Supporting Beginning Readers Through A Home Reading Program Blog

by
Tamara Martin
Bachelor of Education, University of Victoria, 1999

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

© Tamara Martin, 2015
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.
Supervisory Committee

Supporting Beginning Readers Through a Home Reading Program Blog

by

Tamara Martin
Bachelor of Education, University of Victoria, 1999

Supervisory Committee

Dr. James Nahachewsky, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Supervisor

Dr. Ruthanne Tobin, Department of Curriculum
Departmental Member
Abstract

This project examines the benefits of designing a blog to facilitate communication between an early years classroom teacher and her students’ parents to support their beginning readers through a home reading program. Blogging is a meaningful way for teachers to establish an effective contemporary form of communication between the home environment and school environment. The guiding question for this project was: How can blogging support parents’ understanding and use of reading strategies when engaging in text with their beginning readers at home. References to theoretical frameworks and a review of the literature supports the use of blogging for home and school communication to facilitate parental involvement in their children’s education. The literature suggests that: programs designed to help parents instruct their children in school-based practices can increase parental involvement and students’ self-efficacy, motivation and engagement at school; blogging between teacher and parents promotes family-professional relationships towards collaboration, commitment and parental empowerment in their children’s learning development; and home-school blogging increases communication, accessibility and connection for parents and their children’s school environment. This project offers a guide and example for teachers interested in designing and implementing a home reading program blog as it provides curricular connections, a description of the foundations of reading, best reading practices, and information on creating the blog. In addition, presentation slides for “Home reading blogs: A forum for sharing reading strategies and connecting home and school” is included in the appendices. After reading this project, teachers will have a better understanding of why and how they should consider designing and implementing a blog to facilitate communication with parents to support their beginning readers through a home reading program.
# Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ........................................................................................................ ii
Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. v
Chapter 1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Personal History and Motivation for the project ......................................................... 1
  Connecting with contemporary parents ........................................................................ 3
  The English Language Arts Curriculum Draft ............................................................. 4
Chapter 2 Literature Review .............................................................................................. 6
  What is Reading? ................................................................................................................. 6
  Theories of Reading ........................................................................................................... 8
  Bottom-Up Theory ........................................................................................................... 8
  Top-Down Theory ........................................................................................................... 10
  Interactive Theory .......................................................................................................... 12
  Transactionalism ............................................................................................................. 14
  Social Constructivism ..................................................................................................... 15
  Reading Process System and Strategies to Support .................................................. 18
  Parent Involvement .......................................................................................................... 22
  Communicating in the 21st Century ............................................................................. 28
  What is a blog? ............................................................................................................... 29
  Gaps in the existing literature and future research suggestions ................................ 33
  Conclusion of the literature review .............................................................................. 34
List of figures

Figure 1-Ways of Assisting Readers Through Their Zones of Proximal Development:
- Modes of Scaffolding ................................................................. 16

Figure 2-Blog Welcome................................................................. 40

Figure 3-Three Ways to Read a Book Lesson................................. 43

Figure 4-Check for Understanding Lesson...................................... 44

Figure 5-Home Reading Blog Powerpoint Title Page....................... 48

Figure 6-What is Reading? ............................................................. 48

Figure 7-What is Word Recognition? ........................................... 49
Acknowledgements

It is with sincere gratitude that I thank my mentor, Dr. James Nahachewsky, who has inspired and guided me throughout this journey. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and wisdom and for guiding me through this learning process as I reflected on and refined my work.

I could not have completed this project without the support of my family. Thank you to my mom, Penny, my sister, Liz, and my partner, Josh for your endless support, words of encouragement, and acts of love that helped me get through this project. A special thank you to my daughters, Hunter and Taylor, who have given up their “mom time” so that I may complete my masters degree.

I would also like to thank my dear friends who have been right beside me on this journey. Thank you to Sue, Michelle, Kelly, and Stacey. Your strength helped me through this process, and I am so grateful to have you by my side.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal History and Motivation for the project

Reading has always fascinated me. My earliest memories of reading were snuggling up beside my mom with my favourite book in hand. Every night it was the same ritual, and for many nights, it was the same book over and over again. In my early school experiences, my enthusiasm for reading did not diminish, and I was eager to learn the symbols on the page and open up my mind to a world of stories. Throughout childhood, into my teen years, and as an adult, books have always had an important place in my life. Reading is not just a passion for me, it has also been my salvation; my safe and familiar place when my world was turned upside down. So naturally, when I decided to become a teacher, I vowed that I would share my passion for books and work to instill a love of reading in my students.

During my undergraduate studies in Education, I learned that the process of reading is a complex one that requires a number of mental strategies working together for one purpose: making sense out of print. What I did not learn from my university experience, however, was any clear method to teach my students how to read. Through my observations of other classrooms during my years as a teacher-on-call and through much trial and error in my own classroom, I developed my own reading program that includes individual reading, buddy reading, and group reading with read-alouds where students have the opportunity to learn specific reading strategies, vocabulary, and word skills. In addition to the classroom-based program, I have also implemented a home-reading program.

At the beginning of the year, I send home a book bag that consists of good fit books at the student’s reading level as well as a detailed information package that outlines the activities and
strategies that parents can use when reading with their children. I had always believed that my program was organized, and my explanation of the strategies of reading were clear and easy to follow. Yet, one morning, I was looking at a parent comment in a home reading book log and read the following: “I really wanted my daughter to focus on the words in the book, so I covered up the picture and asked her to read the story”. My jaw dropped open, and I immediately thought that the parent had not read my reading package because one of the first reading strategies that I teach to my students is to look at the picture to help with the words in the text. I began to wonder if other parents had not read my reading package as I received other comments such as, “My son is having difficulties reading, so we keep telling him to sound out the words”. As parents, we may remember how we learned to read, and for most of us, when it came to figuring out an unknown word, we used the sounding out strategy. We make the connection that since we as parents are literate and used the sounding out strategy as one of the tools that guided us in the process of learning to read, it must be an effective strategy. I am not dismissing the sounding out strategy as an effective tool here, but for those students who have difficulties with letter sounds and combinations, the sounding out strategy is difficult when trying to decode a word. I do, in fact, teach the sounding out strategy, but it is usually one of the last strategies that I teach as I believe there are other strategies that are more useful to students when they are trying to identify an unknown word. I had described this very concept to the parents in my reading package, but again I had to question whether the parents had read the information.
Connecting with contemporary parents

For the last five years, I have taught kindergarten to grade two and throughout these years, I have always worked hard to seek out better strategies to help my students learn to read. When I see my students grasp the reading process and become proficient readers, I am thrilled that I had a very small part in their reading development. My philosophy of teaching is that learning is a partnership; one that involves students, teachers, and parents. Parents make a difference in their children’s development. If I can create an opportunity for parents to be involved in their children’s process of reading and connect the school experience with the home experience, then it is the children who benefit and become accomplished, independent readers and thinkers.

I decided that in order to get the parents on board with my home reading program, I needed to change the way that I communicated with parents. I realize that today’s parents are busy not only with their own schedules of work and activities, but also with their children’s activities outside the school environment. Parents do not always have the time and energy to read an information package, especially one that is several pages long with a lot of detailed information. Parents also need an opportunity to access information at any time from any place. Most families have access to a computer, so I decided that a better way to communicate with my parents is through a blog. Through blogging, I am able to break down the long, detailed reading package that I previously sent home, and focus on one strategy at a time without overwhelming both parents and beginning readers. Once I have taught a specific strategy in class, I can then relay the information through the blog to the parents with a written explanation as well as a video demonstration so that parents can observe how the strategy is used in the context of reading a piece of text. By providing both
a written explanation and a visual demonstration, I am ensuring that the language that is used in the classroom, when discussing reading strategies, will be similar to the language used at home when students read with their parents. It is my hope that if both teachers and parents use the same language and strategies at school and at home the process of learning to read will result in greater success for the beginning reader. Other key features of using a blog is that parents can communicate in real-time, make a comment on their child’s progress with the strategy, or ask questions about a particular strategy or activity.

Having discussed my personal motivation for creating my M ED project, I now turn to an introduction of the curricular context for this project. In particular, I identify the goal of reading and its place in the English Language Arts draft for the new British Columbia curriculum.

The English Language Arts Curriculum Draft

The main goal of reading instruction is to teach children to become independent readers and thinkers. The current English Language Arts draft for the new British Columbia curriculum is based on ideas developed from a constructivist point of view where learning is constructed through communication and interaction between the reader and the text. This provincial document describes literacy foundations to be “the heart of a person’s ability to learn and succeed in school and beyond” (English Language Arts BC Curriculum, 2014). In the document, there are several key concepts and competencies, and one focuses on the importance of teaching reading strategies in order to construct meaning, explore texts, appreciate story, explore language, and understand literary elements (English Language Arts BC Curriculum, 2014).
Implementing a home reading blog that focuses on reading strategies, skills, and activities will aid students in their learning and help to achieve the curriculum’s goal of creating lifelong learners who embrace reading with passion and to develop real-world thinkers who can construct meaning, think creatively, analyze, synthesis, form opinions, and evaluate. With a clear personal context and professional rationale for creating a blog to communicate with parents to support my grade one reading program, I now turn to developing a better understanding of the theory and best practices for my M ED project.

In this project, I investigate the following question: How can blogging support parents’ understanding and use of reading strategies when engaging in text with their beginning readers at home? Further in the second chapter of this project paper, I describe salient theoretical foundations of reading, and I review the relevant literature to identify the best reading practices and processes that support beginning readers. My goal in examining the literature is to then determine how these best practices can be translated into an effective home reading program delivered through a classroom blog and implemented by parents to support their beginning reader with vocabulary, comprehension, word identification, decoding and fluency.

