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Home Literacy Environment and Effects of Reading Development in Children

By Natalia Ames

A professional project submitted to Western Oregon
University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:
Master of Education Program

May, 2022



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Project

“The presence of books in the home has a greater influence on a child's level of education than does the parents income, nationality, or level of education. A 20-year study shows how investing in books can make a big difference” (Delisio, 2010, p.1).

I am a kindergarten teacher at Kalapuya Elementary in West Salem and this is my 5th year teaching. I have taught 4 years of 1st grade, and this is my first year in kindergarten. I am graduating with my master's in education, specializing in reading instruction. I have a passion for teaching reading. There isn't anything quite like watching a bright smile come across a face with beaming eyes, as a student reads their first book fluently. However, as a teacher in the primary grades, I have always felt the pressure of making sure students were “readers” before leaving first grade. But what makes a child a successful reader? And what should teachers do if they aren't reading at grade level? These questions are almost as important as the student actually learning to read. It will always be important to me to continue my education, specifically in developing my own literacy skills to prepare students for the best possible pathway for their future in education. Taking this step of earning a reading endorsement will be the most useful skill I will develop as a primary teacher.

One of the greatest predictors of student success is parental support and home environment (Black, 2019). Unfortunately, these are things we as educators cannot control. My project will be focused on creating a parent toolkit for caregivers to help support their children at home. This toolkit will solely be for reading instruction and will have helpful tips, activities, and books they can read at home with their child in order to help support their reading development.

This project stemmed from my experience with many families not reading at home, and not being exposed to books and print before entering kindergarten. Many parents that I have

conferenced with and talked to over the years have always said they want to help their child but they don't know how to. Parents have mentioned that they are using phrases like "sound it out" but have no true skills in prompting their children while reading, especially when their child gets stuck. Most parents have communicated the lack of books they have in their home for reading aloud and at their child's independent reading level. This toolkit could help children as early as birth and extend into elementary school (around 2nd grade). It is a reach out project to help educate parents on the progression of the way their child will be learning to read. My hope is that they will use the toolkit as a way to check in on their child's development, to make sure they are mastering the skills they need, at the appropriate age. We know it is important to read to your child as early as birth because it can help cognitive development, vocabulary, and boosts their chances to succeed academically. The goal of this project is to give parents and caregivers the support and resources they need and the confidence in supporting their child's reading development at home.

When thinking about my approach to teaching, my philosophy, and experience in education thus far, I feel strongly about creating an equitable learning environment for all of my students. My goal as a professional is to make every single student in my class feel valued, important, and loved. Unfortunately the way our school system was built does not include all students, it does not include all types of learners, and it does not include all types of communities. This discrepancy is something I strive to change in my classroom every day. One way this project will help initiate change is by educating families by giving them tools and resources to integrate into their homes.

In a time where we are so divided, stories and literature can bring families together, it can bring hope and validation when people need it, it can help families do something positive with

their children. From toxic homes, cyclical poverty, abuse, and trauma, reading can take you to new places and let us experience things outside of our world. It can also educate, inspire, and change the way we live our lives or at least the perspective from which we once had.

Goals

When thinking about child development and how it has evolved over the years, technology is a rising topic of concern. Domingues-Montanari (2017) wrote an article discussing the positive and negative effects screen time had on children. An overview of her research was, “Screen time, in particular, television viewing, has been negatively associated with the development of physical and cognitive abilities, and positively associated with obesity, sleep problems, depression and anxiety” (Domingues-Montanari, 2017, p.333). While the effects technology has on children are continually being explored, my goal of this project was to dig deeper into interactive games and activities that don't involve a screen. When creating this project, I kept in mind a toolkit would be a great way to promote family engagement without requiring a device or screen. It is a small gesture to reduce the amount of screen time for children. This toolkit will give families a way to engage with each other in person instead of using technology.

My hope is that this toolkit will create routines for children at home and spark the joy of reading to create lifelong readers. I want more children to love reading while simultaneously reducing screen time. I want parents to feel empowered and confident when reading with their children. My goal is to create a usable, effective, student-centered toolkit that families will be able to use easily. A successful toolkit would result in parents and caregivers creating developmentally appropriate, literacy experiences at home for their children.

Themes

As I was researching “family literacy”, many topics surrounding programs and activities in a school setting came up. For example, reading nights or workshops with the school, providing an event for families. My project is not creating a program or event for my school, it is creating a resource for families to use at home. I had to change my research topic to “at home literacy practices” to ensure I was researching topics that were supporting my project's goal. In this project I use the term “Home Literacy Environment (HLE)”, which is defined as “an umbrella term used to describe the literacy-related interactions, resources, and attitudes that children experience at home” (Hamilton et al., 2016).

