Emergent literacy: school to home connection

Barbara Grell
University of Northern Iowa

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Emergent literacy: school to home connection

Abstract
All homes have opportunities to influence young children's emerging literacy. Parents or other caregivers and teachers can work together to help children develop literacy abilities. Sharing this responsibility between the home and school demonstrates to children the importance of learning. Establishing connections from home to school and from school to home will help children make sense of the world in which they live. The school can provide families with ideas to support literacy development in the home.

A project to support children's emerging literacy at home is provided through the use of literacy theme bags. This project is designed for first grade students but could be adapted for younger and older students. The project emphasizes to families the importance of establishing a partnership between school and home for the benefit of their child's literacy learning. Newsletters sharing tips for reading, writing, and listening to children read provide parents or other caregivers with information on how they can help in their child's literacy development.
Emergent Literacy: School to Home Connection

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Barbara Grell

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Jeanne McLain Harms
Director of Research Project

12/17/99
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms
Graduate Faculty Adviser

12/20/99
Date Approved

Rick C. Traw
Graduate Faculty Reader

12/20/99
Date Approved

Rick C. Traw
Head, Department of Curriculum
and Instruction
Abstract

All homes have opportunities to influence young children’s emerging literacy. Parents or other caregivers and teachers can work together to help children develop literacy abilities. Sharing this responsibility between the home and school demonstrates to children the importance of learning. Establishing connections from home to school and from school to home will help children make sense of the world in which they live. The school can provide families with ideas to support literacy development in the home.

A project to support children’s emerging literacy at home is provided through the use of literacy theme bags. This project is designed for first grade students but could be adapted for younger and older students. The project emphasizes to families the importance of establishing a partnership between school and home for the benefit of their child’s literacy learning. Newsletters sharing tips for reading, writing, and listening to children read provide parents or other caregivers with information on how they can help in their child’s literacy development.
Literacy behaviors are present in most homes in one form or another. Adults in family situations support literacy development to differing degrees (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Educators need to be knowledgeable about the literacy backgrounds of students in their classroom, particularly how language is used in their homes, so literacy activities can be presented in meaningful ways in school programs. A close school-home connection can greatly benefit young children's emerging literacy (Morrow, 1995).

Children's parents or other caregivers are their first teachers and models of language use. Therefore, the home environment is important to a child's emerging literacy development. From birth on, children's home experiences affect how they acquire language and eventually how they achieve in school (Morrow, 1995). Children who have been exposed to books and print and are read to prior to entering school are more likely to become readers (Strickland & Morrow, 1989).

Home Literacy Environments

Families vary greatly in the support they give to their children's emerging literacy (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Although literacy practices may differ from family to family, children should learn the purposes of literacy in the family setting (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Engaging in purposeful literacy events within the everyday life of the family provides children with understandings of the functional uses of
language (Goodman, 1986). Such functions can include making grocery lists, reading and following recipes, and writing notes and letters (Graves, 1994).

Literacy rich environments and parent-child attention to environmental print are linked to children’s acquisition of print awareness (Goodman, 1986). Reading and writing are viewed as important activities both for pleasure and learning in literacy rich homes (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Children who come to school reading or who learn to read easily in the first years of school have experienced supportive adults and print-rich environments in their homes. These children have had literacy materials readily available to them, such as books, magazines, and newspapers, along with writing materials (Goodman, 1986). Parents who believe their children are interested in reading are more likely to supply reading and writing materials for their children to experiment with (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Parents’ values, attitudes, and expectations regarding reading literacy are likely to have a lasting impact on their children’s attitude toward reading (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Parents or other caregivers who value literacy take their children to libraries and bookstores at a young age (Graves, 1994). Their reading aloud to their children when they are young can establish firmly the importance of reading (Smith, 1988). Such an understanding is more difficult to develop after children have begun school (Butler, 1998).
Children benefit from early read aloud experiences. Children and parents build a close relationship through the sharing of books. Dorothy Butler (1998) emphasizes the importance of reading to children from the time they are babies in *Babies Need Books*.

It is my firm belief that giving the parents the idea of the book as a tool will do more for the dual purpose of establishing the parent-child relationship and ensuring the child’s adequate language development, than any amount of advice on talking to babies (p. 6).

