

Marino Institute of Education

To what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?

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SHARED READING AND PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of John Doyle at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

Alison Nulty

SHARED READING AND PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION

Abstract

Shared reading is a particular type of reading whereby the adult engages in repeated readings of a book with a child over a period of time. The concept behind shared reading is that through repeated readings, the child becomes familiar with the book. This familiarity allows the child to recognise a series of events while remembering new words and phrases which are repeated throughout the book. In addition to this, re-reading a story enables the child to develop deeper understandings of the book.

This study examines parents' perceptions of reading in general, then more specifically, their opinions of the shared reading project. In further detail, this research aims to discover what the current reading practice is in the homes of children who attend a DEIS Band 1 school. In addition to this, the researcher aims to determine whether children's vocabularies can develop at home as a result of engaging in shared reading with their parents. Finally, it is intended to explore whether shared reading is a possible strategy that can aim to narrow the 'vocabulary gap'.

This study follows a qualitative approach to data collection. It was decided to implement the shared reading project for a duration of five weeks in order to allow parents to have direct interaction with shared reading. Furthermore, the data was collected using a focus group prior to the shared reading project and semi-structured interviews were then conducted. A personal diary was kept throughout the shared reading project to log the researcher's observations. Overall, it was foreseen that this data would provide the researcher with an insight into parents' perspectives of shared reading in the home.

The findings from this study show that both the parents and children felt positivity about shared reading. In addition to this, the parents believed that their children's vocabulary knowledge was

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expanded through engaging in repeated readings. Furthermore, the parents also gained the skill of shared reading which they can continue to implement in their home in order to enhance their child's language abilities. Lastly, it was evident that the shared reading project created a positive reading environment in the home.

It is concluded that parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting can heighten the reading experience in the home. When parents upskill with the help of their child's teacher, it is likely they feel more capable of reading in an effective manner. Moreover, when a reading routine has been established the parents will read more effectively and frequently with their child. In addition to this, the parents will focus on reading with the purpose of developing vocabulary knowledge, instead of solely reading for pleasure.

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SHARED READING AND PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION

[List of abbreviations]

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education & Skills

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research involved the implementation of a shared reading project at home between parents and their young children, over a period of five weeks. The overall aim was to investigate parents' perceptions of reading in general, then more specifically, their opinions of this project. This study was conducted in a DEIS Band 1 setting where the majority of children in the class group live in an area of low socio-economic status. I was interested in investigating the implications of collaborating with parents and showing them how to implement shared reading in their homes. Throughout this study, I aim to answer the main research question:

To what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?

In summary, shared reading is a particular type of reading whereby the adult engages in repeated readings of a book with a child over a period of time (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). The concept behind shared reading is that through repeated readings, the child becomes familiar with the book. This familiarity allows the child to recognise a series of events while remembering words and phrases which are repeated throughout the book. In addition to this, re-readings enable the child to develop deeper understandings of the book.

The concept of the 'vocabulary gap' (Christ & Wang, 2011) will be central to this investigation. It outlines that children from low socio-economic backgrounds will begin junior infants with poor vocabulary knowledge compared to their peers who come from families of higher socio-economic status. Studies have shown that this gap widens over time, as children progress through primary school. In addition to this, literature suggests that children who grow

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up in poverty will have difficulties acquiring language (Ronfani et al., 2015). Therefore, children who attend DEIS schools require extra support in terms of language development. I believed that the nature of shared reading lent itself to the development of vocabulary knowledge. As a result of this, I was curious to explore whether shared reading was a possible method of reducing this ‘vocabulary gap’, to boost the vocabulary knowledge of children who attend DEIS schools. Furthermore, I wished to uncover parents’ perceptions of whether or not shared reading enhanced their children's word knowledge, alongside other implications that shared reading may have had on their overall reading experience at home.

1.2 Theoretical Underpinnings for the Study

There are a number of theoretical underpinnings which frame this research. Firstly, the concept of socio-cultural theory, particularly scaffolding, is central to this research. Throughout the shared reading project, I scaffolded the parents by providing prompt cards and in addition to this, the parents scaffolded their children in an attempt to broaden vocabulary (Hoffman, 2011). In terms of the children, it can be argued that without the guidance of their parents, they would not have acquired vocabulary or deep understandings of the storybooks (Hoffman, 2011).

The importance of learning environments also cultivates this research. Bronfenbrenner (2006) emphasised the importance of the home environment, especially for the determination of a child’s success in school (Hayes, O’Toole & Halpenny, 2017). Moreover, his bioecological model outlines that strong links between micro-systems, such as home and school, are beneficial to the child’s all-round achievement. This study explores the concept of parents engaging in shared reading with the assistance of a class teacher, in a similar manner to how the children learn in the classroom.

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Finally, the idea of parental involvement in their child's education is central to this study. Literature suggests that such involvement has a positive effect on children's academic achievement (Taylor, 1980). This concept is explored in greater depth throughout the Review of Literature and Presentation and Analysis of Findings chapters.

1.3 Significance of the Research

This research strives to contribute to the field of literacy in Early Childhood Education, more specifically the literacy development of young children who attend DEIS Band 1 schools. Previous studies indicate that there is a need for further investigation into how to implement high-quality reading instruction and different interventions at primary school level, particularly for children in DEIS settings (DES, 2017). Furthermore, the 'Vocabulary Gap' (Christ & Wang, 2011) outlines that there is a need to research further into this area to gain a greater understanding of how teachers can work with parents in order to 'narrow' this growing gap.

1.4 Methodological Approach

This study follows a qualitative approach to data collection. I decided to implement the shared reading project for a duration of five weeks to allow parents to have direct interaction with shared reading. I collected data using a focus group prior to the shared reading project and semi-structured interviews were conducted after the project. I kept a personal diary throughout the investigation to log observations. Overall, I foresaw that this data could provide me with an insight into parents' perspectives of shared reading in the home.

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1.5 Dissertation Outline

1.5.1 Rationale and Origins of the Enquiry

The research question was created due to my personal interest in literacy and Early Childhood Education. I have always displayed a curiosity for literacy instruction. However, through completing various modules in year one of the M.E.C.E. program (Masters in Early Childhood Education), more specifically the Language and Literacy module, I learned about the implications of shared reading. Following this, I began to implement shared reading in my classroom on a daily basis. Practising shared reading with my junior infant class allowed me to see the benefits of reading in this manner for the enhancement of unconstrained literacy skills. Furthermore, I developed a curiosity as to whether parents would discover the benefits of engaging in shared reading at home.

Through examining the relevant literature, it was clear that there was a lack of prior research regarding parents' perceptions of shared reading in both an international and Irish context. This absence of research provided me with the objective of pursuing this investigation.

1.5.2 Researcher's Background

I have worked in School X for four years, primarily teaching junior and senior infants. This practical experience with young children was particularly useful for this study as I had adequate experience of the various infant teaching methodologies, along with a knowledge of the relevant curriculum and an understanding of how infants learn. Furthermore, the completion of year one of the M.E.C.E. meant that I had acquired a comprehensive education surrounding Early Childhood Education, and that I was aware of what was considered 'best practice' in an

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infant classroom. In addition to this, teaching infants throughout this investigation provided an appropriate research context whereby I could implement such a project in my classroom.

1.5.3 School Type, Size and Background

School X is a vertical, mixed primary school of DEIS Band 1 status. Currently, there are 404 students enrolled. The school is located in a large city in Ireland. The school was established in the 1930s and has expanded in recent years due to demand. Most children live within the local community. Currently, there are three classes within the junior infant stream and two classes within the senior infant stream. A junior infant class consisting of nineteen students undertook the shared reading project.

1.6 Purpose, Aims and Limitations of Study

1.6.1 Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this study is to uncover parents' perceptions of reading in general, then more specifically, their opinions of the shared reading project. The aims include:

- To discover the current reading practice in the homes of children who attend a DEIS Band 1 school
- To investigate whether parents who primarily live in an area of low socio-economic status are willing to participate in a shared reading project
- To determine whether children's vocabularies can develop at home as a result of engaging in shared reading with their parents
- To detail the possibility of parents acquiring a new skill which they can continue to implement at home with their young children

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- To explore whether shared reading is a possible strategy that can aim to narrow the ‘vocabulary gap’

1.6.2 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. Firstly, the small scale to which it was conducted could be considered a restriction. The analysis was executed in a single DEIS Band 1 school in an urban area and it may be argued that some of the findings are unique to this particular school. In addition to this, the sample size was small. I focused on investigating the perceptions of parents in my own class setting. Fourteen parents partook in the project. Out of these fourteen parents, six offered to participate in the semi-structured interviews. This signifies that the outcomes of this research may be unique to my classgroup.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five main chapters. Firstly, Chapter One, the Introduction, outlines the research rationale along with background information regarding the researcher, the overall aims of the investigation and the context in which the research occurs. Next, Chapter Two, the Literature Review, presents and explores the relevant findings in line with the research question. The themes of literature presented include socio-cultural theory, constrained and unconstrained literacy skills, educational disadvantage, environmental factors and parental involvement. Following this, Chapter Three, the Research Methodology, outlines the planned research. This chapter explains the chosen method of data collection, along with the instrument design for this study. In addition to this, this chapter describes the ethical considerations for the investigation. The findings resulting from the focus group, semi-structured interviews and diary entries are then presented in Chapter Four. As well as showing the findings, this chapter provides a commentary on the results. Finally, Chapter Five summarises the main

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conclusions and discusses the implications of the findings. Additionally, this chapter outlines recommendations for future shared reading practice, along with directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review the current literature which is relevant to the research question:

To what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?

Overall, I endeavour to define shared reading and discuss the practicalities of how shared reading may be implemented in the home. Keeping in line with the notion of collaboration between parents and teachers, this chapter will discuss Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory. Furthermore, I will disclose the literature which suggests that shared reading is a means of developing children's unconstrained literacy skills. Generally, it is argued that shared reading has positive implications for children's vocabularies, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Finally, in terms of educational disadvantage, I will present the literature which conveys the environmental factors which may impact literacy practices in the home. Additionally, I will highlight the importance of bridging the gap between the home and school in order to improve children's literacy skills.

2.2 Shared Reading

Shared reading can be defined as "an interactive way of reading books aloud with children that gives them a chance to be active participants in the reading session, thus providing a meaningful experience that stimulates learning" (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006, p. 554-555). Shared reading is a literacy experience whereby the adult engages in repeated readings of a book

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with a child over a period of time, through which the child becomes familiar with the book, recognising a sequence of events and recalling repetition of words and phrases. The first time a story is read, children focus on asking questions to clarify the text. The second and third readings of a story generally focuses on predictions and inferences (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). These repeated readings are found to foster curiosity in children which can encourage more questioning and interpretations of the story (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). This familiarity of text allows the child to become the storyteller, enabling them to describe the book using vocabulary acquired from the repeated readings (van der Wilt, Boerma, van Oers & van der Veen, 2019). This can be empowering as the child is provided with a sense of ownership in the storytelling process (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington & Thomason, 2013).

2.2.1 Creating an Appropriate Environment

Shared reading can create a comfortable, safe environment for the child (Partridge, 2004). It is important to ensure the child feels at ease during the shared reading experience. If a relaxed, secure reading environment is created the child is more likely to challenge themselves further and take risks without fear of making mistakes (Partridge, 2004). Ideally, shared reading should take place in a small group setting. While it may be easier for the adult to read one-to-one with a child in the home, teachers should try to read to smaller groups in the classroom (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). This can be of particular benefit to shy children, reluctant readers and those who may not have had much exposure to books in their home.

2.2.2 Practicing Shared Reading in the Home and School

When engaging in shared reading in both the home and school, it is good practice to establish a routine which is familiar to the child (Partridge, 2004), for example, shared reading could take place at the same time each day. At home, this could be bedtime or when the child comes home from school (Lee, 2010). In school, shared reading could happen first thing in the morning or before the children go home. When engaging in shared reading, the adult may wish

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to follow the same sequential routine each time. They could, for example, discuss the author and illustrator of the story; examine the front cover and title; and engage in elements of predicting, summarising and inferring. This could help children learn about elements of storybooks and the vocabulary associated, such as ‘illustrator’, ‘author’, ‘title’ and ‘blurb’ (Lane & Wright, 2007). In terms of the physical reading environment, the adult should read in a comfortable, cosy space. In the classroom, this could be a designated reading area with a rug, cushions and soft toys. In the home, the reading space could be a bedroom or a sitting room with soft furnishings. This creates a setting that is conducive for this collaborative activity (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2013). Furthermore, shared reading is a sociable experience for children and their parents and teachers. It is closely linked to Lev Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory (Hoffman, 2011).

2.3 Socio-Cultural Theory

It can be argued that Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory is embedded in the shared reading experience (Hoffman, 2011). Socio-cultural theory suggests that human learning is a social process and that intelligence originates in society or culture (Soler & Miller, 2003). Vygotsky believed that children learn best through social interactions, particularly with more experienced adults (Soler & Miller, 2003). Shared reading can be viewed as a social interaction whereby the child and adult examine and discuss a book in a sociable setting (Justice & Pullen, 2003).

