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Examining the Role that Families Play in Shaping Children's Attitudes toward Reading

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EXAMINING THE ROLE THAT FAMILIES PLAY IN SHAPING CHILDREN'S
ATTITUDES TOWARD READING

by

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in the Program of
Early Childhood Studies

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EXAMINING THE ROLE THAT FAMILIES PLAY IN SHAPING CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD READING

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Master of Arts
Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University

When we reduce the idea of learning to read and write to memorization and copying letters, the sense of power and expansiveness that comes from reading and writing eludes children who are only taught through prescribed, out of context literacy activities. In contrast, children who are surrounded with meaningful print and stories can't wait to unlock the secrets of this powerful form of human communication.

Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 80

ABSTRACT

This qualitative investigation presents findings from interviews and observations with 6 mothers and 7 children (ages 6 to 8) in Vaughan, Ontario. The purpose of this research study was to examine the rituals and routines in the home environment that impacted children's attitudes toward reading. By incorporating the perspectives of children, the researcher sought to answer the question of "why" there continues to be a steady decline in positive attitudes amongst primary children. Using a grounded theory approach, the findings suggest that it was not exclusively the rituals and routines which children had that shaped their attitudes. Rather, participants identified distinct principles of motivation, engagement and the roles of peers, siblings and parents as being influential. The findings demonstrate the value of supporting children in locating their own purpose when reading and exploring literacy opportunities as a shared experience.

Key words: children's attitudes to reading, early literacy, parents' literacy beliefs, family literacy practices, motivation, engagement

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview of the Issues

Language and literacy acquisition is a central means for teaching and learning within schools in Western culture. Despite the abundance of research emphasizing the importance of reading and mastering the accompanying literacy skills, it is concerning that many primary children continue to experience a steady decline in their interest and motivation to read (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Kush & Watkin, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen, 2006; Lever-Chain, 2008; People for Education, 2011). A child's ability to read and master a broad range of literacy skills is associated with both academic and professional success. As Lilles, Griffiths, Lee, Cardenas, Chacko and Jimerson (2008) emphasize: "reading is a core academic skill that not only lays the foundation for educational achievement, but also provides the groundwork necessary for life-long success" (p. 19). It is a child's inability to possess these skills and knowledge, which potentially creates a roadblock in the opportunities that are available. For example, a child who is unable to grasp simple phonetic concepts or meaning-making skills may struggle on a math test that requires a problem to be read, in order to determine its solution. This same child who may continue through his or her academic life, unable to grasp the basic skills of the written and oral language may find that the opportunities that are available in both academic and professional pursuits, may as a result, be compromised.

As Freedman-DeVito (2004) highlights:

reading is important to children, because not only is it necessary for survival in the world of schools and universities, but in adult life as well. The ability to learn about new subjects and find helpful information on anything from health problems and consumer protection...depends on the ability to read. (as cited in Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011, p. 178)

In recent years, the importance of the home environment and the influence of family on children's language and literacy skills, has been well documented and highlighted (Heath, 1983; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Mctavish, 2007; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich & Kim, 2010; Griesheber, Shield, Luke & Macdonald, 2011). Investigating the homes where children often make their first encounters with literacy skills and reading therefore appears as an integral starting point for understanding children's rituals and attitudes toward reading. As DeBaryshe, Binder and Buell (2000) note: "the importance of the home environment is grounded in the fact that the home serves as a setting in which language and literacy is typically first encountered" (as cited in Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006, p. 194).

As I sit and recall my primary experiences with reading and literacy learning, my memories bring me back to a time when the teacher held the authoritarian role, shaping and building a classroom in which I felt no connection. My role and that of my parents seemed that of passive recipients of knowledge; whereas teachers were those responsible for providing the information, tools and skills that children needed to move forward. Our daily tasks as children included dull and predictable routines, generic worksheets and teacher-directed activities. These tasks failed to spark even the slightest interest for me. It remained a constant struggle to get me through the front door, as mornings were often filled with tears and feelings of frustration.

My greatest struggles were in reading and writing and a fundamental concern for my teachers during my early primary years. My parents attributed my struggles to our family speaking a non-dominant language and furthermore, to me demonstrating a lack of initiative and interest in reading. Teachers would remark to my parents that although an energetic and creative child, I failed to possess a deeper level of critical thinking and writing that was "typical" for my age. This contributed to frustration and feelings of failure on their part. As recently landed

immigrants, they wanted nothing more than for their children to enjoy the educational opportunities and success that their own primary years had not afforded. Thinking back, there was nothing exciting about being forced to read dull pre-selected novels, write book reports and complete endless generic worksheets to demonstrate my skills. It was these activities which failed to nurture my creative instincts and gain my attention as a young child. Little value and attention was paid to the learning that happened at home which included regular engagement in various reading and writing activities with my sibling. I marveled at the stories of my parents' early years as children and happily immersed myself in the traditional fairy tales read by my mother in her native language, each evening. It was these rituals and activities which appeared overlooked and undervalued in the Canadian classroom.

Teachers often discouraged my parents from speaking their native language. They emphasized the importance of reading and language acquisition of the dominant language to ensure optimal educational opportunities for me in the future. Of particular interest many years later, is how I continue to share similar stories and struggles with the families of children who I work and interact with, many of whom are native-born Canadians. Their fears and anxieties seem to mirror many of the concerns and frustrations that my parents once felt, where encouraging their own children to read becomes a constant battle and endless struggle.

My struggles as a young child have been inspirational as I maintain a strong desire to advocate for meaningful and engaging literacy instruction and opportunities within today's classrooms. Recent research has identified the value of bridging a connection between the home and school environment (Lee & Johnson, 2007; Mctavish, 2007; Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009) and the abundance of learning that can happen within the home. It is these first experiences with language and literacy acquisition which merits greater consideration, particularly when shaping

classrooms and curriculum geared towards literacy learning. Carter, Chard and Pool (2009)

remind us that

children's early language and literacy opportunities are embedded throughout the social and cultural contexts in which they live. Identifying the unique context and culture of an individual child allows us to better understand their strengths and the literacy learning opportunities [that have been made available] to them. (p. 520)

In this study, I investigated the home environments where children often make their first meaningful connections with reading and literacy learning, addressing the following research question: How do children's rituals and routines around reading at home impact their attitudes toward reading? This central question was explored with the following sub-questions:

- a) What are the routines and activities which tend to foster a positive attitude toward reading?
- b) Do parents' perceptions of their children's reading attitudes align with those of their children?

If not, where does the discrepancy lie?

Conceptual Framework

My own research and queries have been inspired by the work of Howard Gardner (1983; 1999a), Michael Wyness (2005) and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Their theories lay a strong foundation for re-evaluating classrooms, perceptions and re-examining the systematic influences that impact child development. Central to this qualitative study is an understanding of the overlapping spheres and systematic influences that impact child development, whether in homes, schools and communities as highlighted in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model.

Embedded within these spheres of influence, a new ideological model of literacy flourishes (Street, 1984), which draws attention to children's literacy learning as more than an autonomous acquisition of skills rather, as a social practice. Understanding literacy as a social practice requires educators to acknowledge the multiple purposes and uses of literacy learning within the

social and cultural contexts (Marsh & Hallet, 2008), which shape young lives. It is these contexts where children's perceptions and attitudes toward reading are often first bred.

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (1983; 1999a) recognizes that children enter the classroom with diverse capabilities and intelligences. His theory which examines eight distinctive intelligences encourages educators to explore a deeper psychological investigation of children's cognitive abilities and talents. Gardner challenges educators however, to consider the emphasis that they often place on shaping children's intellectual abilities. It is this preoccupation which is believed to minimize the importance placed on motivation, which he identifies as one of the key indicators of educational success. As Gardner (1999b) states:

if one is motivated to learn, one is likely to work hard, to be persistent, to be stimulated rather than discouraged by obstacles, and to continue to learn even when not pressed to do so, for the sheer pleasure of quenching curiosity or stretching one's faculties in unfamiliar directions. (p. 76)

Specifically relating to reading Gardner draws on the importance of motivation.

"Individuals should be motivated to read because they are curious about essential questions and because they are convinced that some inroads can be made through reading pertinent works of nonfiction and fiction" (Gardner, 1999b, p. 218). It is his perception which challenges both parents and educators to consider strategies that will continue to motivate and engage young readers in meaningful contexts for inquiry and discovery.

Gardner's (1983; 1999a) theory calls attention to children demonstrating multiple capacities and aptitudes. Whether demonstrating intelligence through musical, spatial and/or bodily-kinesthetic activities, educators and families alike are encouraged to reflect on how these capacities may be embedded in language and literacy opportunities, which will motivate young readers. As Moran, Kornhaber and Gardner (2006) emphasize:

adopting a multiple intelligence approach can bring about a quiet revolution in the way students see themselves and others. Multiple intelligences theory proposes that it is more fruitful to describe an individual's cognitive ability in terms of several relatively independent but interesting cognitive capacities rather than in terms of a single 'general' intelligence. (p. 22)

The underlying goal is that of welcoming a meaningful context for all learners. His theory further highlights the variety of human behavior and the different value that people place on intelligence, often impacted by the cultures and communities in which they live. "Some communities in Northern India or West Africa, value musical and kinesthetic intelligence...[others have] suggested that intelligence is defined in some African communities as learning how to be helpful to others" (Penn, 2008, p. 57). Educators should consider how their classrooms, assessment methods and curricular expectations around reading can be re-evaluated to include the values and intelligences brought forth by culturally diverse children.

Michael Wyness' (2005) work in sociology centres on the value of including children's voices and active participation in the decisions that not only shape the foundations of the home and classroom, but also in educational and political decision-making. Rather than children "being seen as social actors drawing on a wider range of resources in constructing their identities, they become the projects of adults, to be shaped and molded" (Wyness, 2005, p. 8). Wyness promotes the notion that children are competent beings. He places an emphasis and value on them being actively involved and contributing to decision-making processes, particularly those that impact their lives. "It is of importance in childhood studies to take the child's perspective, to listen to children's voices, and in doing so to aim for knowledge that takes into account the standpoint of children" (Hallden, 2005, p. 4).

The value of children's voices and perspectives lays the foundation of this qualitative investigation, where children are given the opportunity to have a voice beyond what a generic

questionnaire may provide. As Nutbrown and Hannon (2003) emphasize, “educational research is one of the last arenas in society where it is still the case that children-especially young children-are seen and not heard” (p. 116). In investigating the literature on children’s attitudes, it should be noted that studies which incorporated the voice and perspectives of the child (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen 2006; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008; People for Education, 2011) were limited to questionnaires, failing to provide a more detailed and holistic account of their perceptions. It is by incorporating their voice and perspectives in this investigation that the researcher sought to fill the gap in the literature on children’s attitudes toward reading.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model examines the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, four different yet interrelated spheres of influence on child development. This investigation explores the innermost sphere, the microsystem, which focuses on both parents and children sharing literacy experiences. Parents and siblings are seen as playing a valuable and active role in fostering literacy acquisition and reading. Bronfenbrenner (2005) states that a child’s psychological development “is enhanced through his involvement in progressively more complex, enduring patterns of reciprocal contingent interaction with persons with whom he has established a mutual and enduring emotional attachment” (p. 34). Children’s development reflects the influence of these systems, where children are seen as actively involved in constructing these social systems. Learning and thinking is seen as a social activity within the ecological model, where the influence of the home, communities and larger societies are valuable in shaping the context where children’s literacy learning takes place. As Barbarin and Wasik (2009) highlight:

An ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) suggests that children develop as participants in an elaborate concert in which

their own characteristics interact with those of other people and contexts over time. Development is the result of increasingly complex interaction between the child and his or her environments. (p. 226)

Recognizing the impacts of systems which shape this development is fundamental so to shape meaningful contexts and opportunities for literacy learning within the classroom. Whether reflecting the influence of families, schools or communities, children's acquisition of skills and knowledge needs to be understood within the social contexts in which children interact and inhabit.

My own knowledge, experiences and theoretical framework, provides a broader lens for understanding how different children make connections with literacy learning and reading. Understanding the systems that influence child development and recognizing the significance of including the voice of the child and celebrating their diverse abilities, is important for both parents and educators. It is these principles that need to be supported and considered in shaping both home and classroom practices which may in turn foster an interest in literacy learning and reading. The value of making connections with the home environment and understanding many of the rituals and routines that are embedded in this context reminds educators of the value of reflective practice. Through reflection, educators are encouraged to consider how their teaching approaches around reading and literacy instruction, reflect the opportunities and the meaningful connections that are encountered prior to children entering the classroom. Of significance is how teachers can use this knowledge, to re-evaluate their own teaching approaches and expectations, working in collaboration with parents to engage children in socially and personally meaningful ways through reading.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this investigation the following key terminology will be defined as follows:

- *Family literacy* will be defined as the innumerable ways that literacy is practiced and encouraged within the context of the family.
- *Reading attitude* will be defined as “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions that make reading more or less probable” (Smith, 1990, p. 215).
- *Beliefs* will be defined as “knowledge or ideas accepted by an individual as true or as probable answers to questions of fact” (Evans, Fox, Cremaso & McKinnon, 2004, p. 131).
- *Intrinsic Motivation* will be defined as “the enjoyment of reading and the disposition to seek out reading activities. This can be based on a number of different feelings, including curiosity, involvement and challenge” (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004, p. 373).
- *Engagement* will be defined as an activity which attracts, occupies or holds the attention of a participant. This activity is not limited to books rather, may include literacy-related materials and activities throughout the home.
- *A holistic approach* will be defined as an approach to promoting literacy and reading which considers the whole child. It encompasses and considers children’s culture, voice, values, beliefs, traditions and strengths as an individual. As Miller (1999) notes: “in seeking to nurture the human spirit as well as to improve academic ability and performance, holistic learning attempts to provide a broader vision of education and human development” (p. 46).

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

As Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) note “despite a plethora of educational literature attesting to the value of children’s literature and reading interests, it seems that finding ways to effectively develop children’s interest in reading has not been adequately addressed” (p. 179). It is proposed therefore, that exploring the homes where children first encounter reading and literacy learning is a pivotal starting point for researchers to address one of the gaps in the research centered on children’s attitudes toward reading.

The home can be seen as a place where children often make their first meaningful connections with literacy learning whether through the exchange of books, their exposure to various print-rich resources and/or materials. Often fostered through the presence of parents or siblings, it is the roles that families sustain in supporting children’s interests and exposure to literacy learning which requires merit and further attention. It is these key elements which provide the foundation on which this investigation and literature review has been presented. For the purpose of this review, literature has been selected that will address the following key points of discussion: children’s attitudes toward reading; children’s motivation for reading; family literacy practices and parents’ literacy beliefs.