Family involvement in children’s reading development is crucial to the success of young readers. Children can listen to stories as soon as they are born. It does not mean “teaching” your child their letters and sounds, and teaching them how to write, it is simply exposing them to stories, words, and experiences that they have yet to have. “Parents who read 1 picture book with their children every day provide their children with exposure to an estimated 78,000 words each year” (Jar, 2019). That statistic alone can show the importance of exposing our littlest learners to reading as early as we can.

Using a reading survey that I created, I interviewed all 23 of my students about their experience of reading at home with their families. The survey asked questions about if they read at home, if anyone else reads to them at home, and what kind of books they like. It also asked questions about screen time, if they are allowed to be on screens, if they have a time limit, and if anyone is in the room with them when they are on their screens. This interview was extremely interesting as I found out a lot of information about my students and their screen boundaries at home.

Out of 23 students, 14 of them stated that they read at home to a family member on most nights. The other 9 students answered they did not read to anyone at home. The next question I asked was if an adult read to them, 16 of my students answered yes, of those 16, 11 of them shared that someone reads to them almost every night. The other 5 said it was less frequent. This leaves 7 students who are not getting read to. It is important to recognize, the same 7 students who are not getting read to, also answered “no” to reading at home to someone. These 7 students are not being read to, nor are reading to anyone at home. In my class alone, around 30% of my students are not being exposed to literature at home. These results show a high need for family involvement.

In the past, my school has not had an expectation of families to implement reading into their homes at a school-wide level. Many grade levels have reading requirements of students each night. For example, reading 20 minutes a night, getting a signature for reading a take-home book, or having a monthly reading calendar. This is all based on what individual grade levels decide. Our school district has zero at home resources for families to “check out” or packets to read about the benefits of reading at home. This project will be a different approach to help students because it has not been done at a school or district level. It will target individual grades making it easy for parents to use and navigate.

Learning Outcomes

When deciding to create this project I wanted it to not only benefit families and improve my teaching practices, but also meet the four learning outcomes of the Master of Education program at Western Oregon University. This project meets the requirements of the MSED program because it will help me reach all four goals.

Learning Outcome 1: Effectively use advanced content knowledge and educational technologies. In order to successfully create a toolkit, I will need to use what I already know about reading development and research extensively about developmentally appropriate stages children will be going through in their reading development and how to best support them at each level. It will deepen my understanding of each age group and the skills they need to become successful readers.

Learning Outcome 2: Analyze data and evidence to support learning and engage in change. After I have finished researching, I will then have to apply that research to creating appropriate activities and handouts for families to read and participate in. The whole idea of this project is that I will be changing my community for the better by getting more families reading at home.

Learning Outcome 3: Apply learning theories and research in education in a variety of contexts. I will be researching different ages of reading development from a different perspective than I have done before. After my research is done, I will need to communicate my research in a user-friendly way while still being research based. I will need to be clear when describing different skills and activities which will help develop my understanding of the skills themselves.

Learning Outcome 4: Demonstrate professional growth, dispositions and leadership appropriate to their field in education. This will push me to learn more in my area of expertise and will give me a chance to share my findings and toolkits with families and colleagues. This toolkit will give me the opportunity to gain feedback and grow my personal knowledge.

This project will start with children at birth and end in 2nd grade (age 8), or when kids typically go from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. After this switch, children typically

don't need more help with decoding words anymore and start learning comprehension strategies and how to make meaning as their texts get increasingly more complex. Each age group will have information, books, activities, and prompts for parents to help their children in whatever age group they are in. I plan to start my research for development at birth and make cover pages for each age group stating the skills their child should be doing from a literary standpoint, what activities are in the kit, and what books are included. The cover pages will help me dictate what activities and books I need to find or make for that part of the project. This project will take a lot of time because pre-research needs to happen before I can start to assemble the kit. This multi-step project took the entire term to complete each step successfully. I will assess my success by having a parent go through the kit and review its components. I will then make revisions based on feedback and questions they might have. A truly successful kit would mean that an adult has found it helpful to teach their child at home. If it is user friendly, engaging, and easy to understand, more families would be interested in using it and more children would benefit.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Studies of children's development have been of interest to researchers, teachers, and families for a long time. As children develop and enter school there are many questions surrounding what should be done at home before they begin school, and how to support children at home once they have started. Durkin (1974) conducted a 6 year study researching if children were ready to read before the age of 6.5, the previous age in which it was believed. Her studies proved that children show interest in reading and writing at the earliest of age four, meaning they are ready to start learning basic fundamentals of reading. Because of this, we can assume that once children show interest in reading or writing they are ready to start getting small pieces of instruction. But what are families supposed to do before this? Research suggests that reading aloud to children as early as birth can boost language, attentiveness, and critical thinking skills (Towell, 2021). There has been research surrounding and supporting this topic for decades. It improves critical skills for young readers before they can read themselves. "Reading aloud creates an appreciation of children's literature, develops listening comprehension, improves awareness of text structures, provides exposure to new vocabulary and promotes emergent literacy and language before children can speak" (Brown, Westerveld, et al., 2017, p. 76).