2.3.1 Scaffolding and Shared Reading

The term ‘scaffolding’ is a socio-cultural term. It was first introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross in 1976 (Muhonen et al., 2016). Scaffolding is when an adult recognises and promotes the child’s reasoning, creativity and problem solving (French, 2012). It is important that both teachers and parents establish what children already know and then challenge them to extend their abilities and thinking to a higher level (French, 2012).

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One of the main concepts behind shared reading is that the adult scaffolds the child through the story-reading process. This is what separates shared reading from other types of reading (Hoffman, 2011). The adult may gauge the child's understanding of the events in a story along with their vocabulary comprehension. It is then the adult's responsibility to deepen the child's understanding of the text by guiding them through the story and explicitly expanding their word knowledge. This thorough comprehension of text and the acquirement of complex vocabulary is something that the child would not have achieved on their own (Hoffman, 2011).

The term 'co-construction' is linked to scaffolding. It places the child as a powerful and competent contributor to his/her own learning. To co-construct is to establish meaning with others (Jordan, 2004). When engaging in shared reading the child and adult share their thinking and opinions with one another. They then work together to derive meaning from a story, reaching a conclusion together (Jordan, 2004).

2.3.2 The Zone of Proximal Development and Shared Reading

The Zone of Proximal Development is the space in which effective learning occurs. It can be defined as "a way of describing an activity in which someone with greater expertise assists someone else to participate in socio-cultural activities in a way that exceeds what they could do otherwise" (Rogoff, 1998, p. 699). In shared reading, the adult is the 'expert' who has more sophisticated comprehension skills and word knowledge, enabling them to understand and recognise words which the child may find difficult. The adult should then focus on these words and explicitly teach them to the child in the context of the story. This supports the child to reach a level of understanding which they would not have reached without the adult (Jordan, 2004). Comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge are both considered 'unconstrained' literacy skills. A child who has well-developed unconstrained literacy skills, will be successful readers as they progress through primary school (Dougherty Stahl, 2011).

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2.4 Constrained and Unconstrained Literacy Skills

It is important to understand the difference between constrained and unconstrained literacy skills. Constrained skills include alphabetic awareness, phonological awareness and concepts of print. These skills can be mastered in a set time frame and are easily assessed (Lennox, 2013). Unconstrained skills include vocabulary knowledge and comprehension abilities, which constantly develop throughout the learner's life. Unconstrained skills are considered complex and are therefore difficult to measure, teach and assess (Lennox, 2013).

Teachers ought to be careful that the teaching of constrained literacy skills does not dominate classroom instruction (Dougherty Stahl, 2011). It can be argued that there is currently an over-emphasis on these skills in infant classes (Concannon-Gibney, 2019) and that they may be dominating literacy instruction, leading to the neglect of unconstrained literacy skills which could negatively impact children later in their school life (Concannon-Gibney, 2019). A balance of constrained and unconstrained literacy skills should be taught as a combination of these two skills can complement each other and lead to a more holistic approach to literacy instruction (Paris, 2005).

It is often thought that decoding leads to comprehension and is a precursor to reading achievement. This narrow focus results in the neglect of other aspects of literacy including comprehension, vocabulary and background knowledge. This could have a detrimental effect on children's reading success as they progress through primary school (Concannon-Gibney, 2019). Shared reading allows children to construct complex meanings from books and gain rich vocabulary knowledge, thus developing unconstrained literacy skills (Hoffman, 2011). In the home, parents should aim to expand their children's vocabulary knowledge through activities such as shared reading and engaging in informal day-to-day conversations. Expanding children's vocabulary could additionally lead to better language comprehension skills (Dickinson, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010).

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2.5 Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is an unconstrained literacy skill which should be taught explicitly in a child's early years of education (Wasik & Hindman, 2015). Typically, children acquire vocabulary at home through family interactions and sharing meals at the dinner table (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer & Ohi, 2013), however, some children are not provided with rich language opportunities at home. This can be due to parents' busy lifestyles, an over-reliance on technology and few sit-down family meals. This has resulted in a greater need for sophisticated vocabulary development and oral language experiences in primary school (Hindman, Wasik & Snell, 2016).

A broad and rich vocabulary in the early years of primary education can predict children's future reading comprehension success (Christ & Wang, 2011). Vocabulary acquisition and knowledge in infant classes will not only predict children's reading ability at the end of the academic year but could affect reading comprehension much later on in school life (Mol, Bus, de Jong & Smeets, 2008). Vocabulary is not just unique to reading success but is also an essential foundation to children's overall academic achievement: whether they're understanding mathematical terms, scientific words or general instructions (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer & Ohi, 2013).

A particular type of language that can be explored while engaging in shared reading is decontextualised language. This is used when discussing events that are not in the immediate context, including events in the past or future, and not in the present (Curenton, Craig & Flanigan, 2008). Decontextualized language can be defined as language "used to convey novel information to audiences who may share only limited background knowledge with the speaker or who may be physically removed from the things or events described" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 851). This is a very sophisticated type of language that requires specific vocabulary, advanced grammatical skills and higher-order thinking, skills which young children can often

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struggle with. Decontextualized language can be acquired through shared reading as it can provide the adult and child with an opportunity to discuss abstract concepts (Curenton, Craig & Flanigan, 2008).

2.5.1 Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary must be taught explicitly in the infant classroom with direct instruction of individual words. Often, children may have to encounter a word on at least twelve occasions before they can read, comprehend and use it in the correct context (Concannon-Gibney, 2019). Shared reading is viewed as an excellent way to enhance children's vocabulary as words are taught in the context of the book. The adult must explicitly show the children the word printed in the story, explain its meaning, think of different synonyms and then use the word in context. This contributes to the children's word consciousness and helps to foster an interest in expanding vocabulary (Concannon-Gibney, 2019).

2.5.2 Dialogical Storybook Reading

Within shared reading there is a particular method called dialogical storybook reading. Dialogical reading was first described by Whitehurst et al. (1998) as a certain type of reading whereby the adult uses strategic questioning, prompting the child when reading a book (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). This idea is similar to shared reading whereby children are read to repetitively in small groups.

Dialogical reading is an effective way to build vocabulary knowledge as when a story is re-read the children are exposed to the same words repeatedly. However, vocabulary may only be acquired if a storybook is read in a dialogical manner. If the adult makes the child aware of the print in the storybook, their alphabet and print knowledge may be enhanced (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer & Ohi, 2013). Similarly, reading a book without the use of interactive techniques is not sufficient for language development (Mol, Bus, de Jong & Smeets,

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2008). Children will lose interest if an adult reads a story in a dull voice, without addressing the pictures or allowing the child to be involved in the storytelling process. The adult must use a mixture of verbal and non-verbal techniques. These include questioning children about and commenting on the print in the storybook while placing their finger on words to help children track what they are reading (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer & Ohi, 2013).

2.6 Educational Disadvantage

Socio-economic status can have a huge impact on a child's educational achievement. Children from disadvantaged families may have a lower level of language skills, poor executive function and less aspirations than those from advantaged backgrounds (Sylva, 2014). Neuman, Kaefer and Pinkham (2018) talk about a 'double dose of disadvantage' whereby children from 'low-income' families may have poor language experiences both at home and in school. Controversially, they state that "children in higher poverty neighbourhoods are more likely to attend troubled schools, have less qualified teachers, and have lower levels of academic achievement compared to their peers in more affluent neighbourhoods" (Neuman, Kaefer & Pinkham, 2018, p. 103). They suggest that while achievement is predicted by a child's family socio-economic status, the school's status may also have a powerful impact on the child's achievement (Neuman, Kaefer & Pinkham, 2018). This should not be the case in Ireland as all primary school teachers have at least a level 8 degree. Additionally, children who attend schools in low socio-economic communities are often provided with a range of opportunities and support fostered through the DEIS initiative. Such supports may include breakfast clubs, homework clubs and home-school liaison officers. Teachers in DEIS settings follow specific numeracy and literacy targets in order to help the children reach their potential. However, it was found that a child's familial socio-economic status may impact their opportunity in education (Madden,

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2017). This may influence the child's motivation, the resources available to them and how much the parents can invest in their child's education (Madden, 2017).

2.6.1 DEIS

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools) is the Irish Government's initiative attempting to overcome educational disadvantage (Weir & McAvinue, 2012). DEIS was first introduced in May 2005. There are currently around 825 schools in the program, 640 of these being primary schools ("DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools", 2017). The 2017 DEIS plan outlines a set of literacy targets based on the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (MAERM) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). It can be inferred from these targets that only 18% of second class students and 21% of sixth class students in DEIS Band 1 schools are reading at level 3 or higher (DES, 2017). Similarly, 44% of second class students and 47% of sixth class students are performing at or below level 1 in reading (DES, 2017). These results indicate that there is a need for high-quality reading instruction and intervention at primary school level, particularly for children in DEIS Band 1 schools. Shared reading is a possible intervention which could enhance reading abilities in DEIS primary schools.

2.6.2 Socio-Economic Status and Word Knowledge

Socio-economic status has a huge impact on vocabulary development. Children who come from families that live in disadvantaged areas and experience poverty in their day-to-day lives may struggle with word acquirement. Studies have shown that children from these backgrounds may begin the equivalent of junior infants with a poor vocabulary knowledge compared to their peers who come from families with a higher socio-economic status (Christ & Wang, 2011). This is referred to as the 'vocabulary gap' (Christ & Wang, 2011). This vocabulary

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gap is already visible from the age of three. Hart and Risley (1995) found that by this age, children from higher socio-economic status families knew on average six hundred more words than children from low socio-economic status families. Furthermore, it was discovered that this gap continues to widen as children progress through primary school. By fourth-grade, or the age of ten, children from higher socio-economic status families knew four thousand more words than their peers from lower socio-economic status backgrounds (Hard & Risley, 1995) (Christ & Wang, 2011). This in turn will affect children's reading comprehension, leading to what is described as "the fourth-grade slump" (Christ & Wang, 2011, p. 427). This 'slump' is visible across DEIS primary schools in Ireland whereby children struggle with reading comprehension at fourth and fifth class level. In order to close this gap in vocabulary knowledge, explicit and intentional vocabulary learning is especially needed in junior and senior infant classes, particularly those in DEIS primary schools. Otherwise, these children will experience difficulties with word acquirement.

2.6.3 The 'Matthews Effect'

Children who have good exposure to language in their early years will find it easier to acquire new words (Coyne et al., 2019). This concept is termed 'the Matthews Effect' and suggests that previously existing language knowledge creates a platform for further development (Coyne et al., 2019). In other words, a child who is exposed to rich vocabulary in their home environment throughout their early years will find it easier to learn new words when they begin primary school. In contrast to this, if a young child has had little exposure to vocabulary in their home, they may find it more difficult to acquire new words. Additionally, if they had negative learning experiences as a young child, they may be more likely to shy away from new learning experiences on entering primary school (Coyne et al., 2019).

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Coyne et al. (2019) conducted a study where they introduced an intervention using explicit and extended vocabulary instruction. This study found that children with larger initial vocabulary knowledge benefited more from the intervention than those with a smaller initial vocabulary knowledge. Hence, in DEIS schools it is likely that children come to school with less word knowledge compared to those who attend non-DEIS schools. These children may find it more difficult to learn new words despite a teacher's efforts to explicitly teach new vocabulary. This leads to a further growth in the 'vocabulary gap'. Despite this, Hassinger-Das et al. (2016) found that through shared reading and word-game intervention, the children who showed poor word knowledge at the initial pre-test gained a greater amount of vocabulary through participating in the intervention, compared to those who began with superior language skills. Therefore, it is important that teachers are careful not to fall into the trap of deficit thinking. It is possible to make a difference to children's vocabulary knowledge through strategies such as shared reading and playful learning experiences (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016). It is also conceivable for children who descend from an unstimulated learning environment with poor language exposure to make vocabulary gains through explicit vocabulary instruction (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016).

2.7 Environmental Factors

Environmental factors may impact on how shared reading and general learning experiences occur in a child's home. The home environment has a huge influence on children's cognitive, social and emotional development. It has been proven that children who grow up in low socio-economic families have difficulties acquiring language (Ronfani et al., 2015).

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2.7.1 Bronfenbrenner and Learning Environments

Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist, emphasised the importance of early learning environments for children's development (Hayes, O'Toole & Halpenny, 2017). He believed that a child's home environment can determine how successful a child is in school. His bioecological model organises contexts of development into five areas of external influence. The micro-system is the day-to-day environment that the child experiences such as their home, school and relationships while the meso-system is the link between two or more micro-systems (Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny, 2017). It is advantageous to have strong connections between these micro-systems, for example, if there is a strong link between home and school, the child may greatly benefit. If a parent engages their child in informal educational activities in the home, the child could be more likely to progress better in school.

