareness is related to later reading skills in this study.

Chapter III

Methodology:

The Effect of Early Literacy Exposure in the Home on Reading Development of Kindergartners

Setting:

This study took place at Public School 65, The Academy of Innovative Learning, located on Staten Island, New York. Staten Island is one of the five boroughs of New York City. The exact address of the school is 98 Grant Street, Staten Island, NY, 10301.

Public School 65 is located in the Tompkinsville community of Staten Island. The Tompkinsville community is positioned on the North Shore and comprises 1.630 square miles. There are approximately 14,863 people in the Tompkinsville community. The average yearly income of a family of three in a Tompkinsville neighborhood is \$56,265. The families that make up the Tompkinsville neighborhood are middle-income, making it a moderate income neighborhood. The Tompkinsville community has 22.3% of its population below the federal poverty line.

Public School 65 is in New York City Geographic District #31. The school has 18 full-time teachers and a student to teacher ratio of 18/1. There are 304 students who attend Public School 65. These students range from pre-kindergarten to grade four. The school's student population consists of 39% Black, 31% White, 25% Hispanic and 5% Asian. The 304 member student body includes 60 students in grade 4, 53 students in

grade 3, 52 students in grade 2, 47 students in grade 1, 42 students in kindergarten and 50 students in pre-kindergarten. There is an even split between the boy to girl ratio in the school. The school is up and coming. The school opened in 2008 and has been growing ever since, as in the last three years it has added grades three and four. Next year it will be adding grade five for the first time. The students in grade five are the first group of students that came through the school from the beginning.

Specifically in Public School 65, the study took place in Christine Ferragano's general education kindergarten classroom. This classroom is located on the second floor in room 209. This classroom is where the participant's children attend school every day. The means of data collection were through this classroom, the students in it and their parent's responses. The study itself and comparison to these children's reading level took place outside Ms. Ferragano's individual instruction.

Participants:

The subjects used for this study were the parents of eight kindergarten students in Ms. Ferragano's general education classroom. In Ms. Ferragano's classroom there are 24 students, thirteen boys and eleven girls. These students are between the ages of five and seven. Of these 24 students, eight of their parents were surveyed. Ms. Ferragano first picked eight students at random, four boys and four girls. Once Ms. Ferragano had selected the students, each of these eight students' parents completed a ten question

questionnaire regarding their child's early reading experiences. There was no restriction on the gender of the parent who answered the survey.

Instrumentation:

The primary materials used in this study were paper and writing utensils. The questionnaires that parents completed were on white computer paper. The parents marked down their answers with both pencils and pens. A computer was required for the investigator to create the questionnaires and forms. Access to white computer paper and a printer was necessary in printing out the forms for the parents to fill out. A stapler was needed to staple necessary forms together for the parents. Additional materials included the informed consent form, permission forms, assent forms and thank you letters.

Procedure:

Through a questionnaire, the researcher asked eight parents questions about specific things that they did with their child at home in the early years regarding early print exposure. Parents were asked precise questions about the amount of early literacy that was provided to their child growing up. Parents had the answer options of, "Never," "Rarely," "On Occasion," "Weekly," "Daily" or "Several Times Per Day." The researcher then used parent answers as a number scale. The response of "Never" corresponded with a zero. The response of 'Rarely' corresponded with a one. The response of 'On Occasion' corresponded with a two. The response of 'Weekly'

corresponded with a three. The response of 'Daily' corresponded with a four and the response of 'Several Times Per-Day' corresponded with a five. The researcher then added up the total score of the parent survey. Finally, findings were then compared to the children's initial reading levels when entering kindergarten.

Data Collection:

All data was collected by the researcher. After the parents returned the questionnaires, the researcher marked down their answers to the questions. Parents answered questions with the options of "Never," "Rarely," "On Occasion," "Weekly," "Daily," and "Several Times Per-Day." The researcher then used parent answers as a number scale. The response of "Never" corresponded with a zero. The response of, 'Rarely' corresponded with a one. The response of 'On Occasion' corresponded with a two. The response of 'Weekly' corresponded with a three. The response of 'Daily' corresponded with a four and the response of 'Several Times Per-Day' corresponded with a five. The researcher then added up the total score of the parent survey. There were ten questions on the survey; therefore a score of 50 would be equivalent to a 100%. The researcher then did this for each of the eight surveys. Findings from the survey were then compared to the child's reading level entering kindergarten in the fall. The researcher looked to see if there is a relationship between children's exposure to literacy and their reading scores when entering kindergarten.