For this literature review I researched how Home Literacy Environment (HLE) can boost reading development within children. It also explores home reading experience and school instruction and helps explain the importance of the two working together to create optimal reading development. It will also review the barriers to family literacy and discuss the inequities different communities experience surrounding the topic.

Methodology

In order to conduct proper research for this review I had to find a number of articles that covered the broadness of this topic. It started with researching “reading development” in children ages zero to five, which led to finding information on “family literacy”, then redirected my search in discovering “home literacy environments”. Because of this, I had to look through the online databases of ERIC, Academic Search Premier and Google scholar to find peer-reviewed research articles in different subject types. I first used key terms like “reading development”, then stretched to “home literacy environments”. I had to determine if it was useful by making sure the studies conducted had to do with reading at home resulting in success in the classroom. I made sure the research correlated with at home reading development and not reading development in the school setting.

After reaching out to my professors, they recommended some researchers who brought me in new directions of the research. I had to then decide what angle I was approaching reading development from. Victoria Purcell Gates (2011) researches the sociocultural angle of teaching children to read and the literacy practices in different communities. Dolores Durkin, as I stated above, is responsible for a study that suggests children were ready to read before the age of 6.5. With these researchers in mind, I tailored my research to fit into 3 themes: Literacy exposure before age 5, home literacy environment, and sociocultural factors. If the research could fit into one of these categories, they were identified as a successful finding for this review.

Definitions

To understand this literature review, it is important to define key terms associated with the research. The terms that need a shared understanding are reading development, home literacy

environment, and sociocultural factors. Reading Rockets (2022), a popular reading website with many resources defines **reading** as, “a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation” (Leipzig, 2001, p.1). Literacy development is learning words, sounds, and language. When reading this review it’s helpful to remember that literacy development is as simple as sounds and language. It does not start with sounding out words to learn to read. There are many crucial stepping stones before children start viewing print. Another definition to be familiar with is **home literacy environment**. Home literacy environment (HLE) is defined as the “three-way interactions between children, parents, and text that take place in the home” (Hamilton, et al. (2016), p. 401). It was important for me not to confuse HLE with family literacy. Family literacy as defined by the US Department of Education (2022), “refers to a continuum of programs that addresses the intergenerational nature of literacy. Under the [Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998](#), family literacy programs integrate (1) interactive literacy activities between parent and child; (2) training in parenting activities; (3) literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; (4) age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences” (*Family Literacy. Home* | U.S. Department of Education. 2022). Family literacy refers to the caregivers and the school working together to provide reading opportunities for children. But the idea of this toolkit was to boost the HLE separately from the school. The idea of HLE is that parents and caregivers are the first teachers of their children long before they enter school. This is critical in starting the development of readers. The last definition to know is **sociocultural factors**, the American Psychological Association defines sociocultural factors as, “the environmental conditions that play a part in adaptive and healthy behavior and wellbeing. The opposite is maladaptive behavior, mental disorders and social pathology” (VandenBos, 2015). It is important

to keep in mind all of the different barriers families and children are facing in their everyday lives. It would be naive to say that all children learn the same and that all families have the same circumstances and family structures. We have to consider this first, before anything else, when we are in the process of teaching our students.

Literature Review

“One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers” (Hernandez, 2012, p.4). That statistic alone seems like enough for families and educators to prioritize the development of reading from the earliest stages possible. However, there still seems to be a disconnect between families and teachers on the importance of a positive home literacy environment and its benefit to early literacy development. With the importance of early literacy development in mind, it is crucial to explore the different abilities within a range of age groups in order to best support children at home.

Literacy Exposure Before Age 5

Early storybook reading (ESR), also known as shared reading, is the act of an adult sharing a story with their child. “Engaging children in ESR can lead to beneficial outcome for communication, social and emotional development, cognition and emergent literacy skills, which together assist in the child’s over school readiness (Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Shoghi, Willersdorf, Braganza & McDonald, 2013). Early theorists Vygotsky and Chomsky had two entirely different views on how children acquire language. Vygotsky suggested a socialist approach, that humans acquire language through others and purposeful interactions. In contrast, Chomsky believed that children naturally acquired language through non-forced exposure. (Brown, Westerveld, & Gillon, 2017, p. 69) This is important to recognize that the theory of

reading development and language acquisition has been widely researched and different approaches to teaching language are common. However, the act of reading aloud to children can easily fall under either of these theories. A non-forced story time for a child for joyful purposes can be a purposeful interaction or a non-forced exposure. Either way, this action alone can support both sides of these two theorists.

We can infer now that it is a mixture of the two, natural and purposeful interactions that help develop a child's language. Brown (2017) conducted research to see just how important reading was to a number of different families. What was interesting was that most families believed that ESR was important, yet for families from less advantaged areas there were many more barriers preventing them from participating in reading to their children. It is important to note that less privileged communities will have more barriers accessing libraries and quality books over more privileged families.