Children’s Attitudes Toward Reading

Schatz and Krashen’s (2006) quantitative study explored children’s attitudes toward reading asking the primary question “do you like to read?” Using a sample of convenience, the participants included 812 children that were enrolled in four elementary schools in Fort Collin, Colorado. The findings within this investigation indicated that there is very little dislike of reading at the primary level. A decline in enthusiasm is noted however, as children in grade one,

three and five most often indicated “kind of” versus “a lot” when answering the question “do you like to read?” It may be inferred that the findings from this investigation are inconclusive, as a result of the significant variation in the number of participants that were surveyed from each school and in each grade level. Additional research addressing this variability and children’s attitudes at different ages and stages in their education is warranted.

A finding which draws attention in Schatz and Krashen’s (2006) study was that despite differences in poverty levels and the participation of English Language Learners, few children indicated a dislike for reading. Using the simple question “do you like to read?” to guide an entire investigation however appears problematic, as it fails to provide readers with a holistic account of why children enjoyed or were disinterested in reading. Children’s perceptions depend on their own interpretation of the question, possibly isolating the question as simply including reading within school versus recreational reading. Their responses to this question may have varied, had reading been associated with a particular context, whether reading at school or within the home. Schatz and Krashen’s (2006) investigation provides a starting point for future educators and researchers, to identify when an initial decline in enthusiasm for reading, may begin.

Sizmur’s (2008) report on the findings from the third National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) 2007 national reading survey provides a broader lens for examining children’s attitudes and extends the findings in Schatz and Krashen’s (2006) study. This quantitative investigation not only explored children’s enjoyment of reading, but also their confidence and preference for particular reading genres. The NFER’s goal in running the third national survey was to determine whether any significant changes in attitudes were notable when compared to the feedback of children who had participated in the 2003 and 1998 surveys. The

2007 study included a total of 4477 primary school pupils across England in a sample of 61 schools; 2278 students were in Year 4 and 2199 children were in Year 6 of their studies.

In terms of the genre of books, younger children were more inclined to read stories, information books and comics. Magazines and newspapers were more popular with older children. Although the enjoyment of reading appeared to have stabilized since 2003, it remained well below the level of enjoyment that had been noted amongst children in the 1998 survey. A similar decline in enjoyment was also noted amongst Ontario students since 1998, in grade 3 and grade 6, highlighted in the report presented by People for Education (2011). In the NFER study, 72 percent of participants indicated a greater feeling of confidence which was associated with higher levels of reading. This could possibly be attributed to having gained additional literacy skills over the years. One third of nine-year-olds indicated that they enjoyed reading with a grown-up and over 70 percent indicated that they read to an adult at home. Consistent with surveys that had been administered in 1998 and 2003, it was found that 65 percent of children reported enjoying reading, with younger children indicating a greater enjoyment of reading than the older children.

Although the study focuses on children's attitudes in the later primary years, this investigation highlights how critical it is for educators and researchers alike, to explore several of the factors impacting children's motivation and interest during the early years. By identifying these factors and key indicators, educators and families may consider approaches and rituals which may be embedded during early childhood. This strategy may address children's continued enjoyment, interest and confidence with reading throughout the later part of their lives. Similar to Schatz and Krashen's (2006) study and the People for Education (2011) report, the survey fails to provide a broader lens for understanding the underlying reasons for children's

preferences for certain genres of books, current attitudes and their interests. Children were required to agree, disagree, or indicate unsure on the statements that were presented on the survey, solely.

The NFER's (2007) study indicated that girls' responses were noted as significantly more positive than boys, whereas boys demonstrated a preference for other activities such as watching television. The boys often mentioned that reading was something that they found difficult and boring. Lever-Chain's (2008) two year longitudinal study extends to the perceptions of boy's attitudes toward reading, including a sample of 60 British boys who were randomly selected from 18 schools so to measure their reading attitudes. Participants were between the ages of 4 years and 9 months and 5 years and 1 month, who were entering the classroom in the fall. The Photographic Reading Instrument (PRAI, which is designed for ages 5-7) (Lever-Chain, 2002, pp. 320-363) alongside qualitative data from verbal responses to the reading instrument, were used as tools to explore children's attitudes and perceptions about reading.

Negative attitudes were most often attributed to school-related reading, adult-directed reading and the actual process of learning how to read. The small number of boys who did show tendencies for more favorable attitudes shared vivid experiences with particular books that they had been exposed to or read (Lever-Chain, 2008). More than half of the boys cited the purpose of reading as something to be enjoyed. One-quarter of the boys who saw it as an adult-directed task or compulsory activity, expressed negative feelings toward reading. The study highlights the value of addressing and recognizing the motivational factors that inspire young readers beyond the value placed on the acquisition of skills and the implementation of standardized testing (People for Education, 2011), prominent within the curriculum and expectations embedded within Canadian classrooms. As noted in the report by People for Education (2011):

while the increase in Ontario's students' reading scores is to be applauded, the decrease in their love of reading is worrying. It is possible that our focus on targets for test scores and on the 'mechanics' of literacy have had an impact on students' attitudes. (p. 4)

Sainsbury and Schagen's (2004) study used a longitudinal, comparative study to explore primary students' attitudes toward reading. The researchers' intention was to determine whether children's attitudes had changed over a five year period, during a time when the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), a government initiative, had been implemented in England. This was a major government initiative that had been put in place, to allot more resources, both human and material, to initiate an interest in reading. A sample of 5076 participants in grade 4 and grade 6 were used and children were asked to complete questionnaires, including 18 questions that explored their interest in reading. Questions also addressed their attitudes toward reading particular texts, their level of confidence with reading and allowed children to identify places where they were exposed to reading i.e. within the home. The results suggested a steady decline in positive attitudes toward reading however a greater confidence in reading, similar to the findings presented in the NFER (2007) study. The researchers attributed this confidence to an increase in the acquisition of skills over the grades which would provide greater success in reading, as a result.

Classroom teachers were responsible for administering the questionnaire to their students, although the study did not indicate whether formal training had been provided. They were urged to support children by helping them to read the questionnaire and reassured the children that the questionnaire was not meant to locate a correct answer. Children were expected to provide an answer which they felt was true about their feelings and opinions. The results show that attitudes in grade 4 were more positive than in grade 6. This is consistent with the findings in Schatz and Krashen's (2006) study where a gradual decline in attitudes from grade 1 to grade 6 was noted.

Boys' and girls' responses were analyzed separately, indicating that girls' attitudes were found to be significantly more positive than boys. This reflects the more current work in the NFER's (2007) study and the recent report by the People for Education (2011), which addresses the attitudes of children in the Ontario classrooms. This report further substantiates Sainsbury and Schagen's (2004) findings.

Kush and Watkin's (1996) 3 year longitudinal study in a southwestern, suburban school district explored the long-term stability of children's attitudes toward reading. Using a sample of 189 students, 83 boys and 107 girls, in Grades 1-4, the authors explored the developmental trends in reading attitudes. Gender differences were also addressed as a secondary goal in their investigation. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990) was used, as children were given 20 questions to measure their reading attitudes. The initial ERAS was completed in the fall of 1990 and later in the spring of 1993. The results suggested a consistent decline amongst participants over the three year period, in both academic and recreational reading. The girls over the three year period however, exhibited consistently more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than boys. Although the reading attitudes of all children is significant, this study reiterates the importance of directing further attention to boys attitudes upon entry into school, consistent with the findings presented in Lever-Chain's (2008) study.

Research dating back to the 1990s and through to recent years has consistently found that disengagement occurs gradually throughout the elementary years, despite initial reports of high reading engagement during early childhood. With the convergence of findings on the decreased interest in reading, replicated and consistent within the findings presented within this brief literature review, an opportunity to address the question of "why" children continue to

experience a steady decline and interest in reading appears valuable. The studies which have been described provide a starting point and lay a foundation for understanding and highlighting the importance of addressing the decline in children's positive attitudes. Qualitative investigations which offer a subjective account of children's perceptions and a holistic account of their experiences with reading are warranted. Similar to the in-depth study being carried out within this investigation, this is one method which may be sought to address the gap in the literature on children's attitudes toward reading. Identifying gender differences amongst attitudes toward reading should be further investigated and noted.

Exploring Children's Motivation for Reading

Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski's (2008) literature review challenges educators to move beyond a focus on high-stakes testing of literacy skills and skill-based instruction. The value of promoting independent reading is highlighted, too often seen as secondary to many of the skills and expectations that are set-out within the curriculum. As Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski (2008) note "if intrinsically motivated to read on their own, children will sustain interest in reading and improve abilities" (p. 135). Educators are provided with eight motivational principles that the authors' believe may encourage independent reading amongst children. The literature review highlights the importance of considering these principles to shape teachers instructional approaches, deemed valuable by the authors beyond the scope of the classroom.

Choice and control, social interaction, and interest are three of the principles which were at the heart of Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski's (2008) discussion. The opportunity to have choice, in terms of selecting books and taking on the role of decision-makers, was seen as an approach which fostered a sense of empowerment amongst children (Williams, Hedrick &

Tuschinski, 2008). Through social interaction the authors' suggest that children may seek out the support of peers and have an opportunity to discuss the underlying messages often presented within stories. Identifying that different students have different reasons for reading and a variety of literacy personalities should not be disregarded (Cole 2002/2003). The authors' stress the value of choosing and including books as part of the classroom library, reflecting the interests and needs of all children. Teaching approaches and tools to implement within the classroom are further highlighted, but should not be considered exhaustive, when motivating children to read.

Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski's (2008) literature review outlines several of the best practices and teaching approaches for teachers to implement so to motivate young readers. Of value is how many of these principles and strategies may also transfer to home literacy practices, particularly when parents struggle to motivate their own children to read.

Baker and Scher's (2002) American study explored children's motivation for reading in relation to the home literacy experiences and beliefs shared by their parents. Sixty-five culturally diverse first-graders and parents were recruited. The authors sought several of the motivational factors and parent behaviors which triggered children's interest and motivation to read. As Baker and Scher (2002) note: "research provides converging evidence that children who have more opportunities to engage in literacy-relevant activities at home have more positive views about reading, engage in more leisure reading, and have better reading achievement" (p. 240).

Children completed the Motivations for Reading Scale, which explores enjoyment of reading, perceived value of reading, perceived competence and children's interest in library-related situations (Baker & Scher, 2002). The parent interview focused on parents' perceptions of their child's interest in reading and the value parents placed on reading. Nine key themes emerged centered on the value of reading: reading for learning, reading for education and

reading for enjoyment. Parent's own recollection of their child's interest in reading was suggested by such behaviors as their children pretending to read. Children's use of skills such as decoding and demonstrating general interest, were also viewed as indicators of children's motivation. It was those parents who conveyed positive messages and provided literacy-rich environments, both directly and indirectly, that tended to nurture children's motivation around reading.

As the findings highlight, most children demonstrated fairly strong motivation for reading. No significant differences for motivation were noted between the girls and boys or across the four socio-cultural groups. Necessity was noted as central for parents, particularly when considering the importance of reading for their children's futures. Parents who demonstrated pleasure in reading were those who had children that were the most motivated to read. Motivation can be seen as one of the key indicators shaping children's attitudes toward reading. Identifying several of the key indicators which may motivate young readers is recognized as promoting reading and literacy learning in both the context of the school and home environments (Baker & Scher, 2002).

Baker and Scher's (2002) study and; Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski's (2008) literature review reminds educators that by becoming knowledgeable about the home-literacy environment and identifying systematic influences, that connections can be made to several of the factors that play a role in motivating young readers. Recognizing parents' own beliefs and the purposes that they attribute to reading is further addressed, providing educators with insights and their rationale for selecting particular strategies and approaches for motivating young readers, over others. Working with children to address the principles and activities which motivate them to read is further suggested.

Expanding Perspectives on Family Literacy Practices

Heath's (1983) foundational ethnographic work across three racially and economically diverse communities in North Carolina prompts readers to explore some of the differences in exposure and practices surrounding literacy learning. In Maintown, a primarily white-middle class community, children's exposure and engagement with print was enjoyed and experienced in early childhood. Children in this community not only had the opportunity to be exposed to literacy experiences, but were read to on a regular basis. Furthermore, they had opportunities to practice their skills through an abundance of activities including story writing at home. In Roadville, a white working-class community, children's exposure to print occurred from the time they were born through activities such as games and storybook reading. Although the distinct traditions of the third community in Trackton, a Black working-class neighborhood were different than those expected to prepare children for school success (Heath, 1983) children's exposure to literacy could be seen as equally valuable. Children in this community were not read to and exposed to the sophisticated approaches of the surrounding communities. Their exposure and engagement with literacy and language was provided through a more holistic and playful approach. Exposure to print occurred as a way to communicate by creating analogies further serving as a tool to assist families and children to stay connected with the community i.e. through reading about community happenings.

Heath (1983) argued that the Trackton children did not in fact lack exposure to literacy rather this community exposed them to literacy learning through dynamic models and approaches, reflecting the needs and values of the community. Heath's (1983) study reiterates the value of seeing literacy as a social practice and the diversity of literacy practices that are

embedded amongst different cultures and contexts. Too often are these differences overlooked and undervalued in the organization of literacy-rich experiences and curriculum within the classroom.

Gadsden's (2000) investigation further encourages educators to explore how intergenerationality informs the literacy practices that influence the lives of many children.

Intergenerational literacy draws from beliefs about knowledge, its power, and its contributions to the future...It houses vision and implicit meanings and purposes that are constructed and conveyed within families and communities, that are influenced by societal success and barriers, and that becomes a part of our own social and contextual historiography. (p. 872)

In Johnson's (2010) study, the researcher explored the literacy practices of African-American families within a rural community in southeastern United States. Her research centered in on one family, tracing their traditions and cultures of literacy that had been passed along through multiple generations. At the centre of this research, Johnson (2010) reminds educators of the value of viewing and connecting with families as a resource, in fostering rich and meaningful instruction and curricular approaches within the classroom. "By investigating how families value literacy and the legacies that families have with it, teachers and researchers alike can challenge their assumptions about what literacy means to different people" (Johnson, 2010, p. 33), similar to what the findings in Heath's (1983) study suggests.

Centering on the Jones family's uses of literacy through a life history study, literacy was seen as something that this family used for various purposes and within various contexts. Literacy was seen as a tool for interacting with families and community members, also used for instrumental purposes such as learning about how to manage their households. News-related literacy was an opportunity for the family to connect with local communities, to share both in sorrow and celebrations, during times when there was prominence of white supremacy. The

1960s brought a time when many African-American children were being segregated in the school system, as many European Americans claimed that they were biologically incapable of learning at the same pace as the dominant European community (Johnson, 2010). Families were able to stay informed about activities and rights movements, to ensure and often self-advocate for the educational opportunities and rights of African-American families and children.