2.7.2 Home and Pre-School Learning Environments

Schmerse et al. (2018) researched the effects of home and pre-school learning environments on early language development. They found that children's language development was essentially shaped by their learning environments, particularly the home (Schmerse et al., 2018). Carneiro, Meghir and Parey (2012) stated that a child's home environment was the strongest factor in explaining inequalities in child development. They suggested that language education in the home should be embedded into daily routines such as meal times, play time and reading experiences. Parents should use child-centred communication approaches and model how to correctly use spoken language (Schmerse et al., 2018). They found that the quality of the home environment predicted grammatical skills at age four but not receptive vocabulary (Schmerse et al., 2018). They described an ideal home learning environment as a place where informal learning occurs through reading, teaching nursery rhymes, playing games with phonemes, words and verbalising emotions, intentions and actions (Schmerse et al., 2018). These home learning opportunities had more of an impact on children's language development than

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structural indicators like maternal education and socio-economic status (Schmerse et al., 2018).

In terms of the quality of a preschool environment, children who came from disadvantaged homes and attended high-quality early childhood settings benefited more than those from disadvantaged homes who attended low-quality pre-schools or did not attend a pre-school at all (Schmerse et al., 2018).

2.7.3 Maternal Education

A major environmental factor in a child's life is their mother's level of education. Research has shown that maternal education is a strong predictor of children's language, behavioural, academic and cognitive development (Carneiro, Meghir & Parey, 2012) (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). Children who have well-educated mothers are more likely to enter primary school with stronger academic skills and to perform better than others (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). In some cases, mothers may return to education after their children are born. This has been proven to improve children's school readiness, quality of home environments and language skills (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). Similarly, an increase in maternal education was shown to boost children's receptive and expressive language skills, especially for those mothers who initially had low levels of education (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). In addition to this, an increase in mothers' education also improved children's home environments, enabling mothers to become more responsive to their children's developmental needs (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). If a mother is well-educated, she may have higher educational expectations for her children, encouraging them to strive towards academic achievement (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). She may also be more likely to provide more educational opportunities for her children through extra-curricular activities (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009). Similarly, she may recognise how to create more informal

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learning opportunities in the home such as reading to her children and encourage language-enriching opportunities such as trips to the library (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009).

2.8 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in their child's education may have a very positive effect on children's school achievement (Taylor, 1980). Taylor (1980) states that if a parent is positively involved with their child at home it can impact how they might achieve scholastically and intellectually. If a child is raised in a home where there is a lack of educational stimulation or support, they are more likely to under-achieve (Taylor, 1980). As well as being supportive of their child's education at home, parents should attempt to support the learning in school in order to establish a home-school link. Both teachers and parents must create a clear line of communication so that parents are enabled to understand how their children are progressing in the classroom and how they can help them at home (Taylor, 1980).

Historically, it seemed that principals and teachers did not involve parents in the school environment (Taylor, 1980). There was a gap between what occurred in the home and the classroom. The school would typically remove the child from the emotional ties of their own family, encouraging school values and norms instead (Taylor, 1980). As a result, the school became a completely separate environment to the family home in physical, moral and academic terms.

2.8.1 Parental Involvement and Socio-Economic Status

Roberts (1980) discusses schools, parents and social class. He states that in contrast to middle-class parents, working-class parents are characterised as uninterested in their children's

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education and are discouraging of education. Research has shown that parents from areas of low socio-economic status may have lower aspirations for their children. They may view signs of educational failure as evidence of their child's lack of ability, as opposed to the lack of stimulation or support they may receive in the home (Roberts, 1980). Parents may shy away from becoming involved in school matters, whether it be lack of confidence or interest. Teachers, particularly those working in areas of disadvantage should continuously strive for positive home-school relationships in order to engage parental support (Roberts, 1980).

It has been identified that parental attitudes are one of the main causes of children's under-achievement in areas of low socio-economic status. It can be said that teachers are powerless when it comes to attempting to overcome this (Roberts, 1980). In observing this, Crozier (2000) explored parent-school relationships in the case of two schools. One school was located in a middle-class area and the other in a socially-disadvantaged area. Crozier (2000) stated that in the past, schools were not welcoming to parents and did not encourage parental involvement. In the past twenty years, however, schools have been working hard to involve parents in different school-based initiatives in an attempt to bridge the gap between home and school. While literature typically suggests that parents from low socio-economic areas are less interested in involving themselves in their child's education, Crozier's (2000) case study showed otherwise. She found that working-class parents were very supportive of their child's education and endeavoured to support them however they could, particularly with their homework.

2.8.2 Home and School: Bridging the Gap

"The surest route to better schools lies through involving parents in the learning activities of students" (Coleman, 1998, p. 9). Parents need to understand what their children are learning in school and how they are progressing academically and socially (McGeeney, 1980). They must

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understand what and how their children are taught in order to help at home. Teachers may wish to involve parents in different classroom initiatives to model the learning that is occurring, however, some teachers may fear that this parental involvement could undermine their professional status (McGeeney, 1980). Parents are not expected to acquire the teacher's role and explicitly teach their children at home. Instead, it is hoped that they support the teacher's professional responsibility (McGeeney, 1980) through their values, attitudes and home practices, as acknowledged by Coleman (1998) who stated that "it is not who parents are but what the parents do to encourage and facilitate learning that makes a difference to students" (Coleman, 1998, p. 10).

2.9 Emerging Research Questions

Overall, it is evident from examining relevant literature that there is a gap in research within the area of parental perceptions of both reading and shared reading. Furthermore, the concept of parental involvement with reading in the home has received little attention in terms of prior examination. More specifically, the notion of shared reading to improve children's vocabulary has not been studied thoroughly in neither an international nor Irish context.

Conducting the review of literature has led to the emergence of the following research questions:

- How does reading actually occur in the homes of Irish families, in particular those living in areas of low socio-economic status?
- Do parents engage in an activity similar to shared reading unknownst to themselves?
- Are parents open to putting the time into attempting a shared reading project?
- To what extent can creating an appropriate environment impact on reading at home?

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- If teachers and parents work in tandem, is it possible to improve children's vocabulary through engaging in shared reading?
- If parents learn a new skill i.e. shared reading, will they continue to implement this new skill in order to benefit their children?

I wish to address these gaps in literature. It is hoped that this investigation will provide some possible answers to the above questions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used for this research study. Initially, the aims and questions surrounding this study are presented; my background and position explained; an overview of the study is then provided, and finally, the data collection methods will be elucidated. I collected evidence through the use of a focus group, interviews and diary entries. I chose these research tools as they were deemed to be appropriate instruments for investigating parents' perceptions of reading and their experiences with the shared reading project. These tools provided qualitative data, which will be presented in the next chapter. Ethical considerations are discussed as a key component of the research design. In line with this, I outline my dual role as teacher and researcher, and how I attempted to avoid bias throughout the data collection process.

3.2 Aims of the Research

Through examining the relevant literature, three specific research questions emerged:

1. What is the current reading practice in the home between parents and their young children?
2. If parents acquire the skill of shared reading, can their children's vocabulary improve?
3. What recommendations can be made as a result of this study for the enhancement of vocabulary knowledge in the classroom?

3.3 Research Paradigm

It is important that educational research seeks to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, it must inform future teaching as a means of enhancing educational experiences (Bassey, 2007).

Sharp (2012) outlines the difference between two educational research paradigms; research from a normative perspective and research from an interpretive perspective. Research paradigms can provide investigators with a common sense of purpose and may help them decide what is considered to be reliable and valid knowledge. Similarly, research paradigms can help the researcher choose an appropriate means of data collection (Sharp, 2012).

Research from a normative perspective can be defined as “something which is very often carried out on people, on places and on events by looking in at them from the outside” (Sharp, 2012, p. 5). It can be argued that this normative perspective is impersonal and often unfavoured by educational researchers (Sharp, 2012). An interpretive perspective on the other hand, can be defined as “something which is very often carried out with people, in places, creating events by looking at them from within” (Sharp, 2012, p. 5). Interpretivists wish for research to focus on the immediate meanings of action from the participants viewpoint (Gage, 2007). Thus, interpretivism is the most applicable paradigm for this investigation. It should allow me to construct a strong examination of parental perspectives in relation to the context of this particular study (Gage, 2007). Therefore, for this examination, I chose to conduct a focus group and interviews as a means of data collection. This allowed me to view the parents’ perceptions of the shared reading project from an interpretive stance.

3.4 Research Methods

I chose qualitative research as the research method for this study. It can be argued that qualitative research differs greatly from quantitative research, for example, quantitative research generally focuses on frequency of the data collected (Kincheloe, 2012). Usually, a set of facts are gathered and subsequently the relationships between different sets are studied (Bell, 2005). In

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quantitative research, data-collection techniques are used to produce quantified conclusions (Bell, 2005) in the form of numbers, and this data is usually presented statistically (Sharp, 2012).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is usually concerned with non-concrete qualities of events (Kincheloe, 2012) where the researcher is generally interested in understanding human perspectives of their own environment (Bell, 2005). Qualitative methods allow the investigator to obtain human perceptions as opposed to numerical perspectives of the world (Bell, 2005). Often, researchers who favour qualitative methods may claim that it is difficult to present natural properties quantitatively (Kincheloe, 2012). In other words, researching and representing knowledge of human beings is difficult to express solely in figures (Kincheloe, 2012). Qualitative data is usually presented in words and an emphasis is placed on their meanings and the context in which they are embedded (Sharp, 2012). This leads to the collection of data which is abstract, broad and more difficult to measure. Despite the above, quantitative research is still important in many educational contexts (Kincheloe, 2012). Often, researchers may use quantitative research to support qualitative data. When this type of data coincides with a concern of purpose and set in context, it can provide deep insights into human matters (Kincheloe, 2012).

3.4.1 Advantages of Qualitative Research

Context is one of the most essential aspects of qualitative research and it can be argued that research is not accurate if its context is stripped away (Kincheloe, 2012). Context shapes human understanding. It is difficult to comprehend human action if removed from its environment (Kincheloe, 2012). Therefore, qualitative research strives to be 'true-to-life'. This involves leaving context unmodified but in its natural state (Kincheloe, 2012). The ordinary, daily lives of participants is a significant factor that must be considered when collecting data.

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Quantifiable data often disregards the qualitative context in which the data is rooted (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). It can be viewed as favourable to examine a small number of situations in detail as opposed to looking at a large number of situations in minor detail without considering the background information (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

3.4.2 Drawbacks of Qualitative Research

Literature outlines some limitations to the techniques used to collect qualitative data. Sometimes, the interviewer can convey biased views when conducting interviews and facilitating focus groups (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). This can especially occur in situations where the researcher is involved with the topic of study in their everyday careers. For example, I engage in shared reading each day with my class group and I believe that it is an excellent way of promoting vocabulary development, however, when I conducted the interviews, I was careful not to place my opinions on the parents as this could have resulted in invalidity. Quantitative research often consists of a larger sample size due to the use of surveys and questionnaires. It is commonly assumed that the larger the sample, the richer the data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). It can therefore be argued that quantitative data is more accurate than qualitative data due to the larger sample size and presentation of data in figures, meaning, the more participants involved in a research project, the stronger the explanations may be (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

3.5 Situating the Researcher

In this study, I was the class teacher and the participants were parents of the children in my class group. I was positioned in an urban DEIS Band 1 school, teaching junior infants. All children were either four or five years old. My classroom experience was valuable as it meant that I was familiar with both children and parents. I was aware of the context of this research and the type of families that I would be working with. Through the Masters in Early Childhood

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Education modules, I gained both academic and practical knowledge around the literacy and shared reading skills that I use every day in my classroom.

3.6 Research Ethics and the Teacher

Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) emphasise the importance of considering ethics as a classroom-based researcher. In this investigation, I was personally involved with the participants and worked closely with the parents. I sought to sustain ethical standards, professionalism and trustworthiness and I maintained transparency at all times, ensuring interview transcripts were available for the parents to view if they wished. This minimised any potential bias during the data collection and presentation stage.

3.6.1 Methods of Maintaining Ethical Standards

When a teacher conducts classroom-based research, many ethical issues must be considered prior to, during and after the study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). In terms of professional integrity, the researcher must ensure that the study they propose is feasible and that a suitable research design has been recognised with adequate data-collection methods (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

Research that encompasses children or their parents/guardians can be viewed as a sensitive area of research, in particular when the researcher knows the participants on a personal level. Hitchcock & Hughes (1989) outline a set of rules which the researcher could follow. Before the researcher gathers data, they should gain permission from the appropriate individuals. This may include the school's Board of Management, the School Principal and the various participants. At the beginning of the research, the teacher should outline what the study will entail: its aims, objectives and methods of research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The

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participants directly involved must give their written and informed consent in order to partake in the focus group and interviews. This consent provides the researcher with permission to refer to these methods of data collection in their study. Additionally, the participants must be guaranteed anonymity (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) which must be maintained throughout the research, particularly when writing the Presentation and Analysis of Findings chapter. Participants must be confident that the researcher will not name them, their place of residency or their child's school. This is especially crucial when referring to excerpts from focus groups and interviews.