As technology grows and becomes more and more a part of our world, there are studies that prove they can help in the development of early literacy skills in children ages 2-4. Michelle Neumann (2016) indicates that touchscreen devices give children the opportunity to engage in writing, drawing, and searching for information successfully. Neumann (2016) conducted a study to see if the use of tablets for early literacy skills actually corresponded to non-digital early literacy skills (print awareness, writing, storybook reading). Her findings were not surprising, children who played educational games on a tablet had higher print awareness on and off of the screen, but it did not correspond to actually producing writing or reading off of the screen. This study is important to recognize that the use of technology can help support literacy skills but by no means should it be the only form of literacy instruction provided. It is also important to recognize that they were using specific programs to help develop literacy skills and it was not

any program or game. The missing component in this study is we aren't seeing the long-term effects of screentime for children.

From the time a child is born, they can benefit from being read to. "Reading aloud is a research-based strategy that helps children of all ages develop a love of literacy, grow their vocabularies, read independently and think critically" (Towell, 2017, p. 322). Durkin (1974) determined that students who developed reading skills early were children who had been read to frequently from an early age by their parents or other caring adults.

While children are young, it is important for parents or caregivers to read aloud picture books as often as they can. This action alone can boost vocabulary, boost attentiveness, boost vocabulary, and can even help parents develop a deeper bond with their child because of a shared consistent experience (Towell, 2017).

Home Literacy Environment

Home Literacy Environment (HLE) is the idea that the parents and caregivers in homes are the first teacher of literacy to their children. HLE can be a number of activities done at home to improve the development of reading. Most parents and caregivers help make meaning of the world through purposeful experiences and exposure to literacy for their children much earlier than grade school. The Florida Reading Association (2022) refers to family literacy as the way adults use literacy at home, at work, at school, and in their community. It is helpful to understand that this is a broad spectrum to look at, and a number of things could fall under the umbrella of "Home Literacy Environments" including family literacy.

Creating a literacy-friendly home environment is a way for families to provide an engaging, positive experience with literature as early as possible. This approach is an indirect

way to promote literacy within homes, this idea would correlate with Noam Chomsky's theory on humans acquiring language in the most natural way possible. (Casper, & Lopez, 2017, p. 3)

There are two different types of literacy activities that can be done at home. The first type of activity is meaning-first. "Meaning-related literacy activities are those where print is present but it is not the focus of the parent-child interaction, for example, when parents read storybooks to their children" (Goldfeld et. al, 2021, p. 1). This would be another way that research supports Chomsky in his findings that children develop language and skills through exposure. The other type of activity that can be done at home is code-related, these activities focus on print, for example, when a parent makes flashcards for their student to memorize sight words or teaches their student the letter names and sounds. (Goldfeld, et. al, 2021, p. 1)

Research shows the positive correspondence when families participate in either of the two types of activities before their children are school aged, meaning-based or code-based. There wasn't a big difference in the results that one activity was better than the other, but that "one of the activities or both, correlated with children being more likely to become independent readers by the end of first grade" (Goldfeld, Moreno-Betancur, M., Guo, et. al, 2021, p. 10). Children who received either type of instruction at home were more interested in print when they went to school, had a higher vocabulary, and were more motivated in general in a school setting. (Goldfeld, Moreno-Betancur, M., Guo, et. al, 2021, p.12)

Another way for families to engage their children in appropriate development is by having ongoing conversations. This particular skill doesn't always need to be about books, it can be conversations that require the child to critically think about something, answering a question that needs elaboration, or even just acknowledging that young children are curious and have many questions about everything. Understanding that children are constantly trying to make

sense of the world around them can help us as adults shape our answers and conversations toward a more meaningful approach for our conversations with children. (Caspe, & Lopez, M. E, 2017, p. 4)

Some challenges that we face with different home literacy environments is there is often a disconnect between home and school structures that surround our own individual definitions of literacy. There are many ways schools can promote partnerships with families to encourage the two to get to a common ground on the topic of literacy. To start, schools should be including everyone in decisions about their students and making all parents and caregivers feel wanted in the schools and in the decision making. If parents do not feel adequate or wanted, they are less likely to engage with the school. Another way to promote literacy is by introducing quality books at a young age and communicating the benefits of reading to parents and caregivers. The best thing we can do as educators is get to know our families and see how they are already contributing to their child's learning at home. If both home and school can support a student with their best interest in mind, that student will have the highest chances for a successful life.

(Zygouris-Coe, 2007)

Some implications to note are a lot of the research done surrounding HLE is that much of the information gained for home literacy environments is by an adult filling out their own family's information and surveys regarding the topic. This could be skewed in the amount of reading and engagement families are participating in, versus how much they want to be doing or how much they think they should be doing. When so much of the research has been done by self-assessments, it leaves room for error and questioning the accuracy of certain studies.

