PARTNERS IN TEACHING: ENGAGING PARENTS IN PARALLEL LEARNING

by

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Abstract

This action-based professional inquiry took place in a French immersion multi-grade primary classroom. In this inquiry I addressed the problem of how to increase parent involvement in their children's education through parallel learning, in which students and parents learn and work together to support student learning at home. The ultimate goal was to increase student learning. The context for parallel learning in this inquiry was connecting to literature. Parents received weekly letters about a connecting strategy as well as weekly assignments to complete with their child. I collected data from assessments of student achievement before and after the connections unit. Other sources of data were student-parent assignments, parent surveys, and parent interviews. The study demonstrated that parallel learning has potential to increase parent involvement and confidence, with beneficial effects for students learning to make connections while reading. Further inquiry is required to assess the value of parallel learning for other intended outcomes and in other classrooms.
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GLOSSARY

**BC Performance Standards** “describe levels of achievement in key areas of learning. The performance standards answer the questions: “How good is good enough? What does it look like when a student’s work has met the expectations at this grade level?” (BC Ministry of Education, p. 2)

**Connections** to literature enhance and help readers to construct meaning by recalling background knowledge and experiences to repair comprehension when it is lost (Kindrachuck, L., 2007).

**District Assessment of Reading Test**, also known as DART, assesses for a variety of reading processes and skills, such as making personal connections while reading. It is a performance-based assessment of learning developed by BC teachers and administered to Grade three-9s. The data gathered through DART assists teachers in designing student learning programs to increase the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations (Angerelli, S., Croll, S., DeCastro, D., & Pilgrim, N., 2008).

**Explicit instruction** “involves four phases: teacher modelling and explanation of a strategy, guided practice during which teachers gradually give students more responsibility for task completion, independent practice accompanied by feedback, and application of the strategy in real reading situations.” (Pearson and Dole, 1987, as cited in Fielding and Pearson, 1994, p. 64).

**Formative assessment** also referred to as Assessment for learning is “designed primarily to promote learning. Early drafts, first tries, and practice assignments are all examples of assessment for learning (Cooper, 2007, p.11).
Home reading provides “a workable method of promoting parent involvement in their child’s reading development through daily reading practice at home. (School District #44, 1999, p. 53)

Leveled Text is a book that “has been categorized by its level of difficulty. Generally speaking, this is most helpful for primary materials” (School District #44, p. 231).

Parallel learning is a term coined for this project. It describes the simultaneous learning of adults and children on a topic, with each exploring materials at their own level but sharing the interest and enthusiasm for learning through conversations that are likely to enhance the child’s learning. In this study, the term applies specifically to a program of parallel learning for parents and students that is structured by the classroom teacher.

Phonological awareness as well as the term phonemic awareness refer to the knowledge that phonemes (the smallest units of speech sounds) are separable and can be manipulated mentally and orally, as when blending phonemes into a word and say it (/t/, /a/, /l/ = rat). (Coles, 2000, p. 3).

Purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher selects cases for interviewing that are best suited to explore the concepts the researcher wishes to develop (Creswell, 2007, p. 75).

Reading Powers is a term used by Adrienne Gear (2007) to represent the strategies that proficient readers use to repair reading comprehension. In her book, Reading Power (2006), Gear focused on the following five comprehension strategies: connect, question, visualize, infer and transform. Gear popularized research on the strategies used by good readers (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) by translating it into classroom strategies and making it accessible to teachers.
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Dr. Willow Brown has been my supervisor for this project. I would like to thank Dr. Willow Brown for the many hours she has spent helping me. She has suggested many ideas for improvements and revisions on a wide variety of topics from APA formatting, suggestions for reading, topics for the literature review, rational, and editing. She also coined the term “parallel learning” which is the title of the inquiry. Dr. Brown believes that a Masters Project is collaboration between supervisor and student. I believe that this inquiry project embodies that spirit of collaboration. Thank you Dr. Brown, for helping me create a project that is much better than what I could have produced without your support.