3.7 Research Validity

Validity refers to the different reasons why we believe in claims of truth. This includes why we believe certain things and how we rationalise the claims that we construct (Norris, 1997). A range of truth claims may include inferences, descriptions, facts, judgements, arguments and interpretations (Norris, 1997). When conducting research, it is important to ensure validity. The use of controls and randomisation are two ways to ensure that the study is valid (Norris, 1997). It is important to consider that no research is immune to error, whether it is large scale research or a small research project (Norris, 1997).

To avoid conveying bias views, the researcher must remain open-minded. They must detach their own personal values from the conducted study. A source of bias may consist of the researcher's ability, preferences, personal qualities and the reliability of data sources (Norris, 1997). Teachers must reflect on their own personal views and motivations to avoid personal bias' impacting their study (Xerri, 2017). With this in mind, I recognised that there was potential for such bias during the research study as I was familiar with both the participants and the practice of shared reading. It was particularly important that I removed my own personal views and opinions about this practice when conducting the interviews in order to gather genuine data.

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Prior to the interviews, I reminded the participants to be honest with me as I was interested in discovering their opinions for research purposes and it was vital to assure them that I would not judge their responses.

3.7.1 A Dual Role: Teacher and Researcher

A complicated aspect of teacher research is that often the teacher holds a dual role as researcher and educator. This can affect the validity of research. The teacher must be aware of their relationship with the participants. In this study, I knew the parents prior to the interview and was aware of their lives and backgrounds. It was important that I did not make judgements of these parents before the interviews or hold biased views about their abilities prior to or during the interviews. Furthermore, it was vital that the parents did not feel obliged to take part in the research solely because I was their child's teacher. This could have decreased the accuracy of the research (Xerri, 2017).

3.8 Data Collection

I collected data with the aim of testing the research question: **to what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?** Kincheloe (2012) outlines that it is essential that the researcher begins their research with a hypothesis that is of interest to them. This personal interest can help motivate the researcher through the investigation. A research question can subsequently be derived from this interest. From this enquiry, the investigation can activate through means of appropriate data collection (Kincheloe, 2012).

Two methods of data collection were decided on: a focus group and semi-structured interviews. The aim of the focus group was to gather information about parents' perceptions of

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reading in the home and to discover how such reading actually occurred. After the shared reading project, it was originally planned to conduct semi-structured interviews in a face-to-face manner, however, school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in them being completed over the phone. I hoped to utilise these phone interviews to explore whether the parents noticed a difference in their children's vocabularies through reading stories in this way. Furthermore, I was interested in discovering the parents' opinions of shared reading as opposed to reading stories in a more traditional manner.

3.9 Gaining Access

Prior to conducting this research project, I discussed the proposed investigation with the school principal who then approved its conduction with the Board of Management. Once the initial process was complete, I then received verbal consent to proceed with the inquiry. Following this, I proposed the research to the Marino Ethics in Research Committee (MERC).

Initially, I wrote a letter to all parents of my class group, inviting them to the focus group. This letter outlined exactly what it would entail and explained the shared reading project in detail. In addition to sending a letter, a text message was sent via the Aladdin Schools software the day before the focus group.

Two weeks prior to the interviews, I sent a separate letter home to the parents. The letter invited them to interview and clearly explained what this would involve. However, after the school closure was announced due to the COVID-19 outbreak, I emailed the parents inviting them to interview over the phone instead of face-to-face.

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I received written consent to audio-record all participants during the focus group. In terms of the phone interviews, I sought verbal consent as well as consent through an email. Additionally, all participants were informed that they could opt out at any stage of the investigation and could refuse to answer a question without stating a reason.

3.10 Focus Group

I used the focus group to investigate parents' opinions of reading within the home; what their current reading practice in the home consisted of and whether they would be interested in taking part in a five-week shared reading project.

3.10.1 Focus Group Background

In total, fourteen parents partook in the focus group, consisting of six fathers and eight mothers, each of whom had a child in my class group. On the day of the focus group, they gathered in the school at 1.30pm. I received written permission from all participants to audio-record the focus group, using my laptop. In addition to this, they were all guaranteed anonymity.

Prior to the focus group, I made arrangements for the children to be supervised while their parents were partaking in the meeting. A junior infant teacher positioned in the classroom next-door watched the children in her room and played with them, ensuring they were occupied for the duration of the focus group.

3.10.2 Outlining the Shared Reading Project

I outlined the project that I was inviting the parents to partake in. The plan was that each child would take home a storybook for a week. Over the week, the parents were asked to read this book three or four times. In addition to this, each book came with a prompt card that outlined

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the importance of using words such as title, author, illustrator and cover when examining a book. Generally, each prompt card suggested three new words that the parent may wish to focus on. For example, in the story *Tyrannosaurus Drip* (Donaldson, 2008), three new words were ‘reeds’, ‘carnivore’ and ‘herbivore’. As well as the new words, each book I distributed had a phrase which was repeated throughout the story. In this book the phrase was: “up with rivers, up with reeds, up with bellyfuls of juicy water weeds” (Donaldson, 2008). The idea of these phrases was to enhance the child’s memory using playful language, as this humorous repetition of words has been proven to aid vocabulary acquirement. Overall, I emphasised that on the first day of reading, the book should be read through without stopping. On the other days, the parent may stop, identify, clarify and repeat the new vocabulary.

3.10.3 Previous Research and Focus Groups

Research suggests that focus groups can offer an insight into participants’ meanings and conceptualisations through debating the issues that are discussed (Xerri, 2018). They can encourage self-disclosure through conversations that are less formal than that in an interview setting (Xerri, 2018). Focus groups can help create a non-judgemental attitude where participants trust both one another and the researcher (Xerri, 2018). Participants that tend to be shy and reluctant in interviews may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences in a group where the spotlight is not solely on them (Xerri, 2018). While there are several positive aspects to focus groups, there are equally many drawbacks. If the group consists of a number of strong personalities, these participants can dominate the discussion. This can intimidate shy members (Bell, 2005). Along with this, if a participant’s opinion is contrary to the prevailing opinion in the group, they may be inclined to keep their beliefs to themselves (Bell, 2005).

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The hope of a focus group is that participants will positively interact with one another, listening to each other's opinions. The researcher should act as a facilitator and less as an interviewer (Bell, 2005). In focus groups, the researcher typically presents an educational matter. In this case, I put forward the notion of reading at home and asked the parents to consider their typical reading practice with their child. This allowed me to observe how the group interacted together, along with the information they conveyed about their personal experiences (Sharp, 2012). The researcher's main role is to ensure the conversation is relevant to the research question and to encourage reluctant participants to contribute (Sharp, 2012). Naturally, as the focus group progresses, the topic of conversation may change. This is acceptable once the interviewer probes in a way that is meaningful for both researcher and participant.

3.10.4 Topic Guide

It is good practice to use a topic guide in a focus group to guide the discussion. The aim is to maintain a clear focus within the conversation towards achieving answers to the general research question. This helps the researcher to stay on task and avoids veering the conversation in the wrong direction (Xerri, 2018). However, in some cases the researcher may decide to have a completely unstructured focus group where they avoid intervening (Bell, 2005). In this study, I used a brief topic guide which outlined the different key issues that I was interested in exploring. These consisted of resources within the home, what time of day the parents generally read to their children and what genre of book their children enjoy. Additionally, I wished to discover if their children prefer the use of tablets over books and whether they struggle to find time to read. Generally, literature recommends open-ended, broad questions when conducting a focus group (Xerri, 2018). This gives the participants scope to address topics that are important to them and provides them with an opportunity to share their own personal experiences and opinions.

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3.11 Phone Interviews

As stated previously, I had originally intended on conducting face-to-face interviews for this investigation. This was no longer feasible due to health and safety risks associated with COVID-19. As an alternative, it was decided to interview the parents over the phone.

The concept of phone interviews is under-researched (Lechuga, 2012) (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2010), however, in the available literature, phone interviews are often presented as inferior to face-to-face interviews (Lechuga, 2012). Typically, they are not recommended as the primary source of data but are usually used to supplement face-to-face interviews where necessary (Lechuga, 2012). On the contrary, Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2010) argue that data derived from phone interviews is as valid as that gathered face-to-face. They claim that the advantages of phone interviews outweighs the drawbacks (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2010). Such advantages and disadvantages of phone interviews will be outlined below.

3.11.1 Advantages of Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are cost-effective (Lechuga, 2012). They decrease research expenses as they can be conducted from both the participant's and researcher's homes. Similarly, phone interviews allow for greater geographical access. If a participant lives a significant distance away from the researcher, a phone interview may be a feasible option. However, in this research all of the participants lived within 5km of me.

Phone interviews are also proven to promote disclosure of information that may be considered sensitive (Lechuga, 2012). Participants may be more willing to discuss sensitive topics over the phone as they are less exposed to the researcher and may feel less judged.

3.11.2 Disadvantages of Phone Interviews

The lack of nonverbal cues associated with phone interviews can be challenging (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2010) (Lechuga, 2012). It can be difficult for the researcher to use positive body language to put the interviewee at ease. Similarly, it can be tough for the investigator to read the participant's body language and interpret how they are feeling (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2010). I ensured to provide the participants with instant feedback and prompts throughout the phone interviews to reassure them that I valued their responses. I felt that this put them at ease and reassured that I was listening and noting their answers.

3.12 Semi-structured Interview

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews for this study as they tend to be more flexible than structured interviews (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). They are often preferred by educational researchers as through prompting and questioning the interviewer can reach more depth (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). A semi-structured interview can be defined as a formal encounter whereby the interviewer and interviewee discuss a particular subject (Drever, 1995).

The semi-structured interview enriches interaction and allows the interviewee to answer questions on a personal level (Xerri, 2018). The aim of a semi-structured interview is to allow the researcher to make a comparison between different respondents' answers while allowing variety and flexibility (Xerri, 2018). The researcher conducts the semi-structured interview based on a set of questions which guide and structure the overall purpose of the interview. The semi-structured interview can consist of both closed and open questions. Open questions provide the interviewee with a sense of freedom to personalise the interview, to guide what they wish to

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address and how much they want to express (Drever, 1995). Sometimes, interviewees may feel restricted and frustrated in closed-ended questions (Aberback & Rockman, 2002). Open-ended questions can help to maximise the validity of responses (Aberback & Rockman, 2002). It is important, however, that the interviewer takes control and focuses the interview back on a refined topic if necessary (Drever, 1995). A semi-structured interview must be designed to the purpose of the research. The questions must aim to answer the overall research question (Aberback & Rockman, 2002).

3.12.1 Limitations to Semi-Structured Interviews

There are limitations to semi-structured interviews, typically, they consist of a researcher interviewing an individual that they may be familiar with on a personal level. In an educational research setting, the interviewee may be a teaching colleague, a well-known professional in the field, a parent or a student. The direct interaction involved between the researcher and interviewee may involve the researcher showing bias or subjectivity, (Xerri, 2018) as naturally, interviewing is a very subjective procedure (Bell, 2005). The researcher must be careful not to convey personal values when interviewing and to avoid seeming judgemental in response to the participant's answers (Xerri, 2018).

3.12.2 The Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview has an overall structured agenda which simultaneously allows for flexibility (Xerri, 2018). The order of questions asked can be changed and the interviewer can seek in-depth, follow-up answers (Xerri, 2018). In semi-structured interviews the researcher uses the interview guide to plot the direction of the interview. This may consist of a list of written questions. Overall, the researcher has the opportunity to steer the direction of the interview based on the participant's responses (Xerri, 2018). The interview guide ensures a sense

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of consistency across the set of semi-structured interviews which allows the researcher to compare and analyse the different participant's responses (Xerri, 2018). Despite the general outline of questions being the same, they are primarily open-ended which allows both interviewer and participant to divert slightly from the interview guide. Similarly, they allow the respondent to answer honestly and share their true experiences (Xerri, 2018). For example, if the participant mentioned that their child learned new words during the shared reading experience, I was able to prompt the parent and seek further information. Such information may include finer details such as the type of words they acquired and what different strategies the parent used to help the child to remember the new vocabulary. Therefore, the guide served as a means of controlling the semi-structured interview but also gave both the participant and I a sense of freedom, while simultaneously allowing for consistency across the various interviews (Xerri, 2018).

3.12.3 Piloting the Interview

It is important to pilot the interview guide prior to conducting a set of semi-structured meetings (Xerri, 2018). This allows the researcher to improve the effectiveness of the interview for the purpose of the collection and analysis of data. The pilot interview helps the researcher to foresee any research problems or issues with the questions (Sampson, 2004), for example, if they are misleading or worded poorly. Similarly, if the questions in the pilot do not lead the researcher towards the research question, they must be revised and made more accurate. In other words, the pilot will highlight gaps in the collection of data. It also seeks to help the researcher contemplate potential ethical issues (Sampson, 2004). In this study, I piloted my interview twice with different junior infant teachers as a means of ensuring the interview process was effective. These teachers were familiar with the notion of shared reading, which meant they could give me constructive feedback in terms of questions that could be merged together, removed or clarified.

3.12.4 Recording the Interview

I decided to audio-record the phone interviews using two different devices. A built-in device on my laptop was used along with my phone as a back-up source. No written notes were taken during this interview as I wished to focus on listening to the interviewees. I received verbal consent to audio-record the participants at the beginning of the interviews. Again, participants were reassured that they could withdraw from the interview at any time and that upon request I would destroy all data recordings.