Finally, in chapter three of this project, I present information on and a description of the blog that I am creating, how it will be organized and implemented, a critical reflection on what I have learned while creating the blog, and implications for future research.
“[Reading] is a complex process of problem solving in which the reader works to make sense of a text not just from the words and sentences on the page but also from the ideas, memories, and knowledge evoked by those words and sentences” (Cziko, Greenleaf, Hurwitz, & Schoenback, 2000, p. 38). My M Ed project investigates the question: How can blogging support parents to utilize reading strategies when engaging in text with their beginning readers at home? In this chapter, I define reading, discuss the theoretical foundations of reading, and explore best practices that can be implemented in a home reading program to support beginning readers in their processes. I also examine the effects of parental involvement for the development of beginning readers’ processes and the impact of blogging on parents’ active involvement in their children’s reading development. Finally, I address the gaps in the existing literature.

What is Reading?

During the past 40 years, educational and reading researchers and theorists have developed a variety of definitions to describe reading. Marie Clay defines reading as “a message-getting, problem solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more that it is practiced” (Clay, 1979, p.6). Ken Goodman describes reading as “a constructive process that is based on a relationship between a reader and a writer; it is complex and involves more than the simple recognition of letters and words” (Goodman, 1996, p. 2). Each definition highlights a common element: reading requires the reader to make sense of print. In order to make sense of print, a reader needs to identify the words in print (word recognition), and also construct an
element of understanding from the print (comprehension). When word recognition and comprehension are automatic and accurate then fluency in reading is achieved. Word recognition is developed when children are exposed to phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding strategies, word study, and sight vocabulary. Comprehension is developed when students learn to use their background knowledge, oral and print language, understand how their language works, understand different types of texts, and different purposes for reading text, and construct strategies for meaning.

Cognitive strategies and skills such as phonics and comprehension are essential for reading development, but these skills and strategies do not fully explain developing readers’ success or failure (Afflerback, Pearson, & Paris, 2008; Stanovich, 1986). Reading development extends beyond strategies and skills to include affective factors such as metacognition, student engagement and motivation, epistemic beliefs, and self-efficacy. Students use metacognition in reading to understand their thinking processes and influence reading achievement. As a result, students set goals, select and use strategies, and monitor progress to determine the effectiveness of their reading (Zimmerman, 2008). Epistemic beliefs influence reading comprehension. The term epistemic refers to the nature of knowledge. In reading development, epistemic beliefs relate to how the reader thinks about a piece of text and the knowledge gained from that text. If a reader approaches a piece of text with the intention of constructing new knowledge, then the reader employs higher order thinking strategies to that piece of text, and the goal of reading the text extends beyond a literal understanding. Self-efficacy also influences reading success and development. Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s beliefs in his or her ability to succeed in particular situations. Readers with high self-efficacy have more incentive to succeed in reading.
and face reading difficulties as a challenge. Readers with low-self efficacy avoid the challenge and instead focus on their deficiencies as a reader. Another important piece in reading development is student motivation. *Motivation* is the essential element in engaging students to read and can predict later reading skills (Deci & Ryan, 1985 as cited in Ciampa, 2012, p.93). Reading requires much effort and students need motivation to engage in the task of reading. In order for readers to be motivated to read, the reading environment must be engaging and the instruction must be effective to enhance strategic reading development.

**Theories of Reading**

A good working knowledge base of the theories of reading is required for teaching beginning readers in that it helps teachers to develop best practices, guide instruction, and helps explain why one particular technique may be more effective than another. Historically, each theory is important in understanding the processes of reading. However, many of these theories, no longer play a singular role in reading instruction today. After 1960, research moved away from topics such as reinforcement and the principles of conditioning to cognitive processing. In terms of reading, cognitive processing perspectives attempts to describe the underlying mental processes that occur during the act of reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). The focus of reading has now shifted where reading is learning that takes place in socially culturally shaped contexts. In the following sections, I discuss the theories of reading from several perspectives: bottom-up, top-down, interactive, transactionalism, and social constructivism. I begin with bottom-up theory.
Bottom-Up Theory

Traditional reading instruction was influenced by the study of behavioural psychology in the 1950’s. Effective instruction was based on positive reinforcement to shape desired behaviour, and any tasks involved in instruction must be broken down into small achievable steps that begin with the simple and move to the complex. As students perform each task, they require reinforcement to ensure success until the goal is reached, and they need regular reinforcement of the task to maintain student performance. From this “conditioned learning,” a model known as the bottom-up reading theory was developed.

Philip Gough proposed a reading model in 1972 that was based on an information-processing perspective. Information-processing theories and models describe the processing, storage, and retrieval of knowledge from the mind (Slavin, 2003, p.173 as cited in Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Gough’s model became known as a bottom-up theory because it describes cognitive processing of information where the operation of processing proceeds from lower levels of information such as letter identification to higher levels of information such as the construction of meaning (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). In Gough’s model, the reading process is described as a sequential series of mental stages that is data driven and begins with the eye capturing the printed text. Bottom-up theorists believe that before beginning readers can read, they must first develop print awareness. Beginning readers need to understand that lines and shapes represent letters and that letters, when put together, represent words. Once beginning readers develop print awareness, the decoding process, the key element in a bottom-up model, begins where graphic symbols are then translated into speech sounds or phonemes. Speech sounds are pieced together to form individual
Bottom-up models only explain one part of the reading process: decoding. Reading instruction using bottom-up models places emphasis on the details of text and fail to process the meaning of the text. Instruction using a bottom-up approach relies on drill and practice rather than engaging in text in an authentic and natural learning environment. Another weakness of bottom-up models is that “processing is seen as proceeding in one direction so this implies that no higher level information ever modifies or changes lower level analysis” (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 154). In the next section I discuss top-down theory.

**Top-Down Theory**

Contrasting with the bottom-up theory is the top-down model. A top-down approach begins with “higher-level processes that interact with and direct the flow of information through lower level processes” (Stanovich, 1980, p. 34). The focus of a top-down approach is reading for meaning rather than reading to decode and understand each word. This model is conceptually driven with a focus on background knowledge and whole language that emphasizes reading development through meaningful experiences. Examples of background knowledge include information such as knowledge about the topic, text structure, sentence structure, word meanings, and letter-sound correspondences. In a top-down model, readers use all of these sources of information to construct meaning and make predictions about what will happen next in text. A reader with extensive background knowledge about a topic will find the text easier to
comprehend than a reader who has little or no experience with the topic and must therefore rely on the individual features of the text.

In 1967, Goodman described reading as a “psycholinguist guessing game” where readers construct meaning of a piece of text through prediction and their knowledge of language and the world (Singer & Ruddell, 1971). According to Goodman, and psycholinguistic theory, readers approach a piece of text using their background knowledge to make predictions about the author’s message and then proceed to use language cues to construct meaning. These cueing systems include syntactic cues, the grammatical structure of language; semantic cues, the meaning of words and sentences; and graphophonic cues, the visual patterns of letters and words and their corresponding sounds to determine what word may happen next in a piece of text. Children naturally use these language cues in oral language, and it is believed that these same cues may be used in the process of reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Therefore reading instruction, using a top-down model, is accomplished by creating a natural and holistic environment filled with materials rich in print where the reader brings meaning to the text.

Goodman believed that reading did not result from “precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time” (Singer & Morrow, 1971, p. 260). Readers who have extensive prior knowledge on a topic have to rely less on the graphic information, however, a true top-down model does not exist as the reader must focus on print to activate prior knowledge and derive meaning from the text.
The top-down model is an effective model for fluent readers. However, this model does not account for students who do not have extensive background knowledge and must rely on a greater number of cues to derive meaning from text. Even if a skilled reader has extensive background knowledge, generating predictions can take longer than using word identification skills (Stanovich, 2008). Good reading is more than a guessing game. In the following section I discuss the interactive theory of reading.

**Interactive Theory**

Reading is seldom bottom-up or top-down. Rather, it follows an interactive model that combines both bottom-up and top-down strategies, so the reader interprets and constructs meaning from print (Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon, 2009). In 1977, Rumelhart realized that linear, bottom-up models of reading were not effective because they did not allow higher level processing to influence lower-level skills. Effective reading requires knowledge of how to interact with print and will decide what strategies to employ when reading a piece of text in order to understand the message of the writer. Rumelhart (1977) proposed an interactive model where information is presented through the visual text using processes such as syntactic information, semantic information, orthographic information (visual input), and lexical information (word knowledge). Unlike Gough’s linear bottom-up model where the process of reading begins with print stimuli and progresses to higher-level processing, Rumelhart’s interactive model allows for higher-level and lower-level processes to interact simultaneously.

Stanovich expanded on Rumelhart’s interactive model to include the notion that text processors are not only interactive, but they are also compensatory meaning that if one processor
is not working or has insufficient data, then the other processors will compensate for it (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). For instance, if a reader is unable to read a piece of text due to the state of the text, then the orthographic information is insufficient. The reader must then rely on other processes such as semantic knowledge to decipher the meaning of the text. With this new information, Stanovich proposed the Interactive-Compensatory Model.

An interactive approach to reading takes advantage of using a reader’s *schema*. According to schema theory, a schema explains how readers develop and use their knowledge. A schema is the pictures we create in our minds when we hear or read a word or sentence (Pearson & Spiro, 1982). Schema is expandable which means that with each new experience we encounter, we elaborate, or we change our knowledge. According to Schema Theory, there are three ways to change our knowledge: *accretion*, *tuning*, and *restructuring* (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Accretation is when learners takes in new information but do not change their schemata. Tuning is when learners add new information to their existing schemata. Restructuring is when learners change their schema because their previous knowledge is no longer sufficient.