Results – Explanation:

All eight surveys were returned by the original chosen families. The following are the results of each survey. Students were labeled 1-8 in recording this information. Reading levels at P.S. 65 are on an alphabetic system, starting with the letter A. Reading level A is the most elementary level. Level A books contain many pictures and few starting sight words. As the books continue through the alphabet they begin to contain more information, vocabulary and sight words. By the time students enter first grade, developmentally the school strives to have them on an E reading level. For each student, their reading level entering kindergarten was noted. The parent response, the number this response corresponds to on the created number scale and their child's score have also been noted. Scores were totaled out of 50 points. The higher the number score, the more noted print that the child had been exposed to before kindergarten.

Table 1 - Early Literacy Exposure Parent Questionnaire Results

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8
Question 1	2	5	2	4	5	4	2	3
Question 2	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3
Question 3	2	4	2	4	5	5	2	4
Question 4	1	4	2	2	4	4	2	3
Question 5	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5
Question 6	2	5	2	5	5	5	2	4
Question 7	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4
Question 8	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5
Question 9	2	4	2	4	5	5	3	4
Question 10	2	5	2	4	5	5	2	4
<i>Reading Level</i>	A	C	A	B	C	B	A	B
Score	28/50	44/50	29/50	41/50	48/50	47/50	30/50	39/50

Student 1:

Student 1 was on an A reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 1 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *on occasion*. 2
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *weekly*. 3
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *on occasion*. 2
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *rarely*. 1
5. Child read words by sight, *daily*. 4
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *on occasion*. 2
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day*. 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *on occasion*. 2
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *on occasion*. 2

Based on the number scale, student 1 received an early literacy exposure score of 28/50.

Student 2:

Student 2 was on a C reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 2 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *several times per day*. 5
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *daily*. 4
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *daily*. 4
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *daily*. 4
5. Child read words by sight, *daily*. 4
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *several times per day*. 5
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *daily*. 4
9. Played rhyming games together, *daily*. 4
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *several times per day*. 5

Based on the number scale, student 2 received an early literacy exposure score of 44/50.

Student 3:

Student 3 was on an A reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 3 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *on occasion*. 2
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *weekly*. 3
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *on occasion*. 2
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *on occasion*. 2
5. Child read words by sight, *daily*. 4
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *on occasion*. 2
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day*. 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *on occasion*. 2
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *on occasion*. 2

Based on the number scale, student 3 received an early literacy exposure score of 29/50.

Student 4:

Student 4 was on a B reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 4 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *daily*. 4
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *daily*. 4
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *daily*. 4
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *on occasion*. 2
5. Child read words by sight, *daily*. 4
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *several times per day*. 5
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day*. 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *daily*. 4
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *daily*. 4

Based on the number scale, student 4 received an early literacy exposure score of 41/50.

Student 5:

Student 5 was on a C reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 5 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *several times per day.* 5
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *daily.* 4
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *several times per day.* 5
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *daily.* 4
5. Child read words by sight, *several times per day.* 5
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *several times per day.* 5
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day.* 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day.* 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *several times per day.* 5
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *several times per day.* 5

Based on the number scale, student 5 received an early literacy exposure score of 48/50.

Student 6:

Student 6 was on a B reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 6 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *daily*. 4
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *daily*. 4
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *several times per day*. 5
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *daily*. 4
5. Child read words by sight, *several times per day*. 5
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *several times per day*. 5
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day*. 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *several times per day*. 5
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *several times per day*. 5

Based on the number scale, student 6 received an early literacy exposure score of 47/50.

Student 7:

Student 7 was on an A reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 7 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *on occasion*. 2
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *daily*. 4
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *on occasion*. 2
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *on occasion*. 2
5. Child read words by sight, *daily*. 4
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *on occasion*. 2
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *several times per day*. 5
8. Child took interest in drawing, *daily*. 4
9. Played rhyming games together, *on occasion*. 2
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *weekly*. 3

Based on the number scale, student 7 received an early literacy exposure score of 30/50.

Student 8:

Student 8 was on a B reading level when entering kindergarten.

The parent of Student 8 had the following responses to the survey:

1. Pointed out signs and words when together, *weekly*. 3
2. Child identified words in the environment by him-or herself, *weekly*. 3
3. Child asked for help in reading words, *daily*. 4
4. Played, The License Plate Game while driving together in the car, *weekly*. 3
5. Child read words by sight, *several times per day*. 5
6. Child showed interest in adult reading materials, *daily*. 4
7. Child had access to writing utensils, *daily*. 4
8. Child took interest in drawing, *several times per day*. 5
9. Played rhyming games together, *daily*. 4
10. Child tried to play rhyming games, *daily*. 4

Based on the number scale, student 8 received an early literacy exposure score of 39/50.