3.12.5 Ethics and Interviews

As previously mentioned, I obtained informed consent from the participants prior to the interviews (Bell, 2005). As a researcher, I had an ethical responsibility to explain to the participants what the study entailed; why I wished to interview different individuals; what the interview would involve; how I intended on handling data and what would be done with the data once the process was finalised (Bell, 2005). This information should be presented to the respondent in advance of the interview to provide the opportunity to query the implications of any declarations (Bell, 2005). It can be seen as poor practice to explain what the study entails verbally at the beginning of the interview (Bell, 2005). This can put respondents under pressure to partake, reducing the validity of the data. It is also important that participants are aware that they can withdraw from the interview at any stage. Informed consent ensures that respondents are familiar with their rights and responsibilities. In addition to this, it also ensures that the researcher is protected (Bell, 2005).

Along with obtaining informed consent, I told the participants that the interview transcripts will be kept for a period of time, as agreed by Marino Institute of Education. The

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parents will remain anonymous throughout this duration. In addition to this, the signed forms of consent will be kept to protect me as a researcher. Following the dissertation examination process, these transcripts and signed forms will be destroyed.

3.13 Diary Entries

I chose to keep a personal diary throughout the shared reading project to log my observations. I wished to note how the parents and children were engaging in this project. I believed that these diary entries could supplement the interviews and give me an insight into how the children were progressing with the project. I also wanted to record any information the parents conveyed to me regarding their experiences with shared reading.

Literature conveys that the use of a personal diary is valuable for tracking the progress of a research project (Bell, 2005). Researchers must be aware of the ethical considerations that are required when using diary entries. Personal information must not be disclosed in relation to the individuals who are being observed (Bell, 2005). In the context of this study, I had to ensure not to disclose any sensitive or personal information regarding the children and parents I was interacting with.

3.14 Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology used to highlight parents' perceptions of reading in general, along with their personal experiences with the shared reading project. The reasons for choosing qualitative methodologies for this research study were explored, as were the aims of the research. Issues regarding the researcher within the study were investigated. Ethical issues and other data-handling considerations were outlined. The following chapter discusses and analyses

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the findings regarding parents' perceptions of reading as a whole, along with their involvement with the shared reading project.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research study aims to investigate how parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting can impact on shared reading in the home with young children. Chapter Four will present the findings from the gathered qualitative data whilst also commenting on the results. The data from the focus group, interviews and diary will be examined through emerging themes. Prior to this, background information regarding the interviews and diary entries will be outlined. Additionally, data will be triangulated from various sources and linked to relevant literature as discussed in Chapter Two. The key topics in this chapter include vocabulary development, skill advancement and reading environments. Overall, this chapter will strive to answer the original research question:

To what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?

4.2 Ensuring Validity

I tried to ensure results were valid by thoroughly examining the gathered data. Before transcribing the dialog, I listened to the audio-recordings of both the focus group and interviews repeatedly. I endeavoured to transcribe data from the focus group and six interviews accurately, attempting to avoid issues regarding validity and bias. In addition to this, my diary entries were utilised to verify the results of the focus group and interviews. Subsequently, the relevant literature was examined, along with the transcripts and diary entries. This process of triangulation also aimed to ensure that the findings were reliable. Furthermore, time was spent

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coding the transcripts and dividing all data into three different themes in accordance with the research question.

4.3 Presentation of Data

The data from the focus group and interviews is summarised to avoid duplication and to add fluency to the chapter. The results from the focus group, interviews and diary entries are combined under three different themes which emerged when examining the data. This helps provide clear, concise data from the parents' general experiences of reading in the home and then more specifically, their opinions of the shared reading project. The diary entries I logged throughout this initiative will supplement the interviews while providing a further insight into the parents' and children's engagement with the project.

Data from the focus group, interviews and diary entries have been analysed in the following themes:

- Vocabulary Development
- Skill Advancement
- Reading Environments

4.4 Semi-structured Phone Interviews

I interviewed a total of six parents, each of whom corresponded with me via email and offered to take part. Each interview lasted twenty minutes.

It is important to note that these interviews were semi-structured. However, I prepared a set of questions to navigate the interviews which ensured that I stayed on topic, answering the

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original research question. Nevertheless, I wanted the participants to experience a sense of fluidity throughout the interview. I began with the same open-ended question: “overall, how did you find the shared reading project?”. Following this, I encouraged the participants to share what they felt was important. I used questions to prompt, for example, “did your child get tired of reading the story so many times?”, “do you believe your child learned any new words or phrases from these books?” and “did you find shared reading different from the way you would have read to your child before?”. This allowed me to uncover certain elements I felt were important such as the participants’ opinions on re-reading, vocabulary acquisition and shared reading versus a more conventional approach to story-time.

4.5 Diary Entries

Throughout the shared reading project, I kept a diary to note my different observations during the initiative. The notes in my diary varied from comments passed by parents to statements made by the children involved in the project. I believed these diary entries could supplement the interviews and help me to develop an insight into both parents’ and children’s engagement with the shared reading project.

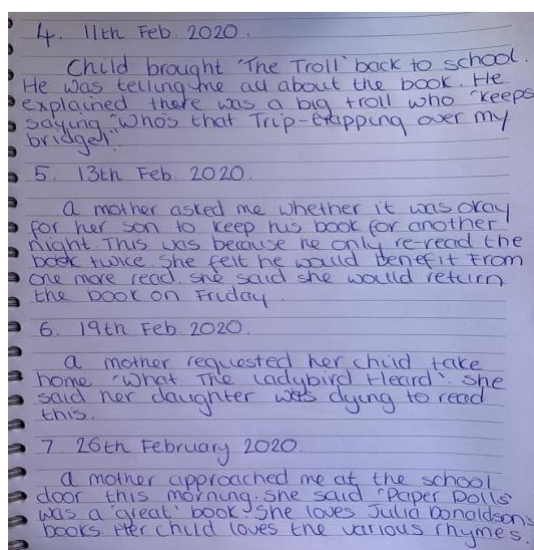


Fig. 4.1: Sample of diary entries.

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4.6 Theme One: Development of Vocabulary

4.6.1 Finding One:

- Children acquired new vocabulary from the shared reading project

4.6.2 Evidence:

In light of the ‘vocabulary gap’ as discussed in Chapter Two, I was curious to uncover whether or not the parents felt their child’s vocabulary was enhanced as a result of engaging in shared reading. I posed the following question: “do you believe your child learned any new words or phrases from these books?”. Overall, the interviews showed that the parents believed their children had learned new words.

P03 stated that her daughter was joining in on the story-telling by the third or fourth reading, especially the rhymes and songs. She could recite the rhymes, which enabled her to retell the story. Later in the interview, she explained that her daughter had indeed acquired new vocabulary as she heard her performing the rhymes from the stories while engaging in play. She said **“I would hear her repeating some of the different words. I’d laugh because I’d remember that was from one of the books”**.

P04 discovered that her daughter could recite the various rhymes by the third reading. She stated that her daughter **“definitely”** learned new words and phrases. In addition to this, she said that throughout the shared reading project, her daughter was curious to learn the meaning of unfamiliar words.

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P01 said her son “**definitely**” learned new words from the shared reading project. She explained that he has continued to expand his vocabulary since completing the project. He is currently reading other books in the house and if he does not comprehend a word, he asks his mother to explain the meaning.

P06 could not recall a particular phrase that her son learned. However, she explained that they followed the prompt cards and focused on the recommended vocabulary. She believed that sometimes her son failed to understand some of the words. She thought this was due to processing difficulties that can often come with an autistic spectrum disorder.

P02 outlined that she loved re-reading stories with her son as he could recall the words and join in with the storytelling. She explained; “**he actually knows the words and all. He can tell us them**”.

P05 said that if his daughter saw the books again, she would have no problem remembering the accompanying words. He felt that through re-reading, his daughter picked up on new words each time.

In addition to the interviews, my diary entries also clarified that the children were acquiring new vocabulary at home whilst engaging in the shared reading project. Some of my observations were as followed:

I made an observation while reading *Cave Baby* (Donaldson, 2011) in the classroom. Child 01 had read this book previously as part of the shared reading project. She told me the name of the author and the illustrator (Diary Entry 4.1), similarly, she defined the words ‘hyena’

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and ‘mammoth’. She stated that a hyena was similar to a dog but that it laughed, like in the Lion King. She said a mammoth was like a hairy elephant with two big tusks (Diary Entry 4.1). It was clear she had learned vocabulary from reading the story at home.

This morning a mother approached me at the school door and explained that her children were thoroughly enjoying the shared reading project. She explained that by the third night they could join in, repeating the rhymes which they found humorous (Diary Entry 4.2).

The children were choosing new books to take home. Child 05 chose ‘Sharing a Shell’ (Donaldson, 2005). Child 06 who was standing beside her exclaimed: **“in that book there’s weird things called anemone”** (Diary Entry 4.3).

Child 01 brought ‘The Troll’ (Donaldson, 2019) back into school. He was telling me about the book. He explained that there was a big troll who **“keeps saying ‘who’s that trip-trapping over my bridge!’”** (Diary Entry 4.4).

4.6.3 Discussion:

It is evident that parents believed their children developed new vocabulary throughout the shared reading project, through the re-reading of stories. Additionally, it is clear that the parents were reading books in an effective, dialogical manner (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). Similarly, my personal observations showed evidence of word-learning. One child recalled the word ‘anemone’ from his storybook; another explained the words ‘hyena’ and ‘mammoth’ from Cave Baby (Donaldson, 2011) whilst naming the author and illustrator. The third child recited the rhyme ‘who’s that trip-trapping over my bridge’ from The Troll (Donaldson, 2019) storybook. This is concrete evidence that these three children did learn and remember new words and phrases, most

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likely due to repeated readings of stories whereby they were consistently exposed to the same vocabulary. If the children merely read each book once, it is possible they would not have recalled as many words. In addition to this, it was probable that the playful use of rhyming phrases throughout the stories aided the children's memory.

As stated in Chapter Two, story-reading is an excellent way of teaching vocabulary, as the words are placed in context (Concannon-Gibney, 2019). It would have been less effective if the parents chose words at random to teach their child. Instead, the parents explicitly taught vocabulary from the storybooks, for example 'hyena' and 'mammoth'. These books provided a context for word-learning, resulting in a deeper comprehension of vocabulary as the children could relate it to the storyline. When reading the book *Cave Baby* (Donaldson, 2011), the child repeatedly encountered the word 'hyena' and 'mammoth' while observing illustrations of these animals. The storyline, repeated exposure of words and illustrations all enhanced the memory of such vocabulary.

In addition to recalling new words, the parents recognised that their children joined in by repeating phrases from the storybooks. One mother outlined a time when she heard her daughter use a phrase from a story during play. The use of phrases from stories during play can be considered a higher-order thinking skill. Not only was this child recalling a phrase, but she was also placing it into a new context. This shows deep comprehension of the actual meaning of a phrase. Therefore, this consolidates that this child developed her vocabulary knowledge and could furthermore apply it to a different setting.

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4.7 Theme Two: Skill Advancement**4.7.1 Finding Two:**

- Parents' attitudes towards the shared reading project was positive

4.7.2 Evidence:

It was apparent from interacting with parents that they were engaged and willing to participate in the shared reading project. Overall, they displayed a positive attitude towards the task. This was evident from the diary entries:

At home-time, a mother asked me if it was okay for her son to keep his book for another night as he had only re-read the book twice. She felt he would benefit from one more read (Diary Entry 4.5).

One morning, a mother arrived at my classroom door and requested her child take home 'What the Ladybird Heard' (Donaldson, 2010). She said her daughter was **"dying"** to read this (Diary Entry 4.6).

A mother approached me at the school door this morning. She said that 'Paper Dolls' (Donaldson, 2013) was a **"great"** book. She stated that she loved Julia Donaldson's books, especially the various rhymes throughout this story (Diary Entry 4.7).

Another mother walked to the classroom door this morning. She wished to inform me that her four children were taking part in the shared reading project. They were all enjoying reading the different books (Diary Entry 4.2).

In addition to the evidence from the diary entries, fourteen parents participated in the focus group. This showed that they were interested in participating in the shared reading project. There were nineteen children in my class, therefore fourteen out of nineteen families wished to partake.

4.7.3 Discussion:

The evidence from the diary entries and focus group highlight that the parents displayed a positive attitude towards engaging in the shared reading project. This was an important factor, as if few parents were interested in participating it would have been very difficult to implement and examine such a project. In addition to this, they were interested to participate in an effort to collaborate with me, their child's teacher, to enhance their child's literacy experience at home. The interest in partaking was an excellent indication that the parents valued their children's education and wished to learn how to help their child in the most effective manner. This is in contrast to the literature which suggests that parents from low socio-economic status backgrounds often avoid becoming involved in school-based initiatives due to a lack of interest in their child's education (Roberts, 1980). Furthermore, the concrete evidence from the diary entries emphasises that the parents were engaging well with the project. One mother requested that her son kept his book for an additional read, as he had only read his book twice. This highlights that the mother understood the benefits of re-reading and was implementing shared reading as I had advised. Similarly, one mother informed me that her four children were joining in, which was evidence that this family was actually implementing shared reading at home.