Dr. Colin Chasteauneuf has helped me in several ways. His greatest contribution to this project was to suggest that I streamline it to focus on one reading strategy rather than the four I had planned. For this, I cannot thank him enough. It was Dr. Chasteauneuf’s idea to add parent interviews to the other sources of data I had planned. Although this was outside of my comfort zone, I agreed. To my surprise, it was one of the highlights of the inquiry experience for me. Dr. Chasteauneuf also provided me with many books about research in reading comprehension. I enjoyed reading the books and articles, including several that had nothing to do with my project. Reading these books and articles has acquainted me with the world of scholarly writing of which I had previously been unaware.

I would like to thank Deborah Koehn for taking the time to visit me in my home to discuss my project, for reading and suggesting revisions for my work twice, and for her kind comments about my work.

I would like to thank my husband, Frank McDonald, for his support and sacrifices while I was working on the project.
CHAPTER I: THE OPPORTUNITY

As a primary teacher of a French Immersion Classroom, the need for a new approach to teaching reading comprehension strategies had been developing in my mind for several years and I began to wonder if enlisting a parent's help would improve student performance. I noticed that although my students demonstrated an ability to use comprehension strategies while working on activities directed by the teacher, many were unable to demonstrate the same ability while taking the *District Assessment of Reading Test* (DART). This authentic problem in my teaching practice became the focus of this study to explore how engaging parents as partners in teaching might make a difference in students' achievement at school. To engage parents, I developed an approach I refer to as *parallel learning*: teaching both students and parents and having them work together on related assignments at home. For this study, I implemented parallel learning by teaching parents and students about the reading comprehension strategy, *making connections* (Gear, 2007).

This study is the second round in a spiral of classroom inquiry (Kaser, Halbert, & Koehn, 2001) in which the results of one study deepen understanding and lead to related questions for a new inquiry. In my initial investigation (McFarland, 2011) I explored the effects of increasing the amount of formative assessment students receive by having parents assess their children's reading and writing. One of the encouraging findings of that study was the willingness of parents to participate in an innovative process. More importantly for this study, I realized that parents did not always have a good understanding of the concepts their children were learning or how to help them. This realization led me to the idea of teaching concepts to parents at the same time as I teach them in the classroom and giving the parents related activities to do with their children at home. Therefore, in this subsequent project, I focused on comprehension strategies because they are a relatively new concept.
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(Gear, 2006; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keen & Zimmerman, 2007) and most parents do not appear to be familiar with them. Specifically, I focused this study on teaching parents the reading comprehension strategy of making connections and how they might support their child’s proficiency with the strategy.

The participants in this study were the 21 students (eight boys and thirteen girls) in my multi-grade French Immersion class and their parents. There were eleven Grade one students, seven Grade two students, and three Grade three students. Two of my students were of Aboriginal ancestry and one Grade one student was an English language learner who did not speak for the duration of the project. The class also included one high achieving special needs student who has foetal alcohol syndrome. Although the average salary of parents whose children attended this school was $18,000 per year, the salary of the parents of my students in the French Immersion stream was considerably higher. Many of the parents were professionals or owned successful small businesses. They appeared to be well educated and involved in their children’s education.

This study can be described as an action-based professional inquiry (Brown & Cherkowsky, 2011), informed by the action and reflection cycle of action research (O’Brien, 1998), and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Over a period of six weeks, I observed the effects of my action as I structured and supported parallel learning for parents about the reading strategy of connecting. In a series of six lessons about making connections, I communicated to parents through weekly letters and assignments, I introduced parents to the concept of connecting to literature, and I gave parents some tools to help their children at home. Simultaneously, I was teaching connecting lessons to the students at school, so that the children’s learning and their parents’ learning was conducted in parallel.
Sources of data included assessment of student work from before and after the project using the *Performance Standards for Reading* (see Appendix E), student/parent assignments, *Parent Satisfaction Surveys* (see Appendix B), and *Parent Interviews* (see Appendix C). The main focus of the study, however, was on the attitudes and actions of parents who participated in the project. For this I relied on the *Parent Satisfaction Survey* and *Parent Interviews*.