Sociocultural Factors

Anytime we are talking about communities, schools, and groups together as one, we need to make sure we are doing the research about who struggles most in our society. We must research whose voice is not being heard, and we have to get the perspective of all communities, not just the ones who have access to resources. We cannot just take in and accept this research for what it is, because we have to take into account the socioeconomic factors of why a family may be struggling bringing a certain type of literacy practice into their home. That is not to say that different cultures do not have different ways to access literature, because they do. Through storytelling, games, songs, reading and sharing of religious texts and other traditions, all families have some way to access language development in their homes. The point of the research is to make known that certain types of language and reading activities are more correlated in the school setting. Home literacy practices may not align with those supported in the dominant culture in school but those practices are just as important, if not more, than the practices that fit “best” in the school setting.

Children's early literacy development may differ for various reasons. For example, poor family and neighborhood socioeconomic status are correlated with lower quality of books and insufficient learning resources for children (Nai-Cheng Kuo, 2016, p. 201). The socioeconomic status of an area or family is a large predictor in getting families resources to have the opportunity to bring books into their homes. Without plentiful schools and public libraries, it is nearly impossible to have as much exposure to literature as parents, caregivers, and teachers would like our children to have.

The Preschool Promise was implemented in Oregon to help close some of these gaps and remove economic barriers for families in poverty. If families are at or below the 200 percent of

the Federal Poverty Level they would qualify for free preschool. The problem with this is still not all children are attending preschool. Some stay at home with their families, and some go to daycare. “Both home reading and preschool interventions are recognized as key opportunities to reduce educational inequities in a number of high income areas” (Goldfeld, Moreno-Betancur, et. al., 2021, p. 1047). Early intervention is key in a child’s development. If students need early intervention, it is more likely they won’t need the intervention as long, the earlier it starts. If they don’t attend preschool, this is yet another barrier a child might face while developing their academic skills.

When talking with families about family literacy, we need to be sensitive to each different family’s race, culture, values, and beliefs. “Such efforts involve creating a sense of welcome, recognizing the value of all members and their input, having focused goals, and being aware of barriers to family involvement, including both school and social factors” (Nai-Cheng Kuo, 2016, p. 207). When we support families at school and encourage and support all differences and values, it makes our communities stronger and our children more successful.

Another aspect of home literacy is families being able to support reading development in their home language. There needs to be better representation in picture books for families to be able to do this successfully. "Children enjoy a healthier ethnic identity and better relationships with their caregivers when they are able to communicate in their parents' home language” (Caspé, & Lopez, M. E, 2017, p. 7). Having picture books in multiple different languages would change the way families interacted with stories at home. This would provide another opportunity for families to bond over language and create positive experiences with literature.

Conclusion

This review of literature highlighted the many benefits of a positive HLE and how it can support the reading development of children. HLE is not as easily integrated in some homes as it is in others, and different barriers and social structures need to be prioritized first, in order to close the gap between privileged communities and non-privileged communities.

There is a bountiful number of resources on how to bring literacy into homes from the schools' perspectives, but there needs to be a better action plan on trying to close the educational gaps families are experiencing first. Before we can successfully educate, provide resources, and build relationships with all families, these factors need to be addressed first. As educators we need to give families the control and confidence of knowing what is best for their child's development, while simultaneously providing resources to help support them in whatever way is needed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Demographics

I have worked in the Salem-Keizer school district for the last five years. Salem-Keizer is in Salem, Oregon. Our district serves 40,155 students and employs 2,549 licensed teachers. Salem-Keizer school district has 42 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, eight high schools, and four charter schools. I am an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Kindergarten teacher at Kalapuya Elementary in West Salem. Our enrollment is at 570 students, and we serve grades K-5. Our school is 74.6% white and the other 25.4% are minorities. My class has 23 students, two of my students are receiving special education services. One of my students has autism and needs a high level of support, he spends 60% of his day in our Development Learning Center (DLC). Three of my students are receiving speech services. Two of my students are currently in the process to receive services on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Typically, I have at least 2 or 3 students that are English Language Learners (ELL); however, I don't have any students designated as in need of ESOL services in my class this year.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to give parents and caregivers the opportunity to help their children at home. It will be easy to use and self-explanatory so it will be accessible to all families. Once families have the toolkit, no other resources are needed besides the kit itself, there will be an additional resource page if families wish to seek out further resources.

Phases

Overall, my project had three phases that I went through in order to create my toolkit. Phase 1 was the research of the developmental stages and creation of the cover pages. Phase two

was the creation of games and the gathering of materials and books. And Phase 3 was the organization and “assessment”.