Many research studies have concluded that a positive impact occurs on children as parents or caregivers read aloud to and with their children (Chomsky, 1972; Teale and Sulzby, 1986). These adults serve as models for children (Smith, 1988). As a result, children develop concepts about print: where the text begins, the direction of print from left to right and top to bottom, words represent a message, and the print corresponds with the spoken word (Clay, 1979).

Parents and caregivers who read to and with their children and ask questions and answer questions about reading experiences further their children’s literacy (Durkin, 1966). Discussions of the stories build concepts and related vocabulary and promote prediction, an important tool in the act of reading (Butler, 1998).
Building School-Home Partnerships

Children live in two worlds, the school and the home. They move back and forth at the beginning and end of each school day (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996). Establishing a partnership between the school and home supports the emerging literacy of children. Teachers and parents or other caregivers have the same goal for children: seeing them learn. Both parties must share their roles as they contribute to children’s learning. The interconnectedness of the school-home partnership has significant impact on children regardless of the social-economic status and cultural background of the families (Fruchter, Galletta & White, 1993).

Educators need to encourage families to be actively involved in children’s school life. They can provide families opportunities to build a school-home relationship (Gelfer, 1991). As a result, children work harder to achieve success toward goals and values when the expectations and attitudes of the school and home overlap. Children’s academic achievement increases when teachers and parents or other caregivers encourage and respect children’s efforts (Epstein, 1987).

Strategies to Support School-Home Partnerships

Schools have frequently failed to communicate to parents or caregivers how their involvement in the school setting encourages their children’s learning. Teachers need to take the first step in initiating dialogue with
families about how they can participate and collaborate in the school culture. Teachers can begin by focusing on the strengths of each family unit. When teachers recognize the positive aspects of children and their families and build upon those strengths, families are more likely to be involved in their children’s education. The school personnel in extending an invitation to families to be part of their children’s education, need to establish a school environment that is family-friendly. Parents or other caregivers must perceive the school as a non-threatening place to visit if they are to be involved in school activities (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996).

To strengthen the family-teacher relationship, teachers can develop home-school portfolios. Accessing information and items of family communication stored in these portfolios can assist teachers in knowing their students and families.

Gelfer (1991) suggests these contents for the home-school portfolio:

- family-school connection letters
- notes and requests written by the parents
- telephone conversation logs
- checklists or surveys completed by the parents
- home visit notes
- child-parent-teacher conference notes
- copies of memos sent to the parents by the teacher
• assessment reports
• parent classroom or school visits
• parents workshops or study trips that parents have participated in during the school year
• letters of appreciation sent to parents for their support at school
• family response journal entries from school-home literacy theme bags.

Providing parents or other caregivers with the opportunity to participate in "Welcome to School" conferences at the beginning of the school year can assist in building strong school-home partnerships. The purposes of such conferences are to introduce families and teachers, give a cursive view of the school program, and communicate the importance of the school-home partnership (Gelfèr, 1991).

Early in the school year, teachers can hold a parent literacy workshop. The goal of the session is to share information with parents or other caregivers on how children’s literacy emerges. During the workshop, teachers can provide background information on literature experiences and how they nurture children’s language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The teacher can demonstrate strategies for parents or other caregivers to use when reading to their children. The importance of connecting children’s prior knowledge to the literature experience by asking questions before and after the reading needs to be emphasized (Smith,
1988). The adults responsible for the children's home care can be given the
opportunity to practice the reading experience with each other. Following
this experience, parents can be given ideas for extending the reading
experience through expressive activities (Harms & Lettow, 1998).

Another parent workshop can focus on young children's writing.
Examples of young children's emerging writing abilities can be explained.
Ways families can nurture children's writing can be given (Graves, 1983).