In this study, I examined the effects of parallel learning through a series of lessons and assignments for both students and parents. I was interested in how parents would engage in parallel learning with the materials I prepared for them and whether these activities would contribute to student learning. I collected several sources of data, which provided convincing evidence that parallel learning increased the knowledge and confidence that parents needed to enhance their children’s learning at home. This finding has informed my own practice in Language Arts and other subject areas. I believe that other educators may find a parallel learning program that enlists parents as partners for the teaching of key concepts and essential skills helpful in their efforts to increase student achievement.

**Research Questions**

To focus my data collection and analysis, I expressed the purpose of this study in the form of an overall research question:

> **How will a parallel learning program increase student achievement and affect both the parents’ understanding of their children’s learning and their confidence to support that learning?**

For observation and analysis, this overall question can be separated into questions that isolate the “understanding” and “confidence” components and a third that focuses on student learning:
1. How will parent understanding of what their children are learning be affected by a parallel learning program?

2. How will parent confidence in their ability to support their child's learning be affected by a parallel learning program?

3. If parent participation, understanding, and confidence are evident, will there also be indications of improved student achievement?

Implementing and Refining Reading Powers

I chose connecting to text as the focus for parent learning because few of the parents of my students appeared to be knowledgeable about reading comprehension strategies. In addition, parents are particularly well-suited for helping their children make connections because of their intimate knowledge of their child's life and experiences. My own introduction to comprehension strategies has been fairly recent. In 2008, I attended a workshop with Adrienne Gear about reading comprehension strategies and was given a copy of her book, Reading Power (2006). Each chapter focused on a different reading strategy and contained step-by-step lessons for the teacher to follow. I began by teaching my students to make connections. The lessons appeared engaging and provided students with opportunities for practice, interacting with peers, and class discussion.

While learning about connections, the class discussed, practiced, and categorized deep thinking and quick connections. According to Gear (2006), deep thinking connections are meaningful in that they help the student to identify with a character, setting, or situation and give the student a deeper understanding of the text. Conversely, quick connections do not move children forward in their comprehension. Gear provided an example, "My uncle has a dog like that" (p. 39) to illustrate a quick connection. My class also discussed, practiced, and categorized different connections to self, to other texts, and to the world.
While working with me, my students demonstrated an ability to make meaningful connections to literature.

Soon after teaching the unit on connections, it was time for my Grade three students to take the DART. In DART, there is both a written and oral question about connections. I was confident that my students would do well on the connection questions in DART, but, sadly, I was mistaken. Many students, including high achieving students, were unable, in either the oral or written sections of the test, to make any connections at all, let alone a deep thinking connection.

Last year, while again teaching the connections unit in Reading Power (Gear, 2006), I realized that parents would be far better than I at helping their children form meaningful connections. Parents know what books their children have read, what movies they have seen, the television shows they like to watch, the games they play, who their friends and neighbours are, the places they have been, and all of the small everyday experiences that make up a child’s life. These are the resources the child needs to draw upon to make connections. Parents are uniquely situated to help their children do this. Therefore, I decided that I would like to determine if involving parents could help students to learn to form meaningful connections independently.

I began by briefly explaining the connection concept I was teaching that week in my weekly letter to parents. I also gave the parents and students a related task to complete at home. Unfortunately, I found the results to be disappointing. For example, for the first activity, I explained to parents that students do not have to have a connection to every book and I asked the students to choose a home reading book that they thought would be a good connecting book. The next day, half of my students reported that they had no connection to their home reading book. In this case, I felt that many parents accepted their child’s
statement that they had no connection without tapping into their intimate knowledge of their child’s life to guide them to make a connection.

For another assignment, I asked the students to choose a good connecting book from the school library. I explained to parents the difference between quick and deep thinking connections and asked them to help their child find a deep-thinking connection to their library book. Again, I was disappointed with the results. I felt that parents were struggling with the concept of deep thinking connections. Soon after teaching the connecting unit from *Reading Power*, it was time for my Grade three students to do the spring DART. Once again, many students were unable to make connections.