Phase One

My toolkit starts from birth and goes to 2nd grade or age eight. I had to organize the sections into “Birth to 2”, “Ages 3 to 4”, “Ages 5 to 6”, and “Ages 7 to 8”. I made this decision because usually it is about the end of 2nd grade going into 3rd that students make a switch from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. My kit focuses on developing the skills to learn how to decode words. It doesn’t focus on comprehension and vocabulary, but rather, the skills necessary to learn how to decode words and read grade appropriate texts. This is not to say that comprehension is not crucial to reading at any time of development, however this kit is focused on decoding skills. Vocabulary and comprehension are not at focus, despite being just as important to developing readers.

I had to start my research at birth and look up infants and how they begin to develop reading skills at such a young age. For each age group I made a “note page” to help me organize my information in a way that I would be able to create a reader-friendly cover page for each section of the kit. The cover page guided exactly what would go in that section of the toolkit. The cover page has four sections into which I could place information. The sections on each page are, “What Child Does”, “What Adult Does”, “Reading Development Stage”, and “Books and Games Included”. The cover page provides expectations for whomever is going through the kit so that they know what to find in each section. I got my cover sheet templates from a Teacher Pay Teacher newsletter resource (Teacher Pay Teacher, 2022).

Each section of the toolkit has the same format of cover page, so it is easy to navigate as you get to different tubs. The two sections (“5 to 6”, and “7 to 8”) will have an additional part in

the “books” section that is the “independent readers” part of the kit. This section has books at their child’s recommended reading level that are meant for the child to read aloud to an adult. This will not only help families know what their child should be able to read, but also give families an idea of what type of books they can look for if they want to seek out more books.

