

Parent Stories of Struggling Readers

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Key Words

Struggling Readers, Parent Stories, Family Literacy, Parent Involvement

Abstract

What really goes on in struggling readers' lives outside of school? Parent stories, narratives gained through interviewing, were collected on three families of third grade struggling readers. Other information gathered to explore students' experiences outside school included parent and student surveys, family literacy pictures taken with a disposable camera by each of the three families interviewed, and teacher's daily journal of critical incidents. Major findings include 1) families of struggling readers spend time together, 2) parents share limited amounts of time with their children in book reading activities, 3) parents treasure their children's published work, and 4) parents and children value media-based activities. Teachers can use these findings to support parents' efforts to engage students in reading tasks at home, reimagine curriculum to provide opportunities for struggling readers to read and write for authentic purposes, and find new ways to bring the students' media-related interests into the classroom. Finally, this work challenges teachers to examine their own assumptions about the children and families with whom they work.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Rationale	2
Literature Review.....	2
Data Collection	5
Data Analysis	5
Context.....	5
Findings.....	6
Reflections	12
Works Cited	14

Rationale

As a Reading Interventionist, I work with students who scored below grade level benchmarks in text reading and comprehension. My major focus for the last five years has been to study students who struggle and explore ways to help them progress in their reading development. At times I found this task frustrating because I believed struggling readers not only lacked reading knowledge and skills, but also, motivation, purpose, behavior control, and the independence required to develop reading skills and gain reading proficiency.



Surveying the research, I have found that the professional literature for struggling readers is as broad and varied as the problems that I've encountered. Two findings that especially interested me were: 1) The more readers read, the greater their proficiency (Leslie and Allen, 1999; Rasinski & Padak, 2011) and 2) parental involvement contributes to the success of the reader (e.g., Knoff & Swick, 2008; Leslie & Allen, 1999). So how can I, as a reading interventionist, understand how much time struggling readers actually spend reading instructional level texts and receiving strategic coaching on their reading level during the school day? Also, how can I encourage struggling readers to read more at home and be assured that the students are reading "just right" level texts?

I made negative assumptions about my students' home-lives, given the difficulty I have had in getting them to read books at night. And yet, as I encouraged them to make connections to the books we read during instruction, my students shared many stories revealing the importance of family in their daily experiences. It did not take me long to realize that somehow I needed to change my way of thinking and to capitalize on the trust and respect these young children place on their parents' vital participation in their lives. I believed that one positive step would be to examine "What is really happening in the homes of my students?" and "What does literacy look like in the homes of my struggling readers?"

The purpose of this inquiry was to de-mystify the home life of my students and set aside my assumptions so that I could see clearly how to solicit reading support at home. I needed to investigate the possible barriers to parental involvement and learn to develop collaborative relationships with parents in the interest of their child's personal and reading growth.

Literature Review

Several areas of research informed my study. First I investigated trends in home literacy practices. I was especially interested in how students spent their time outside the school day. Secondly, I gathered information on methods and programs that teachers and researchers had previously tried to encourage struggling readers to engage in more reading, especially at home. Finally, I researched how parent involvement fits into these pursuits of helping students increase the amount of reading in the home.

Trends of Families and Time Use in the Home

Parents have relied on the school more and more to support their children's education because of changing family dynamics and increased stressors in the family (Knoff & Swick, 2008). Parents may know what to do to support their child's education in the home, such as reading with their child, and yet count more on the schools to fill this historical role (Edwards, 2009).

Hofferth and Jankuniene (2001) found that even though most students had a parent at home, students spent more time in unsupervised activities. Media may supplement the role of caregiver and teacher of vocabulary while parents are present but busy in the home. In *The Other Parent*, Steyer (2002) suggested that media may be taking over the parent's role in values education, such as helping children learn how to get along with others or what to do in different situations. Steyer also mentions that children are exposed to mature themes such as sexuality, crime, dysfunctional relationships, and violence through media. This research suggests there may be less engagement between parent and child as the home relies more on media-related activities.

Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found that reading books outside of school activities was the strongest indicator of reading proficiency and that time reading books was the best predictor of a child's reading growth from second to fifth grades. The 2007 National Assessment for Educational Progress found that only 40% of fourth graders reported reading on a daily basis, and nearly 20% read never or hardly read (as cited in Raskinski & Padak, 2011). Research substantiates that reading at home is a useful and underutilized instructional tool.

Teachers Supporting Struggling Readers to Increase Voluntary Reading

Many teachers base their views of struggling readers on what students cannot do. Just as teachers support students by building on their reading strengths (Johnson, 2006), teachers need to focus on the students' personal and family strengths to develop working relationships with students and families. Through conversation with students and families, we can learn about them more holistically and respond to their interests and needs through instruction. Dozier, Garnett, & Tabatabai (2011) call this practice responsive teaching. Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner (2001) demonstrate the importance of caring relationships in an after school program led by college students tutoring the resistant readers. Students who increased their voluntary reading in the home had a tutor who went far above and beyond the expectation of the program. Successful tutors developed relationships with the students and build on student's interests in the selection of reading materials.



Another way to encourage parents to motivate their struggling reader is to remove the parents from the teacher role at home. This is done by training parents to interact orally and encouragingly with their children in literacy activities. The key factor is to read together through a variety of venues with meaning-making intentions. Sharing connections, personal stories, and

thoughts throughout the joint reading time strengthens the parent-child relationship and removes the punitive measures that parents may take when they assume the teacher role (Baker, 2003).

Darling (2008) supported this intergenerational approach to closing the literacy achievement gap, but stated that parents need explicit training in effective reading strategies to raise reading scores. Clark and McDonnell (2001) increased independent reading practices through family involvement and motivational strategies. Interventions included a television awareness activity, a weekly family literacy newsletter, and classroom motivation activities. This study resulted in a slight increase of voluntary reading during the motivation period. All of these ways of supporting the struggling reader after school hours built on the strengths and needs of the struggling readers, not their weaknesses. In terms of parent involvement, these methods concentrated on ways to eliminate stress and support effectiveness.

Call for Parent Communication

As I read the research literature, I became intrigued by new ways to connect with children's families. Teachers need to find ways to build bridges with families so that teachers discover and honor the parents' understanding of their children. Edwards (2009) supports differentiated parent involvement, finding strategic ways to connect with each family. Teachers need to know what is going on in the lives of their students' families by asking families to share personal insights and information. In order to do this work, teachers need to form a relationship based on trust (Knoff & Swick, 2008). Dozier, Garnett, & Tabatabai (2011) used e-mails and phone conversations to connect with families.

As I read deeper into the literature, I became particularly fascinated by parent stories. Parent stories, defined as personal narratives gained from open-ended conversations or interviews, give educators access to better understanding and knowledge of the child's literacy exposure and practices outside the classroom (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999). These stories help deconstruct assumptions of the struggling readers and their families on which we use to cast blame for the child's literacy deficiencies or non-visible involvement of the parents (Compton-Lilly, 2004; Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999). Educators should be mindful that as Mindes (1996, p. 45) states "... parents engage in the same processes of observation and interpretation that professional do." Educators and parents need to share this process together to give both new and purposeful insights based on the identified student needs. Only then can we support the child's reading development at school and at home (Edwards, Pleasants & Franklin, 1999; Mindes, 1996).

<p>"Parents engage in the same processes of observation and interpretation that professionals do." - Mindes, 1996, p. 45</p>

I concluded that establishing a trusting, two-way relationship with parents would be more lasting in promoting active students' reading habits than any program or system that I would ask my students and their parents to follow at home. I decided that getting to know my students outside of the school day through talking with their parents would give me an opportunity to learn how to form partnering relationships with parents. Hopefully, through gathering parent stories I would gain insight that would strengthen my teaching and student learning.