Schema is important in reading comprehension because readers must decide which parts of a text are essential to understanding the author’s message. Readers must also be able to infer when information in the text is not so obvious. Readers who approach a piece of text without sufficient schema on the topic may have difficulties comprehending the information. Schema theory has shaped reading instruction by placing a focus on establishing background knowledge before engaging with a piece of text. In the next section I discuss transactionalism.
**Transactionalism: Louise Rosenblatt**

Louise Rosenblatt, known for her research into the teaching of literature, developed a revolutionary approach to reading and the instruction of reading called the Transactional Theory. Rosenblatt (1978) believed that printed words were important to reading comprehension, but in order to make the reading experience meaningful, readers need to bring their own knowledge and experiences to the text. The act of reading involves a transaction between the reader and the written word. Rosenblatt proposed that the reader reads for two specific purposes: *efferent* and *aesthetic*. *Efferent* reading requires the reader to read for information purposes whereas *aesthetic* reading requires the reader to experience the text and the literary world created by the author. In order to apply the transactional theory to reading, teachers need to demonstrate to the beginning reader how to use what they read and what they know to build knowledge and experience the text. According to Rosenblatt, reading is more than making sense of symbols on a page; it is an opportunity to participate imaginatively, experience emotions, and make connections communicated by the words on the page. In the next section I discuss social constructivism.

**Social Constructivism: Vygotsky**

In his writing, Gee states, “over the last several decades in a wide variety of disciplines, there has been a massive ‘social turn’ away from a focus on individual behaviour and individual minds towards a focus on social and cultural interaction (Gee, 1999, p.61). Social constructivists believe that literacy is a social act where teachers or facilitators and students interact in a social practice that affects the nature and ideas of literacy (Street, 2007). Much of the sociocultural perspective has been grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978), a psychologist and founder of what has become known as Social Development Theory, wrote extensively on
theories about how children learn and developed three major ideas: learning is most likely to occur in a child’s zone of proximal development, language can play an important part in a child’s cognitive development, and the sociocultural element in teaching and learning is an important part in fostering cognitive development. The zone of proximal development is the stage at which children can do an activity with the help of a teacher, parent, or mentor, and in order for children to be successful at the specified activity, the “expert” must first model the skills involved in the activity, provide guidance while the children perform the activity, and step back when the children are able to complete the activity independently. This process is known as scaffolding where the “expert” guides the learner to construct new knowledge by building upon a foundation of what is already known. At the beginning of a task, scaffolding is concrete, external, and visible. As the task progresses and the learner is developing new knowledge, the task transforms from the concrete to the abstract. The important element in scaffolding is a gradual release of responsibility where the learner is supported until the task can be completed independently.

Rogoff, Matusov, and White (1996) refer to a “community of learners” where active learners and expert learners engage in a community of practice. In this community, knowledge is not about transmitting, but it is about transforming. The transformation not only lies within the novice learner in attaining new knowledge, but it also transforms the instruction and the interaction of the expert. Both the novice learner and the expert share in the endeavour of knowledge.
The above diagram represents the ways of assisting readers through their zones of proximal development using scaffolding. The first step in scaffolding is the “I do, you watch” stage where through explicit instruction using methods such as read-alouds, teachers model specific strategies and skills. As readers become familiar with the skills and strategies, the next stage of scaffolding progresses from “I do, you help” to “you do, I help”. In this stage, teachers continue explicit instruction and modelling through activities such as shared reading, literature circles, shared guided reading, and reciprocal reading with the intent that student will take a more active role in the process of reading. In the final stage of scaffolding, reading is student regulated and the progression has now moved into the “you do, I watch” phase. Students work in small group settings, read independently, and choose their own reading material. The role of the teacher is now the guide as the student independently accomplishes the task. Vygotsky believed that “what
Vygotsky also believed that language is a tool for learning and helps the learner develop skills of self-regulation. In terms of reading development, self-regulation is defined as what the reader does to solve problems when decoding print, what strategies will be put in place when difficulties in decoding arise, and what the reader will do to ensure that the text is understood.

As teachers model good reading strategies, attention to the instructional language used is vital so that beginning readers can effectively transfer these strategies to their own reading process.

Vygotsky believed that “social interaction and children’s participation in authentic cultural activities are necessary for development to occur” (Berk & Winsler, 1995 as cited in Johnson & Keier, 2010, p.48). A learning environment where students and teachers work collaboratively and interact with each other promotes cognitive development. In terms of reading, the classroom environment needs to promote a variety of activities where teachers and students are actively engaged in reading, not just physically reading a piece of text, but discussing features of texts, strategies to decode, and methods of comprehension.

Decades of study and research have led to many ideas and theories of reading. Each theory regarding the development of reading has its significance in creating lifelong readers, and it is from these theories that researchers and educators have created best practices for reading instruction. Reading instruction today does not just follow one model. As is evident from research, reading is more than just a bottom-up or top-down approach. Reading extends beyond the interactive model to a transactional model where the reader not only brings his or her knowledge to the text, but also experiences the imagination, emotions, and connections with the
words on the page. Reading is social and is developed through interaction within a community where knowledge is shared and constructed collaboratively.

In the following section, I discuss the reading process system and the best practices to support the development of the beginning reader. These best practices include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. I conclude this section with a study done by Pressely, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret (2007) that examines the best reading practices in one school where students excelled in reading achievement.

**Reading Process System and Strategies to Support**

Reading is an interactive activity, and the process of reading consists of a network of strategies such as using word recognition skills (phonics), searching and gathering, checking and confirming, self-monitoring, making connections, visualizing, summarizing, activating schema, inferring, evaluating, synthesizing, and questioning to interpret the meaning behind print in a piece of text. Proficient readers employ complex, well-developed and well-practiced skills before reading, during reading, and after reading (Alipanahi & Mahmoudi, 2014). Proficient readers are active and have a goal when they read, use visual representations, pre-read a text, predict, construct, revise and question meaning, discern the meaning of unknown words, use prior knowledge to make predictions and comprehend text, monitor and adjust their understanding of the text, and read different kinds of texts (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). According to Pressley, proficient readers also have the ability to recognize sight words, sound out unknown words, recognize letter combinations, and solve problems when a piece of text does not make sense (Pressley, 2006).
The teaching of reading instruction has moved away from an “either-or point of view” meaning that instruction does not solely focus on one strategy, one method, or one type of program (Bond & Dykstra, 1997). Every reader tackles the process of reading differently, and therefore, reading instruction should focus on the needs of the individual reader. Clay believed that we must respond to the needs of readers and link what they know to what they need to learn (Clay, 2005). Reading is a complex process and therefore, reading instruction needs to consist of a variety of skills and strategies taught in a balanced curriculum.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel reviewed research to determine the best practices in reading instruction and concluded that for readers to be successful, they needed to be taught skills and strategies in the following five areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000 as cited in Boyle, 2008). Both phonemic awareness and phonics promotes early reading skills and is most effective when taught systematically and explicitly in combination with other word skills such as developing sight words and using words in context. Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression and is an important skill in reading comprehension and is often achieved with the repeated readings of a piece of text. Fluent readers process words quickly so they comprehend the text, whereas readers who require time to examine each letter of every word they encounter, slow down the reading process, and as a result, lose meaning of the text. One instructional strategy that promotes fluency is guided oral reading where readers read a piece of text to a teacher, adult, or other student and receives corrections and feedback on their reading.
Vocabulary instruction promotes reading comprehension (Duke & Block, 2012; Snell, Hindman, & Wasik, 2015), however, simply reading a piece of text does not promote vocabulary development. Vocabulary should be taught both directly, examining words outside of text and indirectly, exploring words as they are encountered in text, and in order to increase vocabulary learning, rich instruction needs to include the following strategies: defining new words, discussing and asking questions about new words, rereading books several times to learn new words, retell stories or information using new words, and integrate new words into the classroom environment and other content areas.

Comprehension, intentional thinking during reading in order to make sense of the author’s message, is the “essence of reading” and in order to foster comprehension in early readers a variety of strategies must be taught through teacher modelling and scaffolding (National Reading Panel, 2000). In order to be proficient in comprehending a piece of text, early readers need to reread for understanding, develop a sense of story structure, generate and answer questions, summarize, predict, seek clarification, and construct mental images. When it comes to teaching reading, “there is no set teaching sequence; there is no prescription to learn this before that” (Clay, 2005, as cited in Johnston & Keier, 2010, p.110).

In order to create classrooms where all students read, teachers must provide an environment that promotes balanced instruction. Balanced instruction not only provides students with opportunities to learn both skills and strategies, but it also affords them the opportunity to implement those skills and strategies in authentic reading experiences. Effective reading classrooms make reading a priority and offer students many opportunities to read, integrate subjects such as science and social studies with reading, emphasize higher-level thinking, teach
skills through modelling, engage students in conversations, and teach problem solving, self-regulation, and how to monitor comprehension. Teachers in effective classrooms are organized, maintain excellent classroom management, create high levels of engagement, and provide a variety of materials to support reading as well as opportunities for students to work collaboratively both in whole and small groups, and individual situations.

In 2004, Pressely, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret observed 296 students from Bennett Woods Elementary school to answer the question: How does Bennett Woods Elementary School produce high reading and writing achievement in its students? Test scores in 2004 revealed that 95 percent of the grade four student population had passed the reading test and that 91 percent of the grade four population had passed the writing test. In that year, the state average was 79 percent and 48 percent respectively. Bennett Woods Elementary school reported a student population of 296 students from kindergarten to grade five, in 2004, with 14 teachers, a reading teacher, and ESL teacher, a resource room teacher, an art teacher, and a music teacher. From their observations, the researchers determined that effective schools have the following characteristics: an effective principal and administration that supports curriculum and instruction, an environment that is inviting and contains print-rich resources, an academic focused program, children who come from homes that provide rich preschool experiences, teachers who seek out professional development opportunities to hone their skills in reading and writing, specialty teachers to support the classroom teacher, librarians, and parents who are involved in their children’s learning and development. According to Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret, an effective school creates a curriculum where students are exposed to a variety of books and literature, participate in whole-group and small-group settings, receive reading instruction that
occurs in the context of text, participate in read-alouds, and are explicitly taught skills in letter-sounds, phonics, word recognition, spelling, vocabulary and semantic context skills, as well as comprehension skills and strategies. The findings from this observation also noted other important factors such as motivation, positive environments, inclusiveness, individualized instruction, and encouragement of self-regulation to create effective classrooms where reading and writing achievement are high.