A Project to Promote Literacy Experiences at Home

This project was designed to support literacy learning at home for first
grade children. Theme bags with books and suggestions for activities were
developed for students to take home for family experiences. These theme
bags relate to concepts being presented in the school program. The goals
of the theme bags are portrayed in the voice of the child so that when an
adult reads to the child, it will make sense to him/her. The goals of this
project are three-fold: 1) to communicate information to families about the
importance of reading to and with their children, 2) to provide parents and
other caregivers with information and directions that will aid them in
helping their children with learning activities related to a theme, and 3)
to provide families with literacy theme bags that contain quality literature
and related activities to extend the reading experience.
Several newsletters have been developed to introduce families to the literacy theme bags and related reading information. The first family newsletter will be sent home early in the school year, sharing information about the project (see Appendix A). The next three family newsletters will be sent home shortly thereafter, providing information on how adults or older siblings can help young children with reading and writing activities at home (see Appendix B). A memo will be distributed to families before the first theme bag is sent home explaining the management system of the theme bags (see Appendix C). Thereafter, the first grade children will take a theme bag home each Friday for families to enjoy until the following Wednesday.

Each theme bag will contain a book related to the theme being studied in the classroom. Four bags will be developed for a theme. Each bag will focus on a particular aspect of the theme. The theme of friendship is offered as an example with four sub-themes: I am a friend; I have friends; My teacher is my friend; and I know an older friend (see Appendix D). Included in the bag is a guide sheet giving the theme and sub-theme, a summary of the story, tips for reading, other books related to the theme, and suggested activities. Also, in the theme bag is a response form for the families (see Appendix E) and a list of the items to be returned to
school on the due date (see Appendix F).

Summary

The school to home literacy theme project encourages families to be involved in connecting what is learned at school to the home. The theme bags will encourage parents or other caregivers to provide their first grade children with a print-rich home environment that supports their emerging literacy and helps them to develop a positive attitude toward reading and writing. Reading aloud to children and listening to them read shows them the value of literacy. Their language development is extended with related activities.

Theme bags will be developed with the same format to support the study of other themes and units in grade one. The family response forms that are returned with the theme bags will be examined, and their suggestions will be considered. It is projected that this project will nurture first-grade children's emerging literacy and will create pleasurable family experiences.
References


Appendices
Dear Parents or Caregivers,

Welcome to a new school year for you and your child. Throughout the year, your child will bring home several literacy theme bags related to the unit of study in school.

Each theme bag will contain a piece of literature, a sheet with information about the book and instructions for each related activity, a family response form, and a card that lists the materials the family should return to school on the due date.

The purpose of the literacy theme bags is to encourage interest in reading. I hope you and your child will enjoy the literacy theme bags during the year.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Grell
Dear Parents or Caregivers,

It is important to read aloud to children. They enjoy listening to you read aloud to them. Listed below are tips for reading aloud.

1) Make the experience enjoyable and relaxing.

2) Find a comfortable spot where you can read to your children daily.

3) Give the title of the book and the name of the author and illustrator of the book before beginning the story.

4) Before reading the book, have your child predict what the story will be about.

5) Also, view the pictures and talk about what is happening in each picture. Help your child notice details in the pictures.

6) As you begin, point to the print as you read.

7) When it makes sense as you read the story, have your child predict what will happen next.

8) Encourage your child to read with you on repetitive parts.

9) Invite your child to ask questions and make comments as you read.

10) Talk about what you and your child enjoyed most about the story after reading the book.
11) Children enjoy hearing the same book read again and again.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Grell
Dear Parents or Caregivers,

Listening to your child read is important as they become better readers. The reading experience should be enjoyable for both you and your child.

Following are tips for listening to your child read.

1) Find a quiet, comfortable place for you and your child to read.
2) Have your child choose a familiar book to read.
3) Let your child do the reading.
4) Be supportive and encouraging as you listen.
5) If your child comes to an unfamiliar word, ask them to predict what word might come next. Then, ask them if the word makes sense, sounds right, and looks right. Have your child read the passage again for fluency and meaning. There may be times when you need to tell your child the word so reading for meaning can continue.
6) Discuss the story after your child has finished reading the book.
7) Encourage your child to read to other family members.
8) Have your child read daily even if they want to read the same story over and over again.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Grell
Dear Parents or Caregivers,

Writing can help your child develop as a reader. Many children write before they read. Here are some tips you can use to help your child enjoy learning to write.