Results:

The data from this study shows that there is reason to believe that there is in fact a relationship between children's exposure to literacy in the early years and their reading scores when entering kindergarten. In looking at the data, students who had higher literacy exposure scores had higher reading levels entering kindergarten. Without exception, the students that entered kindergarten on reading level A had early literacy exposure scores of under 30/50. There were three students that had less than a 30/50 early literacy exposure score. Student 1 had an early literacy exposure score of 28/50. Student 3 had an early literacy exposure score of 29/50. Student 7 had an early literacy exposure score of 30/50. The students who entered kindergarten on reading level B had an early literacy exposure score of between a 39/50 and 47/50. Student 4 had an early literacy exposure score of 44/50. Student 6 had an early literacy exposure score of 47/50. Student 8 had an early literacy exposure score of 39/50. Finally, the students who entered kindergarten on a reading level C had an early literacy exposure score of between 44/50 and 48/50. Student 2 had an early literacy exposure score of 44/50. Student 8 had an early literacy exposure score of 48/50. This was the highest early literacy exposure score. This student also entered kindergarten on the highest noted level. Though Student 6, who entered kindergarten on reading level B, had a higher exposure to print than Student 2, who entered kindergarten on reading level C, there is still a correlation between the variables being studied. When comparing Student 6 with other students studied who entered kindergarten on reading level A, Student 6 still entered with a higher

reading level and overall more early print exposure. This student is exemplifying that exposure to literacy in the home environment before entering school will result in children receiving the base they need to begin to become successful readers. The parents of students who entered kindergarten on a C reading level had no responses of “rarely” or “on occasion.” They provided their students with many opportunities to be exposed to print weekly, daily or even several times per day. Students who entered kindergarten at an A reading level had many more “rarely” and “on occasion” answers.

Chapter IV

Limitations:

One of the biggest limitations of this study is accuracy. When taking surveys, researchers run the risk of not being able to tell if participants are answering in a way that is consistent with their actual experience. There is no way to look back in a child's life and see if they really did have these certain experiences as frequently or infrequently as a parent is portraying. Surveys that study parenting get especially tricky. Parents often do not want to feel like they did something "wrong" or that their child missed out on something. Parents of the eight students in this study may have marked off something at a higher rate so that they did not feel embarrassed when sending back the survey in their child's "Take Home Folder." Parents could have wanted to circle that they have "never" played "The License Plate Game," but said that they played it "rarely" just because they didn't want to admit it or seem like a "bad parent" to their child's teacher. In getting the surveys back, the researcher had to take the parents word for their answers and use the numbers given.

Another limitation under the idea of accuracy is that the surveys were not anonymous. If parents were able to answer without feeling like their answers were going to be judged and compared to their child, they may have answered more precisely. For this study the researcher had to compare the results to children's reading level, so names were necessary. It would be interesting to have had the researcher send home the same survey home anonymously and see if parents' answers varied.

Another limitation with this study is the ‘other’ section. There are so many ways that parents can expose their children to print every single day. The researcher had to single out ten ways that were very common and easy for parents to note, but results were tallied based on only these items. Many parents have certain games, routines and additional things that they do with their child that may also expose them to large amounts of print. It is difficult to judge using only ten base questions, but more than that might have caused parents to feel overwhelmed by the survey. This leads into another limitation, distraction. Parents may have felt pressured to return the survey the very next day or as soon as possible. Coming back to the idea of how they are portrayed, parents may not want to look like they forgot about the survey. Parents may have answered quickly just to get the survey done and back in their child’s folder. With rushing or distraction comes an answer that may not be completely true. A parent may have filled out the survey quickly while cooking dinner and trying to help their children with their homework. These answers may be different than if they had filled out the survey over a cup of tea while sitting alone at the kitchen table. There is no way to tell how and when parents completed the survey. The researcher just had to trust that they answered to the best of their ability.

A final limitation is the number of survey questions and the number of parents surveyed. A difficulty that Ms. Ferragano has in her classroom is parent correspondence. She has had students return their “Take Home Folder” day after day with the same papers that she sent home a week ago in the slide folder. For validity purposes, the researcher

wanted to pick a number that would certainly be returned by the parents in the classroom. The researcher also didn't want to overwhelm the parents who were completing the survey with too many questions. If the survey had any more than ten questions or two pages, parents may have been turned off by the length.

Discussion/Conclusions:

This study has shown that there is probably a strong connection between children's early exposure to print and their reading scores when entering kindergarten. The survey allowed parents the opportunity to show the quantity of print experience their child encountered before kindergarten. The study worked as well as it did because the questions to participants were exact and to the point. The survey gave parents a clear and concise way to note exactly how much early print exposure their child truly had. The questions were not too long-winded. Parents were able to answer each question and move onto the next one. The text was simple enough that if a parent was a struggling reader, this parent would not be too overwhelmed by the vocabulary.