Although I was disappointed in the parents’ inability to help their children make connections that would contribute to their reading comprehension, I still believed in the potential of parents working with their children to complement the teaching taking place at school. Furthermore, I knew from the responses to the Parent Satisfaction Survey in my previous investigation that parents appreciated the opportunity to be more involved in their child’s education and were eager to help. Although my initial attempts at parent education did not turn out as I had hoped, I saw the potential to explore and develop it further in the form of an action-based professional inquiry project.

Simultaneously, I realized from informal conversations with parents that many of them did not read to their children. All of my parents participated regularly in *Home Reading* where the parents listened to their children reading to them in French; however, most parents were not also reading to their children in English on a regular basis. Parents often asked me what they could do to help their child improve their reading skills. I always replied, “Read to your child (meaning, read to your child in English)”. However, I found that many parents
were not satisfied with this answer. I assumed that either they did not believe in the value of reading to their child or they wanted an activity more focused on a specific learning outcome.

Furthermore, home reading in past years was not always a pleasant experience for either parent or child. I had my students read to their parents in French and most parents could neither understand nor help with their child’s reading. I decided, therefore, that rather than having my students read to their parent in French, I would ask the parents to read to their children in English. This solution addressed both the problem of parents not reading to their children and helped parents to give their children the more focused task they seemed to desire.

It was not my intention to focus on the French Immersion aspect of my teaching assignment in this study. However, it was the context of the inquiry and it influenced the way I structured the project as well as bringing forth a number of questions that could lead to subsequent inquiries. For example, by the end of the study, I wondered if learning in one language at home would transfer to enhancing the learning in another language at school. Would parents teaching their children about connections in English help the children to make connections in French? Would the ability of students to make connections when their parents read to them transfer to making connections when reading independently? I have not found any studies that recommend that parents of French Immersion students read to their children in English, but as I will demonstrate in my literature review, there are studies that confirm the positive effects of parents reading to their children.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter One, I described the cycle of inquiry whereby a previous investigation about parent assessment led to this new investigation of parent involvement with a focus on parallel learning and connecting to literature. The change in the inquiry focus from parent
assessment to parent teaching and learning evolved from the realization that parents were ideally situated to support their children in making connections to literature. However, in order to do this, parents also needed instruction about making connections. Hence, I discovered the need for parallel learning.

In my second project, therefore, I planned to go a step further in my exploration of parent involvement. I taught parents about connecting to literature and gave them tools they could use to provide their child with support at home. Furthermore, I continued to involve them in using formative assessment to help them assess their child's learning.

In this study, I assumed that increased parent understanding of the connecting strategy and knowledge of how to support their child's deep reading connections would ultimately lead to increases in student comprehension. I have monitored student achievement with connections using the BC Performance Standards to help determine the success of the parallel learning initiative. However, although changes in student performance have been documented and discussed, this project was not designed to confirm, conclusively, that increases in student achievement were due to parent learning and teaching. Increased parent engagement with their children's learning is, however, a worthwhile goal in itself.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to inform the actions of professional inquiry in the classroom and to give them a research base. The literature reviewed is not exhaustive but sufficient to inform my design of a parallel learning program and contribute trustworthiness to my choice of classroom actions and my interpretation of their effects. The main sections of the literature review address various aspects of the action taken in the inquiry: a) parent learning and homework, b) family literacy programs, c) reading comprehension strategies, and d) formative assessment.

I begin by examining literature on the effects of parent involvement in schools with particular attention to research about parent learning and homework. Next, I review the pertinent literature on family literacy programs. Because I chose the connecting strategy as the focus of parent and student learning, in the third section I examine the role of reading strategies in developing reading comprehension. In the fourth section, because the student-parent assignments included a formative assessment component, I have included research about the effects of formative assessment on student learning.