Data Collection

I collected 3 parent stories from 3 of my 15 students. My selection was based on the first three families who were willing to be interviewed. I conducted 2 of these recorded interviews in the home and one at the local public library. During the first interview with each family, I used a list of open-ended questions selected from questions developed by Edwards (1999). I also had the families fill out an *Evening Family and Reading Routine* survey I developed to gather information on their evening routine and time usage. Lastly, I left them each with a disposable camera to take pictures of their family literacy and home lives. After the pictures were developed, I used them, along with further questions formed from the previous interview, to conduct a short follow-up interview. To understand these stories, I also kept a journal of critical incidents and parental contacts with my students, collected the *Evening Family and Reading Routine* survey from the other 12 students' parents, conducted a published reading interest and attitude survey (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone, 1996) with 14 of my 15 students, and collected an author-developed *Parent Involvement Capabilities* (Edwards, 2009) survey from 11 of 15 students' parents.

Data Analysis

I identified themes in my data using content analysis (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 2008). For reliability, I used member checks and triangulated data sources. First, I gave typed notes of answers to the interview questions to my capstone readers to review individually. We independently coded data to determine themes and then compared and discussed our findings. Secondly, I examined the different sources of data collection; namely, my journal of critical incidents and parental contacts, the *Evening Family and Reading Routine* surveys, reading interest and attitude surveys, and the *Parent Involvement Capabilities* surveys, to confirm findings from parent stories. I used descriptive analysis (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2009) to evaluate and describe the results of the three surveys. Finally, I considered my own reflections and experiences through data collection, listening and re-listening to the interviews, and rereading transcriptions of interviews. Even with a small sample size and the use of self-reporting, the corroborative findings helped to answer my two questions: "What is really happening in my students' homes?" and "What does literacy look like in the homes of my struggling readers?"

Context

I teach in an elementary school in an urban Midwestern school district. Our school has approximately 425 K-5 students. On the 2009-2010 State Report Card, my building received a designation of Excellent. The student body is 65% Caucasian, 18% Black, 10% Multi-racial, 4% Hispanic, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. The mission of my elementary school is to help each child reach his/her fullest potential.

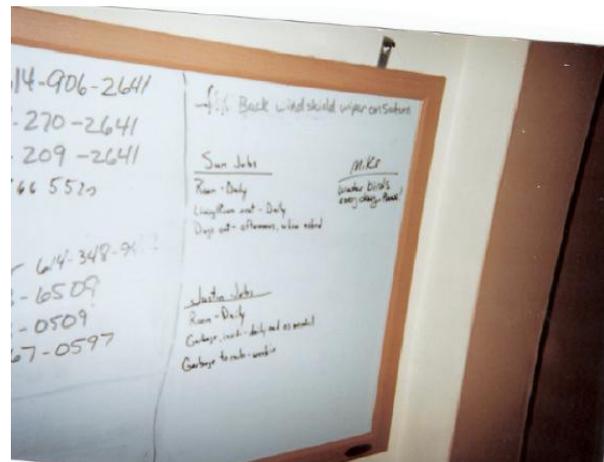
As a part-time Reading Interventionist using Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009), I service 15 second and third grade students needing reading support. These students are considered predominately high-risk based on their scores on mandated reading achievement tests. At any one time, I have 5 groups with 3 students in each group reading at the same text level.

This year I made an effort to contact the parents of every student by phone as they entered the program. I maintain ongoing contact by sending a small book home nightly to reread and requesting that parents initial a file card to validate that their child is rereading at home. I enjoy getting to know my students and their families through our book connections and discussions, as well as our chats as the students and I walk to and from group time.

I interviewed three families, including a set of parents, one mother from a two-parent household, and a female temporary caregiver of a 2-parent family. In collecting these three parent stories, I was able to put my students in context. This helped me to understand them and to gain valuable insights to inform my teaching and working relationships with families of struggling readers.