“An intergenerational approach...asks educators and researchers to widen their lenses from the child’s immediate biography to how that biography is situated within a family culture of practice” (Johnson, 2010, p. 42). Drawing from the resources and knowledge that can be gained in connecting with the legacies and traditions that families attach to literacy learning, Johnson (2010) encourages educators to reflect on how this knowledge can be welcomed into their own classroom practices and curriculum.

Mctavish (2007) further highlights the rich out-of-school literacy experiences that can be fostered within the context of the home. Spending over a month conducting observations, field notes, videotaping and interviews within the Norris’ home the author noted the use of literacy materials and explored some of the foundational concepts of emergent literacy as outlined by Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) which were embedded in the daily routines and practices of one family. There were daily conversations that were shared with their youngest child Katie as well as opportunities to explore. Whether sharing songs, conversations and regular stories these experiences provided literacy and learning opportunities that were enjoyed with family members. Literacy learning was embedded as Taylor (1998) would describe as “the very fabric of family life” (p. 87).

The purpose of Mctavish’s (2007) case study was not only to investigate a working class family’s efforts in supporting their child’s literacy development rather to make readers aware of

the various and unique home literacy practices, which enhance children's reading and literacy learning. Mctavish (2007) challenges educators to revisit possible biases and deficit views about families reflecting their social economic status (SES) and residential location, on which assumptions are often drawn about whether or not literacy learning and resources to support literacy are readily available. Grieshaber, Shield, Luke and Macdonald's (2011) Australian pilot study further challenges this belief and bias in further detail. Educators rather are encouraged to see all families as co-constructers in the literacy development of all children through the distinct activities and rituals that are shared within the home (Mctavish, 2007).

Mui and Anderson's (2008) case study examined the literacy practices of the Johar family who was made up of 15 members, challenging the notion of family literacy as simply parents reading books to their children. Through a case study approach (which included the use of interviews, field notes, artifacts, informal conversations and sample literacy activities), they demonstrated how one family supported the literacy learning of their child Genna within a multilingual and multicultural context. This was accomplished with the assistance of extended family and caregivers. Mui and Anderson (2008) remind readers that literacy holds different values for different people and that "recently, educators have begun to realize that literacy is also complex cultural and social practices that vary from context to context" (p. 234).

The Johar family placed a high value on literacy, providing an environment and an abundance of resources to foster literacy learning for their children. Although there was much emphasis on print and literacy in the home through the availability of ample resources (reading and writing materials, books, opportunities for dramatic play etc.) it is mentioned that none of the children enjoyed reading books for pleasure rather for functional purposes mainly; an absence of storybook reading as a daily routine is noted. Genna's mom is frequently reminded by her

teacher of the importance of reading at home. Her mom notes the children's disinterest in this particular activity, finding additional activities to promote literacy and language acquisition (Mui & Anderson, 2008) beyond the mainstream approaches celebrated in the Western classroom (Carrington & Luke, 2003). The interactions between Genna and her siblings, extended family and caregivers play an important role in literacy learning as well. The value of being immersed in a multilingual environment, to support and foster literacy learning is further highlighted.

For several decades, educators have been met with many grand universal theories of development, including learning theory and those presented by such theorists as Jean Piaget. Lee and Walsh (2001) warn that “within these...grand systems, child development is described as occurring in linear and universal stages and is considered ‘lawful and, with minor adjustments’, the same for everyone across time and place” (p. 74). As the demographics of classrooms and communities continue to change, Lee and Johnson (2007) highlight the importance of broadening society's understanding of development to include a more comprehensive lens and framework. Advocating and in support of a cultural psychology framework, the authors emphasize the need for educators to step away from a focus on universality and biology recognizing the impact that culture has on human development. “The goal of cultural psychology, as we see it, is to study the co-creation of human beings and cultures by focusing on both mentalities and practices, on both culture and biology” (Lee & Johnson, 2007, p. 241).

Using a mock case study to highlight the value of a cultural psychology framework and exploring development through a systematic process, the literature explores the implications that cultural psychology holds for educators. An overview of the challenges faced by one teacher in her work with an African-American student reflects several of these implications, influencing reading and literacy learning. The challenges this child experienced with the acquisition of

literacy and reading skills, could be attributed to a classroom which failed to respond to the individual family values and literacy practices that were rooted within the context of both his home and community. The teacher's limited cross-cultural experiences and what Plata (2011) would identify as a monistic cultural schemata or narrow "folk psychologies and theories" (Lee & Johnson, 2007, p. 240), was evident in how the classroom was shaped and her expectations for this child's reading development were determined. Readers are able to follow and evaluate the transformation which this teacher underwent in beginning to understand culture as central to the child's literacy development rather, than driven by ages and stages and celebrated through a tourist approach. Lee and Johnson (2007) argue that "many early childhood educators still tend to discuss child development in 'conceptually implausible and empirically counterfactual lines'- that is, they focus on universal stages, far-fetched dichotomies (e.g., biology vs. culture), and separate domains of development (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, physical)" (p. 235).

As suggested by this literature review, family literacy practices are individualized often sharing links to cultural tradition and the values of families. It is these traditions and values that are often embedded in the routines and rituals of families that are followed around reading and literacy learning. By considering a holistic approach and families' cultures of literacy, educators are urged to reflect on how this knowledge may be put into practice, to provide literacy and reading experiences which are meaningful for all children. "Unless the larger society values and includes a child's home culture, children as young as ages 3 and 4 may internalize a sense of not belonging and of themselves and their family as somehow being wrong" (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 58). This paradigm shift is needed in the field of Early Childhood Education where attention needs to be paid to how children develop within dynamic cultural contexts, rather than seeing development as linear, invariant and universal. Bruner (1986) argues that any

theory which overlooks the influence of culture “is absurd because the plasticity of the human genome is such that there is no unique way in which it is realized, no way that is independent of opportunities provided by the culture into which an individual is born” (p. 135).

Parents’ Literacy Beliefs

Lynch, Anderson, Anderson and Shapiro’s (2006) study conducted in an urban area of Western Ontario explored parents’ literacy beliefs and the self-reported behaviors in which parents engage in with their children, to encourage reading and writing. The findings presented reflect interviews that were conducted with 35 parents of 3 and 4-year-old children from various culturally diverse backgrounds of which 71 percent spoke a language other than English. The findings reflect the data collected as part of a larger longitudinal study (Anderson, Anderson & Shapiro, 1999-2002). Using the Parents’ Perceptions of Literacy Interview Schedule (PPLIS) (Anderson, 1992), the questionnaire was meant to determine whether parents’ views of literacy reflected holistic or skills-based perspectives. Within this study the terms holistic and emergent approaches were used interchangeably, however not explicitly defined for its readers.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that most parents held holistic beliefs to encourage their children’s learning versus skill-based instruction. Parents who held more holistic beliefs were more likely to encourage children through a variety of activities, rather than directly teaching them discrete skills for reading and writing. As Lynch et al. (2006) note:

children of parents who value the product of what children know, and not the process in which children come to attain this knowledge, may not be as successful in school as those children whose parents engage in a variety of literacy activities. (p. 13)

Parents in this study who held holistic beliefs tended to be those who completed post-secondary education. These parents formed the larger proportion of participants in the study. However, one cannot assume that parents’ whose education is below post-secondary school

demonstrate less competence in promoting promising literacy skills and learning, nor understand a holistic approach to literacy. Culture and intergenerational literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Gadsden, 2000; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Johnson, 2010) are but two factors that should be considered, possibly influencing a preference for one technique over another. Readers may infer that questions presented in the (PPLIS) may have reflected questions centered on practices, not necessarily reflecting the values, traditions and beliefs of all its participants. The study provided evidence of the importance of understanding that parents share different beliefs around literacy development.

Weigel, Martin and Bennett's (2006) study explored the literacy beliefs of preschool parents, examining the approaches taken within the home to foster reading and literacy acquisition. This study further investigated how parents' literacy beliefs impacted the manner in which they shaped the home environment and the impact that the environment and their beliefs had on children's literacy outcomes. Seventy-nine mothers and 79 children primarily of middle class families participated in this longitudinal study, of which the majority of participants were Caucasian. Literacy beliefs were measured using the Parental Reading Belief Inventory (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). Participants were required to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 32 literacy related beliefs, using a likert scale; e.g. "I am my child's most important teacher" (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006). The home environment was also assessed using three key aspects highlighted by Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002), which examined parents' demographic characteristics, literacy habits and direct parent-child literacy related activities.

Results of the investigation categorized participants as demonstrating "facilitative" or "conventional" beliefs. Facilitative mothers tended to be those that believed in taking an active

role in teaching particular skills for reading and literacy acquisition. These were mothers who generally provided literacy-enriched homes and fostered children's interest in reading, enjoying shared book reading as a regular activity with their children. On the contrary, conventional mothers tended to be those who expressed beliefs that teachers were the ones responsible for teaching children reading and literacy skills. They provided environments in which opportunities for reading and literacy activities were not readily available, expressing challenges in providing resources and engaging their children in reading. Readers are urged to be critical when drawing assumptions about parents' beliefs. Generally, the study focused on very specific literacy activities like reading stories, a practice which is commonly favored in the Western culture (Carrington & Luke, 2003). One may question whether conventional mothers may have been involved in other literacy-rich activities which were not measured during this investigation.

Consistent with Heath (1983), Mctavish (2007), Mui and Anderson's (2008) and; Lee and Johnson's (2007) study the literature on parents' literacy beliefs draws attention to the different approaches that families take when shaping the home environment for reading and literacy opportunities. It is these beliefs which are often influential in parents preferring a holistic approach rather than a skill-based approach for encouraging reading. Identifying and recognizing how parents' beliefs are woven into the home literacy environment may be a starting point for understanding their approaches and choices when promoting opportunities for reading and literacy learning within the home.

Summary

The literature which has been presented draws attention to the steady decline in positive attitudes toward reading for children during the primary years. We know from previous studies that addressing this decline warrants an investigation of the home environment, being a place

where children often make their first encounters with reading and literacy learning. Children's exposure to literacy learning and reading within the home is influenced by parent's own beliefs, approaches, values and often the traditions which are embedded within families. Recognizing the diversity and variability with which children often first encounter these literacy experiences, the current study will address the critical question of why children are or are not engaged in reading. This will be approached with a qualitative emphasis on children's unique perspectives.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

For this research investigation a qualitative approach was used. This was a strategy which was suitable in addressing the gap in the literature on children's attitudes toward reading by investigating the critical question of why a decline in interest and engagement with reading has been found. A qualitative approach is appropriate as it seeks to understand rather than quantify the perceptions of parents and children that are acting as participants, more accurately and in more detail than a quantitative approach may allow. Qualitative methods focus on understanding an individual's views of the world and his or her experiences in a particular context and point in time (Merriam, 2002). This method contributes to generating rich and descriptive details from a relatively small sample of participants, which includes a total of 13 participants for the purpose of this investigation. As Creswell (2009) states those who engage in qualitative strategies "support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (p. 4).

Semi-structured interviews were used as a primary tool for data collection. The opportunity to meet with participants, both children and parents provided them with an opportunity to share their perspectives reflecting the focus of this investigation. Participants were given the opportunity to extend and expand on their own opinions and insights in response to the interview questions, through a personable and informal manner. This approach offered many benefits and demonstrates obvious differences from several quantitative investigations presented within the literature review. The use of semi-structured interviews extend on the more formal and indirect approaches that the use of a questionnaire and/or survey, prominent in previous studies on children's attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995;

Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen, 2006; Sizmur, 2008; People for Education, 2011) may allow. The interviews allowed participants to clarify and support their own responses, provide insights and opinions beyond what a survey or questionnaire would allow (see Appendix C & D). The opportunity to make observations within the home environment (see Appendix E) further complimented and allowed the researcher to gain a more holistic account of children's accessibility to print-rich materials and literacy learning tools within the context of the home. Specifically as it relates to the literature on children's attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen, 2006; Sizmur, 2008; People for Education, 2011), a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to understand a broader range of factors that might influence children's attitudes.

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) highlight "theory development occurs continually in qualitative data analysis" (p. 23). The use of grounded theory, allowed the researcher to generate and adapt a theory from the data which was collected during both the interviews and observations within the research study. Grounded theory builds a theory, that is "faithful to the evidence" (Neuman, 2006, p. 60) and reflects the perceptions of those acting as participants, both parents and children, throughout this qualitative inquiry. This theory reflects the conceptual categories that are established during the data analysis process and allows the researcher to generate theories or explanations to address the main research question and sub-questions that have been adapted within this investigation. "Over time, as the conceptual categories are refined and linked, a theory evolves" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 436).

Recruitment

A sample of convenience (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) was used to recruit all participants, to ensure that data was collected to satisfy the limited time and resources allocated

to this investigation. Participants included children between the ages of 6 to 8 and their parent/primary guardian, all residents of Vaughan, Ontario. Children in this age range were selected because as the literature highlights, there tends to be a steady decline in positive attitudes toward reading, from grades 1 through 6 (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Kush & Watkin, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen 2006; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008; Lever-Chain, 2008; People for Education, 2011). “It is commonly believed that young children are initially excited by reading, but enthusiasm declines as children get older, and the reading romance ends by the time children reach middle school and junior high school” (Schatz & Krashen, 2006, p. 46).

Having previously been employed at a private school within the area and having resided in Vaughan for most of my life, many relationships and contacts with families and children in this area have been maintained. As a result, recruitment provided no obstacles for the researcher, enabling data collection to occur over a two week period. This occurred during times that accommodated the requests and needs of all participants. A limitation of recruitment through convenience sampling is where participants might feel obligated to participate in the study and/or respond to the interview questions in a manner which will maintain the confidence of the researcher. Although participants were advised and reassured of the voluntary nature of their participation (see Appendix A, B & F) several findings may demonstrate perceptions that may not entirely reflect the perspectives of all participants. The researcher also addresses that her inability to recruit a larger sample of culturally diverse participants fails to provide a broader perspective of the factors impacting children’s attitudes toward reading.

Upon receiving ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University (see Appendix G), the researcher began the selection and recruitment of participants. Parents

were contacted via phone, (see Appendix F) email and/or were visited in person. This allowed the researcher to discuss the purpose of the investigation and outline all provisions made to ensure confidentiality. Once participants confirmed their interest, the researcher met with them at their primary residence. A copy of the ethics approval provided by the Ethics Board at Ryerson University was provided along with a copy of the parental consent and children's assent agreement. This was made available to them in advance to review all documentation and decide whether or not they were willing to participate in the research. A time frame of three business days was given to all participants, to review the forms, address any questions to the researcher and make their final decision.