Parent Involvement

To explore the potential of parent involvement in education, I began my literature review with Fullan’s (2007) research-based approach to pursuing educational change, which highlighted the potential of parent involvement to contribute to positive change. Fullan reviewed studies from 1988 to 2006 that confirmed the importance of parent involvement in schools. These included Coleman’s (1998) Canadian study of schools in two districts and Rosenholtz’(1989) research on effective schools. Fullan also discussed Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, and Ecob’s (1998) study on school effectiveness, Henry’s (1996) study of parent-school collaboration in poor neighbourhoods, Bryk and associates’(1998)
evaluation of schools in Chicago, and James and Colleagues' (2006) research on effective schools. Although these studies were quite diverse in nature, they all concluded that parent involvement in "the learning activities of students" (Coleman, 1998, p. 9), was an important factor in the success of both schools and students.

Rosenholtz (1989), in her study of effective schools, used the terms stuck and moving to distinguish between teachers (and schools) who (and which) are discouraged and have lost their ambition to improve and those who's "sense of progress and future gain encourages them to look forward, to take risks, and to grow" (p. 149). One of the areas examined by Rosenholtz (1998) was parent involvement. She found that moving teachers "involve parents directly in their children's learning by giving them specific activities to do at home" (p. 153). Although stuck teachers were aware "that a gap between home and school existed" (p. 152), they either had no plans for parent involvement or their plans did not include involving parents in academic content. Rosenholtz made it clear that effective teachers focus "their efforts on involving parents in academic content, thereby bridging the learning chasm between home and school" (p. 152). In this manner, learning extends seamlessly from school to home.

Whereas Rosenholtz (1998) studied parent involvement as one of a number of factors contributing to student achievement, Coleman's (1998) five year study of schools in British Columbia focused solely on parent involvement. His goal was not to study the effect of parent involvement on student achievement but on student commitment to learning.


Similar to Rosenholtz's concern, Coleman was concerned with "parent engagement in learning activities" (p. 2). Using a combination of case studies and surveys, Coleman (1998) collected data from parents, teachers, and students, whom he referred to as "the classroom
The participants in Coleman’s study included schools that “broadly represented the population of BC with respect to the level of education, income, family composition, and other social characteristics” (p. 6). The questions in the surveys and interviews were designed to find responses to “a variety of questions about the importance of triad relationships in schools and schooling” (p. 6). Coleman asked:

Can teacher efforts to collaborate with the home be changed for the better? How do more collaborative teachers differ from others? How do students and parents view teacher collaboration? Can home and classroom work together to develop student acceptance of responsibility? (p. 7)

Coleman offered conclusions and recommendations for each of these research questions. To answer the last question, for example, Coleman wrote that “when school and home are connected, schools *usually sustain and sometimes reinforce* positive attitudes brought by students from the home” (p. 44).

Based on survey results, Coleman provided teachers with the following recommendations:

Teachers must (1) realize that parent collaboration is often dependent upon teacher invitation; (2) legitimize parent collaboration by recognizing parent rights and responsibilities; (3) facilitate collaboration through parent-teacher dialogues, informing parents about curriculum and methodology; (4) encourage collaboration by providing activities which parents and students can do together; (5) acknowledge parent collaboration by providing good, timely information about student performance. (p. 141)

All these recommendations are addressed in parallel learning. However, timely information would come from the parent’s own formative assessments as well as from the teacher.

From these and other studies cited in Fullan (2007), it appears that much research has been done on parent involvement in children’s learning over the last twenty years. These studies have clearly demonstrated that parent involvement is an important factor in student progress and is an essential feature of effective schools. Rosenholtz (1989) found that parent
involvement was one factor that distinguished stuck from moving schools. Coleman’s (1998) study led to recommendations about increasing student commitment to learning and, incidentally, parent satisfaction through parents being involved in their children’s learning. Yet, in spite of this research, Coleman lamented, parent involvement in their children’s education continues to be low in most schools in British Columbia.