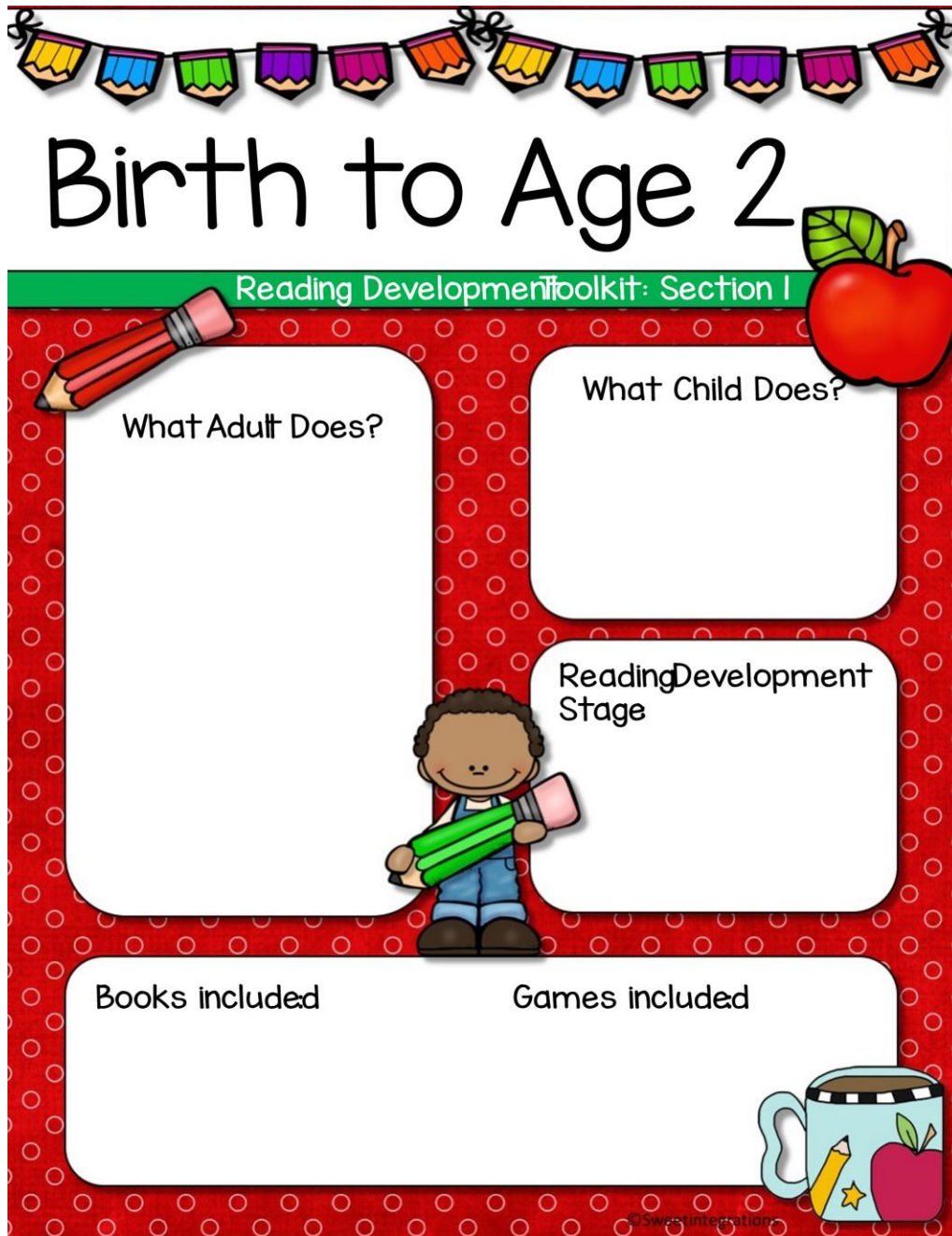


Image 1: Sample of Cover Sheet in Toolkit

Phase 2

This phase was the most time consuming. I had to look at each cover sheet for the individual sections and identify which games I was going to put into that part of the kit. From the “birth to 2” section, the games were not tangible, but rather word games and activities parents could do with their infants/toddlers. I made “game cards” for an adult to look at for ideas of ways they could boost their child’s attentiveness, vocabulary, and reading readiness. All of my families speak and read English so when I was developing these game cards, I was focused on creating one set of cards, as an extension I want to create the game cards in multiple languages.

Grocery Store Game

Take your child to the grocery store. While you are there, talk about everything you are seeing with your child. Use descriptor words such as color, quantity, and size.

For example: “We are in the produce section of the grocery store. We need bananas, can you see the yellow bananas? Here they are! We are putting 4 yellow bananas in our cart.”

Image 2: Sample of “Birth to 2” game card.

For the rest of the games, they had the instruction card as well as the actual materials to play the game. I had to laminate, cut, glue, and assemble games for each of the sections. My goal was to have at least five games for each section and to add more at the end if I had time. Some of the games required dice, white board markers, and whiteboards. For the games that required extra materials, I borrowed the resources from my school that I already had instead of purchasing new ones.

When I was making activities for the “3 to 4” year old section I realized that it was hard to fit everything in the kit that you would need for a hands-on approach for learning. Because of this, I had to add some of the activities I originally thought would be in the toolkit to the “extra resources page”. Some examples of the hands-on learning activities are shaving cream to practice letters, playdough, and letter stamps for name writing and letter recognition. All are great ideas to do with your developing child, however, not as functional to fit in a small toolkit.

The instruction cards were difficult to write because I didn’t know how much detail to include the instructions. I had other people look over the cards to make sure I was explaining the games appropriately. I also had one instruction card to go with every activity or game. This was so they could be stored together easily.

Alphabet Card Games:

Use as flashcards for letter names and sounds, mix up the order between each time

Play “go fish” with uppercase and lowercase letters. For example, if you have an “A” you will ask the other player if they have an “a” and upper and lowercase pairs will go together.

With a fly swatter, you can play “Swat the Letter”. The student has a fly swatter and you set out 5-10 cards. You then say a letter and the student swats the letter as quick as they can.

Note: you can use all these games for letter name or letter sound practice.

*Image 3:
Sample of
Instruction
Card for
Alphabet
Cards.*

This

Alphabet Game card (as shown above) would be attached to the resource (seen below) in order to explain what games could be played with this set. As I got deeper into making games for the toolkit, it was clear my physical box needed to be bigger if I was going to add all the “extra materials” for the games.



Image 4: Sample of alphabet cards.

This phase of the project was the most time consuming because I had to write out each of the cards while making the resources to go with them. I also had to make directions to go with each game which was hard to make them concise yet understandable. I had to do a lot of creating, laminating, and cutting for this part of the project.

Phase 3

The organization of this project was something that I assumed would be easy but ended up being a challenge because I had so many items I wanted to fit in the toolkit. I thought a file crate would be enough for all the parts, but I ended up going with a Tupperware box with a lid for each age group of the toolkit, That way I could fit the direction cards in smaller boxes and add some of the bigger materials (i.e. fly swatters, dice, whiteboards, etc.) to go with without it looking messy in file folders in a file crate.



Image 5: Sample image of container for 1 section of toolkit resources

I ended up using small task card boxes to fit the instructions of games into so they wouldn't get lost in the tub. Each tub has a task card box that contains all the directions to each of the games. Both the instructional cards and games are labeled clearly so it is easy for the adult to find the corresponding cards. There is another task card box in each of the boxes that has the prompts for when adults are reading aloud to their child. For example some prompt on the cards range from, "who are the characters in the story?" to "turn the page". Each age group had different prompting cards to support higher levels of thinking as they get older and progress in their development.



Image 6: Example of task card boxes

For me to test my toolkit to make sure it was functional I brought it over to a family member's house so she could look through it and give me feedback on what I needed to change or if there was any editing or clarification I needed to do. I had her look through my most complete part of the project, the “ages 5 to 6” section. I chose this specific family member because her field of work is not in education, and she currently has three children under the age of two. I wanted someone who was unfamiliar with the reading development of children to look at the toolkit so I could get a true understanding if my toolkit was clear enough for anyone to read and be able to do.

The feedback she gave me was helpful because on my cover page there were a few things that she wanted more information about because it was unclear. I had the grade level standards on the page, but she said it would be helpful to add examples so as a caregiver or parent, you know what that certain skill looks like in action. She appreciated all the games and was able to understand the directions for all of them easily.