In the previous section, I examined best practices for reading instruction. The literature supports balanced reading programs where beginning readers are engaged in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension to develop skills and strategies to become proficient, life long readers. Reading, however, requires more than skills and strategies to make meaning from words within a piece of text. Beginning readers need to understand that they can become proficient readers (self-efficacy), and therefore, must be motivated, encouraged, and provided with the support and opportunities (social constructivism) to meet their individual reading needs. Beginning readers require support from a number of individuals such as teachers, librarians, and parents as they develop skills and strategies to become proficient readers. In the next section, I discuss the importance of parental involvement in learning and reading development.

**Parent Involvement**

“Parental involvement is often best understood as parents’ investment of resources in children’s education, including parent-child communication about school-work, supervision of homework, educational aspirations for children, school contact and participation, and provision of school supplies” (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007, p. 265).
According to the literature, parental involvement is categorized in two ways: school-based involvement and home-based involvement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007, p.534). School-based involvement is defined as activities that parents participate in where the focus is on the individual child and may include activities such as attending a parent-teacher conference, an open house, observing a child in the classroom setting, watching a child’s performance in a school-based activity, or participating in a field-trip. Home-based involvement is defined as activities that occur out of school between the child and parent and include activities such as helping with homework, reviewing for a test, or monitoring a child’s progress.

According to role theory and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process, parents become involved in their child’s schooling for several reasons: they want to assume an active role in their child’s education, they have a strong sense of efficacy when they help their children succeed in school, they are invited to specific school events, they feel as though their personal skills and knowledge fit into the context of the classroom, and they have the time and energy to devote to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et. al, 2005). Role construction is defined as the belief about the role one plays in certain situations and the behaviours that are associated with that role. An example of parental role construction would be the belief that the role of a parent in a child’s education is to ensure that the parent communicates with the teacher regularly and helps with a child’s homework. Parents who possess a strong sense of role construction will more likely be involved in their child’s education than those parents who do not have a strong sense of role construction. Research indicates that parental involvement in the education of children correlates with higher student achievement and the
attributes related to student achievement such as self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007).

A study done in 2007 by Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler examined factors such as role construction, personal self-efficacy, general invitations from school, specific invitations from teachers and children, self perceived knowledge and skills, self-perceived time and energy, social economic status, and age of children in relationship to parental involvement in children’s education. The study consisted of 853 parents of children who were in first grade through to sixth grade. The students, who attended public school in the mid-southern United States, were from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The parents were recruited from two different time points, the fall of 2002 and the fall of 2003. They were selected by means of a questionnaire and were separated into two groups labeled as Sample 1 and Sample 2. The demographic characteristics of the groups differed slightly: Sample 1 parents had a slight lower education of high school or equivalent, whereas Sample 2 parents had some college education. As a result, Sample 2 parents were higher wage earners than Sample 1 parents. Sample 1 parents had a higher number of Hispanic families, 24.5 percent, in comparison to Sample 2 families at 6.4 percent.

The findings from this study revealed that self-efficacy was a strong predictor in home-based involvement, but it was not an influence for school-based involvement. The researchers suggested that parents may not feel that their involvement in school-based activities is effective, and therefore choose not to offer assistance in school. The researchers also concluded from this study that parent involvement was motivated by social context driven by the parent’s interpersonal relationships between children and teachers and that SES was not major factor in
parental involvement. This study also demonstrated that as children increase in age, parental involvement decreased. Elementary school parents were involved in home-based activities motivated by invitations from children, self-efficacy, role activity beliefs, and perceived time and energy for involvement. Middle school parents followed the same level of involvement with the exception of role activity beliefs. The researchers believed that the change in role activity beliefs was due to the fact that as children become older they become more independent in their learning, and they are less likely to invite parents to their learning. The results of this study inform practical practice where schools can consider creating in-service teacher training for parent involvement. This practice would allow parents to have a positive interaction and increase engagement in both school-based and home-based activities. Schools could also implement programs where activities such as parent-teacher conferences are flexibly scheduled times to allow parents who are conflicted by time and energy to play a part in their children’s education.

Despite the findings in the literature, there are many parents who choose not to engage in their child’s education for a number of reasons: they may be unfamiliar with school-based practices or they may lack the skills and knowledge to support their children’s reading development and want to avoid teaching them incorrectly. Research has indicated that programs designed to help parents instruct their children in school-based practices can increase parental involvement in children’s education (Steiner, 2014). Schools cannot expect parents to “just figure it out” when it comes to their children’s educational needs. Programs needs to be created to provide support so that parents who are unfamiliar with school-based practices have the opportunity to learn how to support their children and help to create a stronger link between home and school. It is
paramount to create home-school partnerships in the early stages of education as research has shown that over time and as children enter secondary school, parent involvement decreases.

A study done by Steiner in 2014 focused on a family literacy intervention where parents learned how to integrate school-based literacy practices into their home-based literacy practices. The purpose of the study was to teach parents how to become involved in their child’s literacy practices at home and to investigate the parent’s role in children’s literacy development and how it can be strengthened due to parent involvement.

The study was conducted in the Northeastern United States in a high poverty urban school district. Two classrooms from two different schools in the same district were selected. Both schools had similar demographics with students who were linguistically and culturally diverse. Both classrooms had 19 students and one classroom served as the treatment classroom while the other classroom was the control classroom. The teachers in both classrooms used the same mandated reading and writing programs. In addition to the participation of the students in this study, parents were also invited to participate from both the treatment classroom and the control classroom. Six parents from the treatment classroom participated in an intervention where they learned how to incorporate storybook reading and discussions into their regular literacy routines. Six parents from the control group provided data for the purpose of collecting information. Although the classes were evenly matched according to demographics, the participating parents had some variations in education levels, primary language spoken at home, employment status, literacy practice experiences, and access to literacy resources. For example, parents in the treatment group had higher levels of employment whereas parents in the control group had higher levels of education. At the beginning of the study, the researchers determined, through
transcribed recordings, the parents from both groups were equal in terms of the types of reading strategies used when interacting with their children.

The treatment group was exposed to an eight-week intervention taught by the university researcher and the focus was on storybook reading and the discussions around storybooks. The parents were given read aloud strategies, ways to discuss the books, and the resources to share with their children. The teacher in the treatment group also participated in a separate intervention with the focus on incorporating existing family literacy practices into school-based instruction.

After the study was conducted the results demonstrated that parents in the intervention program increased the frequency that they read with their children, and they used more “school like” practices to talk about books. Parents in the treatment group were using reading strategies such as using illustrations, questioning, returning to text, making connections, and questioning in both pre and post reading stages. As a result of the intervention, parent’s perception of their role in their child’s literacy development changed in terms of having a greater understanding school-based literacy practices and how parents could contribute to home-based literacy. In the control group, the result were not significantly different from the beginning of the study, and in fact, the results showed that parents decreased the use of some of their reading strategies such as questioning.

The results of this study were not to prove that parental involvement has a positive effective on children’s literacy development, but rather the purpose of the study was to explore a parent program that supported the literacy development of their children, and also fit in with the lifestyle of contemporary parents. For today’s parents, schools needs to provide alternatives to back-to-school nights and parent-conferences. By employing other alternatives, all parents have
the opportunity to be involved in their children’s education and become more familiar with school-based literacy practices so that they can support their children’s literacy development.

In the previous section, I discussed the importance of parent involvement in children’s learning, and examined the reasons parents choose to participate in their children’s academic development. Regardless the reason for their participation whether it be role construction, self-efficacy, parent strength in a particular subject area, or time and energy, parent involvement increases student achievement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). For the beginning reader this means sharing a common reading language, skills and strategies between the classroom environment and the home environment. There are, however, many parents who choose not to participate in their children’s learning because of personal negative school experiences, fear of not being able to support their children academically, or unable to find the time or energy to be a part of the school environment (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Steiner, 2014). It is for these reasons that blogging potentially provides effective support for a home reading program where parents can learn the skills and strategies to support their children’s reading development in the safety of their home and in a time frame that fits best into their schedule. In the next section, I discuss how blogging can be an effective tool of communication in the 21st century, and how it encourages parents to become involved their children’s reading development. I conclude this section, and chapter, by discussing gaps in the literature of blogging.
Communicating in the 21st Century

Before digital learning, communication between home and school often consisted of phone calls to families or notes sent home. This form of communication limited both the quality and number of interactions between parents and teachers. Research has also demonstrated that strategies such as home school newsletters, parent-teacher interviews, booklets, and home school bulletins are not the most effective methods for promoting parental involvement for a number of reasons such as negative parent attitudes about school, nervousness during traditional meetings, or parents being informed about their children only when a problem occurs (Ozcinar & Kizoglu, 2013). The advent of online learning has resulted in a number of benefits such as rapid feedback, better collaboration and student grouping, stronger communication with families, improved access, stronger student engagement, improved critical thinking, new student interactions, increased instructional time, and improved classroom management (Wardlow, 2015).

The key to parent involvement is communication and in today’s world defined by technology, communication requires a two-way approach that not only informs parents of their children’s learning, but also encourages them to participate in the development of their children’s learning (Mitchell, Foulger, & Wentzel, 2009). In terms of building stronger communication between home and school, a blog is an effective tool because it creates and encourages real-time dialogue between parents and teachers and allows learning to transcend beyond the walls of the classroom.

What is a blog?

Berners-Lee had a vision in 1989 when he created the World Wide Web: to establish a place where people could meet, read, write, and collaborate. In 2003, Pew Internet and American Life
Project found that 63% of Americans were using the Internet. Forty-four percent of adults on the Internet were using it to publish their thoughts, post pictures, respond to other people’s writing, or share information (Lenhart, Fallow, and Horrigan, 2004). Blogging has become an important part of this communication. Blogging is not just a trend; it is an authentic form of engagement to reach an audience that, for many people, is a part of everyday life. “When we share online, we create the potential for connections in ways that were simply not possible a few years ago” (Richardson, 2010, p.3).