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4.7.4 Finding Three:

- Parents acquired a new skill by participating in the shared reading project

4.7.5 Evidence:

Prior to the focus group, parents were unfamiliar with the term ‘shared reading’.

Throughout this meeting, I took the opportunity to explain the concept of shared reading and model how the parents could implement this in their homes. This original unfamiliarity with shared reading is evidence that the parents acquired a new skill by participating in the project.

- When interviewing the parents after completing the project, I was interested in exploring whether shared reading was similar to or different from how the parents would typically read with their children at home. I asked: “did you find shared reading different from the way you would have read to your child before?”.

P06 emphasised that shared reading was different to how she previously read with her child. She explained that she “**would have just read it and then put it away**”. Her son loves a Thomas the Tank Engine book which they often read, however, she never considered following the words with her finger or questioning him about the story.

P05 described shared reading as a “**totally different concept**” to how he previously read with his daughter. He believed that the most different aspect was that there was a timeline and a lot of interaction throughout the story.

P03 explained that when she normally read at home with her children, they read the book through and read a new book the following night. She only read a book a second time if her

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children requested it. She outlined that when reading ‘normally’ her children would not remember the book; **“it was a story and that’s it”**. She believed that re-reading helped them recall the storyline, enabling them to retell the story.

P04 said that shared reading was similar to how she typically read with her child. She explained that normally she let her child interrupt a bit more. However, she learned from shared reading that it was better for her daughter to listen on the first read.

P01 engaged in a similar project with her older son when he was in junior infants. She explained that she was **“out of practice”** and it was great to learn how to do it again. However, this similar project she outlined did not focus on vocabulary development. She explained that she never thought to describe difficult words or ask her son to infer the meanings. She stated, **“I probably would have read the book and looked at the pictures, but I wouldn’t have gone into that much detail”**.

- ii. In addition to acquiring a new skill, it was evident that parents were interested to continue implementing this skill at home:

P06 explained that she is engaging in shared reading with books she found in her home. She outlined that she asks her son to predict elements of the story and asks him to repeat phrases. As well as this, she has continued to follow words in the books with her finger.

P04 explained that when reading her ‘own’ books, she is asking her daughter to listen to the story without interruption on the first read. She elaborated further, outlining that her daughter comprehends the storyline in greater depth when she listens to the story through.

P01 found comics in her home which belonged to her older son. She is now reading them with her child and finds that he is memorising the words and reading them with her. She stated that **“he’s nearly telling me the story the second time round”**. She has noticed that when reading he continues to ask her questions about the meaning of different words in stories.

4.7.6 Discussion:

The evidence I extracted from the focus group and interviews showed that the parents did acquire a new skill from engaging in the shared reading project. At the beginning of the initiative, it seemed that they had never encountered the concept of shared reading which signified that they were about to develop a new ability. However, one mother did state in the interview that she engaged in a similar project with her older son when he was in junior infants.

In the interviews, the parents described how shared reading differed to how they typically read prior to the shared reading project. Two mothers mentioned that normally, they would read a book once and place it back on the shelf. The concept of re-reading was new to them and it seemed that they read to their children for pleasure as opposed to reading with the intention of learning words. In addition to this, one mother said she never thought to follow the words with her finger, while another said that she never focused on explaining difficult words. This is all evidence that the parents learned new reading strategies from participating in the project. This concept of upskilling ties into the literature discussed in Chapter Two, which outlines benefits of increased maternal education such as improvements in children’s home environments, (Magnuson, Sexton, Davis-Kean & Hutson, 2009) along with boosts in behavioural, academic and cognitive development (Carneiro, Meghir & Parey, 2012).

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I am hopeful that the parents will continue to use the acquired reading strategies, despite that the shared reading project is finished. Each parent has developed new skills in terms of engaging in shared reading with their child. These skills can continue to be implemented in the home in order to enhance and sustain word-learning in an effort to close the ‘vocabulary gap’ (Christ & Wang, 2011). In the interviews, three parents mentioned ‘continuing’ with shared reading at home. One mother specified that she will continue to follow words with her finger and encourage her son to repeat phrases. Another mother mentioned she is now reading comics at home with her son and explained that after one or two reads he is repeating new words.

4.7.7 Finding Four:

- Parents believed re-reading a story was beneficial

4.7.8 Evidence:

The concept of re-reading a story is quite unique to shared reading. I was interested in discovering the parents’ experience with and opinions of re-reading a story. During the interviews I asked: “do you think there is a benefit to re-reading a story? Did your child get tired of reading the story so many times?”.

P06 explained that her child had a particular fascination with the books *Monkey Puzzle* (Donaldson, 2000) and *What the Ladybird Heard* (Donaldson, 2010). He chose to take both of these books home twice which she believed was interesting. She explained that on the first night she read the book through and on the next, questioned him. This re-reading enabled him to recall one or two things about the story. Her son has an autism diagnosis, so this pleased her. She said, **“I was really happy with that kind of interaction from him”**.

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P04 said that on average, they read the story four times. She felt her child would lose interest if they read it more. She said there were **“definitely”** benefits to re-reading.

P01 read the story five days a week, her son was happy with this. She believed this was because he understood that he would have a new book the following week. She mentioned that he was particularly interested in the Gruffalo (Donaldson, 1999) and Cave Baby (Donaldson, 2011) because we had read these stories in class. She believed he enjoyed them because he **“knew more about them”**. P01 explained that prior to beginning these stories at home, her son was able to tell the story without opening the book. She found that when re-reading stories, he picked up on new things each time. She believed that on the first read her son focused on one element of the story, but when they re-read the story, he could notice something new. Similarly, she felt that as they continued to read the book, he noticed new things in the illustrations which helped **“magnify the story”**.

P02 said she read the story five nights a week. She felt her son remained interested in the story on each reading. He never lost interest, she said **“he’d go straight back up, get his book and we’d read”**.

P03 believed her children were happy to keep reading the same book because they understood there was a routine to follow. She explained that on day-one she would read it through, then on the second day she would ask them to recall what happened in the story. She stated that following on from this, **“the next night they’d remember a little bit more”** compared to the previous night.

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4.7.9 Discussion:

The parents noticed the benefits of re-reading stories. Overall, they believed their child could pick up on different elements of a story on each read. One parent acknowledged that re-reading helped her child retell a story as the storyline and vocabulary was reinforced as the week progressed. Literature also shows that repeated readings increase the child's familiarity with a story, enabling them to recall new words and phrases (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

It seemed the children did not tire of continuously re-reading books. One mother explained that her son had a particular interest in re-reading *Monkey Puzzle* (Donaldson, 2000) and *What the Ladybird Heard* (Donaldson, 2010). He chose to take these books home twice. We had read these stories in the classroom previously, so it was interesting that he wished to read them again at home. Similarly, another mother outlined that her son loved taking home *Cave Baby* (Donaldson, 2011) and *the Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999) because we had previously read them in class. She said he could retell the story at home before engaging in the first read. This is evidence that if a child enjoys a story, they will take pleasure in repeatedly reading it. This could be due to their familiarity with the story, and knowing what words and phrases will come next, enabling the retelling of the story. However, one mother explained that her child would possibly lose interest if a story was read more than four times. This indicates that it is important the child gets a sense of enjoyment from the reading experience in order for them to remain interested.

4.7.10 Finding Five:

- Parents found use of prompt cards effective at the beginning

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4.7.11 Evidence:

During the interviews I was interested in exploring whether the prompt cards were useful to the parents.

P03 thought the prompt cards were useful, especially at the beginning. She felt as the weeks advanced, her children understood the structure of shared reading. They knew that their mother would read the story through on the first night. Following this, they would engage in questioning and subsequently, retell the story themselves.

P04 used the prompt cards for the first week of the project. As the weeks progressed, she felt that her and her husband did not require them as they “**knew the formula**”. She explained that then they “**got a good rhythm going**”.

P01 explained that after the first week, the prompt cards were not required. However, she would revert to the cards if she failed to recognise a challenging new word. She said that they would check the prompt card to see whether there was a difficult word they “**overlooked**”. She explained that as time progressed, the sequence that came with shared reading became familiar.

P06 said the prompt cards were very useful at the beginning. She read the cards through before reading the story with her son. On the second read, she would glance at them to get inspiration for the type of questions to ask him. She explained that after a few weeks, she could decrease her use of the cards.

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P02 believed the prompt cards were **“very useful”**. She stated, **“I could explain properly to him instead of me going on with my own spiel”**. She found it beneficial to have the **“big words”** written on the cards as guidance.

P05 felt positively about the cards. He believed they were helpful to keep his daughter on task. However, he felt **“after a few runs into it”** he could read the stories without the prompt cards.

4.7.12 Discussion:

It is clear from the interviews that the parents found the prompt cards beneficial at the beginning of the project. After a week or two of practising shared reading in the home the parents could read independently of them. One mother noted that she returned to the prompt cards if she felt she **“overlooked”** a difficult word in the story. Most parents agreed that after a few weeks the sequence of shared reading became ingrained and they could participate without the prompt cards.

In terms of the prompt cards, the concept of Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory arises (Soler & Miller, 2003). Typically, educators refer to their students when they discuss socio-cultural theory and the concept of scaffolding. However, in this case I was somewhat scaffolding the parents through explaining how to conduct shared reading and providing the prompt cards. The prompt cards ‘scaffolded’ the parents through the process of shared reading for the initial weeks of the project. As the parents acquired the skill through repeated practice, they became more confident in their abilities, then gradually decreased their use of the prompt cards.

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4.8 Theme Three: Reading Environments**4.8.1 Finding Six:**

- Both parents and children had positive experiences with shared reading

4.8.2 Evidence:

- i. During the interviews I wished to investigate whether the children enjoyed the shared reading project. Furthermore, I wanted to discover what particular aspects of the project they might have favoured.

P01 stated that her son particularly enjoyed the different illustrations in the storybooks. She mentioned that he is quite artistic and that when examining the pictures, he would say to her **“I can actually make that”**. Following this, he attempted to draw the various scenes or characters.

P06 admitted that her son enjoyed the reading routine that the shared reading project required. It became part of his bedtime ritual.

P05 said that his child loved predicting the storyline by examining the front cover of the book. He explained that at the start his child found this difficult to grasp but it helped when he prompted her to study the pictures. He believed that as the weeks progressed, she could predict more accurately.

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P03 concluded that her daughter particularly enjoyed the quality time that they spent together throughout this project. She has three older siblings; therefore, she enjoyed this one-to-one time with her mother. P03 said her child also enjoyed the ownership that came with bringing a book home from school.

P04 explained that her daughter loved following the structure of the shared reading project. She loved knowing that on day-one her mother read the story through, then subsequently, she could ask questions and begin to recite the rhymes in the stories. She explained that her daughter's favourite part was being involved in the storytelling. She favoured the stories with rhymes that she could remember with ease.

P02 declared that her son's favourite part was partaking in the reading process and exploring the different characters' dialog.

Similarly, my diary entries showed that the children enjoyed participating in the shared reading project:

On Thursday I observed the children choosing their books. Child 02 said to her classmate: **“you should pick the book about the Mermaid, it's great. Pick it”** (Diary Entry 4.8).

I observed the children picking books again. Child 04 said **“I love that book (Cave Baby)”**. Child 04 asked **“can I read that one this time? (Paper Dolls)”** (Diary Entry 4.9).

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I observed one child showing his book to a friend. He said, **“this one is good, it’s like the Gruffalo but better because... the baby”** (Diary Entry 4.10).

- ii. In addition to the children’s enjoyment, throughout the interviews I was interested in gaining a general insight into the parents’ perceptions of shared reading. I was curious to discover whether they thought it was worthwhile.

P06 said the project was **“very good”** as her son learned how to outline events in books. With *Monkey Puzzle* (Donaldson, 2000), for example, he could say **“I can’t find my mom”**, which was his way of retelling the story. She explained that when visiting his grandmother, he could tell his cousins about the books. She was delighted that he could have this conversation with other people, emphasising that this **“was great for him”**.

P05 described the project as **“very useful”**. He felt the project enhanced his child’s attention skills. P05 highlighted that the project was well organised and **“very easy to follow”**.

P03 thought the project was **“really good”**. She loved that her four children were involved. She felt it **“brought them all together in a sense”**. Each evening she switched off the television and the five of them gathered to read the story. Her children are an array of ages: five, seven, eight and sixteen. They all loved participating. She believed it was something different they could enjoy as a family. At the end of the interview, I asked P03 whether there was anything else she would like to share with me. She stated that the project was a good idea and she felt that **“it should be put into place in all schools”**.

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P04 described the project as **“really good”**. She believed it was especially useful for keeping her daughter engaged in books. She felt one or two of the books were ‘wordier’ than others. She believed her daughter might have been less interested in these; it was more difficult to recall the rhymes.