Recruitment Criteria and Sample Size

During recruitment, the age, gender, employment status or background of parents were not considered. Parents who provided written consent were required to be the primary caregiver of the child who was participating in the study and be residents of Vaughan, in order to be eligible to participate. Both parents and children were required to confirm that the child satisfied the recruitment criteria, as the children needed to be between 6 to 8 years of age in order to participate. The sample included a total of 13 participants, 7 children and 6 mothers. This was the parent who provided written consent to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Children were also required to confirm their willingness to participate by signing an assent agreement (see Appendix B). A total of 4 boys, 3 girls and 6 mothers were recruited for this study.

Participant Profiles

The six families that participated in this study held a middle class status and all resided as nuclear families. Several brief details about the participants, both parents and children, have been provided below; pseudonyms have been assigned to all participants to maintain and ensure

confidentiality.

Cathy originates from Italy, having spent her teenage years and adult life living in Toronto. She is the mother of three children and is a stay at home mom, whose husband works full-time and is second generation Italian-Canadian. English is the primary spoken language at home with Italian often spoken to the children by grandparents and other family members who visit the household. Her son **Marcus** is 6 years old and is the middle child. His younger brother is 2 and his eldest sister is 12 years old. Cathy is the primary caregiver of the children and on the rare occasion may seek the assistance of her in-laws to care for the children.

Margaret is Canadian born, having spent the first ten years of her early primary years living in Italy before returning to Canada. She is the mother of two children and is a stay at home mom, whose husband is self-employed. Her husband is second generation Italian-Canadian and English is the primary spoken language at home. Mom notes however that Italian is spoken quite frequently by the children to their grandmothers and several family members. Her son **Matthew** is 8 and his older sister is 11 years old. Margaret is the primary caregiver of the children and on the rare occasion may seek the assistance of a neighbor or grandmother, to care for the children.

Linda is a mother of two boys, who is second generation Italian-Canadian. She works full-time and has the daily assistance of her mother, an Italian-born Canadian, who resides in their family home. Her husband also works full-time and is second generation Italian-Canadian. Mom notes that they speak Italian as a family but not as often as she would like them to. Her son **Mickey** is 8 years old and his older brother is 10. During the interview, Mickey mentions that most times his grandmother only communicates to him and his brother in Italian. Linda's mother

watches and cares for the children on a regular, day-to-day basis, while she and her husband are working.

Peggy, a mother of three children, was born in Toronto and is second generation Italian-Canadian. She works part-time and her husband who is also second generation Italian-Canadian, is self-employed and works full-time. Mom indicates that Italian is spoken on the rare occasion at home, although not so often with the children. **Janet**, age 6, is the middle child. She has a younger brother that is 3 and an older brother that is 9 years old. Peggy is the primary caregiver of the children however seeking the assistance of her mother and in-laws to care for the children, on occasion.

Josie, a mother of three children, was born in Toronto and is second generation Italian-Canadian. Both she and her husband, who was born in Guyana, are working full-time managing their own business. Mom mentions that both she and the children's grandmother often speak Italian to the children although English is the primary spoken language within their home. Both of her children, **Anna and Aaron** demonstrated an interest in participating in the study, allowing the researcher to include the perspectives of both children. Anna is 6 years of age and Aaron is 8. There is a younger brother who is 4 years old. Josie is the primary caregiver of her children, on the rare occasion seeking the support of her mother to care for her children.

Pam, a mother of two children, was born in Toronto and is second generation Italian-Canadian. Both her and her husband who is also second generation Italian-Canadian work full-time. They are assisted by grandparents to care for their children, from Monday to Friday. English is the spoken language at home however mom notes that Italian is spoken on occasion to the children particularly when visiting relatives and close family members. She also indicates

that both children continue to express an interest in French, although it is not spoken at home. **Nancy** is 7 years old and has an older sister who is 11 years of age.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Ryerson University. Ethical issues as outlined by Check & Schutt (2012) for qualitative research were highlighted within all consent documents and were verbally explained to the participants, prior to commencing data collection. This included outlining issues and any concerns around voluntary participation, identity disclosure and confidentiality. Participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and a pseudonym was assigned to each participant.

Children were told that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. They were also provided brief details about the study by the researcher and instructed of ways they could communicate any feelings of discomfort or stop the interview once it had started, if they wished. During the interviews, children were also permitted to have their parent and/or sibling(s) sit in on the observations or interviews if they chose, to ensure a feeling of comfort. Those who sat in on the interviews were encouraged and advised by the researcher to allow participants to answer all questions, reflecting their own opinions and feedback. Siblings and/or parents who sat in assumed the role of an active listener, being discouraged from providing suggestions, prompts and/or additional feedback to the child during the process.

Setting and Rationale

All observations and interviews were conducted at the homes of participants. This location appeared favorable for children specifically, providing a natural environment that they were familiar with and could feel comfortable in, with the researcher. The researcher recognizes that the home can be seen as one of the first places where children learn and develop the

necessary skills to encourage reading and literacy learning. As a result, this appeared the most ideal and meaningful setting in which to gather data for the researcher and participants alike. This further provided convenience for participants. This avoided them having to make special accommodations to arrange a meeting time, recognizing the commitments and responsibilities that they have within their own lives. Observations needed to be conducted in this setting, to provide the necessary data to align with the main focus of the research investigation.

Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews and observations of the home environment were the main data collection tools that were used (see Appendix C, D & E) to gather all data for this investigation. An interview offers many benefits in providing a more personable opportunity for two-way communication. It also allows the researcher to gain a deeper, more personal account of the participants' feelings, insights and the reasons why they may demonstrate particular feelings.

The interview was structured as a natural flowing conversation between the researcher and the participant, rather than being concerned with structure and the chronological asking of questions (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002). The researcher took the role as an active listener and asked questions such as "what do you mean," "give me an example" and/or "please clarify..." when needed, in order to generate the most accurate and detailed account of their perceptions and responses. Time was allotted in the interview to allow participants to clarify their uncertainties of what was being asked and offer additional insights, which could be considered for future research investigations. Although the researcher anticipated and communicated to participants that data collection would require approximately an hour and a half, the researcher remained flexible around allotting ample time for participants, to share their perspectives and feedback. Most interviews and observations lasted for approximately two hours. This allowed participants

to share their feedback and perceptions, without feeling limited or pressured by a strict time constraint.

All interviews and observations were transcribed. Interviews were audiotape recorded and verbatim transcriptions were later made from the audiotapes. With this added tool, the researcher was able to revisit any data that had been missed during the interviews and check the accuracy of the field notes. To ensure accuracy and trustworthiness, participants were also given the opportunity to revisit and review all transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the data. The participants were given the opportunity to omit or add anything that they felt was noteworthy for the investigation; it should be noted that four participants reviewed the notes and none of the field notes were altered. This could be attributed to parents feeling confident with the data that had been collected or perhaps feeling that they needed to maintain the confidence of the researcher, through the feedback that they provided.

Data Organization and Analysis

Constructing grounded theory.

Data analysis began at the point when the interviews and observations occurred with participants, being distinctive from the approaches taken for data analysis, in quantitative research. While transcribing the data from both the interviews and observations, the researcher made additional memos in the margin to document possible emerging themes, important statements and perspectives which were valuable for addressing the research question and sub-questions. This was the point when the researcher began to draw ideas about the meaning of the text, key themes and made inferences about how data may be impacted by other issues (Check & Schutt, 2012). Some of the sample memos which emerged included: reading for enjoyment; salience of the roles of particular individuals; parent's nostalgia about their experiences with

younger or older children; reading for a purpose etc. As Charmaz (2006) notes “writing successive memos throughout the research process keeps you involved in the analysis and helps you to increase the level of abstraction of your ideas” (p. 72).

Miles and Huberman (1994) developed a major framework for identifying distinctive phases in qualitative data analysis, which the researcher sees as complimenting the stages in the adaptation of grounded theory as outlined by Charmaz (2006). These three phases include: data reduction; data display; conclusion drawing and verification. Once all data had been collected, this was an opportunity for the researcher to review and attempt to condense the data, always looking back at what the intention of the study was. The goal was to simplify the data without losing focus of key findings that could contribute to the breadth of the investigation. This was done through both inductive and deductive analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Using an excel spread sheet (data display), the researcher organized each interview question in its own box and aligned the answers from the participants in the appropriate box.

Initial coding.

While organizing the interviews and observations, the researcher assigned a tag to each parent/child (pseudonym) and input the appropriate response provided by the participant next to each question. Once all data had been entered, the researcher began a thorough analysis of the data while searching for themes, patterns, and any possible cause and effect relationships which may have emerged. This visual display allowed the researcher to examine patterns and relationships which had surfaced, being the initial coding process in the development and documentation of central ideas in the data (Charmaz, 2006). This included a line-by-line coding of all transcriptions (see Appendix H). As Charmaz (2006) highlights:

initial codes are provisional, comparative and grounded in the data.
They are provisional because you aim to remain open to other analytical

possibilities and create codes that best fit the data you have. You progressively follow up on codes that indicate that they fit the data. Then you gather data to explore and fill out these codes. (p. 48)

Initially, the parents' interviews were coded, categorized and organized separately from the children's interviews, through an open coding system where the central ideas were sought in the data. "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain the data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). It is the initial coding that leads the researcher to define several of the core conceptual categories, which emerge through constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once all data had been displayed and organized, it was brought together for analysis, including all observations. Through an analysis of the data, when cross-checking the findings, the researcher began to analyze common themes and categories which had emerged. It was also important to address the value of data which did not necessarily align with the main goal or intent of the research study. This allowed the researcher to explore cause and effect relationships, address limitations and additional considerations for future research.

As new themes and questions emerged, and new connections were unveiled, revisiting the data periodically and the literature was valuable. This reinforced the value of ongoing analysis through the adaptation of grounded theory, being an ongoing component of this investigation up until the final conclusions and the verification phase occurred.

Focused and axial coding.

"Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data...[it] requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize [the] data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). This was an opportunity to use

the most significant and readily occurring codes to begin defining categories and establishing subcategories, being a focal point during the process of axial coding. This stage of coding involves determining the specific properties of categories (see Appendix H). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding addresses the “when, where, why, who, how and with what consequences” (p. 125). It is at this point that the researcher took the initial codes and memos into a more focused, categorized state for analysis, reflecting the key themes and categories that had emerged.

Theoretical sampling, saturation, and sorting.

This process involved the researcher revisiting the data and current theories surrounding the phenomena of the research study. This stage allowed the research to establish well defined categories and subcategories, which encompassed the themes that had emerged from the data. An opportunity to fill the gaps in the research and saturate the categories is at the core of this stage of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). It is the emergence, sorting and saturation of the categories which serve as the building blocks of the theory that will emerge. It is during this final stage that the researcher was able to revisit her analysis and generate the theory and key findings that have been presented.

Potential Researcher Bias

Based on my past experiences and work in the field the researcher realizes that there may have been certain expectations about what might be observed, for example theoretical sensitivities (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sensitivity is defined by Johnson and Christensen (2008) as “a characteristic that is present when the researcher is effective at thinking about what kinds of data need to be collected and what aspects of the already collected data are the most important for the grounded theory” (p. 413). In order to gain theoretical sensitivity

researchers need to “look at studied life from multiple vantage points, make comparisons, follow leads, and build on ideas” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 135).

The researcher addresses that there are certain factors that may have affected the research questions, methods and the interpretations that have been presented. As the participant profiles suggest, the sample was ethnically and socioeconomically homogeneous. My intention through this investigation however, was not for the findings to be representative of all groups and populations. The main objective was to provide a glimpse into several of the reading and literacy opportunities that are fostered in homes. This was an approach that could substantiate the literature (Heath, 1983; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Mctavish, 2007; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich & Kim, 2010; Griesheber, Shield, Luke & Macdonald, 2011) that sees the home as a context for providing myriad opportunities for literacy learning. Considering that I share an Italian-Canadian background similar to most participants, I realize that I may not have been able to identify patterns and perspectives that someone external to the community might have identified, defined as an “etic perspective”. Pike (1967) describes this perspective as a description of a behavior, experience or cultural phenomena by an outside observer not participating in the culture that is being studied.

In order to minimize researcher bias related to participant views and to cross-check the findings, several protocols were followed. The regular cross-checking and review of the literature and theories pertinent to this investigation was done, pronounced during data analysis. Credibility was further enhanced “by the prolonged and varied time spent with...the interview transcripts, writing the final report and using the words of participants” (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). The researcher ensured that all perceptions and perspectives were recorded using both verbatim transcriptions and audiotape recordings. This approach was particularly valuable

so to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy in the findings, allowing me to re-visit and access any data that may have been missed during the interviews. The researcher consulted with her faculty supervisor in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University, to ensure that the findings aligned with the theories and current research centered on children's attitudes toward reading. Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher was open-minded to what was observed within the home, wanting to be sensitive to new knowledge and possibilities for creating dynamic approaches for fostering children's positive attitudes toward reading. Alternatively, the intention of this investigation was also to locate practices and approaches within the context of the home that may encourage educators to re-evaluate their own practices around reading and literacy opportunities, within the classroom.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study investigated a broader understanding of the many elements within the home environment that shape children's interests and attitudes toward reading. Thirteen semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted with parents and children in the home. This allowed for a more holistic perspective of parents' rituals and their approaches to support children's reading and overall literacy interests. For most parents, their children's access to a variety of books, literacy resources and their willingness to make attempts at engaging in learning with their children was not addressed, while discussing their children's opportunities for literacy learning within the home. Several parents rather, became consumed with addressing the pressure that they felt to satisfy the expectations of the prominent ideologies embedded within the Canadian curriculum. It was this preoccupation which often left them feeling frustrated with the limited time that they were able to dedicate to reading, specifically. Most parents did not address and recognize the significant opportunities to support their children through meaningful contexts. As Kress (2003) notes: "children come into the world with an absolute interest in meaning. To them, knowing what the world means is of more than academic interest" (p. 154). For children however, their feedback and perceptions highlighted the importance of looking beyond the acquisition of skills, recognizing literacy opportunities as something which could be enjoyed together.