The definition of a blog is a website or a web page that is updated regularly and contains the writer’s own experiences, observations or opinions and may also include links to other websites or images. There are many benefits to using a blog in an educational setting. Through video, sounds, images, texts, and links to other sites, blogs enhance learning by making it easier for students to access information and to share knowledge in a collaborative manner (Morgan, 2005). Blogs are also effective tools for teachers to implement strategies that parents can use with their children in the home environment, and these strategies help children recall and implement skills that have been learned in the classroom environment. Blogging allows relationships to be established between teachers and parents and extend learning beyond the walls of the classroom to the home environment. Blogging promotes family-professional relationships as collaboration between teachers and parents encourages commitment and empowers parents to be the key factor in their children’s development (Powell & Wheeden McCauley, 2012). Blogs are also convenient by allowing parents to access them at any time and feel connected to their children. Challenges to blogging can include parent and teacher comfort level with technology, access to computers, and for some families the ability to read and write.
In the year 2011-12, a study was conducted by Ozcinar and Kizoglu that evaluated parent’s views on a blogging system referred to as Blog-Based Parental Involvement Approach (BPIA); created with the intent to strengthen school-parent communication. This approach was modeled from an organizational theory developed by Kim (2008) and consists of four parts: the work system, teachers and parents as the bloggers, the blog and the blogging tools, and the children who were considered the external environment. In order for this system to function all the components must continually interact.

The study was conducted in Cyprus, Greece over an eight week period and involved 20 five year old pre-primary students and their parents. The blog was designed to provide a variety of learning experiences that were to be shared by both parents and children. The theme of exploration was “The Place I Live in is North Cyprus,” and included the topics cities, villages, Cypriot lifestyle, flora, animals, and history. Each week students explored one topic and were involved in the following activities: watching an animation, playing games that focused on the topic, engaged in conversations with their parents about the animation, completed desk based activities, research-based activities, excursions and observation-based activities, and practical activities. Rationale and directions for each of the activities were posted on the blog, and once the activities were completed, parents emailed result to the coordinator along with their observations, and as a result of parent observations, activities were revised for the following weeks of the programme. The blog contained links with the titles, ‘students,’ ‘activities,’ ‘the school,’ ‘the project,’ and ‘help’. Each student had a personal page for their completed activities to be displayed. Before the blog was created, the researcher asked parents to complete a form
listing the services that they would like to incorporate into the blog to guide them through the
programme.

Parents observed and reported many benefits of BPIA such as increasing knowledge for both
children and parents, implementing enriched learning into practical practice, participating in their
children’s learning, developing a closer relationship with their children, and discovering who
their children were as learners. The blog environment and its organization provided parents with
the opportunity to confidently assist their children in developing their learning.

Despite the success with the programme, the researchers noted some problems such as parent
computer literacy and parents not commenting on the blog because they were concerned that
their comments would be taken with the wrong intent. Parents noted that they had difficulties
encouraging their children to be motivated to do the activities for certain topics such as the
history and governance of Cyprus. Some parents were unable to answer their children’s questions
about the activities due to their limited knowledge on certain topics.

The researchers in this study, provided some suggestions to improve this programme based on
parent observation and feedback: parents required more information not only on the programme
but also on the activities that their children performed at school, and they wanted this
information to be in the form of video recordings or pictures of daily activities; parents also
wanted more time to complete the activities set out in the blog programme. Overall, parents
emphasized through their observations that the blog was a useful tool, well structured, and the
components of the blog were easy to comprehend and follow (Ozcinar & Kizoglu, 2013). In the
following section I discuss gaps in the research literature and topics for future research on home-
reading program blogs.
Gaps in the existing literature and future research suggestions

In contemporary education, there are many ‘buzz words’ to describe the recent trend of 21st century learning such as collaboration, differentiated instruction, and student centred learning. At the heart of 21st century learning is technology. We live in a digital age where learners and teachers can be instantly connected, by the Internet, to the world outside our classroom walls. With the click of a button, students can access information, talk to experts in a particular field, and communicate with students on the other side of the world. The goal of 21st century learning is to create an environment where students are encouraged to be creative, solve real world problems, question, think critically, and learn beyond the mere recollection of facts (Wardlow, 2015). It is an exciting time to be both a learner and an educator. However, in my research of the literature regarding blogging as an effective tool for home and classroom communication, I discovered that there is a gap in the literature. I found brief articles outlining the “do’s” and “don’t’s” of blogging. But, there is not a lot of research on the specific effects of blogging, and its impact as a tool for communicating with parents. Further research is needed to examine how blogging supports parental involvement in the reading and learning development of children, and what form of communication is best suited in a blog. Researchers need to determine if parents respond better to a piece of written text, a video demonstration, or an auditory step-by-step example when learning a new skill or strategy.

In this section, I discussed how blogging is an effective tool for communicating with parents because it provides an opportunity for two-way communication where parents can learn and implement strategies and skills in the home environment, access information regarding their children’s learning at anytime, and still feel involved in their children’s learning development. In
terms of supporting beginning readers, a blog is an important tool to communicate the language, skills, strategies, and best practices taught in the classroom environment. If parents implement the same language and best practices in their home reading instruction, beginning readers have an opportunity to become proficient readers because the instruction in both the school environment and the home environment is consistent. I also discussed the gaps in the literature and the topics that could be explored in further research.

**Conclusion of the literature review**

Reading is complex and involves a number of skills and strategies working together for one purpose: making sense of print. Theories and models of reading are important to the development of best reading practices, and they are the foundation from which we construct our knowledge of how to support beginning readers in their quest to become proficient readers. Research has demonstrated that balanced reading programs that include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are the most effective in reading instruction. The research also indicates that reading is more than just sounding out words or gaining knowledge; it is an experience that involves an aesthetic aspect where the reader engages in the literary world created by the author. Reading also requires motivation, enthusiasm, and self-efficacy. For the beginning reader, learning the skills and strategies necessary to be a proficient reader can be extremely overwhelming, and therefore, it is vital to have support both in the classroom and home environment. Parental involvement is essential in children’s reading development, and parents needs the necessary skills and strategies to support their children’s learning. The key to providing that support is effective communication, and blogging is one method to provide parents with information, skills, and strategies to support their children’s reading development.
In this chapter, I explored the question “How can blogging support parents to utilize reading strategies when engaging in text with beginning readers at home?” A blog is an effective two-way communication system that parents can access at any time and feel part of their children’s learning development. Teaching children to read involves the commitment of both teacher and parent. Language, skills, and strategies must be the same between home and school so that students can become proficient, life long readers who have passion, enthusiasm and motivation for reading. As Rosenblatt states, “a story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p.62). Blogging provides parents with an opportunity to implement the language, skills, and strategies taught in school to support students in their quest to become readers.

In the third chapter of my M Ed project, I present and discuss my final product including the following information: a description of the home reading program blog, how it is organized, how it will be implemented, reflections on what I have learned while creating the blog, and implications for future research.
Chapter Three

A reflection on creating a home reading program blog

In chapter two, I investigated the following question: How can blogging support parents’ understanding and use of reading strategies when engaging in text with their beginning readers at home? In that chapter, I described salient theoretical foundations of reading, and I reviewed the relevant literature to identify the best reading practices and processes that support beginning readers. My goal in examining the literature was to then determine how these best practices can be translated into an effective home reading program delivered through a classroom blog and implemented by parents to support their beginning reader; particularly with vocabulary, comprehension, word identification, decoding and fluency.

In this chapter, I present information on and a description of the home reading program blog that I am creating, how it will be organized and implemented, a critical reflection on what I have learned while creating the blog, and implications for future research based on my personal teaching experiences and theory from the literature review. The purpose of creating this home reading program blog is not only to establish an effective form of communication with parents, but to also provide parents with a program of best reading practices to support beginning readers. Research has indicated that programs designed to help parents instruct their children in school-based practices can increase parental involvement in children’s education (Steiner, 2014).

It is important to note that this blog is a work in progress. Although, I have designed and drafted several posts, the blog will be implemented in the coming school year. My reflection of this experience, therefore, focuses on the creation of content, design, and intention for the home
reading program blog rather then experiences of its implementation. This, as discussed at the end of the chapter, will be best served in future research and ongoing practice.

**From a traditional page-based program to a blog: a description**

An effective reading program consists of balanced instruction within authentic reading experiences and focuses on teaching the following five areas: *phonemic awareness*, *phonics*, *fluency*, *vocabulary*, and *comprehension* (National Reading Panel, 2000 as cited in Boyle, 2008). When I initially designed my home reading program, my focus was to provide parents with reading strategies to support their beginning readers plus to introduce activities or games to help with phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. My original home reading package was a four page handout that contained information about pre-reading strategies, during reading strategies, and after reading strategies. Below is an excerpt, with the complete handout included in Appendix A, on pre-reading strategies from the handout that I used in my original home reading program:

Dear Families,

Today your child is bringing home a “Home Reading Package”. This package contains the following items: a book for your child to read with you, information on what you can do to support your child with reading, and a record sheet to record the book your child is reading and any observations that you may note while reading with your child.

In this reading package, I am including a “good fit book”. A “good fit book” is one where your child can read most of the words in the book. If you feel that the level of the book is too high or too low, please make a note on the record sheet, and I will switch the levels accordingly.