Findings

The parent stories collected from the three struggling readers revealed home lives with many rich opportunities for language and literacy development. As the readers' teacher, I admittedly had negative thoughts and frustration related to what I viewed as a lack of support from the students' homes. Yet visiting and interviewing the children's parents shed new light on students' home lives. I learned that the children all came from supportive homes and families who loved and valued them.



Even though one of the stories is provided by a temporary caregiver, I will use the term, parents, to discuss my findings. Specifically, there were some themes that surfaced across the homes:

Theme 1: Parents of struggling readers spend time with their children.

The parents were affectively connected to their children. The parents displayed love and affection towards their children by giving hugs, direct eye contact, and treating them with respect. They each described their children noting positive character qualities and expressing high hopes for their futures. The parents voiced that they worked hard to provide for their child's basic needs and wants. Whether through school book fairs or retail venues, the parents purchased books and other popular toys and technology items for students. Some parents valued and provided literacy enriched environments in the home, not only through purchases, but by giving students new experiences or taking them on outings to create memories.

Besides spending time with children in overseeing their homework and attending conferences and other school events, parents spent time with students watching movies and regular TV programming, or in some cases, sharing gaming time with them. Parents named other shared activities such as cooking, running errands, going to the library, and helping them with home projects. Other family activities mentioned included attending their children's sport events, taking them on weekend get-a-ways, and dining out as a family.

Supporting Quotes

Ray's caregiver: "He comes in the door from school and says. '*Lizzy, I got homework. Can you help me?*'" Later in regards to homework time, she says, "It makes me feel needed."

Max's mom: "He loves to help me cook – loves it-loves it – loves it, but depends how busy I am if I can let him help."

Max's dad: "We can go to the library - the comic book store – it's a fun day."

Bruce's mom: Referring to family time, "Weekly TV shows....*Wipe Out, No Ordinary Family, Minute to Minute, Hawaii 5-0.*"

Implications for teaching: Help build students' personal narratives

In processing these parent stories, discovering family connections has helped de-escalate some of my feelings and comments when students misbehave, show frustrations, or need re-direction. It has helped me take a deep breath and see the situation from a need perspective versus a deficient or blaming perspective. I needed to take a caring role in intervening where I can to help the struggling readers change how they see themselves as readers. This perspective of struggling readers being a valued member of their families gave me opportunity to help struggling readers build up their reading independence and ownership which would help strengthen their own personal narratives as readers. (Vlach & Burcie, 2010). For example, in an encounter I was having in intervention with Bruce, I knew I was interacting with him in similar ways as his mother. I saw clearly that this type of interaction didn't work for either of them, and it wasn't working for me. After taking a deep breath, I took a more positive, firm approach and I saw the tension lift and Bruce's disposition shifted and his effort increased.

Theme 2: Parents share limited engagement time with their children in book reading activities.

I found that even though parents of the three struggling readers read to them when they were younger, they were not currently reading with their children beyond homework reading requirements. During a classroom discussion, most of my students reported that their parents helped them with their homework and school reading. Incidentally, my second graders reported more parent involvement in their voluntary reading than my third graders. Of the three families interviewed, *two sets of parents* modeled voluntary reading in the home and even encouraged their child to read independently, but these parents were not holding their child accountable to any voluntary reading. The attitude/interest survey revealed that 72% of the students observe some reading in the home. On the capabilities survey, parents of struggling readers felt capable to help their child, scoring mainly 4 or 5 on a 5 point Likert scale, 5 being "Definitely Capable." Overall on the survey, the parents felt more capable supporting their child's reading (reading to their child, helping with words, and listening to their children read and talking with their child about the story) in comparison to other reading and school related activities such as teaching

their child how to use resources, providing experiences that are reading related, working in the school, and reinforcing what the classroom teacher has taught. While, the three boys' parents stated they *felt* capable of helping, they voiced reasons why they didn't. These reasons included: busyness, inability to find appropriate books, parents' self-identified "laziness", or a desire to give their children some down time from school related activities.