The primary question in this investigation explored how reading rituals and routines at home impacted children's attitudes toward reading. It was not exclusively the rituals and routines which children had that shaped their interests and attitudes, but the distinct principles of motivation, engagement and the salience of the roles of peers, siblings and their parents which had an impact. Using strategies from a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), three

overarching categories have been outlined and subdivided into smaller categories to expand on the overlying themes that are presented. The value of literacy learning and reading is presented through a broader and holistic approach. As Whitehead (2004) states:

literacy itself will suffer if it is not established in a broad and deep foundation of worthwhile experiences of symbolizing and representing meanings through non-verbal communication skills, gesture, modeling, building, storytelling, poetry sharing, scientific and mathematical investigations, rituals and religious celebrations. Literacy in the written forms of a culture is only one form of literacy: the long list above represents the other ‘literacies’ and many symbolic languages. (pp.177-178)

Parent’s Perspectives and Beliefs about Reading

Reading as a necessity.

When speaking to parents about the value and importance of reading within the lives of children, all parents agreed that it was a necessity for children to have a foundation in reading. It was not only reading and overall literacy skills that their children needed to move forward within their present academic pursuits, furthermore it was the long-term value of sustaining these skills. As Peggy noted “reading is what carries you through life. It improves your language skills...it helps you find a job. It helps you deal with people and really it is at the centre of everything”. Josie added that many skills in life require knowledge in reading and that it sets a foundation for what children are up against in their lives. “Reading teaches them. It makes them knowledgeable and it will help educate them on how to find things and learn things in the future”. Linda characterized reading as a “life-skill” while Cathy noted the importance of starting reading early in life. She stated that “the earlier they start the better because everything comes from reading and writing”. Parent’s preoccupations were set in the importance of reading, beyond the academic goals that children were presented within the classroom context.

Children's knowledge in reading could lend itself to being particularly valuable to sustain life skills and the demands that their future responsibilities would require.

Although there was consensus on the necessity of these skills, 5 out of 6 parents shared different struggles and challenges around encouraging their own children to read. Whether discussing their child's feelings of fatigue on particular days; the impact of nice weather; and/or addressing the day that their child(ren) had at school (whether positive or challenging), for most parents, this included relatively minor struggles. The challenges that were identified did not occur on a regular basis. Two parents in particular however found much more significant challenges. They shared details of the battles they often met when encouraging their own sons, who were not avid readers. These children were the only two participants who communicated a dislike of reading during the interview. Parents attributed their frustration to knowing the value and necessity of this task. Though playing a significant part in their children's lives, the struggles they faced with their own children often became overwhelming. Cathy noted that with her son Marcus it was a constant struggle to do any kind of reading. "When we do sit down and try he just wants to get it over with so I am unsure if he really gets anything out of it. It's like a form of punishment for him...you just give up after awhile." Margaret also confirmed similar struggles and highlighted some of the strategies that she had tried with her son Matthew, rendering little success.

Often when he complains that he is bored...I will tell him to pick up a book. Typically he will ignore me because he really has no interest in books. Before bedtime, depending on what he is feeling like I will try to sit with him and read but then I end up doing most of the reading for him. So what's the point?

In connecting with parents own perceptions and beliefs, the necessity that they attributed to this task and the accompanying literacy skills, are a focal point to address in parent's own struggles around shaping children's attitudes.

Addressing parent nostalgia.

Feelings of guilt and frustration were often mentioned during parent's own recollection of the struggles that they often faced with shaping children's attitudes and motivation to read. For many parents, there was a longing for the past, where encouraging their other children to read had presented more pleasurable moments. Parents often recalled "happier and easier" times when reading appeared to be less of an exhausting and daunting task. Three of the parents' remarked that it had simply "seemed easier to encourage their other children to read." They spoke of watching their children derive enjoyment through reading rather than feelings of uneasiness and resentment when being persuaded to read. As Margaret noted; "with Sonia (pseudonym) it was a whole different ballgame. She was always excited to get a new book, always reading and willing to sit down and share it with me. Matthew is just the opposite, putting up a fight when it is time to read". For many parents, it required them to think back to approaches they had used with their other children to encourage them to read. These same strategies were often not as effective with their other children, three of which acted as participants in this investigation.

Although Peggy was quite pleased with her daughter's motivation and love for reading she recalled how encouraging her eldest son to read had been a struggle. "It is a constant struggle to get Dan (pseudonym) who is nine to even pick up a book, let alone try to read it. It was something that was so stressful for me when he was growing up that I arranged for tutoring for him at around three and a half". Pam, also thrilled with her daughter's enjoyment of reading

mentioned the struggles that she faced with her oldest daughter, feeling that at age 11 she was still trying to get her on track.

I try to incorporate 10 minutes a day reading with Nancy. We will sit and read together and even read the labels on things. I wish that I would have done more with Vicky (pseudonym) so I didn't have to feel like we were racing to get her on track and all caught-up, so late in her life.

For several parents, they recollected and often attempted to rationalize why certain approaches and strategies worked more effectively with one child and not the other. For many this was a source of frustration and many unanswered questions around how they could foster an interest in reading in their children. As Cathy noted, she could see the interest that was bred in her daughter's passion for reading, at an early age. "When I would sit down and look at a magazine or the weekly flyers, Dana (pseudonym) would sit by my side and at a young age, flip through her own books and pretend to be reading too. Marcus is just the opposite." Margaret spoke about her children having two different personalities around reading where her eldest daughter always seemed to be curled up with a book; her son rather had no interest. Peggy also noted that with her oldest there was a large availability of resources and an abundance of opportunities to read.

It didn't matter how much money I spent on books, I just couldn't get Dan (pseudonym) to read. Now Janet is just the complete opposite. I mean, Dan will read books about cars and soccer, which are two of the things he is into, when it is right for him. Reading is something that he is forced to do rather Janet does it for pleasure and enjoyment.

The obstacles that several parents faced when encouraging their own children to read were often associated with parents' nostalgia and feelings of frustration. These parents often attempted to engage their children in reading, using similar strategies which they had used with their other children in the past. This did not necessarily ensure that they would be successful, as

their children demonstrated different personalities around reading. For half of the parents, this created a barrier in motivating and engaging their children in reading.

The many hats of motherhood.

When addressing routines and rituals centered on reading and literacy learning all parents expressed difficulty in maintaining a consistent routine. Although several parents spoke of their efforts to establish routines such as a “family game night,” dedicating ten minutes a night to reading or sitting together to complete homework, the busyness of their lives often superseded their efforts. This was a prominent concern and remark made by all parents throughout the interviews, particularly when addressing their often failed attempts at establishing a steady routine around reading.

The busyness of their lives was also paired with their children’s own feelings of fatigue often having commitments outside of the home which included soccer, dance, swimming, gymnastics, and/or hockey for many. Josie noted that although her husband had always taken an active role reading with their children, the added demands of their family’s business meant that it was not happening as often. “When my husband finally has a few moments to spare, he does put a lot of spunk into reading with the kids, which they really like.” Interestingly, her children both mentioned this in their own interviews, remarking that “it doesn’t always happen because daddy is busy with the business.” Linda also recalled that when her boys were younger, reading was something that they did together as a family. “We would usually curl up on Mickey’s bed because it was the biggest and we read to the boys before bedtime. Now the busyness of our lives makes it hard to hold any routine.” Linda also recognized and mentioned that her husband took more of an active role reading than she ever did, while her children were growing up.

Peggy attributed her stress and the busyness of her schedule to both her and her husband working.

When I finally get home from work sometimes I get caught up in household tasks that you can't get to on a regular basis, like just tidying up and cleaning. That is the craziness of being part of this culture. You can never really stop and fall into a regular routine, especially when it comes to reading.

Mothers noted that their roles and responsibilities far exceeded the demands of being a mother. For many, they were wives, employees, business owners, daughters, soccer coaches and the primary caregivers responsible for their own parents, as well. As Pam noted, "the focus often shifts and you just don't have all that extra time to sit down and read with them...that is just the reality of things."

All parents identified and addressed the multiple roles that they held outside of committing to a consistent routine around reading. They spoke of the various responsibilities and roles that they carried out throughout their daily lives, aside from the demands that being a mother often welcomed. For most, this meant that establishing a steady routine around engaging children with reading on a regular basis was often unrealistic.

The salient role of siblings and peers.

Of the 7 children who participated in the study, Marcus and Matthew indicated a disinterest in reading, also confirmed by their mothers. Although both boys indicated a lack of motivation in reading, it was the roles of their siblings which often prompted them to investigate various genres of literature. Cathy noted that she wished that her eldest would spend a lot more time sitting and reading with Marcus. Although it was not something that her eldest would do with her brother often, she found that he demonstrated a lot more interest and motivation. This was evident even if his sister was reading a book geared toward an older child. "I see the impact

that these kids can have on one another. I see it with Marcus reading that same little clown book to his younger brother. You see the impact and Marcus really enjoys the attention”.

During the interview, in response to the question “do you like to read?” Marcus remarked, “no, I hate reading. Books are too long and have too many words. I don’t like any at all.” During the observation however, when pulling a small clown book off the shelf he noted “umm, there is one book that I like to read to my brother...this one [gives book to the researcher]...this is the book I like. I like it because it has small words and it is sooo funny.”

Pam also noted the impact that having her daughter Janet play and read with her youngest sibling had on his own motivation to explore books.

Janet is the type of child who will sit and read by herself and with her youngest brother who is three. She will play school with him and entertain him with all sorts of ‘teachery’ things and he loves it. Her modeling reading plays an important role in his life. Sometimes he will even just flip through a book while Janet is reading.

Even for those children who were eager to read, the influence of both siblings and peers was pivotal. Pam noted that with her daughter Nancy, it was all about keeping up with her oldest sister. “It becomes like a sort of competition and knowing that Nancy wants to keep up with her sister, it seems to push her to practice harder and keep reading.” Linda shared similar recounts of the competitiveness that existed amongst her two boys, not simply around reading and homework rather, many of the extracurricular activities that they were part of.

The influence of peers is a big one as they are more inclined to check-out books that their friends are reading. Mickey is very competitive with his brother so he makes sure to keep up with him even around reading certain books...like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. A little too hard for him but Mickey is determined to get there.

Margaret also mentioned the trends around certain book series and how collectively, children may be more inclined to encourage one another to “check it out.” Of particular interest is how

Linda was the only parent that recognized the role parents play in motivating their own children. “I think that the influence from parents is a big one. Mickey sees his dad and me doing a lot of reading and it is sort of a monkey see, monkey do effect”. Their personal reading behaviors were recognized as influential, in modeling the value and importance of reading for their two young children.

Exploring Children’s Attitudes Toward Reading

Of the 7 children who participated in this study, 2 boys indicated a dislike for reading. The findings indicate that children have preferences for particular genres of books, share different purposes for reading and hold different perspectives around activities that they feel will continue to motivate them to read. The findings have been organized under two main categories: principles of motivation and principles of engagement.

Principles of motivation.

As Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) state intrinsic motivation can be defined as “the enjoyment of reading and the disposition to seek out reading activities. This can be based on a number of different feelings, including curiosity, involvement and challenge” (p. 373). During data collection, several key principles emerged which tended to motivate children to seek out reading and literacy related activities. Three of the elements which emerged as overlying principles included the following: choice and control, reading as satisfying interests, and real-world relevancy. These are described and outlined in further detail below. Of interest is how these principles were not gender specific. Both boys and girls addressed these key elements in various parts of their interviews and during the observations.

Empowering children through choice and control.

When exploring children’s rituals around reading and other activities that they engaged in, their desire and competence in making choices was often highlighted. Matthew who

expressed limited interest in reading spoke to the researcher about being excited to select the books for him and his mom to read. “When I sit with mommy, I like to choose the *Robert Munsch* books or the *Diary of the Wimpy Kid* ones. I know mommy doesn’t like the *Wimpy Kid* ones but those are the ones I like”. Cathy also noted the importance of giving children choice, feeling frustrated that during the library times at school she noticed that books were often chosen for her son.

Why can’t Marcus have the opportunity to choose especially at a place like the school library? I know that he is not choosing on his own because he is coming home with books that I know he would have never chosen. Then he will refuse to read them telling me that ‘I don’t like that one mom’.

Josie noted that when she took her children to the library, it was an opportunity for them to take ownership of their learning. “My kids feel so proud to be able to choose their books and sign them out”. It was seen as one of the few opportunities where her children could actually feel empowered to make a choice within their learning. Margaret further commented that providing children with the choice offers the opportunity for them to “feed their interests.” Throughout the interviews with parents, it was noted that 3 out of the 7 children independently chose to go off and read a story, not far from the researcher. This was an activity that was self-initiated and the books were chosen independently. These were stories later shared with the researcher during their interviews, reflecting the children’s willingness and discretion. Pam remarked, noting her daughter’s behavior while reading on the steps in the hallway; “Nancy enjoys having the ability to choose her stories. She even sets goals for herself and tries to read the bigger and the harder ones”.

Choice and control were principles which were discussed by participants as being relevant within both the context of the home and classroom. The classroom was an environment

where three parents indicated uncertainty around whether their children had any choice or control around selecting books to explore, specifically in a place like the school library. All children demonstrated competence in being able to make choices when selecting books to investigate during the interview and observations. Furthermore, parents also discussed their children being capable of making choices during opportunities for daily reading and during library visits.

Fueling children's interests.

When exploring children's perceptions and attitudes, all participants created a connection amongst the books and activities they selected and how they reflected their interests. Mickey was eager to show the researcher his subscription that he received monthly for the *WWE magazine*, during the observation. He told the researcher that this was a show he watched regularly, commenting; "you know that this magazine comes in my name don't you?" During their encounter he also showed the researcher a bible which sat on a desk near his bed. "I love to read the bible because I love Jesus, Mary, Joseph and mommy too." The purposes which children attributed to reading were linked to satisfying their own interests. As Aaron noted;

I like to read books. I like to read the menus at the restaurant so that I can place my own order. I like to read the labels on my video games and the books that come inside the video games so I know how to play my favorite games and do the battles.

It was their interests which were often embedded in meaningful contexts as Anna highlights when asked, "what sorts of things do you like to read?"

I like to read the posters of the people that are on TV. I like to read the signs like the one of the two little puppies that were lost and the family misses them. I like to read menus but I don't know how to read menus so I can't place the order. I even like to read the white papers that come on Thursdays... [laughing], so me and mommy can go shopping.

The children's interests varied for the most part, however playing a significant role in the activities that they chose to engage in, both related and unrelated to reading. Of particular interest is how many children's interests were embedded in literacy rich-opportunities and activities which did not necessarily involve book reading. Marcus shared his interest in playing soccer and using the computer with the researcher. He spoke of the game *Road Blocks* where he had an opportunity to build a house or create a zombie on the computer with his friends. "When it says clear base that means you can change the colors of the floors. You have to read what it says to help you." Aaron remarked how he enjoyed playing "family" with his sister, an activity seen as fostering various numeracy and literacy opportunities.