The answers that parents gave to the researcher were in measurable terms. Having a 0-5 grading scale kept the results easy to assess. Though the researcher was curious to see other things that the families did at home involving print awareness, additional added activities did not affect their child's overall print awareness exposure score. Doing this would have taken away from the study's validity to begin assigning points for activities that other families may have also done. These other parents may not have remembered or did not have the time to put it down in the other section.

The researcher asked questions about all sorts of ways to expose children to print. Diverse questions were posed that did not favor one type of parenting or way of being raised. Parents were asked questions about things that they may have done, things that their child may have done alone or things that they may have done with their child. The variety of questions was strong. If parents did not play many games with things in the environment, they still had other areas that they could demonstrate print exposure such as, through writing, singing, drawing or playing. The questions allowed parents to reflect back on specific games or activities that promoted print awareness. This survey reminded parents about the little things that they may or may not have done with their children. It also could have been a refresher for parents of things that they could do with their child in the future. One parent noted at the bottom that they, “love playing school with their child.” Parents often do not realize that in playing, their child is getting early exposure to print. When playing school on the chalk board, the child is getting the chance to see print and to understand that it contains meaning. This is just another opportunity for them to absorb in the meanings of things and learn to label the environment around them. Parents can also take turns reading books to the “class” when playing school. This activity would once again reaffirm the idea that the print in the book has meaning.

In all ten questions on each of the eight surveys, not one parent answered “never” to any of the questions. There was in fact some form of print exposure in each of the important areas for children. The researcher was thankful for this, as it was nice to see

that all eight students were exposed to some sort of language before entering kindergarten. From this study, the researcher learned the vital importance of early print exposure. The difference between children who entered kindergarten on a level B or C, rather than an A was apparently the quantity of exposure. The children who entered on a level A only did about 2/3 of the activities. They had exposure, but it is the extent that will really prepare them to be ready to read in school.

There are some researchers who argue that very young children are merely memorizing symbols, but there is reason to believe that early print exposure is more than that. There are a variety of ways that children can be exposed to print, without memorizing symbols. Interestingly, three of the eight parents noted that they put subtitles on their television while their children watch it. This allows their children an opportunity to see the words that they are hearing come from the television. It is also a constant reminder to them that print has meaning and meaning controls action. This was a very unique way to incorporate print awareness into an ever-changing world. Often children are glued to the newest piece of technology, so it was very interesting and creative of parents to incorporate literacy into watching television. It is great if one of their favorite characters says a single word or phrase over and over and the child continuously sees it on the screen. This provides repeated reminders that these words are spelled the same way and written the same way every single time.

Two parents also mentioned in the “other” section was the use of magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Through this, the parents are giving children the opportunity to play

around with letters. They can develop motor skills while learning to spell their name. Parents who are in the kitchen can take this time to interact with their child. Though meal time is often a busy time for parents, while preparing a meal they can also use the magnetic letters. A parent could spell out the word “dog.” They can then turn to the child and say, “I spelled dog. Dog starts with a D.” Even if the child does not show a reaction to this comment through the use of letters, it is still a moment that they could take in what the parent said and comprehended that the parent used the letters to make a word.

One of the most interesting things that parents noted was that all children identified words in the environment by him-or herself, weekly if not, daily. This is showing that regardless of their reading level and how much they are recognizing, the children took note of the words in their immediate environment. The first step is realizing. Once children can comprehend that print has meaning, they will be able to further learn and grow as developing readers. The next step is more exposure. Parents should constantly draw share information with children and draw attention to the words in their immediate environment. For instance, when walking to the mailbox, a parent can take the time to point out a car stopping at a stop sign. A parent can say, “That stop sign says STOP on it. That tells the cars that they need to stop.”

One of the most important things that parents noted was that their child had daily access to writing utensils. Writing materials are vital at this age for children. Print awareness doesn't stop at the ability to notice things in the environment. Even before

these students came to school they had already become familiar with the idea of print. Even if they were just scribbling on a pad of paper next to mom as she created her grocery list, it is refreshing to know that this was an option for them. Having writing utensils available for children allows for endless possibilities in the early years. Their creativity is high and once they begin, they can learn and grow from their own encounters with print.