1. Supply your child with paper, pencils, markers, and crayons.
2. Provide opportunities for your child to write often. Ideas to write could include grocery lists, thank you letters, or short notes.
3. Do not be concerned with form elements such as misspelled words and incorrectly formed letters. The emphasis should be on the ideas.
4. Encourage your child to use his/her ideas in their writing.
5. Have your child read their writing to you.
6. At times, let your child dictate a story to you.
7. Be a role model for your child. They should see you writing.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Grell
Appendix C

Family Connections

Newsletter Five

Dear Parents or Caregivers,

Tomorrow your child will bring home their first literacy theme bag. Each week on Friday, the children will take the bags home to enjoy with their families. On the following Wednesday, the literacy theme bags should be returned to school. Your child can bring some of his/her completed activities from the bag to share at school.

The themes studied throughout the school year will each have four different literacy theme bags for children to bring home. Inside each bag your family will find a book; a guide sheet with the title, author and illustrator of the book; a summary of the story; tips for reading; related activities; a family response form, and a materials card with the return date of the bag to school. Please complete the family response forms included in each literacy theme bag and return it to school. Your responses on the forms will assist me in selecting books and activities for future theme bags.

Please return the items listed on the materials card. If an item is lost or damaged, note the name of the item on paper. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Grell
Note: By saving your child's work in a container, such as a folder or a box, you will be able to watch him/her grow this year.
Appendix D

Theme: Friendship: I am a friend.


Summary: A young boy looks for the perfect gift to give to his sick friend. He views many items in a unique store. At last he spots an advertisement for free kittens and decides this is the gift he will give his friend.

TIPS FOR READING

Before reading:
Read the title of the book and the names of the author and the illustrator.
Discuss what the book will be about.
Examine the pictures and predict what might happen in the story.

After reading:
1. How do friends behave toward each other?
2. What items did you find interesting at McGraw's Emporium?
3. If you had a sick friend, what would you do to show that you were thinking about him or her?

OTHER BOOKS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP: (These books can be found at the school and public libraries.)

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, by Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas. (Brooklyn, New York: Kane/Miller, 1985).

ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILD

Suggestions for activities. (Depending on the activities in the home and your child's interest, all or some of the activities can be chosen to complete.)

Art
- Draw a picture of one way you can be a friend to someone.
• Cut out pictures from magazines of ways you can be a friend to someone. Paste them on a piece of paper. You may want to write about your ideas under or beside the pictures.

• Draw a picture for a friend.

Writing

• Write a note to a friend telling them why they are a good friend.

After you and your child have finished reading McGraw’s Emporium and have completed some or all of the related activities, please fill out the family response form and return the theme bag to school.

Date packet is due back at school __________________
Guide Sheet (continued)

Theme – *Friendship: I have friends.*


**Summary:** In an area of unused land, a group of children use their active imaginations to transform the lot into a town. The children have much fun playing in the world they have created.

**TIPS FOR READING**

*Before reading:*
- Read the title of the book and the names of the author and the illustrator.
- Discuss what the book will be about.
- Examine the pictures and predict what might happen in the story.

*After reading:*
1. Discuss with your child who their friends are.
2. Why do they like them?
3. What do friends like to do together?

**OTHER BOOKS ABOUT BEING A FRIEND:** (These books can be found at the school and public libraries.)

  - Other Frog and Toad books:

**ACTIVITES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILD**

Suggestions for activities (Depending on the activities in the home and your child’s interest, all or some of the activities can be chosen to complete.)
Art

- Draw a picture of your imaginary town. Name the town.
- Make a picture of your town using pictures cut out from magazines. You can use the markers in the bag to draw roads and other details.

Writing

- Discuss what friends you would include in your town.
- Write about the activities you and your friends would do in your town.
- Write a note to a friend telling why you like being their friend.

After you and your child have finished reading Roxaboxen and have completed some or all of the related activities, please fill out the family response form and return the theme bag to school.

Date packet is due back at school ___________________
Theme – Friendship: My teacher is my friend.


*Summary:* Lilly loves school and everything about it, especially her teacher, Mr. Slinger, until one day when he takes away her purple plastic purse. Lilly is angry and draws an awful picture of her teacher and slips it in his bag. The teacher returns her purse at the end of the day. She opens the purse on the way home and finds a surprise. She feels sad about the nasty letter she gave Mr. Slinger. The next day she gives the teacher a letter of apology and some goodies.