One thing she recommended that I added was some way to show parents and caregivers how to pronounce each sound. I hadn't even thought about the importance of knowing the correct sounds in order to practice with your child. I have so much experience with students knowing their alphabet but pronouncing sounds with the /uh/ sound at the end. Because of this recommendation I decided to add a youtube video link of someone pronouncing the sounds correctly. It was also kid-friendly so their child could watch this as well. I added this link to the cover page of the “5 to 6” and “7 to 8” toolkits.

CHAPTER 4: THE PROJECT

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1d8d9ca8-29af-32ce-ab43-b0684a9d834f>

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:1cb2c9e4-2a1c-3204-a94c-70a4f1bfdab0>

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION

Over the past five months I have learned so much about reading development and the effects of home literacy environments. I have been able to effectively determine the differences between family literacy and at home literacy practices, two terms I thought were the same. After researching I realized that family literacy has more to do with the school and the programs or events they offer while home literacy environments are the exposure that children have to literature in their homes. I have always wanted to help parents and families better support their children at home, but it always seemed like the information and resources I was giving were not substantial or clear enough. I have spent the first five years of my teaching career wanting to better improve the relationship between educators like myself and families. Having this opportunity to spend this much time on a project to benefit my students' families for years to come is something that I will continue to be grateful for.

This toolkit gave me the opportunity to apply theories and strategies I have learned about reading in the MSED program to design and create materials to help future families. This toolkit is from a teacher's perspective on what is helpful for children to be doing at home in terms of literacy development. I was able to connect what I already knew, to the research that had been conducted in support of the importance home literacy has on the reading development of children. I also had a ton of new learning on literacy development in children from multiple age groups as well. I knew that reading to children from a young age was good for cognitive development, but I researched specific information on the topic and was able to connect theory and practices. This project gave me vital information that I will be able to share with families from a professional standpoint in the years to come.

I have always gotten the impression from families that they want to help their children with reading. The problem I frequently ran into was there were never sufficient resources for teachers to give families. The “resources” we were told to give out were information sheets that only explained the importance of family support, but nothing on what to do to support children at home with reading. I have sent home sight word lists and take-home books but that is the extent of what I have done to support families and students.

By the time students turn 18, they have spent roughly 13% of their waking hours at school. This means that 86% of children's time is spent outside of school and in most cases, especially for young students, at home. It is this reason that simply providing parents with information is not enough. In my five years of teaching, I have been able to see a profound difference in reading opportunities for students who have access to literacy resources at home and students who do not. Throughout this project, it has become more and more clear to me that families play an important role in their children’s literacy development, but without access to specific resources, families may be unable to help their children in an effective way. As an educator, it is my role to provide these resources for families, especially those who are unable to attain such resources independently.

I asked some families if this toolkit is something they would be interested in and every single one of them said yes. They all expressed that this is something they wish we would’ve provided a long time ago. It seems like even though there are resources out there that parents could use; this is still a resource that has not yet been made accessible for families to have in their homes. This project is a compilation of many resources in one easily accessible tub. The likelihood of a family looking on the internet for developmentally appropriate books and games for their children is slim, but with this toolkit, everything they need is already there.

The section for 5-to-6-year old's is by far the most complete. It has the most books and games, and it was the easiest for me to do because that is the age of students that I work with. My goal for this project is to extend the rest of the sections to be as full as the 5 to 6 one.

Throughout this project, I was able to recognize myself meeting the MSED learning outcomes. I have learned a tremendous amount about reading instruction throughout the program and because of that I can now take my expertise, knowledge, and skills and bring them to the community in which I serve as an educator. This project is proof that I am able to take my knowledge of the development of literacy and how children grow to create a developmentally appropriate tool to help families with reading instruction and practice. I can also share these toolkits, and the information that I have gained, with my colleagues in order to better support them with their own reading instruction.

This project also helped me to enhance my own classroom environment, especially centered around reading instruction. I have been able to tailor my classroom instruction to provide more hands-on opportunities for students. In my own kindergarten classroom, my instruction has become more and more differentiated and developmentally appropriate as I have gone through the process of completing research based around literacy instruction and practices. In my project, I am most proud of the literacy toolkits that I have created which will continue to support student literacy education in their learning environments both in the classroom and at home.

One thing that I am most excited about is that this project has given me the opportunity to bring relevant and effective literacy strategies to my colleagues and other professionals in the field. I have enjoyed learning about literacy development and I hope to be a more successful leader in the community that I teach in when it comes to literacy instruction.

SPECIAL THANKS

I am so grateful for the opportunity to complete this project and I appreciate all of the support I have received from so many people! Western is such a special place and I will hold it so close to my heart forever!

WOU Faculty

Professor Schulze

Professor Hughes

Professor Ittner

Professor Olsen

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Jaimie Popp

Jenna Miller

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