In interacting with their child, the parents I interviewed encountered the same resistant behaviors and lack of reading motivation that I did in the classroom. Only one parent shared experiencing enjoyment in interacting with her child as the child read to the parent. This parent also shared her own personal engagement in the text her child read to her. I found that all three of the children enjoyed discussing their books in intervention, either through sharing, asking questions, or thinking aloud while they read. The students' attitude/interest survey corroborated with this social context to reading: 100% like to talk about stories in a group at least "sometimes," 79% like to read out loud, and 86% like to answer reading questions asked by the teacher.

Supporting Quotes

Ray's caregiver: "Ray has the freedom to pick up books when he wants to – no one to tell him not to."

Max's dad, referring to voluntary reading: "Sometimes, but not as much as we hope. We try to get him to read every day, but I would like to get him to where his brother's at . . . where he will read every day. . . If we could get Max to that point, half that point, a quarter of that point we will be happy."

Later, Max's parents' dialogue: Mom, We used to read to him every night. Dad: He liked it quite a bit. We still do when we can, but with homework we need him to read it on his own at this point." Mom: "Yeah, trying to get him to read." Dad: "He says to me: 'read to me, read to me, read to me' and he won't read on his own."

Bruce's mom, referring to picking up reading materials on his own: "Pokémon books; he reads what he knows."

Implications for Teaching: Encourage more student reading at home by involving parents in partner reading

Based on the strengths I found in the families, I felt I needed a practical suggestion to share with parents on how they could support their struggling reader in reading more, hopefully for enjoyment. Especially during the summer months when there is time for a more relaxed schedule, I hope that they will try partner reading.

<p>"Partner reading provides opportunity for students to read connected text in a socially supported context" - Stahl & McKenna, 2006, p. 181</p>

Taking turns reading could be both motivating for the child and the parent. The child would be in a supported environment to read more difficult text. Also, this would increase the amount of

time a child orally reads in an engaged text. For the parent, partner reading would let the parent monitor their child's reading, neutralize the teaching role, model reading to their child in a less threatening way, and help increase the amount of reading their child does at home. Based on my experience as a parent enjoying shared reading with my children, I see the potential for reading together to become a recreational and instructional activity.

Theme 3: Parents value their child's published pieces

Interestingly, each family interviewed mentioned a specific piece of published work that the parents and child enjoyed sharing together. Parents conveyed the information that their child either worked hard at rewriting it until he was satisfied, or that their child brought home a bound copy of a book he had written and illustrated. One set of parents also shared going to the school for sponsored literary events, like literature night, to see their child's work displayed on the bulletin board or tri-folds. This gave the parents opportunity to celebrate their child's effort, creativity, and learning. These published works became artifacts since they represented a certain period of time in their children's lives. On the capabilities survey, they felt most capable in listening to and talking about stories with their child, and showing a positive attitude towards reading. Yet, parents felt less capable helping their child write stories based on family experiences. In class, students have mentioned how they enjoy the praises and applause of their parents.

Children need to write for authentic purposes and that "struggling readers who do not have opportunities to write may struggle even more with literacy" (Anderson & Briggs, 2011, p.546). These writing projects allow students to synthesize their thoughts and language processes. They allow for more engagement and self-regulation of the student (a real plus for a wiggly or distracted struggling reader.) Re-working their thoughts helps them to reread, think, and interact with the writing process. These projects create opportunity to increase students' motivation through student's choices and ownership. Above all, because of their diversity, these projects neutralize the playing field. They eliminate comparing and ranking among students, and give all students the opportunity to learn from others (Allington, 2002).



“Children need to become both author and audience by giving and receiving genuine responses that value their voices and choices” - Anderson & Briggs, 2011, p. 54

Dyson supports that authentic writing gives struggling readers an avenue to express themselves and build their personal narratives (as cited in Anderson & Briggs, 2011).

Supporting Quotes

Ray: “I made up stories, a cat story and one about a saber-tooth tiger.” Referring to Liz: “She’s getting it.”