We play the cash register game and that helps Anna learn about money. I teach her what the money is and how to make change. Like if I give her ten dollars and something costs nine...I teach her how she can give me back a dollar. Then I give her her bill.

Although the interests of the participants varied, all children spoke about their interests in computer-related games and technology that they had access to at home. These included games and websites such as *Club Penguin*, *Club Tropicana*, *Habbo Hotel*, *starfall.com* and/or *GirlGames.com*. Recognizing children's exposure to literacy learning and tools beyond their exposure to books appears valuable. This is significant so to determine approaches which will satisfy both children's interests and the acquisition of literacy skills.

Real-world relevancy.

Connecting literacy materials with children's experiences and culture was a prominent theme which emerged particularly when children shared details about the texts that they enjoyed. The relevancy of these texts reflected experiences that they had shared, cultures and traditions which they were a part of or books which connected them with aspects of their identity. While Aaron took the researcher to investigate the books on his book shelf he came across a book

entitled *Who is Allah?* Aaron remarked: “I really like this book because it helps us learn about being Muslim.” Mom clarified that the book had been given to them by a family member, when the children began asking questions about their religious affiliation to this community. Four children also made connections to the value of their family’s religious affiliations, which extended beyond books, highlighting an oral tradition. They noted their enjoyment in being responsible for reciting a daily prayer prior to dinnertime and bedtime. This was mentioned by several parents as being one of the few routines and rituals which their family had maintained during the busyness of their lives. Linda recognized this as being part of “a cultural tradition” and something which her son truly valued.

Mickey always says Grace before meals and before bedtime he says the prayer Gesu, Giuseppe e Maria...this is a special bedtime prayer that my mother taught him as a young child. If I ever forget, he is sure to remind...‘hey you forgot something mom’ [laughing].

As Janet noted, “this is one of the few opportunities for me to remind the children how grateful and thankful they need to be for all they have in their lives.”

Books also provided an opportunity for children to connect with components of their identity and life experiences that they shared as young children. While investigating Mickey’s bookshelf he flipped through his books, selecting the story *Andrew’s Loose Tooth* by Robert Munsch. He quickly turned and remarked to his mother; “this would be a good one to read, since I lost my tooth this morning. We can change Andrew’s name to mine and then maybe the tooth fairy will come, if she hears us”. The relevancy of the book *No Nuts for Me* by TumbleBooks for Marcus was embedded in the many realities that he faced as an anaphylactic child. This was a story, first introduced to him by his mother prior to entering school. Marcus remarked “that this

book is all about the things that I can't eat. I like it because it is about me and you can show your friends what you can't have."

One parent also noted the value of relevant materials their children were exposed to. Margaret spoke of her disappointment and questions around the texts that were selected within the curriculum. She often felt that the texts that her son came home with held no relevance in his life and made it even more challenging to motivate him to read.

Books need to reflect more realistic life situations for kids as a whole. I remember Matthew coming home with a book from school about some horse. He couldn't read it and the text was so small and had no pictures so I ended up reading it for him. To make matters worse, it made it even harder for him to answer the questions and write about it.

Her son remarked to the researcher that "schools need to have more books that are for kids". Matthew pulled off a book from the book shelf entitled *Little Fox* and remarked to the researcher; "I like the pattern in this one and how they keep saying 'yuck, yuck'. This book is like me because I don't like a lot of types of food. My school doesn't have this one."

Considering whether materials are relevant and meaningful to children is valuable within the context of both the home and classroom. Books and materials that are presented to children need to reflect their interests and include components which shape their identity and life experiences, as has been suggested by participants, both parents and children. For several children in this investigation this included materials that represented their cultural beliefs (i.e. being part of the Muslim community), personal life experiences (i.e. losing a tooth) and/or the challenges they faced (i.e. living with a peanut allergy) as a young child.

Principles of engagement.

For the purpose of this study, engagement was defined as an activity which attracts, occupies or holds the attention of the participant. This activity was not limited to books rather

other literacy related materials and activities throughout the home. Children's exposure to various texts and materials requires them not only to read a book or participate in an activity, passively. Engagement, involves children becoming interested in the story, maintaining attention and being able to make connections with the meaning of the story. Although the term engagement was not explicitly used within the interviews and observations, all children and several parents noted three distinct principals which held their attention when reading. The main principles are addressed and have been outlined in further detail below.

The value of laughter.

Throughout the interviews and observations with the children, the researcher noted that books which included a comic storyline most often were the ones which were mentioned. Of interest was how even those children who indicated a disinterest in reading at the start of the interviews most often spoke of a favorite story which contained an element of laughter. Children's recollections of favorite books or books that they enjoyed reading were often accompanied by comments like "that's a funny one, it's so funny and it is full of funny stuff." As Mickey shared his recollection of the story *Stephanie's Ponytail* by Robert Munsch when asked the simple question "do you like to read?" He provided the following synopsis:

I really like *Stephanie's Ponytail* because the kids keep copying her... even the teacher. They kept saying 'ugly, ugly' to Stephanie and then she told them that she was going to come to school bald. All the kids came to school bald and even the teacher but she tricked them because she didn't.

Marcus noted enjoying books "where the monsters eat people...that's really funny." Of the seven children who participated, 6 children indicated an enjoyment of several books in the *Robert Munsch* series. His use of rhyme and repetition engages readers with humorous storylines. Like Mickey, Janet also spoke of this same story being one of her favorites. She

provided a brief overview to the researcher noting that “it is the one where she ties up her hair and all the kids copy her...[giggles] and they are all bald... you know that funny one?”

Humor was also mentioned and seemed to engage readers, particularly when the stories presented children with situations or storylines which were not possible in a real-life context. Aaron described several of his favorites to the researcher as follows: “*Herbert, Garry the Gadget Guy and Captain Underpants*...those are all funny ones because you can see them do things that don’t happen in real life.” Janet indicated to the researcher that she thought that reading was fun remarking; “reading is fun because they make up things that are funny. They say funny stuff...uhm...uhm...*the Grinch that Stole Christmas*. He says ‘I have to stop Christmas from coming’ ...I have to stop it”. Janet repeats the verse to the researcher a second and then a third time, remarking “you can’t stop Christmas from coming you big silly.” Aaron who also thought that reading was fun noted that when you read “you get to hear silly things that don’t always happen in real life” like seeing a “superhero in underpants” in the *Captain Underpants* series, which Mickey mentioned. Humor was a key element that engaged the children and immersed them in the literature. This was observed through many of the key details within the stories that they were able to retell to the researcher.

Attainable success.

When parents were asked the question “what do you think impacts children’s attitudes and motivation toward reading?” more than half indicated that engagement with books, was more notable when children had the skills to be successful readers. The children’s ability to not only read the story independently, but to successfully read the story in its entirety allowed them to become more engaged with the hidden meanings and messages. Linda noted that as time passes her son enjoys the laughter and animation that books can offer. “He seems to read more

for a purpose. I know he feels more enticed and eager, by the confidence that he demonstrates especially because he knows so many more frequency-words after grade two.” Pam also noted her daughter’s progress and engagement with reading: “she has grown into reading more and more. Now she even challenges herself to read the bigger and the harder”. On the contrary, Margaret attributed her son’s limited engagement with the texts at school, primarily because many assigned texts presented a challenge to her son, discouraging him from reading. “If he can’t read the story, how can he do the homework?” she remarked. Margaret also felt that the assigned texts had affected his motivation outside of school. Many assigned texts were noted as “challenging” and “unappealing” for Matthew, often bringing on feelings of frustration and uneasiness for him around reading at home.

It becomes frustrating for both Matthew and me...I don’t want him to have to struggle and feel upset because he doesn’t have the skills or knowledge to be successful. I think this is what really pushes him away from doing any reading, even at home. If he could read the book and be able to connect with the story, maybe he would be more interested to look for other books to read. Sometimes I wonder about the books he brings home though...they don’t do much for me either and I can see why he is frustrated.

Parent’s preoccupations extended beyond their children engaging with reading.

Understanding the purpose of the story and the benefits of the knowledge which could be gained were also addressed. Half of the parents associated this with their children being more successful with comprehension and gaining more confidence. This was pivotal for children particularly around homework and the expectations that were embedded in the language curriculum.

The value of togetherness.

Through the observations in the homes it was evident that there was an abundance of literacy-related materials and opportunities. All children had access to a library of stories, a

computer, computer games, board games and various manipulatives, such as puppets, toys and a variety of play-sets. All children had ample opportunities to practice their literacy skills in print-rich environments. *Table One* provides a detailed summary of the literacy materials that were available and accessible to children within the home.

Name of Participant	Availability of Books	Additional Literacy Resources
Marcus	-I spy books, Scooby Doo phonics series, Canadian curriculum books for grade one, Ten in the Bed, assorted Robert Munsch books, Pokemon guide -crossword puzzles and word searches -books accessible to child in bedroom and in the family's computer room	-white board with letters and markers -assorted toys, puppets, wrestling figurines, train set, assorted puzzles, play-sets etc. - access to a computer and a variety of computer games/websites i.e. Build-A-Bear -videogame console and games (Wii)
Janet	-Hello Kitty phonics series, Dr. Seuss collection, Look and Find Series, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Ten Drowsy Dinosaurs -books located on shelves in the kitchen, family room, in the child's room and in the children's play area in the basement	-white board with letters and markers -chalk board and chalk -alphabet letter chart, alphabet flashcards -ABC Cat in the Hat game -puppets and dress-up clothes -super stretchy ABC game and doll house -access to computer, I pad and videogames
Anna and Aaron	-Clifford book series, Winnie the Pooh, Who is Allah, assorted Fred Flintstone series books, Dora the Explorer, Pokemon guide etc. -books accessible to child in bedroom	-desk available in Aaron's room with assorted pencils and writing materials -piano and a piano book in Aaron's room -several play-sets, dolls and manipulatives located in children's play space -computer, videogames; children have access to various children's websites on the computer i.e. Habbo hotel, Club Penguin -board games i.e. perfection, monopoly, mousetrap, clue, connect four
Mickey	-Assorted Robert Munsch books, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, the bible, Scooby Doo, assorted Phonics Series, word searches -WWE magazines that are received as a monthly subscription by the child	-computer and assorted computer games i.e. Club Penguin, Habbo hotel, Road Blocks -videogames and console (Xbox and Wii) -toys, stuffed animals and a secret diary that the child writes in on occasion -board games i.e. monopoly, scrabble -desk with writing materials and paper
Matthew	-dad's old comics from the Richie Rich series, Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, Bones books (assorted), a guitar book which he uses to learn to play the guitar, I don't want to sleep tonight, Little Fox, -all books available in the child's bedroom	-access to the computer and a variety of children's websites i.e. Habbo hotel, Club Penguin -assorted video games/card games -play space in basement with various arts and crafts, writing tools, paper -assorted toys and board games, i.e. connect 4, monopoly, guess who -puppet theatre and puppets
Nancy	-Barbie books, Care Bears most valuable bear, The Best Nest, Put me in the Zoo, Ozzy and Max, Pink Princess rules the school, Froggy plays T-ball, Pinkalicious -Highlights magazine subscription	-Leap pad -access to computer and various websites i.e. starfall.com, girlgames.com -board games i.e. jeu de memoire, monopoly, scrabble -assorted puppets and toys i.e. dolls, stuffed animals, tea set etc.

Table One: Literacy Resources accessible to Children in the Home Environment

Interestingly however, when the children were asked how their moms and dads could make reading fun, a consistent response by 5 children was “if we could do it together”. Children often remarked and shared recollections of activities which they enjoyed with their families, whether a “family game night” or recalling a time when they had sat down and “cuddled with a story.”

Parents were knowledgeable and aware of their children’s attitudes toward reading. For children being together provided a meaningful context for engaging with reading. As Nancy noted; “I wish they would listen more and we could read together”. Matthew mentioned his interest in creating a story with his mom, while Aaron mentioned wanting to act out some of his favorite stories...“we did it with mom and dad one time and it was so fun.” Being able to engage in the activity together, appeared to be a more favorable context for exploring reading and literacy-related activities.

Summary

Several key themes and underlying principles for shaping children’s attitudes were demonstrated during the interviews and observations. These included both principles of engagement and motivation, derived and explored in further detail using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Incorporating the perspectives of parents and children, the findings lay the groundwork for determining ways in which we may continue to motivate and engage young readers, in meaningful contexts for reading. The following chapter will address and analyze these findings in further detail. Using both the theoretical framework which has shaped this investigation and the findings from current research that investigates children’s attitudes toward reading, the researcher will provide parents with several meaningful strategies and approaches that may potentially shape children’s positive attitudes toward reading.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Recommendations

Beyond the research questions that were addressed during this investigation, one of the preliminary findings is the ability of children to share their perspectives related to reading and literacy learning. Nutbrown (1996) argues that “the involvement of children as research participants rather than research subjects should be afforded them as a matter of right” (as cited in Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003, p. 117). As the findings demonstrate, not only are children’s perceptions worth listening to, they provide knowledge and illuminating insights that are often disregarded in our work with young children. It is the perspectives that they have shared which have provided the findings and shaped the implications that are presented within the later part of this chapter. Parents are encouraged to consider children’s perspectives and how these may be significant in re-evaluating their beliefs and shaping their approaches when providing opportunities for reading. Wyness (2005) further encourages educators and educational institutions to consider the voice and positions of children as knowledgeable others.

Children in numerical terms are a majority population in schools but lack any means through which this numerical superiority has any clout politically. Thus, whilst schools are quintessentially children’s places, there is little sense in which children own these places or have any control over how they are organized, run or structured. (p. 11)

This investigation focuses on the learning and literacy opportunities that can be fostered within the home. Furthermore, it highlights the perceptions of children as often being disregarded in the choices that they are offered when seeking reading activities. This emerged from parents when discussing the context of the home and classroom, where there was a focus on the acquisition of skills and the long-term benefits of reading. This in turn may limit opportunities for children to locate their own purpose and derive enjoyment from reading. We

are reminded of the value of listening to children's perspectives in an attempt to shape and understand the principles which influence children's positive attitudes toward reading. Several of the key principles and factors which have been highlighted within the findings have been addressed in further detail below.

Expanding Perspectives on the Influence of the Home Environment

In this investigation, the value and importance of the home environment in shaping children's attitudes toward reading is clearly demonstrated, substantiating the literature which explores family literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Mctavish, 2007; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Mui & Anderson, 2008). It was in their home environments where all children were provided ample materials to engage in reading and overall literacy learning. For most children, these materials extended the individual occasions that they had to engage in reading, beyond simply reading and sharing a story with an adult. Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights the importance of children's development needing to be understood in the context of such influences as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems. In agreement, Brendtro (2006) suggests that "a child's behavior reflects transactions within these immediate circles of influence. One can only gain an accurate understanding of a child by attending to transactions within the family, school, peer group, and neighborhood" (p. 163). The value of attending to the transactions between children and families could be considered to be an important factor in understanding children's attitudes toward reading in the classroom.