**TIPS FOR READING**

*Before reading:*
Read the title of the book and the name of the author.
Discuss what the book will be about.
Examine the pictures and predict what might happen in the story.

*After reading:*
Suggestions for discussion with your child. (Your child may want to talk about what is important to him/her about the book so some of the discussion suggestions may not be needed.)
1. Why did Mr. Slinger take Lilly’s purse away? What might she do differently the next time she takes something to school that she wants to share with the class?
2. How does Lilly help make the next day at school better?
3. Why does Lilly like her teacher?

**BOOKS ABOUT SCHOOL AND THE TEACHER:** (These books can be found at the school and public libraries.)


**ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILD**
Suggestions for activities (Depending on the activities in the home and your child’s interest, all or some of the activities can be chosen to complete.)
Writing
- Your child can tell about his/her favorite school activity. Then, the child may want to write about it and draw a picture to accompany the story.
- If you cannot read your child's writing, ask him/her to read it for you. Then, write his/her words under the writing.
- Your child can write a note to the teacher.

Retelling
- Have your child retell Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse focusing on the characters of the story. The purpose of the activity is for your child to practice story sequencing. Character puppets can be constructed with the crayons and markers provided in the bag. Children enjoy retelling stories again and again.

Math
- In the story, Lilly baked cookies to take to school. Your child could help you bake cookies. You can talk about how much of each ingredient is needed, and your child can do the measuring.

Art
- Your child can select one of the lavender sheets, either the one with the outline of a purse or the other one with the outline of a billfold, and draw what the child would put in the purse or billfold.

After you and your child have finished reading Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse and have completed some or all of the related activities, please fill out the family response form and return the theme packet to school.

Date packet is due back at school _____________________
Guide Sheet (continued)

Theme – Friendship: I know an older friend.


Summary: Mr. Gumpy takes a ride in his boat with some of his human and animal friends. He warns them not to move about on the boat. They disobey, and the boat capsizes. Still, being a true friend, Mr. Gumpy invites them to join him at his home for tea.

TIPS FOR READING

Before reading:
- Read the title of the book and the name of the author.
- Discuss what the book will be about.
- Examine the pictures and predict what might happen in the story.

After reading:
- Suggestions for discussion with your child. (Your child may want to talk about what is important to him/her about the book so some of the discussion suggestions may not be needed.)
  1. Why is Mr. Gumpy a good friend?
  2. What lesson about behaving did the animals learn?

OTHER BOOKS ABOUT OLDER FRIENDS: (These books can be found at the school and public libraries.)


ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILD

- Suggestions for activities (Depending on the activities in the home and your child’s interest, all or some of the activities can be chosen to complete.)

Rereading
- As you read the story, your child can say the action words with you.
  (Young children enjoy stories read again to them. This book from the theme bag can be read more than once.)
Acting
• As you reread the book, your child can act out the actions of the animals. If you have other children, they may enjoy the story and acting it out, too.

Retelling
• Your child can retell the story using the character pieces made of pellon in the bag. A table or the back of the sofa can be used to display the pieces as the story is told. For the first retelling, you may want to reread the story as the child displays the pieces. When the child is comfortable telling the story, he/she can tell it along with the character pieces to someone else, such as a younger child or a grandparent.

Writing
• If you have a special older friend, write a story about what you do with them or what they do for you.

After you and your child have finished reading Mr. Gumpy's Outing and have completed some or all of the related activities, please fill out the family response form and return the theme packet to school.

Date packet is due back to school ____________________________
Appendix E

Name of child __________________________  Date __________

Family Response Form

In order to improve the current theme bags, and to help plan for the
development of future literacy theme bags, I would appreciate your feedback.
I hope your family enjoyed the “Friendship” literacy theme bag. Thank you
for your input.

   Sincerely,
   Mrs. Grell

1. Name of book read __________________________

2. What did you and your child like about the book?

3. What related activities did you choose to do? __________________________

4. Were the directions clear so that you could carry out the activities?

5. What activities were your child’s favorite?

Signature of person who shared this book and the related expressive
activities with the child.

____________________________________________

Date ________________________________