Max’s dad: referring to a published story, “When he wrote his story about the turkey, he wrote it about ten times – that turkey just kept getting more and more elaborate.”

Bruce’s mom: “He made a book in Ms. Smith class.”

Implication for Teaching: Students write in response to our shared text with the purpose of reading their writing at home

Within the requirement of my prescribed program, I can help my students respond in writing about the text they have just read. Then, they can take their writing home to read to their parents on a regular basis. Several times a year, I will also try to incorporate a published work into our intervention time. I will inform parents on the value of a child reading his own words. Also, I will pass this information along to classroom teachers and encourage them to incorporate more authentic projects into their curriculum, especially for the benefits to the struggling readers.

Also, I can look for opportunities for my students to read their published pieces; for example, when they have one posted on the bulletin board. When pulling them out, I can take the time for them to read their pieces to me and the other group members. This will allow us to build a working relationship with one another, give them an audience to strengthen their confidence, and give me future reference points either in classroom connections or when talking with their parents.

Theme 4: Parent and children value media-based activities

On the *Evening Family and Reading Survey*, 47% of the parents reported their child spending over 2 hours a night on media; 40% reported their child spending at least an hour. On the attitude/interest survey, 64% of the students indicated they would rather watch TV than read a book. Students have mentioned in intervention, that they didn’t read or do their homework because they watched a movie, commonly around 2 hours or more. As we walked down the hall on Monday mornings, the students casually commented that they played video games all weekend. All of the three struggling readers studied spent over two hours a night either gaming or watching television. Some of this time was spent with their families, but other times parents relied on media to entertain their child while they were busy with other home related business, such as cooking or cleaning, or studying for school or work. At least one parent in each family chose gaming, or another form of media for their own entertainment. All families had several TVs, each boy having one in his bedroom. Even though some of the families had usage rules, some parents admitted to being too busy to monitor.



At school, the students enjoyed telling me about their newest game purchase and their intent and successes on beating the game.

These findings were supported by the 2009 statistics gathered from large-scale, nationally representative surveys about the use of media of 8 to 18 year olds. The surveys were conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org), an organization that provides independent information on major health issues in the United States. The findings related to my study include: TV consumption is about 4 hours and 29 minutes a day. Of this time, 59% of the young people's TV viewing time comes from live TV and the other 41% comes from time-shifted, DVD's, online, or mobile. The amount of time spent book reading has remained at 25 minutes a day. 64% of the young people state that the TV is usually on during meals, and 45% reported the TV is left on the majority of the time in their home, whether people were watching or not. 71% have TV in their bedroom and 50% have a video game player in their room. Whether location or the amount of usage, the young people spend more time watching TV or gaming compared to homes that are not TV-centric. About 30% of young people report having rules about how much time they spend watching TV or playing video games. When parents do set limits, their children spend less time with media.

Supporting Quotes

Bruce's mom: referring to his present interest; "Video games – he doesn't fight us on it. (meaning: "he comes when called") He doesn't like to go outside – best friend in the neighborhood moved a couple of months ago – hasn't been out with other friends." Earlier, mom states: "he's pretty smart with games and stuff like that."

Bruce's mom: referring to summer reading: "He plays on the computer. It requires reading."

Max's dad qualifies Max's limits by stating that: "There are times when everyone is busy and Max plays a video game for four hours or more." Interjecting, Mom says: "He's quiet and you tend to forget about him. Then you will see him at the corner of the couch or something and then say, 'There he is!'" (Max enjoys making quiet entrances to startle his parents.)

Ray's caregiver: "He likes to play on the X-box which we let him play for one hour, and if it's not that, he usually likes to go back to the bedroom and pick out a movie. All three boys share a room and they have a little flat screen TV back there that they watch."

Implications for Teaching: Bridge media interest to school learning

I understood that students have a large amount of time and interest invested in media. How could this understanding change my teaching? I needed to look deeper into what educators were learning about using media in the classroom, especially with struggling readers. Even though I encouraged time usage boundaries for children, I wanted to find ways that I could capitalize on students' interest in technology. How could students' engagement in gaming be utilized in school learning targets?