The purpose of a home reading program is to encourage regular reading habits, develop beginning reader skills and strategies, provide communication between parent, student, and teacher, and create a love of reading. Reading with your child everyday helps him or her become a proficient, lifelong reader. Reading should happen every night for 10-15 minutes at a time. Here are some examples of what a reading session could look like:

* Reading with your child (taking turns or reading together)
* Reading to your child
* Your child reading independently
* Your child making up or predicting the story

The following tips will support you as you begin to read with your children:

**Introducing the book: (Pre-reading strategies)**

1. Discuss the cover and the title of the book. Ask your child what he or she thinks the story will be about based on the pictures on the cover.
2. Once you have discussed the cover and made predictions about the book, it is time to do a picture walk. A picture walk is a preview of the book looking only at the pictures and discussing what is happening in the story. A picture walk helps your child develop his or her background knowledge (what he or she may know about the topic in the story) and by doing so, makes it easier for your child to determine the words in the story.
3. Ask you look at each picture, discuss what is going on in the picture and what may happen next.
4. After the picture walk, go back to the beginning of the book and start reading the words.
5. At times, your child may come across a word that he or she does not know. If this happens, you can use the following word recognition strategies to support. Some students may use several of these strategies to help with word recognition, other students may only need one or two strategies. As you read with your child, you will be able to determine which strategy is the most effective.

Based on parent responses in the reading logs, as discussed in chapter one, I concluded that my traditional paper hand-out was not an effective method of communicating with parents about their children’s best reading practices. Further research, during my M Ed project, into parental involvement demonstrated that strategies such as home school newsletters, parent-teacher interviews, booklets, and home school bulletins are not the most effective methods for promoting parental involvement. These involve a number of factors such as negative parent attitudes about school, nervousness during traditional meetings, or parents being informed about their children only when a problem occurs (Ozcinar & Kizoglu, 2013). Online learning has resulted in a number of benefits such as rapid feedback, better collaboration and student grouping, stronger communication with families, improved access, stronger student engagement, improved critical
thinking, new student interactions, increased instructional time, and improved classroom management (Wardlow, 2015). To keep up with current trends and to adapt my home reading program to meet the needs of contemporary parents, I am in the process of creating a home reading blog that will be implemented in September 2015. Blogging is an important part of contemporary communication. Blogging is not just a trend; it is an authentic form of engagement to reach an audience that, for many people, is a part of everyday life. “When we share online, we create the potential for connections in ways that were simply not possible a few years ago” (Richardson, 2010, p.3).

The weekly blog will focus on one topic per post. The advantage of having a single topic per post each week is that parents will not feel overwhelmed with too much information. My hope is that the blog will create a positive interaction with parents, increase engagement in both school-based and home-based activities, and provide parents with information about the reading process to support their beginning readers. Blogs are effective tools for teachers to implement strategies that parents can use with their children in the home environment, and these strategies help children recall and implement skills that have been learned in the classroom environment. Blogging allows relationships to be established between teachers and parents and extend learning beyond the walls of the classroom to the home environment. Blogging promotes family-professional relationships as collaboration between teachers and parents encourages commitment and empowers parents to be the key factor in their children’s development (Powell and Wheeden McCauley, 2012).

Steiner (2014), stressed that schools cannot expect parents to “just figure it out” when it comes to their children’s educational needs. Programs need to be created to provide support so
that parents who are unfamiliar with school-based practices have the opportunity to learn how to support their children and help to create a stronger link between home and school. It is paramount to create home-school partnerships in the early stages of education as research has shown that over time and as children enter secondary school, parent involvement decreases (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007).

**Developing the blog**

I chose Blogger as my blogging tool, but I had also investigated other weblogs such as Weebly, WordPress, and Tumblr. In the end, I decided to use Blogger because it is familiar, it is easy to use, and it is free so I did not need to worry about setting up or maintaining software. Also, it has some levels of privacy that makes it effective for a classroom blog, and it can house more than one blog under one account. I have already completed several blog entries that will be introduced to parents in September. The first entry is an introduction to the blog and discusses my goals and reasons for creating a blog as a tool of communication. Below is a screenshot of this first entry:

![Figure 2](image)
Dear Families,

Welcome to our class reading blog! I am so excited to have this opportunity to share my love of reading and teaching reading with you. In this blog, I will be sharing reading strategies, tips, articles, and links so that you may support your beginning reader. Each blog posting will have a written description and/or video demonstration of each strategy or tip. I will also provide fun activities that you and your child can engage in while reading. My goal for this blog is to create a "reading language" between school and home, so that when both you and I sit down to read with your child, we are using the same strategies and language to guide them in the reading process.

Blogs are a wonderful tool to communicate information, share ideas and stories, connect the home and school environment, and respond to each other as we help your children become proficient, life-long readers.

Please feel free to respond to any of the blog posts with questions or observations that you notice as you read with your child.

Enjoy this wonderful moment in your children’s lives where the world begins to open up to them as they discover how exciting it is to learn to read.

Have fun!

Tammy

In this welcome post, my intention is not only to introduce and provide a rationale for creating a home reading program blog, but to also set expectations for the readers, set the tone for communication, and explain how a blog can create a connection between the school environment and the home environment. Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) examined factors such as role construction, personal self-efficacy, general invitations from school, specific invitations from teachers and children, self perceived knowledge and skills, self-perceived time and energy, social economic status, and age of children in relationship to parental involvement in children’s education. From the results of this study, the researchers suggested that schools consider creating in-service teacher training for parent involvement. This practice would allow
parents to have a positive interaction and increase engagement in both school-based and home-based activities.

In the next section, I discuss the organization of the blog and provide some screenshots and content examples from my home reading blog.

**Organizing the blog**

Balanced reading programs whereby beginning readers are engaged in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension develops skills and strategies to support the development of lifelong reading (Pressely, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret, 2004). Reading is a complex process, and therefore, reading instruction needs to consist of a variety of skills and strategies taught in a balanced curriculum. With support from the literature, I have begun to organize my blog with a focus on providing skills and strategies to parents on topics such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each post is broken into a “lesson” with the focus on one topic. I plan to connect with parents and post new lessons at least twice a week so that parents are up-to-date with the strategies and skills taught in class and also have time to absorb, practice, and comment on the strategies and skills they use with their children. Below are some screenshots and sample blog lessons. The first sample is a lesson on the three different ways a reader can read a book, and the second sample is a comprehension lesson called “Check for Understanding”.
Dear Families,

Today in class, we discussed the three different ways a reader can read a book:

1. **Read and talk about the pictures**

   Reading pictures in a book is in fact reading. Children gain a lot of information about the book when they read the pictures. Much of beginning reading involves a combination of reading the words, checking with the picture on the page, and making meaning of the story. When reading the pictures with your child, talk about each picture in the book. You and your child can comment about what you see in each picture and what may happen on the next page. When you talk about the pictures in a book, you are helping your child to make sense of (or comprehend) the story. It is ok if your words or your child's words don't match the words in the story. As long as your words match the picture, then your child is on their way to making sense of what is happening in the story.

2. **Read the words**

   Read the words is a second way to read a book. As parents, we are proficient readers, and as such, we use many different strategies to figure out unknown words and make sense of the book.
that we are reading. Modelling out loud how we read is a great way to help our beginning readers. When you come across a word that you may not know, talk about the strategies that you use to figure out the word. When you don't understand a portion of the story, tell your child that you like to go back and reread to help you understand the story. Reading is a complex process, but if we model what good readers do, our beginning readers will also use those strategies.

3. Retell a previously read book

Every student has their favourite story that they enjoy reading again and again. The third way to read a book is by retelling a story that your child has already heard. When it comes time to retell the story, have your child look at each picture and recall as many of the details of the story as they remember. You can help your child by prompting him or her with questions such as "what happened next?" or "can you tell me anything else about this page/picture?" Beginning readers will use both the pictures and the words they remembered from the story in order to retell it.

Try the three different ways to read a book with your child and see which method of reading is his or her favourite. Engaging with books in a fun way is a wonderful way to hook your beginning reader into the process of reading. Enjoy!

Sample Lesson Plan #2
Dear Families,

Comprehension strategies are skills that I teach the kids to use to help them understand the author's message in a piece of text. The text could be a storybook or an information book. The comprehension strategy in this lesson is called Check for Understanding. Below is an explanation of this strategy taken from The Cafe Book, by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser. Try it at home when you are reading with your child. I'll be sending home a Check for Understanding bookmark (see the example below) to help remind you of this great comprehension strategy.

Even as an adult reader, there are times when I am reading a story and I get lost and am not sure what has happened. Fortunately, when this happens, I have strategies I use to help me understand the story. The same thing happens when children read. However, with children they often keep reading and do not realize they lost comprehension until the end of the story. They are too concerned with reading accurately, and forget to take the time to think about what they are reading. How can we help them gain comprehension? We can teach them the comprehension strategy: check for understanding because good readers stop frequently to check for understanding or to ask who and what.

How can you help your child with this strategy at home?
1. When reading to your child, stop periodically and say, “Let’s see if we remember what I just read. Think about who the story was about and what happened.” Do this 3 or 4 times throughout the story.
2. When reading to your child, stop and have them practice checking for understanding by saying, “I heard you say…”

3. Ask your child the following questions:
   • Who did you just read about?
   • What just happened?
   • Was your brain talking to you while you read?
   • Do you understand what was read?
   • What do you do if you don’t remember?

Ideas and strategies are taken from: The CAFE Book, written by Gail Boushey and Joan Mosey
Created by Allison Behn © 2009 www.thedailycafe.com

In these two screenshot examples from my home reading program blog, I have taken
the complex and detailed information from my traditional page-based home reading program
and broken it down into manageable lessons that focus on one topic per post. The information
in each blog post is clear and to the point and allows parents to respond with questions or to
make observations when using these strategies with their children. The content in these two blog
e xamples focus on comprehension strategies which is an important skill in balanced programs
that include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and vocabulary to support beginning readers
in the process of becoming proficient readers (Pressely, Mohan, Raphael, and Fingeret, 2004).

In the next section, I discuss how the blog is implemented through a powerpoint presentation.
I provide slides and blog content that highlight some of the features of the presentation.