All eight parents also noted that their child took an interest in drawing, at least weekly. This is another important thing as children are developing an interest in print. They may have seen mom or dad sketch a quick picture on the white board in the kitchen or an older brother or sister doodling. Having an interest may be a step towards promoting literacy that could be researched further. Parents can use this time to talk to kids about how many books have an illustrator and how pictures also can contain meaning. If a child draws a picture and proclaims to their parent “cat,” the parent can take the time to say, “You drew a cat. I am going to write the word cat right under it.” A simple interaction like this can show children not only the letters that make up cat, but that those letters combined make up the word that represents cat. The child can then use this interaction for the future. They can then begin to label their work with either their written or spoken words.

This study reaffirms that every family is different. Children are going to enter the classroom at extremely different levels and a variety of background experiences. Some children are going to be very familiar with the idea of playing house when they first get

to school and enter the dramatic play area. They are going to know how to play and how to use and name the items around them. They may be able to enter this center and be able to incorporate writing materials through adding a “grocery list.” Others may not have this background knowledge. Once again, these findings reinforce the idea that early print exposure is important.

Implications For Future Practice:

After viewing the results of this study, it is clear that teachers need to be aware of children’s backgrounds, cultures, and experiences in order to provide appropriate instruction. By creating rich opportunities for all children to share prior knowledge and related experiences, teachers can engage the interest of children from various backgrounds and help them to better understand what they read. Teachers need to remember that all students are different and that there are many different ways to expose them to print.

Children enter kindergarten with a variety of literacy experiences that contribute to their development of literacy skills. Once children enter their classrooms, teachers begin to assess where the child is developmentally and where they want them to be. Effective kindergarten teachers assess these skills and tailor instruction accordingly in order to build on the existing framework of literacy development that each child brings to the classroom. Children are going to be on many different reading levels and teachers need to keep this in mind when lesson planning.

In addition to differentiating reading instruction, teachers need to provide children with a variety of printed materials for practice. Examples of these include books and environmental print, such as signs and labels. Teachers want to work to increase student's sight vocabulary so they can recognize a large proportion of the words in print. Teachers can also advise parents to label the children's environment at home. This will help them to quickly recognize everyday items, such as a bookshelf or a table.

Another thing teachers can do is to reach out to parents before school begins to see what they have already done in regards to early print exposure with their children. So much focus is placed on families in pre-literacy skills as they are their child's first teacher. The problem often lies in many parents do not know what specific early literacy tactics are beneficial to their child. Early childhood educators can let parents know of the importance of early print awareness. Teachers can hold groups for parents and even get in touch with the local pre-school in the area to get the word out. Informational classes for parents whose children have not entered kindergarten would be extremely beneficial. Educators can let parents know of the importance of getting their children to create through their environment, especially using pictures. Teachers can show parents examples of how things like finger-painting and drawing may seem simple, but show developing literacy skills. Teachers can teach parents to work with their children to look at pictures closely and label their work.

Implications For Future Research:

Future researchers should construct studies with larger numbers of kindergartners. The larger the studies, the more generalizable the findings will be. A larger number gives researchers more examples to compare and contrast findings. Also a larger number of questions will give future researchers more data to examine deeper.

If future researchers had the opportunity to conduct future studies they should try and diversify the population of participants used by including students from different schools and districts. It would be interesting to look at the scores of children's early print exposure from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. It would be especially interesting to look at student' early print exposure scores from high socio-economic backgrounds. These students have often the resources, yes, but frequently their parents do not have the time to sit down with them or participate in many of these activities. It would be interesting to read other studies of researchers looking into the amount of time that children spend with their parents or the person who is taking responsibility for introducing print to them.

It would also be very interesting to look a few years down the road. This would allow researchers to be able to compare findings through the years and see if early print exposure does in fact lead to creating lifelong readers. As children get older, it would also be more feasible to provide them with a survey. As they get older, these children can be asked questions about specific things that they remember about their childhood.

These children would also be old enough to understand certain games and could recall other similar activities that they had participated in.

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Appendices**Early Literacy Parent Questionnaire**

Name: _____

Child's Name: _____ Child's Age: _____

Parents, please answer the following questions by circling your response on the scale provided. Please only answer questions in regards to the time BEFORE your child entered Kindergarten.

1. Did you point out signs and words such as restaurant names to your child?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

2. Did your child identify words in the environment by him-or herself?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

3. Did your child ask for help in reading words such as signs or words on food packages?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

4. Did you and your child ever play The License Plate Game while driving together in the car?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

5. Did your child read any words by sight?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

6. Did your child show interest in adult reading materials, such as magazines or newspapers?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

7. Did your child have access to writing utensils?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

8. Did your child draw?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

9. Did you play rhyming games with your child?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

10. Did your child try and play rhyming games with you or others?

Never Rarely On Occasion Weekly Daily Several Times Per-Day

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