P01 enjoyed participating in the project. She explained that in the evening her children are not allowed to play outside, and their ‘screen-time’ is limited. She felt that shared reading was an alternative evening-time activity. She stated, **“it’s something we can do together, me and him”**.

4.8.3 Discussion:

It was evident from both the phone interviews and diary entries that the shared reading project was a positive experience for the children and their parents. It was clear from the interviews that shared reading was a learning experience but also an opportunity for family to spend time together. Two parents noted that they enjoyed the ‘quality-time’ spent with their children during this project. One parent explained that she has four children, therefore, her daughter enjoyed the one-to-one time with her mother. As time progressed, her three other children joined in with shared reading, but she felt it **“brought them together”** as a family. Another mother explained that it was a unique activity that she could engage in with her son. She explained: **“it’s something we can do together, me and him”**. This showed that the children were possibly building relationships with their families while learning.

One parent mentioned that she limits her son’s ‘screen-time’ and therefore, shared reading was an alternative evening activity. Another mentioned that in the evening she turns off the television and her children gather for their story. Turning off electrical devices such as

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televisions and tablets in order to read can be difficult for parents; however, it must be noted that no parents found the shared reading project an annoyance. It seemed all parents enjoyed it and ensured to create time in the afternoon/evening to read with their child. The relevant literature suggests that creating time to engage in educational activities at home such as shared reading can boost children's overall achievement (Taylor, 1980).

The diary entries show the children engaging positively with the shared reading project. In addition to this, it was interesting to see the children forming opinions about literature at such a young age, for example, one child told her friend that *The Singing Mermaid* was a great book and encouraged her to choose it. Overall, observing the children discussing books with their classmates was evidence that they were engaged in the project.

4.8.4 Finding Seven:

- A routine was established when engaging in shared reading in the home

4.8.5 Evidence:

I was interested to discover whether the parents established a routine for shared reading. I posed the following question during the interviews: “did you read the story at a certain time of day?”.

P01 clarified that they always read the book after dinner, in the sitting room. She felt her son would be too tired to read the story at bedtime. She noticed that if she left the book in the sitting room her son would also read the story to his older brother in 5th class at another time of day.

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P06 explained that she found her son's attention span quite poor due to his autistic spectrum disorder. She had had difficulty getting him to listen to the story during the day. He had a routine which he was accustomed to, therefore, night-time was the best time to read the story with him.

P05 explained that he read to his daughter each evening in her bedroom. He felt that this was a quiet space in the house where his daughter would not be distracted by her siblings.

P03 read the story at seven o'clock each evening. She explained that she would turn off the television, gather all of her children and **"go through the book"**. Her daughter requested that she read the story from a chair, while they listened on the floor. She explained that following this, they had something to eat and went to bed.

P04 said that their story-reading routine changed daily. Typically, they read after school. She found her child would lose interest in school-related matters later in the evening. They always read in the living room.

P02 explained they read in the same place every day, always in the bedroom. She read to her son between the hours of half-seven and half-eight.

4.8.6 Discussion:

It was clear from the interviews that the parents established a shared reading routine. Generally, the time of day and location in which they read varied, so the routine was unique to each family. It appeared that most parents read in either the bedroom or sitting room which ties into the relevant literature as it is suggested that children are read to in a comfortable space. This

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is believed to create a setting that is conducive to collaboration and co-construction (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2013).

In the classroom, I have a dedicated shared reading area. This consists of rugs, beanbags, cushions and soft toys. I sit on a chair and the children sit around me. One mother informed me that her daughter asked her to read from a chair while she and her siblings sat on the floor. She wished to physically replicate how shared reading occurs in our classroom. This suggests that perhaps children feel more comfortable when a familiar routine is implemented. Similarly, another mother explained that her son, who is on the autistic spectrum, loved the sense of routine that came with the shared reading project. He reads a story at bedtime every evening, so this project integrated into his regime. It can be argued that the structure of shared reading was particularly beneficial for him as he could foresee what would happen next, for example, after examining the cover, he may have begun discussing the author and illustrator, and retelling the story.

4.8.7 Finding Eight:

- Recognising a link between school and home motivated two children to engage in the project

4.8.8 Evidence:

The concept of connecting learning in the classroom with learning at home appeared in two interviews. Two parents noted that their child was more motivated to engage in the shared reading project in comparison to when they normally read at home. They believed this was because they were excited about the notion of following the sequence of shared reading at home in the same manner as school.

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P01 mentioned that she always reads to her child at home. However, she believed he was particularly excited about the shared reading project because the books came from school. She stated **“I definitely think it was a bigger deal for him because he took the book from school”**. P01 also highlighted that she believed her child looked forward to discussing the books in school with the other children, heightening his involvement in the project. Additionally, on Friday when the books were due to be swapped, he reminded her to not forget his book which she felt gave him a sense of responsibility.

P03 mentioned that her daughter would sit down at story time and almost imitate how I would read the story to the children in school. Prior to reading, her child presented her book, then outlined who the author and illustrator were. She assigned roles to her siblings, stating who would take turns engaging in various responsibilities such as page-turning. Additionally, P03 believed her child enjoyed the sense of ownership that came with bringing a book home from school. P03 clarified **“I think she enjoyed the fact it was her homework. It belonged to her”**.

It naturally arose from the interviews that one child developed a deeper interest in learning vocabulary throughout the shared reading project. Furthermore, two of the children related their learning in school to the books they read as part of the project. One child identified phonemes in his books, while another recognised different phonemes and tricky words in her books.

P01 stated that her child is now noticing the different phonemes in words when reading books at home. She explained that prior to the project, he did not mention the different sounds he could recognise in books. In addition to this, P01 noticed that following on from the shared

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reading project, her son has more of an interest in understanding new words. She said this interest was not there before the project, for example, now when she returns from a grocery shop, he asks her to name the different items purchased.

P03 noticed that her child began to identify different ‘tricky words’ in the books she read. She explained that during shared reading her daughter pointed to and read words such as ‘and’ and ‘the’. Similarly, P03 outlined that her child began to identify different letter sounds in the stories.

4.8.9 Discussion:

Recognising a link between home and school motivated two children to engage in the shared reading project. The children were excited to read at home in the same manner as the classroom. This is possibly because they were excited to show their parents how reading occurs in school. It provided them with a sense of responsibility whereby they were the ‘expert’ and could model the reading routine for their parents. In addition to this, the parents believed their child enjoyed bringing books home from school. It can be argued that this was because they were different from the stories they have at home, adding variety to their reading experience.

Additionally, the two mothers outlined that their children began to notice ‘tricky’ words and letter sounds in books which they recognised from school. It seemed that the children began to realise that what they learn in school could be applied to reading at home. It is also possible that participating in shared reading at home allowed these children to reinforce what they learn in school, creating a strong link between these two micro-systems (Hayes, O’Toole & Halpenny, 2017).

4.9 Conclusions

This chapter presents the findings from the focus group, interviews and diary entries. A commentary was also offered on these results. Overall, the presentation followed a thematic approach, where data from the two research methods and the diary were presented together under the three prominent themes. The aim of this was to triangulate the data while gaining an insight into the parents' perceptions of the shared reading project and the impact that it had on the reading experience in the home. Generally, both the parents and children felt positively about the shared reading project. Furthermore, the parents believed their children acquired new vocabulary through explicitly identifying new words and engaging in repeated readings. It was also evident that the parents learned a new skill which they could implement at home in order to enhance their child's language development. In addition to this, the routine and structure that shared reading demanded resulted in the creation of a positive reading environment. The following chapter will describe the conclusions which can be drawn as a result of this research project. Additionally, the recommendations for future implementation of shared reading in terms of vocabulary development will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

I implement shared reading in my classroom on a daily basis. This cultivated an interest within me to observe how parents would engage with the approach at home. Prior to this research, I wondered whether implementing shared reading at home could benefit my students as literature has shown that children who live in areas of low socio-economic status may struggle with word acquirement (Christ & Wang, 2011). Therefore, I decided to introduce a five-week shared reading project. This encouraged the parents to engage in shared reading with their children at home, in an attempt to boost vocabulary knowledge. The intention of this study was to discover parents' perceptions of reading in general, then more specifically uncover their opinions of the shared reading project. Considering the research question, I wanted to discover how parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting could impact the shared reading experience in the home.

Firstly, relevant literature on the topic was reviewed and critiqued. Following this, the project was designed and I commenced qualitative data collection. I used a focus group, semi-structured interviews and diary entries to gather evidence.

The findings from the qualitative data were presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Overall, it was discovered that both the parents and children felt positively about the shared reading project. In addition to this, the parents believed that their children expanded their vocabulary knowledge through engaging in repeated readings. The parents also acquired the skill of shared reading which I hope they will continue to implement. Finally, it seemed that the shared reading project created a positive reading environment in the home.

It was envisaged that this research would provide guidance and recommendations to aid the implication of shared reading both in children's family homes and the classroom. This chapter outlines the implications of the research findings, suggests a number of practical recommendations, highlights limitations and identifies possible directions for future research.

5.2 Implications of the Findings

This study showed that both parents and children had a positive attitude towards the shared reading project. The parents acquired a new skill which can possibly enhance the learning environment in their homes. Overall, the parents believed their children acquired new vocabulary through shared reading.

Shared reading is a procedure which can benefit parents, children and teachers. It is an approach to reading that is worth considering implementing across different class levels within a school, particularly a DEIS Band 1 school.

5.2.1 Educators and 'Deficit Thinking'

As discussed in Chapter Two, the 'Matthews Effect' explains that children who have good exposure to vocabulary in their early years will find it easier to acquire new words compared to their peers who experience poor language exposure (Coyne et al., 2019). This suggests that children in a DEIS Band 1 school will find it difficult to learn new words. As well as this, they may gain less vocabulary through an initiative such as shared reading in comparison to children from a higher socio-economic background. However, no matter how large the vocabulary gain, educators should recognise the value of developing word knowledge. If we do not strive to broaden children's vocabulary while in the early years of education, there will be

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negative implications later in their schooling. The ‘vocabulary gap’ is not typically noticeable when a child is five or six years old. It is not until they are in fourth or fifth class where teachers will recognise the consequences of lack of vocabulary instruction. The teaching of these unconstrained skills in the early years is essential, otherwise, children will experience difficulties when completing standardised tests at age ten or eleven. While these tests do not ultimately determine ‘success’ for the child, underdeveloped unconstrained literacy skills may follow the child into post-primary education, and moreover, further into their lives.

As educators, we must remember that the development of vocabulary knowledge, no matter how large or small, is still a positive gain. Educators must not fall into a trap of deficit thinking whereby they consider children from low socio-economic backgrounds incapable of achieving the same goals as those from higher socio-economic families. We must set high expectations for our students in order for them to achieve at their best ability. Therefore, it is important to encourage shared reading and playful vocabulary learning experiences. This can make a difference to children’s vocabulary knowledge regardless of their socio-economic status (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016). The children in this study were from predominantly lower socio-economic backgrounds, however, the findings suggest that they still made noticeable vocabulary gains from re-reading stories with their parents.

5.2.2 Involving Parents in Shared Reading

Involving parents in an initiative such as shared reading conveys a positive message to the child as it confirms to them that their parents value their education and thus display encouraging attitudes towards their learning. In addition to this, parental involvement in education creates a strong link between the home and school. This strengthens the link between micro-systems, enhancing the child’s overall learning environments (Hayes, O’Toole &

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Halpenny, 2017). In this study, fourteen parents wished to be involved in the shared reading project. This was a very promising number as literature suggests that working-class parents are uninterested in and discouraging of their children's education (Roberts, 1980). The evidence from this study opposed this generalisation as the parents were extremely interested in helping develop their children's literacy skills.

It can be argued that when parents acquire a new skill such as shared reading, it directly impacts on the reading experience within the home. Firstly, parents may gain more confidence in their own abilities to read once they have upskilled. In addition to this, they may understand the benefits that shared reading can bring to their child. Understanding that shared reading can improve their child's vocabulary and comprehension skills should hopefully result in more frequent reading.

Moving forward, it would be advisable to implement a parent-involved initiative such as shared reading at the beginning of the school year. This would provide parents and guardians with the chance to visit their child's classroom early in the year, an opportunity which might provide them with a greater insight into their child's learning environment. In addition to this, establishing parental involvement early in the academic year would be a good way for parents and teachers to familiarise themselves with one another. If parents and teachers can build a positive relationship, the parent will feel valued within the school community and it may help establish a strong line of communication. As well as constructing good relationships and involving parents in their child's education, beginning such an initiative early in the year may enhance literacy abilities. It would be beneficial to 'boost' children's vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of junior infants. While teachers are making such efforts in the classroom, it would be helpful if this approach occurred in tandem in the home. This would result in high-quality

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vocabulary development in both the home and school from the beginning of junior infants.

Furthermore, this would help to strengthen the home-school connection, linking these two essential micro-systems.