The primary purpose of this research was meant to explore the routines and activities which fostered positive attitudes toward reading. As the findings demonstrate, there were not distinct routines or specific activities which could be singled-out as playing the definitive role. It was a combination of the availability of resources; distinctive principles of engagement and

motivation; the active involvement of parents and; the role of siblings which held significance in shaping children's attitudes. Similar to the results presented in Heath (1983), Lee and Johnson (2007), Mctavish's (2007) and; Johnson's (2010) studies, literacy learning and reading opportunities varied for all families, were used for different purposes and in different contexts. For some families, reading was a chance for children to learn and connect with aspects of their family's religious affiliations and beliefs. For others, it was simply for the purpose of humor. The opportunities to explore literacy learning by reading labels or by children maintaining their family's oral tradition of reciting daily prayers during mealtimes and/or prior to bedtime, demonstrated the different purposes and strategies for exploring literacy within each family.

Partnering with children and families to become knowledgeable about the relevancy of certain traditions and practices is particularly valuable for educators. This provides them with the opportunity to reexamine their curricular approaches and classroom so to provide momentous contexts for reading. Reading involves children not only reciting concrete text. It becomes meaningful and more purposeful when children are able to successfully make connections to the story. This includes understanding the underlying themes in the text as well as drawing relevancy from the content.

Rethinking Literacy Opportunities within the Home: A Child's Perspective

The value that all children placed on exploring these activities "together" extends the work of Mui and Anderson (2008), where literacy learning is seen as a social practice, varying from context to context. Within their study, engaging in literacy was something that all family members were actively involved in, where children became immersed in a variety of reading and literacy learning opportunities collectively. "For young children, the home environment typically represents a large portion of their social and cultural experience and it makes sense therefore, to

focus on identifying and utilizing the strengths and assets of the individual family to develop skills within the family context” (Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009, p. 521). Participants in this investigation shared accounts of several occasions when they engaged in various literacy experiences. For children however, their excitement and engagement with reading appeared most significant and worthwhile when it was an activity that was enjoyed together. Whether reenacting a favorite story, enjoying a family game night, cuddling with a story and/or speaking about their interest in creating a homemade storybook, children’s perspectives call attention to the value of exploring these activities with their parents collaboratively. Furthermore, their perspectives prompt us as parents and educators, to examine a wider lens for locating meaningful opportunities to engage in reading. Their perceptions help to shift beliefs shared by many of the parents within this investigation, that literacy learning opportunities need to be limited and centered on storybook reading.

Based on the perspectives of children, parents are encouraged to consider the value that children place on being able to engage in literacy opportunities together. This may include planning a family game night, exploring environmental print on a walk or car ride to school and/or something as simple as sharing a story from their own childhood. Opportunities to engage in reading may be included during the brief yet intimate moments that are spent with children, recognizing the commitments that parents have within their daily lives. With the many responsibilities and demands that life welcomes, parents are urged to recognize literacy opportunities which may assist children in engaging in significant occasions for reading. As the children remind us, it is these moments that can be located during the daily rituals and routines that accompany our day-to-day schedules.

As the findings highlight, parents own busyness and commitments outside of the home often made steady routines around reading, unrealistic. Further research addressing parents' perceptions and feelings of frustration around reading is needed, to address the gap in the literature on children's attitudes toward reading. This is particularly valuable in addressing the impact that these sentiments may have on providing opportunities for reading and shaping parents' beliefs around reading. It is these beliefs which play a significant role in not only shaping children's attitudes, furthermore in providing literacy-rich environments where reading can be explored.

Young Readers Seek a Purpose

The study's secondary question addressed: Do parents' perceptions of their children's reading attitudes align with those of their children? If not, where does the discrepancy lie? It was apparent that the perceptions of all parents mirrored those of their children. Parents were accurate when communicating their children's feelings and attitudes toward reading. They were aware of their children's interest and/or disinterest with reading, which their children also spoke about during their own interviews. Of particular interest is the purpose attributed to reading by both parents and children, which demonstrated considerable inconsistencies. Similar to the findings presented in Baker and Scher's (2002) investigation, parents communicated a preoccupation with the importance of reading as something which they felt was necessary for their children's academic success and their future. The principles which motivated and engaged children with reading were met with their own purposes for reading beyond academic gain. All children sought reading as a source of humor and laughter, where stories provided them with an opportunity to connect with scenarios which they found unusual, mysterious and often amusing.

For some children, reading was also an opportunity for them to engage with aspects of their culture, identity and/or life experiences, communicating a preference for stories which

reflected these elements. This finding substantiates the work of Lee and Johnson's (2007), whose case study demonstrates the struggles children may face when they are unable to make meaningful connections with the curriculum. Similar to the findings in Heath (1983) and; Mui and Anderson's (2008) study, the practices of families were individualized, sharing links to the values and traditions of the family. For more than half of the children in this investigation this included maintaining the oral traditions of prayer. The values and practices of children and their families should be considered, in the literacy and reading opportunities provided to children within the classroom.

Principles of motivation and engagement, addressed similar ideas that were highlighted in Williams, Hedrick and Tuschinski's (2008) literature review and; Baker and Scher's (2002) study. Although the literature focused on children's motivation being shaped by their interests and opportunities for choice and control, attainable success and real-world relevancy were also addressed so to motivate young readers. The principles of motivation and engagement children spoke about were significant for them as they tried to locate their own purpose for reading. For some children this purpose reflected their desire to be able to do simple tasks such as "ordering off a menu," "helping mommy with the shopping" and for others, the opportunity to make sense of their own questions around "having a peanut allergy" for example. Reading and literacy opportunities provide autonomy for children so they may locate their own purpose for reading. At a young age particularly, these are often their first opportunities to find texts and occasions for reading that reflect their own questions, interests and curiosity. As found in Baker and Scher's (2002) study no significant differences in motivation with young readers were noted between the boys and girls who participated in this investigation.

The emphasis in the literature (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Kush & Watkin, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen 2006; Lever-Chain, 2008) appears more centered on attitudes that would satisfy the acquisition of skills rather than children locating their own objective and deriving pleasure from reading. As the report by People for Education (2011) highlights:

It is possible that in our drive to improve the mechanical aspects of literacy, we have turned reading at home into an extension of school work. This is not necessarily the best way to increase student's motivation to read. Perhaps the most important thing schools could be doing is to get the message out more clearly to parents that reading at home for pleasure is vital to children's long term success. (pp. 3-4)

The findings demonstrate a need to provide children with more opportunities to locate their own purpose and pleasure when reading. Instead of parents and educators being preoccupied with the life-long benefits of attaining these skills, there is potential for children to attain such skills when they can locate their own meanings while reading. The principles of motivation and engagement can assist children in fueling their own interests and finding their own purposes. It is these purposes which the researcher speculates may in fact assist us in shaping children's positive attitudes. Further research addressing this perspective is warranted.

Parents' Beliefs and Approaches: Do they inspire or discourage young readers?

The final question in this study sought an understanding of the routines and activities which tended to foster positive attitudes toward reading. As the findings suggest, it was those activities and contexts which allowed children to engage in laughter, success and enjoy shared activities that children most enjoyed. The children communicated a preference for stories, information books and comics also mentioned in Sizmur's (2008) report, as texts preferred by younger readers. Parents also noted children feeling a greater sense of confidence with reading, which Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) and; Sizmur (2008) attribute to children having gained

additional skills over the years. Mothers recognized and noted their children gaining additional skills and saw a progression of their own children's confidence with reading. It was this confidence and the success that their children enjoyed that they felt would continue to influence their children's attitudes and enjoyment of reading, in the later years of their lives.

Although parents communicated their challenges in developing stable routines around reading, they were successful in providing literacy-rich environments that were readily and easily accessible to children. All children had access to a library of books, technology, toys and/or writing materials that could provide rich literacy learning experiences. Similar to the findings in Mctavish (2007) and; Mui and Anderson's (2008) study, the availability and their access to print meant that children had choice and control in engaging in a variety of activities. This provides a glimpse into the rich-out of school experiences that can be presented to children within the home. It is unclear however, whether children in this investigation had ample opportunities to enjoy these activities as a shared experience with parents, specifically. Several children spoke about these activities being enjoyed with siblings and only a few mentioned their parents' involvement. There is a possibility that limiting these activities to children exploring these materials independently may deter children from locating significant contexts for exploring reading. Further research addressing this query and the role of siblings in shaping children's attitudes toward reading is suggested.

Lynch, Anderson, Anderson and Shapiro's (2006) would support and characterize several of the parent's behaviors and approaches in this study as being driven by holistic beliefs. This was evident in the variety of approaches that several parents used to explore reading, whether reading labels, modeling reading behaviors, including oral traditions in children's daily routines and/or making attempts in engaging in reading with children. For the most part however, parents

demonstrated concerns around the acquisition of skills and their preoccupation with the limited time they had to dedicate toward reading. Although their beliefs would be categorized by Weigel, Martin and Bennett (2006) as being facilitative, their preoccupations could be characterized as being conventional. This was demonstrated in the struggles often spoken about by parents in engaging their children in reading. Parents are encouraged to continue to reflect on manners in which their own beliefs and approaches may in fact deter children from sustaining positive attitudes toward reading. It is the approaches and beliefs which are shared by families which potentially play a significant role in shaping children's attitudes toward reading (Lynch et al., 2006; Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006).

Does Gender Matter?

Although several studies in the literature (Kush & Watkin's, 1996; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008; Lever-Chain, 2008) noted that girls tended to demonstrate more favorable and positive attitudes, several of the boys in this investigation also communicated an interest in reading. The two boys who did express negative attitudes often directed this negativity to reading which was adult-directed and school-related, also highlighted in Lever-Chain's (2008) study. Of value however is how these two boys demonstrated their ability to share vivid and detailed accounts of the enjoyment that they derived from certain stories, which Lever-Chain (2008) attributed to boys who demonstrated more favorable attitudes. There are some notable inconsistencies in the findings which have been presented in this investigation and those presented in Lever-Chain's (2008) findings. It is valuable for further research to be geared towards working with young boys to determine the principles of engagement and motivation, which may encourage them to build positive attitudes.

Both Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) and; Schatz and Krashen (2006) identify the steady decline often experienced by younger readers. Although the majority of children expressed an interest in reading in this investigation, the findings indicate the ongoing work and research needed in the primary years to maintain positive attitudes. This appears particularly significant for boys during early childhood, as highlighted in the findings. It is these positive attitudes which we hope children will maintain and carry forward in the later part of their lives.

Implications for the Classroom

Parents as well as educators are reminded of the significance of listening to children's perspectives. It is their perspectives which are often overlooked and undervalued in our work with young children. Although the value of reading and literacy learning for the academic gains and success of children should not be disregarded, this study demonstrates that understanding the purposes with which children explore books, assisting them in locating this purpose and enjoying shared opportunities with reading, is valuable. Educators are encouraged to continue to support parents to identify children's interests and assist them in locating meaningful contexts for reading with their children. Considering the principles which motivate and engage children in reading is further suggested. It is these key elements that may be considered when shaping reading and literacy opportunities in the classroom, to engage young readers in locating the joy that can be derived from reading.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that the theory and findings cannot be generalized to all populations. The majority of participants were of European descent. Considering that these families were from a middle class socioeconomic status (SES), a future investigation may take this same study into an area where the SES of participants may vary, to compare with this study. By including a wider array of culturally diverse families and by presenting different beliefs

around reading, a more comprehensive perspective may consider traditions and values beyond those found in this investigation.

The researcher recognized her inability to explore the perspectives of grandparents who played a significant role in the lives of several participants in this investigation. Extending the study to include the perceptions of extended family members i.e. grandparents, uncles, aunts etc. who are actively involved in the lives of children is suggested. This could offer a broader perspective of the beliefs and approaches that may significantly impact children's attitudes toward reading, and to connect with values and traditions which may inspire young readers, beyond those that have been explored in this investigation.

While there was an inability to recruit fathers for this study, it would have been enlightening, particularly to counter the often held beliefs that mothers are those responsible for tasks around reading and literacy learning. The importance of the role of the father, as highlighted throughout several interviews demonstrated their perspectives and roles being significant around children's motivation and engagement with reading. This influence could also be considered for future investigations, as the literature which included perspectives of the father was limited. Revisiting these participants through a longitudinal study remains of interest for the researcher, to explore whether children's interests and attitudes do decline in the later primary years as the literature indicates (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Schatz & Krashen, 2006; Sainsbury & Clarkson, 2008; People for Education, 2011). As well, to see if at all, principles of motivation and engagement may change. Researchers are further encouraged to seek out the voice and perspectives of children in future qualitative research studies, in an ongoing effort to shape a generation of lifelong readers and gain a holistic account of the perceptions of young children.

Recommendations for Families

“Literacy is a social and cultural practice, experienced by children long before they start school” (Raban, 1991, p. 16) often disclosed in the homes where children enjoy their initial experiences with reading. Families are reminded of the valuable role that they play in shaping children’s attitudes toward reading, substantiated through the findings that have been presented in this investigation. The home can be seen as a place where children enjoy their first opportunities to embark on meaningful and myriad opportunities for reading and literacy learning. The role of families as co-constructors in the literacy development of all children should not be overlooked (Mctavish, 2007). Several recommendations for families to consider, so to promote and shape children’s positive attitudes are described in further detail below.

- **Think about Reading as more than an Opportunity to Share a Story**

Reading and literacy opportunities should be recognized in the daily encounters that are shared with children. Whether having your child help you write a grocery list, pointing out environmental print while on a walk to school and/or sharing the details of your day during dinnertime, literacy opportunities can be explored and enjoyed beyond simply reading a story. Parents’ are encouraged to recognize opportunities to explore reading throughout their daily tasks and interactions with children. “Research suggests that it is best not to consider literacy [and reading] as isolate[d] skill[s] but to consider how it mediates other activities (Teale, 1986). Helping children learn literacy [and reading] through a variety of activities is important” (Lynch et al., 2006, p. 14).

- **Recognize the Value that Children Place on Reading as a Shared Experience**

Reading and literacy opportunities are often most meaningful and enjoyable for children, when explored as a collaborative endeavor. Consider ways in which you may put aside several minutes in your day so that children may derive pleasure from exploring an activity with you. This may include playing a board game, visiting the local library, stopping to listen to a poem they have written or simply cuddling with your child’s

favorite story. Realize the value and comfort that children find in exploring these activities together. Consider how siblings may also be included in this family adventure.