Implementing the blog

I will be implementing the home reading program blog in September of 2015 by first
introducing it in my traditional weekly newsletter. In that initial newsletter, I will be providing
parents with my blog address and also inviting them to an information evening where I present a
Powerpoint presentation, which is included in Appendix B of this M Ed project, called “Home
Reading Blogs: A Forum for Sharing Reading Strategies and Connecting Home and School”. In this presentation, I provide a definition of reading, my reasons for creating a home reading blog, define and discuss the benefits of blogging, highlight reading strategies that guide beginning readers through the reading process, stress the importance of the home-school connection in the development of supporting beginning readers, and demonstrate how to access, use, and respond to the blog. During my demonstration of how to use the blog, I plan to introduce and discuss the features of the blog such as the written descriptions, videos, and links to other sites and articles that I feel may be of interest to parents. I will also discuss my plans for uploading videos of their children reading for progress purposes, privacy issues related to blogging, as well as building a section within the blog that will cover frequently asked questions. I will draw parents’ attention to the comment section of the blog and tell parents that I believe one of the most important features of the blog is the ability for parents to respond to posts, ask questions, or offer observations and suggestions. I will inform parents that the comment section of a blog is the key element to creating a home-school connection. Importantly, the blog gives parents a voice and an opportunity to share their learning experiences of reading with their children in the home environment. In my presentation, I will explain to parents that supporting the development of beginning readers requires both parents and teachers working together, and therefore, it is important to create a forum where parents and teachers can connect, question, share, and collaborate. A benefit of blogging is that it “opens up all sorts of new possibilities for [people] to learn from each other…work side by side in digital space even though they may be far away from one another physically” (Richardson, 2010, p.23).
Below are some sample slides from my Powerpoint presentation that I plan to share with parents during our information evening in September, 2015:

Figure 5

Home Reading Blogs
A Forum for Sharing Reading Strategies and Connecting Home and School

Figure 6

What is Reading?

- Researchers and authors have developed a variety of definitions to describe reading:
- Marie Clay defines reading as “a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more that it is practiced” (1975).
- Ken Goodman describes reading as “a constructive process that is based on a relationship between a reader and a writer; it is complex and involves more than the simple recognition of letters and words” (Goodman, 1996, p. 3).
- The overall message in reading requires the reader to make sense of print.
- Readers make sense of print by identifying words (word recognition) and constructing understanding (comprehension).
What is Reading?

Researchers and authors have developed a variety of definitions to describe reading:

Marie Clay defines reading as “a message-getting, problem solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more that it is practiced” (Clay, 1979, p.6). Ken Goodman describes reading as “a constructive process that is based on a relationship between a reader and a writer; it is complex and involves more than the simple recognition of letters and words” (Goodman, 1996, p. 2). The overall message is reading requires the reader to make sense of print. Readers make sense of print by identifying words (word recognition) and constructing understanding (comprehension).
What is Word Recognition?

Word Recognition is the skills and strategies that readers use to identify words in a piece of text. The following skills and strategies support beginning readers develop word recognition:

1. Phonemic awareness: ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in a word. For example, identifying the first sound in the word “not”.

2. Alphabetic principle: words are made up of letters and letters represent sound.

3. Word decoding strategies: using knowledge of letter-sound relationships and letter patterns to correctly pronounce words. For example, in the word “play”, the letters p and l blended together make a “pl” sound while the letters a and y blended together make an “a” sound.

4. Word study: an alternative way to traditional spelling that involves understanding that patterns in words rather than memorizing the words. For example, “hard c” (as in cat) and “soft c” (as in cell). “C”’ is usually hard when followed by consonants (as in clue and crayon) and the vowels “a”, “o”, and “u” (as in cat, cot, and cut). “C”’ is usually soft when followed by “i”, “e”, and “y” (as in circus, celery, and cycle).

5. Sight words: common words that a reader should recognize on sight. For example, the words the, and, and to.

In the next section, I reflect on my traditional page-based home reading program and compare it to my home reading blog experience to-date. I provide some suggestions for creating a home reading program blog, and I then conclude this section with further uses of blogs within a school setting.
Blogging: A Reflection

Teaching reading has always been a passion of mine, and I am constantly striving to learn more about the reading process, so that I may adapt or change my current pedagogy to meet the needs of my students and help them become successful, proficient readers. To do this, I need the support of my students’ parents. I believe that the partnership between teachers, parents, and children is vital to student success in reading. I can see the evidence of parent support in my classroom. Many of my students who have parents that read with them at home are very successful readers. The research literature indicates that parental involvement in the education of their children correlates with higher student achievement and the attributes related to student achievement such as self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007).

As I reflect on my communication with parents using the traditional reading handout, I realized that I was not creating a partnership with the parents; I overwhelmed them. My research into parent involvement helped me to understand that despite the findings, there are many parents who choose not to engage in their child’s education for a number of reasons: they may be unfamiliar with school-based practices or they may lack the skills and knowledge to support their children’s reading development and want to avoid teaching them incorrectly (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007). I understand that I could not expect parents to “just figure it out” when it comes to supporting their children in the reading process. I decided that I needed to provide support so that parents who are unfamiliar with school-based practices have the opportunity to learn how to support their children and help to create a stronger link between home and school. It has taken me years to figure out a method to teach reading, and I certainly
could not expect parents to become experts in guiding their children in the reading process after one detailed written explanation. For this reason, I decided to create a home reading blog because I believe that blogging is the tool that can help me get the parents on board to read with their children and use the strategies taught in the classroom in the home environment. The key to parent involvement is communication and in today’s world defined by technology, communication requires a two-way approach that not only informs parents of their children’s learning, but also encourages them to participate in the development of their children’s learning (Mitchell, Foulger, & Wentzel, 2009).

I am in the initial stages of developing and implementing my home reading blog, but as I reflect on this experience to date, I am filled with hope and excitement. I hope that parents will use and embrace this blog as a learning tool to support their children in their process of reading. I am excited that I get an opportunity to work collaboratively with parents to share reading skills and strategies and to create a reading environment that will encourage life long readers who are passionate about reading. In the following section I provide five suggestions for creating a home reading program blog:

1. Acknowledge that not all parents feel comfortable with or use technology.

2. Determine what works best for each individual parent and be prepared to support them with the technology or provide other forms of communication such as a hard copy of the blog entries.

3. Set aside enough time for technology-based communication knowing that some parents will come to depend on the information in the blog, so it needs to be updated on a regular basis.
4. Keep the topics simple, to the point, and introduce one strategy or skill at a time. Many parents have not had formal training in reading instruction and may not be familiar with reading language, so it is important to be clear in your message to parents.

5. Encourage parents to comment or note any observations they notice when reading with their children. The purpose of the blog is to not only communicate effective reading strategies, but to also create a community where parents, teachers, and students collaborate to support beginning readers develop their reading skills. Be prepared as the teacher to make comments in each blog post to initiate conversation amongst the parents using the blog.

Further uses of blogs in the school

In the process of creating this blog, I began to think of other avenues to expand the teaching and learning of reading strategies. Blogs have many purposes and not every blog has to involve students. A blog is a great way to communicate within a school environment, manage and communicate knowledge, collaborate, share best practices, lesson plans, and learning objectives (Richardson, 2010). Creating a reading blog with the teachers in my school is an effective way to ensure that as we teach reading strategies, we are using the same language and strategies within the classroom. When our beginning reading students then move on to the next grade, they will be familiar with the reading strategies, can move forward, and learn higher level reading strategies to become proficient readers.

Blogs can also be used as an online filing cabinet or an e-portfolio. Then it can be archived, organized, and shared. Students can also reflect on their work to see their growth over time. Creating individual e-portfolios of students’ reading, highlights the reading skills and strategies of the student and also helps to support the student in the next step of the reading process.
Parents also have the opportunity to view the individual blogs to see their children’s reading progress and make comments on their achievement. The e-portfolio becomes an effective tool for assessment as teachers can keep track of the children’s reading progress and this information can be passed on to future teachers. In the next section, I discuss implications for future research that have emerged during my M Ed project.

**Implications for Future Research**

Because school-based blogging is a relatively new phenomena, the effects of blogging and a home reading program blog are not well represented in the literature. Existing research tends to focus more on the role of parents in their children’s education and how parental involvement improves academic achievement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007). The research often discusses traditional methods of communication such as newsletters, meet the teacher night, or parent-teacher interviews to create a partnership between the home-environment and school environment. In today’s world which is often dominated by life outside the classroom, these traditional methods do not always fit the needs of contemporary parents. Many of these traditional methods provide a few opportunities to engage with parents, and are therefore not the most effective communication tool. I have three suggestions for future research:

Firstly, future research needs to address the gap in understanding the impact of school and home blogging practices; particularly on blogging and how it may be an effective tool for communicating classroom learning with parents. This research needs to provide evidence about whether blogs help to create partnerships with parents, insights into best practices or the strategies regarding how to engage parents and encourage the implementation of home reading programs.
Second, further research is also needed regarding how educational blogging within a school environment may strengthen the teaching and learning of both students and teachers. Finally, along with research that investigates the impact of blogs as a learning and teaching tool, further research is needed on how parent involvement in the reading process can improve the beginning reader’s reading development. The literature discusses best practices for reading, but it does not specifically indicate what parent supported reading strategies benefit students the most in the process of reading.

Reading is a complex process; it requires the reader to use a number of word identification strategies and comprehension skills. Our theoretical understanding of reading instruction is that it is not an “either-or point of view” meaning that instruction does not solely focus on one strategy, one method, or one type of program (Bond & Dykstra, 1997). As Clay’s states, we must respond to the needs of readers and link what they know to what they need to learn (Clay, 2005). Reading instruction, therefore, needs to consist of a variety of skills and strategies taught in a balanced curriculum that fit the learning needs of the beginning reader. The beginning reader, however, needs support not only from school, but also from home in order to be successful, proficient readers. Creating a home read blog provides parents with a school connection and gives them an opportunity to share the skill and strategies with their children learned in the classroom environment. Creating a strong home-school bond will create strong, life-long readers.