5.2.3 Teachers and Implementing Shared Reading

It is important to relate the findings from this study to the practical application of vocabulary instruction in the classroom. As presented in Chapter Two, the literature alone outlines the importance of developing unconstrained literacy skills in the early years. In addition to this, it is emphasised that explicit vocabulary instruction is required to develop children's word knowledge, especially in DEIS schools. While there are numerous methods of explicitly teaching vocabulary, it can be argued that shared reading is a very natural way of expanding word knowledge. This is because the words are placed in the context of the storyline, and through gentle re-reading the vocabulary is reinforced. Often, teachers may teach words in an overly-orchestrated manner whereby the children are almost forced to remember new vocabulary. Shared reading on the other hand, exposes the child to new words and gives them the autonomy to recall any words of interest to them.

It is advisable that more teachers in School X engage in shared reading in the classroom. Overall, this study showed that the children did acquire new vocabulary through shared reading. In addition to this, the parents had positive attitudes about the shared reading project. A fact which indicates that they may support teachers in implementing shared reading more frequently in the classroom. This could possibly involve teachers redesigning their timetable in order to prioritise shared reading. As well as this, parents found re-reading beneficial to their children as they focused on a new element of the story on each read. Re-reading stories also helped to reinforce new vocabulary. This concludes that it is valuable for teachers to re-read a story four or

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five times over the school week. Reading the book twice would not be sufficient for vocabulary expansion. Additionally, the findings from this investigation showed that the learning environment was enhanced when a familiar routine was established in the home. This is evidence that it is worthwhile for teachers to consider creating a designated reading space in their classroom that is conducive to shared reading.

5.3 Recommendations for Moving Forward

The following recommendations arising from the results of this study may have implications not only for School X, but also for the wider teaching community. It is recommended:

- That junior infant, senior infant and first class teachers in DEIS schools conduct an initiative similar to the shared reading project, whereby they encourage parents and guardians to engage in shared reading at home. An initial meeting could be organised to explain and model shared reading for the parents and guardians. Similar to this project, the teachers could create prompt cards which accompany the books and scaffold the parents. This could run for a period of five to eight weeks, then be reviewed by the teachers in terms of how well the parents are engaging and whether they believe it is beneficial to the child and parent/guardian.
- That teachers who educate junior infant, senior infant and first class level children include shared reading in their everyday classroom practice. If teachers consider this too time-consuming, it is suggested that they implement shared reading every second week. However, it is essential that when engaging in shared reading teachers must re-read the book four or five times throughout the week in order to enhance vocabulary knowledge.
- That children are more involved in the shared reading initiative. I believe the children may have played a vital role in encouraging their parents to partake in this project, as we

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discussed the shared reading project in the classroom prior to inviting the parents to the initial focus group. Therefore, when implementing a project similar to this in the future it might be an idea to involve the children in the initial focus group/meeting. The children could model shared reading for their parents, showing them how they engage in shared reading in the classroom.

5.4 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This investigation presented a number of findings regarding parental collaboration with teachers while implementing shared reading in the home with young children. However, there are still numerous areas for further research which could heighten our understanding of the implications of parents engaging in shared reading at home with the support of their child's teacher. These remaining questions are due to the limitations of this particular research project. Such limitations include a small sample size as this study was completed within one class group, in single primary school. It would be interesting to conduct similar research across different DEIS primary schools and as well as non-DEIS schools. Also, this research was conducted in a large city. Therefore, it would be worthwhile applying this study to a more rural area in Ireland and discovering the various implications. In addition to this, it could be interesting to expand this study and investigate the attitude of parents regarding a shared reading project across multiple classes within a stream, for example all of the junior or senior infant classes in School X.

Secondly, time was another limitation to this study. There was a restraint on time as the project had to be completed within a rough time frame of nine months. It would be interesting to monitor vocabulary development across a year or two. Thirdly, the means of vocabulary measurement was an additional limitation. Vocabulary acquirement was solely measured based

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on the parents' perceptions of the children's word knowledge. Future research may consider the use of a uniform vocabulary assessment prior to and after the shared reading project.

Due to COVID-19, interviews were conducted over the phone. This can be viewed as an additional limitation as I could not gauge the participants' body language, which would have given me a further insight into the validity of their responses. However, I was pleased with the depth of responses that the parents provided me with, despite the lack of face-to-face contact.

A final limitation includes the familiarity between researcher and participant. In this case, I was teaching the parents' children at the time of the study. It is quite possible during the semi-structured interviews and focus group that the parents may have not been entirely honest with me. They may have told me what they believed I wanted to hear, as opposed to telling me their truthful perceptions, in fear of being judged.

5.5 Concluding Comments

To conclude, this research study examined parents' perceptions of reading in general and more specifically, their opinions of shared reading. Overall, the parents felt very positive about reading and the overall project. They believed that their children's vocabulary was enhanced as a result of this engagement. In addition to this, the parents discovered that shared reading created an appropriate reading environment in the home which was conducive to learning while enjoying the process of reading. Furthermore, it was evident that the parents acquired a new skill which they appear interested to continue implementing in their homes. In response to the research question, it can be concluded that overall, parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting may heighten the reading experience in the home. When parents upskill with the help of their child's teacher, it is likely they feel more capable of reading in an effective manner. Moreover, when a

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reading routine has been established the parents will read more effectively and frequently with their child. In addition to this, the parents may focus on reading with the purpose of developing vocabulary knowledge, instead of solely reading for pleasure.

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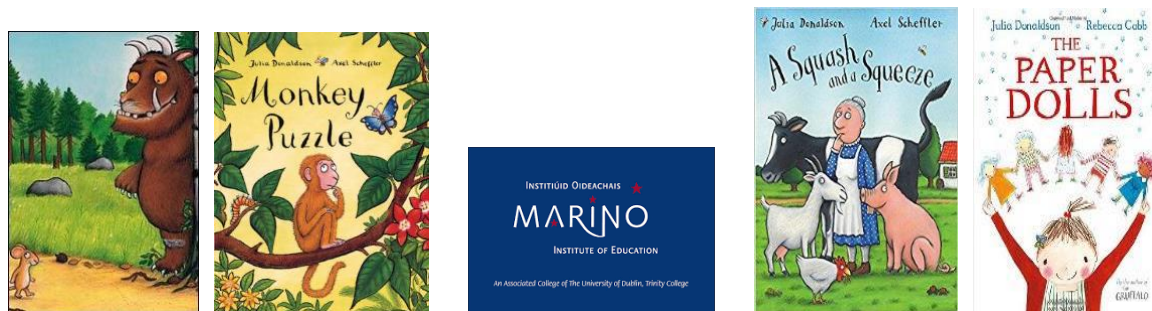
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Appendix 1: Focus Group - Invitation and Consent Form



22nd January 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently completing the final year of a Masters in Early Childhood Education at Marino Institute of Education. As part of my thesis research I am examining the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents/guardians. The specific focus is on Shared Reading. My aim is to investigate the impact of parent/guardian-teacher collaboration on the reading environment in the home.

Shared Reading is a specific type of storybook reading where the child and adult read the book together. Eventually the child becomes the story-teller which builds the child's confidence. It is also helpful for enhancing word knowledge and understanding. We do Shared Reading every day in class for 20 minutes. The children are familiar with it and they look forward to it every day.

I hope to complete a five-week Shared Reading project with the parents and guardians of the children in my class. To take part in this project, you will be asked to read one of my picture books with your child for 10 minutes a night. I will be doing the same in the classroom but with different books. You will be asked to read the same story for the week. The books will alternate every Friday. This project will continue for five weeks, so your child will read five different picture books.

To explain this project and to demonstrate Shared Reading, there will be a short meeting in our classroom on Friday the 31st of January at 1.30pm. Another teacher has volunteered to supervise your children in her classroom for this time. It will take 25 minutes.

Please contact me if you have any questions. I would love to get as many parents and guardians involved in this as possible. It would greatly benefit the children to see their parents participating in the project.

Thank you for your co-operation,

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Please tick the appropriate boxes:

YES	NO

I give permission to take part in the Shared Reading Project:

I give permission to be audio-recorded:

YES	NO

Parent/Guardian signature: _____

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Appendix 2: Focus Group Topic Guide

1. Do your children enjoy reading?
2. Do they prefer watching something on the iPad/tablet?
3. Would you usually read at the same time of day?
4. Would you normally read in the same place?
5. Do your children have favourite books that you might read over and over, or do you normally read different books?
6. What do you think it is about the favourite books that they like?
7. Do you find it difficult to find the time to read?
8. Do you have a local library?
9. Have you ever heard of 'Shared Reading'?

Appendix 3: Letter Inviting Parents to Interview10th March 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to thank you all for your involvement in the Shared Reading Project over the past 5 weeks. The children seemed to really enjoy it. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy evenings to read the different stories.

I am looking for parents to meet me for a 20-minute one-to-one chat about the Shared Reading Project. I am interested in finding out what you thought of the project. As it's for research purposes, all opinions whether negative or positive are welcome.

I would really appreciate if you had the time to meet me after school one day over the next two weeks. It would really help me in writing the final piece of my thesis. As with the first meeting, no names will be used, and everyone will remain anonymous throughout the chat.

If you are interested in helping me with this, please return the below slip in with your child and we can arrange a day and time that suits you.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

Thank you so much for your co-operation,

Parent name: _____

Child name: _____

Preferable day of week: _____

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Appendix 4: Revised Letter (email) Inviting Parents to Interview25th March 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

At the moment I am finishing my thesis. In order to do this I would like to have short, 15 minute chats with some parents who involved themselves in the Shared Reading Project.

I had hoped to do this last week in school but unfortunately the school closure got in the way.

I spoke to Ms. _____ (principal) and my supervisor. They've both given me permission to do these interviews over the phone, as a phone call.

I would be very grateful if you would participate in a chat over the phone for 15 minutes someday, whenever it suits.

There is no pressure to partake, I am just reaching out to the parents who participated in the Shared Reading Project.

As previously mentioned in the letter, your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason. In addition to this, your responses will be kept anonymous.

Thanks for your cooperation,

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Appendix 5: Participant Consent - Interview

Title of Research: To what extent can parent and teacher collaboration in a DEIS setting impact on the shared reading experience in the home with young children?

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, you are free to do so.

Please answer all of the following (tick the appropriate box)

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the letter of invitation.	☐	☐
I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.	☐	☐
I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.	☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept anonymous.	☐	☐

I agree to participate in the above study:

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

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Appendix 6: Interview Guide

1. Overall, how did you find the shared reading project?
2. Is there anything that your child particularly enjoyed?
3. Is there anything your child did not enjoy?
4. How many times roughly did you re-read the story?
5. Did you find it a hassle reading these stories? Any difficulties (time, getting child to listen)
6. Did you find shared reading different to the way you would have read to your child before?
7. Do you think there is a benefit to re-reading a story? Did your child get tired of reading the story so many times?
8. Do you believe your child learned any new words or phrases from these books?
9. Did you read the story at a certain time of day? In the same place?
10. Did you use the prompt cards, or did you feel you could read without them?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

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Appendix 7: Diary Entries

1. **Entry 4.1** “We were reading *Cave Baby*. Child 01 had this book the previous week. She could tell me the name of the author and the illustrator. Similarly, she explained to the class what a hyena was and what a mammoth was. She stated that a hyena was similar to a dog that laughed, like in the *Lion King*. She said a mammoth was like a hairy elephant with two big tusks. It was clear she had learned vocabulary from reading this at home.”
2. **Entry 4.2** “A mother walked to the classroom door this morning. She wished to inform me that her four children were taking part in the shared reading project at home. She was surprised how much enjoyment they were extracting from it, even her sixteen-year-old. She explained that by the third night they could all join in with the rhymes which they found humorous.”
3. **Entry 4.3** “Child 05 chose ‘Sharing a Shell’. Child 06 exclaimed “in that book there’s weird things called anemone”.”
4. **Entry 4.4** “Child 01 brought ‘The Troll’ back into school. He was telling me about the book. He explained “he keeps saying ‘Who’s that trip-trapping over my bridge!’”
5. **Entry 4.5** “A mother asked me whether it would be okay for her son to keep his book for another night. This was because he had only re-read the book twice. She felt he would benefit from one more read. She said she would return the book on Friday. It was obvious that this parent was engaging in shared reading at home and felt there was a benefit to re-reading the story.”
6. **Entry 4.6** “A mother requested her child take home ‘What the Ladybird Heard’. She said her daughter was “dying” to read this. This gave a sense that the children were forming opinions about different books from one another and were discussing the stories in the classroom.”
7. **Entry 4.7** “A mother approached me at the school door this morning. She said that ‘Paper Dolls’ was a “great” book. She stated that she loved Julia Donaldson’s books. Her child loved the various rhymes throughout this story. This was instant feedback that they were enjoying reading at home.”
8. **Entry 4.8** “I observed the children choosing their books. Child 02 said to child 03 “you should pick the book about the Mermaid, it’s great. Pick it”.”
9. **Entry 4.9** “I observed the children picking books again. Child 04 said “I love that book (*Cave Baby*)”. Child 04 said “can I read that one this time (*Paper Dolls*)”.”
10. **Entry 4.10** “I observed a child showing their book to their friend. He said, “this one is good, it’s like the *Gruffalo* but better because... the baby”.”