- **Listen to Your Child’s Perspectives**

Take opportunities to speak with your child about the principles that may engage and motivate them to read. Whether for humor or their desire to read a book suggested by a peer, listen to their perspectives. Consider how their preferences can be used during reading opportunities when selecting books and/or activities to explore.

- **Help Children Locate Their Purpose**

Whether searching for an answer on how to play a video or board game or simply looking for information about their favorite hockey player, show children how books may be helpful in finding these answers. Work with children to help them locate these answers in a book, in an instruction manual, on the internet etc. Show children the benefits of reading and how this skill may enhance their ability to locate the tools, information and/or answers that they are in search of.

- **Empower Children through Choice and Control**

Provide children with opportunities to select stories and literature which reflect their own interests and curiosity. If visiting a library, purchasing a new book or when opportunities for reading arise, allow children to select literature which catches their interest and attention. “Involvement in books allows children to experience, through imagination, other worlds and other roles, and this involvement contributes to their personal and social development as well as to their reading abilities” (Sizmur, 2008, p. 21). Be attentive to several of the reasons why they have selected a particular story i.e. for humor, to seek answers to a question they may have etc. These elements may be particularly valuable so to maintain children’s interests and positive attitudes. This knowledge may also be beneficial when the next opportunity to select and enjoy a story may arise.

Appendices



RYERSON UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Parental Letter and Consent Agreement
Appendix A**

Date: Monday July 2, 2012.

Dear Parent or Guardian:

You and your child are being asked to participate in a research study that will explore children's attitudes toward reading. It is important that you read the following information before you give consent to participate and ask any questions that you feel are necessary to ensure that you understand what you are being asked to do. Your child will also have an opportunity to ask questions about the research and decide whether they want to participate in the study.

Title of the Study

“Just one more story before bedtime...Please!” Examining how children's family rituals and home life impact their attitudes toward reading.

Purpose of the Investigation

This research investigation is part of my requirement as a potential candidate for the Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree at Ryerson University. The purpose of my research is to examine children's attitudes toward reading. I want to explore the rituals and activities within the home that may influence a positive attitude toward reading.

Investigator: Daniela Tessaro
Under the course supervision of Dr. Marni Binder
School of Early Childhood Education
Ryerson University

Description of the Study

Many young children often communicate a lack of interest in reading, as parents often struggle to find ways to convince children of the benefits. For this reason, I am interested in talking to your child to find out how they feel about reading. Further, I want their suggestions on how we can make learning about books, interesting and fun for them at home. Each child will be asked several questions, where they will be able to give their opinions and suggestions to the researcher. All responses will be audio-recorded and notes from our discussion will be written.

Total Time Commitment (Approximately 2 hours):

- Introductory visit: 15-20 minutes
- Child's Interview: 15-20 minutes
- Parent Interview: 45 minutes; this is an opportunity for the researcher to explore some of your own opinions about reading.
- Observations: The researcher is also interested in spending 15-20 minutes examining some of the tools and the materials that your child has access to at home i.e. your child's books, games etc.

You and your child will have an opportunity to explore the interview notes prior to moving forward with my analysis and final report. This will ensure that you and your child will have an opportunity to review the notes and add or take away anything that does not reflect you or your child's feelings and/or ideas.

Location: The participant's home.

If you give permission for your child to participate in the research, you will be asked to sign a letter of permission for the researcher to:

- make observations in your home
- work one-on-one with your child
- audiotape discussions during the interviews

I have attached a letter for your child to sign, making them an active participant in this study. Please note that if your child does not wish to participate, their wish will be the deciding factor.

Potential Benefits

My research is intended not only to investigate the opinions of all participants, rather as a way to gather information for present and future

educators so they may understand how families play an important role in shaping attitudes toward reading and literacy learning. By understanding some of the strategies, struggles and success' that are experienced by you as a parent, educators may be able to consider additional teaching approaches that may promote an interest for reading and literacy learning within the classroom. Please note that this study cannot guarantee a direct benefit to participants.

Potential Risk

It is felt that there is minimum risk to either you or your child when participating in the study. If you or your child does not wish to answer a question that is asked you may ask the researcher to move to the next question. Your child will be allowed to say that they don't want to answer any more questions and/or have a sibling, parent or guardian present, during the interview or observations if they wish. Your child will be told about these options before the interview and/or observations begin. The researcher wants to ensure that you and your child feel comfortable throughout the entire study.

Confidentiality

All responses and field notes will be protected throughout the process of this study. No names or identifying information will be used in any publication, report or presentation. Any direct comments made by you or your child will have no names attached to them. All data, consent forms and audiotapes will be stored securely in a locked file for one year and will then be destroyed. Only the researcher and the supervisor will ever view the actual data.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not you would like to participate or you would like your child to participate, will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the researcher, or the School of Early Childhood Education. Children will also decide whether they wish to participate by printing their name on the attached assent form and by verbally providing consent to their parent/guardian and the investigator. If you choose to have your child participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You may also stop your participation in the study at any time.

Questions about the Study

If you have any questions you may address them now. Questions that may arise at a later time may be addressed to:

Daniela Tessaro (dtessaro@ryerson.ca)
Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Marni Binder (mbinder@ryerson.ca),
(416) 979-5000 x7130

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board for Information.

Research Ethics Board
C/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K3
(416) 979-5042

Parental Consent Agreement

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that:

- you have read the information in the consent form.
- you have had a chance to ask any questions about the study.
- you would like your child to participate in the study.
- you would like to participate in the study.
- you are aware that you can withdraw this consent at any time during the study without penalty by contacting the investigator.
- you have been given a copy of this consent form with all contact information.
- you have been informed that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights or that of your child.

Name of child (please print)

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Audiotape Recording

Your signature below indicates that you have provided consent to be audio taped.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Your signature below indicates that you have provided consent for your child to be audio taped.

Name of child (please print)

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

**Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Child's Assent Agreement
Appendix B**

My name is Daniela Tessaro and I am a student in university. I am doing a special research project about how children feel about reading and I need your help. I want to know how you feel about reading and what you think are some of the ways that mom or dad can make reading fun. If you say okay, I will be asking you some questions and be visiting your home, to see some of the different toys, games or books you may have. Your parents have said it's okay for you to do this but if you don't want to, no one will be upset or angry.

It's OK for me that:

1. I will talk to the researcher (Daniela Tessaro)._____
2. Things I say will be written down or taped. _____
3. The researcher will look at some of my books or toys that I use at home.

4. I can stop the study at any time. One way I can do this is by saying "stop now" or I can say "I would like to finish later." _____
5. I can end being part of the study at anytime without any questions being asked. _____

It's not OK by me that:

1. Things will be taped when I talk. _____
2. The researcher will look at some of my books or toys that I use at home.

My name

My signature or special mark

Today's date _____

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Interview Questions (Parents/Guardians)
Appendix C

- 1) Do you feel that reading is an important skill for children to have? Why or why not?
- 2) Is reading an activity that is a part of your child's routine? If so, is it something that you do with your child?
- 3) For parents who may encourage reading: Describe some of the struggles that you may face when encouraging your child to read.
- 4) Describe some of the rituals and routines that you have at home? (i.e. reading a story before bedtime each night, homework, singing songs etc.)
*Reassure parents that this does not have to include only activities that involve reading *
- 5) How would you describe your child's current attitude toward reading?
- 6) What do you think impacts their attitude and motivation to read?
- 7) Please share any concluding remarks or comments that you feel would contribute to this study and/or future investigations?
- 8) Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

Interview Questions (Children)
Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Appendix D

- 1) Do you like to read? Tell me about a special story that you like to read or one that you did not like so much...
- 2) What sorts of things do you like to read? (Provide suggestions for children that are struggling with this question i.e. books, comics, newspapers, poems, magazines etc.)
- 3) Do you think that reading is fun? What is it about reading that you find fun or not fun?
- 4) Do you read at home?
- 5) What other activities do you enjoy doing at home on your own? With your family?
- 6) How could mom or dad make reading fun for you? (Provide suggestions for children who are struggling with this question i.e. visit the library, read together, let you choose your own stories etc.)
- 7) Do you want to tell me anything else? Do you have any questions for me?

A pseudonym will be used to ensure confidentiality

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Observations at Participants' Home:
Appendix E

What kinds of books are available to the child at home?
(books, poetry, magazines, culturally relevant stories etc.)

Is there a library available for the child that is accessible to them?

Have children share additional resources that they may have access to
i.e. a computer, I Pad etc. Consider whether they would be useful for reading and
literacy learning.

What response is demonstrated by the child when presented with a selection of
stories by the researcher?
(frustration, boredom, interest, lack of excitement/excitement etc).

Note any additional observations that may be significant for the purpose
of this research investigation

Telephone/Email Script (Recruitment):
Appendix F

Hi _____, my name is Daniela Tessaro. I am currently conducting a research study that will examine children's attitudes toward reading. This research investigation is part of my requirement as a potential candidate for the Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree at Ryerson University. I want to explore some of the rituals and routines that you as a parent/guardian may implement to promote literacy and reading skills. Many young children often communicate a lack of interest in reading, as parents often struggle to find ways to convince children of the many benefits. As research indicates, many children, tend to experience a decline in interest and enjoyment of reading as they enter the later primary grades, often starting from grade one and onwards. For this reason, I am interested in talking to your child to find out how they feel about reading and investigate some of the approaches that you may be implementing at home.

Parent/Guardian: *possible parent's response:* Sounds interesting...ok I think I may want to participate...

Daniela: This study requires the participation of a parent/primary caregiver and a child between the ages of 6-8. In order for you and your child to participate it is important for me to confirm that you reside in Vaughan and that your child is between the age of 6 and 8?

Parent/Guardian: Yes, my little girl Franca just turned 7 and it is always a struggle to get her to sit down and do any reading.

Daniela: That sounds like something we can potentially discuss during the interview. It might be something that Franca can tell me more about if she is willing to participate.

Parent/Guardian: How much time do I have to dedicate to this?

Daniela: Your child will be interviewed using an individual semi-structured interview that will explore their own feelings about reading and the books that they enjoy. Interviews will last approximately 15-20 minutes and will happen at your home. My interview with you or another one of Franca's primary caregivers will last approximately 30-45 minutes. I would also like to observe any tools and/or books that you may have available at home, if you consent for me to do so. This may potentially take up approximately two hours, during one visit, on the day of your choice.

Parent/Guardian: What date are you looking at?

Daniela: I will need to arrange a day, within the next few weeks when we can sit and review the consent form. At this time if both you...your husband...partner etc. and child will be willing to participate you will be asked to sign a written consent form. At this point we can discuss any additional questions and concerns that may arise and we can move forward, if you and your child wish to participate.

Parent/Guardian: Let me talk to Franca and see what she thinks and then I will speak to my partner to ensure that he is OK with participating in this study.

Daniela: That sounds great. If you have any additional questions and/or decide this may be something that you are interested in you can contact me on my cell phone at (647) 290-6228 or email me at dtessaro@ryerson.ca so we can arrange a meeting time.

Parent/Guardian: Thanks. Sounds great...I will get back to you in a few days. Oh, one more question. Will our names be used in the study because I know my partner would not like that very much!

Daniela: Absolutely not. When I collect my data I will use a generic name for yourself and your child. We can discuss this further when we meet and I will outline how we ensure confidentiality for all families.

Parent/Guardian: Sounds great, thank you.

Daniela: My pleasure and I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

RYERSON UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

To: Daniela Tessaro
School of Early Childhood Education
Re: REB 2012-163: "Just one more story before bedtime...Please!" Examining how children's family rituals and home life impact their attitudes towards reading.
Date: June 20, 2012

Dear Daniela Tessaro,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2012-163 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2012-163) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.



Nancy Walton, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Coding Samples Appendix H

Please Note: *(word in brackets)-indicates code(s) assigned to each line of text

Interview Question (Parent)

Do you feel that reading is an important skill for children to have? Why or why not?

Participant (CD)

“I do...the earlier they start the better because everything comes from reading and writing.”
*(necessity/relevancy of literacy)

-“I blame myself for having taken a step back with my son *(guilt). Maybe it is because he is doing well at school so I have not made reading a big part of our life *(parent’s beliefs/perceptions). I took more time and interest *(parent involvement) with my daughter who loves to read and can spend hours in her *(differences amongst siblings) room wrapped in a book. With Marcus it is a constant struggle”. *(challenge/obstacle)

Participant (PP)

-“Reading is what carries you through life. It improves your language skills, it helps you find a *(necessity/skill acquisition/long-term benefits) job, it helps you deal with people...it is at the root of everything”. *(future goals/parent beliefs)

Participant (J)

“Yes...it teaches them. It makes them knowledgeable and it will help educate them on how to *(necessity) find things and learn things in the future”. *(long-term benefits)

Participant (L)

“Of course...it is a life skill without a doubt”. *(life skill)

Participant (M)

“Yeah...sure. Without it you can’t function in the daily routine of life. It is everything.” *(life skill/necessity)

Participant (P)

“Without these skills how do we expect kids to get anywhere in life?” *(necessity/long-term benefits)

Interview Question (Child)

What sorts of things do you like to read? (Provide suggestions for children that are struggling with this question i.e. books, comics, newspapers, poems etc.)

Participant (MD)

-“I don’t like to read any books, just the little books that are easy to read. Books that are funny *(attitude/humor) and I like books where the monsters eat people...that’s funny!”
*(humor/interest)

-during observation child pulls off books off his book shelf that he likes which include: Scooby *(interests) Doo books, I spy books and the clown book that he reads to his brother.
*(resources/books available to child)

Participant (J)

-books. Robert Munsch and the Cat and the Hat. *(genre of book/humor)

Participant (A)

-“I like to read books. I like to read the menus at the restaurant so that I can place my own *(attitude/real-world relevancy) order. I like to read the labels on my video games and the *(reading beyond books/environmental print) books that come inside the video games so I know how to play the *(purpose/knowledge) games and do the battles.” *(accomplish a task)

Participant (AA)

-“I like to read the posters of the people that are on TV. I like to read the signs like the one of *(environmental print) the two little puppies that were lost and the family that misses them. I *(reading beyond books/interests) like to read the menus too but I don’t know how to read the *(skills) menus. I even like to read the white papers that come on Thursdays...that’s fun”
*(interest)

Participant (MG)

-“books and my WWE magazine that comes in the mail. You know that it comes in my name.”
*(genre of books)

-He also reads the bible almost every night. *(cultural affiliation)

Participant (MM)

-“I don’t think I have any things. I don’t know. Sometimes I like to read dad’s old comic *(attitude/interest) books...that’s all.”

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