“The assumption that “diverse” children come to school without literacy ignores the resources they bring from popular media text” - Dyson, 2003, p. 100

I had already experienced how children brought text-to-multimedia connections into our reading discussions. Educators need to positively acknowledge these types of connections to help students become more aware of these two worlds and how they relate. Computer programs are being tested to supplement deliberate practice for the struggling reader. An example of a computer based program is System 44 from Scholastic; for 3rd graders on up is designed to support fluency and automaticity. Teacher supervision is still needed even with a computer-based skill instruction program (Hasselbring, 2010). Teachers can either find programs to supplement the drill in school or encourage parents to monitor some drill practice in the evening with some suggested web-sites or computer programs.

Teachers need to take an active role in making connections between children’s everyday literacies and school based language arts instruction (Alvermann & Xu, 2003). We need to help them communicate their cultural experiences using 21st century literacy tools as well as traditional paper based tools. This begins with teachers observing. “Popular culture texts such as Pokémon cards and games are the kinds of materials that many kids read, have access to, and participate with as literate beings in the new millennium”(Vasquez, 2003, p.124). “As children bring unexpected practices, symbolic materials, and technological tools into the official classroom world, the curriculum itself should broaden and become more responsive to children’s worlds” (Dyson, 2003, p. 107-108).



Finally, this perspective gives teachers new text to use in group or authentic project work. Morrel (2004) supports this by discussing these three principles of social cognitive learning:

1. If students use what is familiar to them, they will be more motivated to succeed.
2. If the students feel the subject matter is relevant to their lives, they will be more intrinsically inclined to be successful.
3. In sharing media and constructing learning together by using a media context, students can learn by interacting with others, learning by doing, and learning vicariously.

By incorporating technology and media into the classroom, teachers can draw on the knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes students have developed in relation to these tools.

Reflections

What an adventure! Interviewing parents, seeking to understand what they said, and looking for patterns was definitely a stretching experience for me. The process of contacting parents took time, sensitivity to their busy schedules, and finding methods of communication that worked for each family. The parents and guardians were very willing to contribute their stories and to help

me. I want to give back to them by sharing with them what I learned. At this point, I think the best thing I can do for them is to present partner reading to them and explain it as clearly and enthusiastically as I can. I would emphasize how important it is to dialogue with struggling readers through a shared text. I would encourage parents to listen to their child read text that the child has written. This would give the child the support and accountability needed to increase the possibility of voluntary reading. According to research, an increase in voluntary reading could improve student reading proficiency. Would communicating this information to parents be enough? Is there a way to measure the effectiveness of this advice? Even though I am convinced that reading at home is rewarding and beneficial for students, I know that the parents need guidance in selecting “just right” texts. This would be a huge factor in providing access to the text and making the experience enjoyable for parent and child.

I wonder what the parents’ responses will be to a reading teacher taking a personal interest in their child and family by asking for their stories? Were some of their own questions and concerns about their child’s reading answered in the process or were they disappointed that they didn’t get a better understanding, or maybe advice? In contacting other parents with the possibility of interviewing, I encountered suspicion and awkwardness. And yet, these parents still returned surveys through the exchange of the child. I am not sure what this is saying other than that they do care to support their children. I know the three readers whose families participated in this study commented positively to their peers, noting that I came to their home and talked with their parents.

I set out on this quest to de-mystify the home experiences of struggling readers. I gained from the insights and the relationship building, and can share this with other professionals as we seek to understand more. I still have perplexing questions that haven’t been answered, especially understanding the gap between parents saying that they feel capable to help and actually engaging in spending reading time with their child. In the future, I plan to gather parent stories at the beginning of the school year. This will help the parents and I go one step further in establishing a working relationship and promoting more ongoing dialogue throughout the school year. Hopefully, together we can find ways to encourage and support their child’s reading development.

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