Twenty-first century learning places an importance on connecting with each other and collaborating our knowledge and skills to create new learning. If teachers can collaborate and work together and create programs such as a home reading program where the language, skills,
and processes are similar in nature, then our students will benefit by becoming life-long, proficient learners.

Conclusion

In chapter one of this M Ed project, I presented the question: How can blogging support parents’ understanding and use of reading strategies when engaging in text with their beginning readers at home? This question was generated by my experiences with a traditional page-based home reading program where I felt the parents were not responding or implementing the skills and strategies I had given them in the home reading hand-out. To meet the needs of contemporary parents, I decided to create a home reading program blog. In chapter two of this project, I researched and defined reading, presented a theoretical history on the instruction of reading, determined the best reading practices, investigated parental involvement and its benefits, defined blogging, and its place in 21st century learning. I then began to design and create a home reading program blog that embodied the ideas and theories established in the research literature. Finally in chapter three, I presented my project. In this chapter I outlined the development of the blog, its organization and structure, how it will be implemented this coming school year, and implications for further research. I also presented a variety of screenshots and blog content that highlight both the features of my home reading program blog and the key points in the Powerpoint that will be used to introduce parents to the home reading program blog. The purpose of this project was to create a connection between the home environment and the school environment through a home reading program so that the language, skills, and strategies used in both the classroom and the home would be similar and support our beginning readers in the reading process. Parent involvement is important in childrens’ academic development. Teachers
need to create a forum where parents can be involved, teachers and parents can collaborate, and learning fits the needs of the 21st century.
References


Appendix A: Traditional Page-Based Home Reading Program

Dear Families,

Today your child is bringing home a “Home Reading Package”. This package contains the following items: a book for your child to read with you, information on what you can do to support your child with reading, and a record sheet to record the book your child is reading and any observations that you may note while reading with your child.

In this reading package, I am including a “good fit book”. A “good fit book” is one where your child can read most of the words in the book. If you feel that the level of the book is too high or too low, please make a note on the record sheet, and I will switch the levels accordingly.

The purpose of a home reading program is to encourage regular reading habits, develop beginning reader skills and strategies, provide communication between parent, student, and teacher, and create a love of reading. Reading with your child everyday helps him or her become a proficient, lifelong reader. Reading should happen every night for 10-15 minutes at a time. Here are some examples of what a reading session could look like:

* Reading with your child (taking turns or reading together)
* Reading to your child
* Your child reading independently
* Your child making up or predicting the story

The following tips will support you as you begin to read with your children:

Introducing the book: (Pre-reading strategies)

1. Discuss the cover and the title of the book. Ask your child what he or she thinks the story will be about based on the pictures on the cover.
2. Once you have discussed the cover and made predictions about the book, it is time to do a picture walk. A picture walk is a preview of the book looking only at the pictures and discussing what is happening in the story. A picture walk helps your child develop his or her background knowledge (what he or she may know about the topic in the story) and by doing so, makes it easier for your child to determine the words in the story.
3. Ask you look at each picture, discuss what is going on in the picture and what may happen next.
4. After the picture walk, go back to the beginning of the book and start reading the words. At times, your child may come across a word that he or she does not know. If this happens, you can use the following word recognition strategies to support. Some students may use several of these strategies to help with word recognition, other students may only need one or two strategies. As you read with your child, you will be able to determine which strategy is the most effective.
**During Reading Strategies:**

1. **Look for little words in big words:**
   Take a look at the word in the sentence and see if your child can find some smaller words in the bigger word that he or she knows. If your child can identify the smaller word, it may help him or her to read the whole word. For example in the word “today,” the smaller words would be “to” and “day”.

2. **Reread and think about what makes sense:**
   Sometimes children will read a word in a sentence incorrectly and realize that it doesn't make sense in the understanding of the sentence. If this happens, go back, reread the sentence, and try to determine what word fits best in that sentence. Look at the first letter of the word to help you determine the correct word.

3. **Use the picture clues:**
   In beginning reader texts, the pictures match the text. If your child is having difficulties with a word or a sentence, refer back to the picture and try to determine the meaning of the text.

4. **Look for chunks you already know:**
   As we practice word work in class, students will become familiar with “chunks” of sounds that are found in words. For example, in the word “play”, students will learn that the “ay” letter combination makes a “long a” sound. If children are able to chunk sounds together, it may help them piece together unknown words.

5. **Skip the word and return to fix it:**
   If your child comes across a word in a sentence that he or she doesn't know, skip the word and read to the end of the sentence. Once you have finished the sentence, return to the beginning of the sentence and try to determine what word makes sense or fits best.

6. **Sounding out:**
   This strategy is a popular strategy, but I have to admit I like to use the other strategies before I use sounding out. Sometimes the sounding out strategy can be a difficult one because kids don't always know the different sounds that letters or combinations of letter make in a word. The English language can be so confusing because the “rules” of our language don’t always apply in every situation.
As parents and teachers of our children, we often like to jump in right away and give our kids the words that they don't know instead of giving them time to think about the word. I like to use a strategy called “Coaching or Time”. When you child comes to a word that he or she doesn't know, give them a moment to use one of the strategies mentioned above. If, however, your child is unable to determine the word, ask the question, “Do you need coaching or some more time?” If your child says, coaching, then use one of the above reading strategies for support. If your child says time, then give him or her another opportunity to determine the unknown word. If your child is still unable to determine the word, then ask, “Could it be….?” and provide the correct word. Then ask your child to reread the sentence before continuing on.

After Reading Strategies:

After your child has read the story, you can further discuss the story and enhance your child’s understanding of the story.

2. Retell the story, in sequence, and in your child’s own words
3. Reflect on the story:
   a. That story is just like the time…
   b. My favourite part is where…
   c. One thing I learned in this story is…
   d. I liked the funny/silly/sad part because…
4. Illustrating a favourite part. Many children like to express what they have read through pictures.
5. Finding the words that the child had difficulties with. Say to your child, “Let’s do a word hunt for the word…”

The key to reading at home with your child is to provide support while your child is in the beginning stages of the reading process and to have fun. If your child is not motivated to read, then try reading the story to them or take turns reading a page or read a sentence and have your child fill in words that you leave out. Play rhyming games with some of the words in the story. Ask your child to find a specific letter or word in the story. Make reading fun so your child looks forward to each reading session.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Tammy
Appendix B: Powerpoint Presentation-Home Reading Blogs: A Forum for Sharing Reading Strategies and Connecting Home and School
What is Word Recognition?

- Read and strategies that readers use to identify words in a piece of text
- Phonemic awareness: ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in a word. Example: What is the first sound in the word "sad"?
- Alphabetic Principle: words are made up of letters and letters represent sounds.
- Word Decoding Strategies: using knowledge of letter-sound relationships and letter patterns to sound out words. Example: Join the letters g and d together to make a "jg" sound. The letters e and t blended together make an "et" sound.
- Word Study: alternate way to teach word study that involves understanding the patterns in words rather than memorizing words. Example: "hard" (as in call) and "soft" (as in call). "C" is usually hard when followed by a vowel or diphthong and the vowels "a", "e", and "u" (as in cut, out, and cup). "C" is usually soft when followed by "e", "a", and "i" (as in ocean, cabin, and center).
- Sight Words: common words that a reader should recognize on sight. Example: the, and, in.

What is Comprehension?

- Action or ability of understanding something
- Comprehension is developed by...  
- Background knowledge
- Understanding of how language works
- Experience with different texts
- Reading for different purposes
- Using different strategies for constructing meaning such as connecting, questioning, predicting, inferring, and visualizing

Reading is more than decoding and comprehending

- Metacognition
- Self-efficacy
- Epistemic Beliefs
- Motivation
Theories of Reading
- Bottom-up
- Top-down
- Interactive
- Transactional
- Social Constructivism

What does an effective reading program look like?
- Balanced program that includes instruction in...
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics: method of teaching people to read by relating sound with letters or groups of letters, for example identifying the short sound that "a" makes in apple
- Fluency: the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression
- Comprehension
- Vocabulary

Parental Involvement: A definition
- Parent investment in their children's education and includes:
  - Parent-child communication about school work
  - Supervision of homework
  - Educational aspirations for your children
  - School contact and participation
  - Two kinds of involvement: school-based and home-based
Why is Parent Involvement so important?

- Research indicates that parental involvement in the education of children correlates with higher student achievement and the attributes related to student achievement such as self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler 2007).

A Home Reading Program: Traditional Page-Based Program

Traditional Page-Based Home Reading Program: Some Issues

- Overwhelming
- No opportunity for feedback
- No opportunity for collaboration
What is a blog?

- A website or a web page that is updated regularly and contains the writer’s own experiences, observations, or opinions and may also include links to other websites or images.

The Benefits of Using a Blog for a Home Reading Program

- Video, sounds, images, text, and links to other sites. Blog enhance learning by making it easier for students to access information and to share knowledge in a collaborative manner (Morgan, 2009).
- Effective tools for teachers to implement strategies that parents can use with their children in the home environment, and those strategies help children recall and implement skills that have been learned in the classroom environment.
- Allows relationships to be established between teachers and parents and extend learning beyond the walls of the classroom or the home environment.
- Promotes family–professional relationships as collaboration between teachers and parents encourages commitment and improves outcomes for the key factor in their children’s development (Powell and Wheeden McLeod, 2015).
- Access to allowing parents to access them at any time and feel connected to their children.

Ms. Martin’s Home Reading Blog

- Address: msmartinreadingblog.blogspot.com
- Organization: lessons that focus on reading strategies, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension
- Features: comment section
Sample Blog Lesson: Three Ways to Read a Book

Sample Blog Lesson: Three Ways to Read A Book