**Family Literacy Programs**

The well established link between the family and literacy has led to the development of family literacy programs for disadvantaged families and their pre-school children. These programs were designed to help pre-school children of disadvantaged families gain equality in literacy skills by the time they started kindergarten. Philips, Hayden, and Stephen, (2006) reported on a five year Canadian study entitled *Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child Program*, (hereinafter, *Learning Together*). The goals of the study were “to improve the child’s literacy, parents’ literacy, and strengthen the ability of the parents to develop their child’s literacy” (p. 31). The study focused on under-privileged pre-school children and followed their progress through the primary grades. The program took place over a three month period in which parents received 90 hours of instruction, sometimes with their children, delivered by a program facilitator. Instruction consisted of topics such as creative play, language for literacy, early reading, and environmental print. The children’s and parent’s development was observed over a five year period. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to support the conclusions.

Parent interviews were conducted with both treatment and control group parents for each of the three years following the completion of the *Learning Together* program. Data from these interviews concluded that while working on literacy activities with their children, the control group parents’ engagement in literacy activities in the home was “passive”
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(Philips et al., 2006, p. 120) and focused more on the mechanistic aspects of reading such as decoding. Treatment group parents, on the other hand, “spoke more frequently of a variety of strategies that enhanced literacy development and paid particular attention to the personal enjoyment to be obtained from literacy events” (p. 122).

In the treatment group interviews conducted one year after the completion of the program, parents described how the program changed the way they interacted with their children. Not only did they read more to their children but the quality of the reading improved significantly. They saw themselves as reading role models for their children. They encouraged their children to use strategies such as connecting, questioning, and predicting. Parents indicated that they enjoyed reading to their children more and their children seemed to enjoy the reading experience more as well (Philips et al., 2006, p. 97-98). These parents also felt “more secure in their abilities to help their children on their literacy journey” (p. 99) and believed that their children had made significant progress as a result of their participation in the program. They felt that the “program had helped them to see how their children’s literacy was progressing and how to continue to help them (p. 112)”.

However, by the time of the third interview, the children were in school and parents of both the control and treatment groups reported reading less to their children. Some of the reasons cited were time restraints due to homework and the school’s home reading program, which took away from time available for shared reading. “Many parents thought that the children’s home reading program and their opportunity to select books from the school library collections were sufficient for the children’s needs” (Philips et al., 2006, p. 112).

Philips et al. (2006) believed that “such comments reflect how, school sometimes, for some children, creates perceived barriers in the way of literacy development” (p. 112). Furthermore, “the quantity of homework may mitigate the development of the lifelong
reading habits that evolve when children read their own choice of text for pleasure and enjoyment on a daily basis” (p.112). In spite of the decrease in parent reading during their children’s primary school years, quantitative data measuring the achievement of both treatment and control groups demonstrated that students in the treatment group achieved more “for all children except those who were in the top 20% to 30% at the pre-test stage” (p. 123).

The authors of the Learning Together study used a reliable, generalizable research method to reveal a positive correlation between parent learning and involvement and student achievement. Although this study focused on under-privileged pre-school children, it addressed the ideas I wished to explore in parallel learning: parent learning, confidence, and involvement. The parents in the Learning Together study demonstrated improved techniques for supporting their children’s literacy development when compared to the control group. Furthermore, they had more confidence in their ability to help their children than before their involvement in the study and were positive about their participation in the study. Also relevant to my design and implementation of parallel learning is the finding that homework and home reading may be detrimental to children’s literacy development when they cause parents to read less to their children. The Partners in Teaching study addressed this problem successfully by having parents read to their children.

**Reading Comprehension Strategies**

In 1970, David Pearson conducted a study involving hundreds of proficient readers to discover what “was it that a reader, exceeding expectations for his or her grade level, was doing that enabled him or her to master both the code and the meaning of the text?” (Gear, 2006, p.9). After years of study, he and his research team determined that proficient readers were metacognitive, that is, aware of their thinking, and that they used common strategies to
make meaning from text. Later, Gear (2006) focused on five of these strategies and popularized them by translating them into suggestions for reading instruction in primary classrooms.

In 1978-79, Durkin (1994) conducted extensive observations of reading instruction in intermediate classes. In two different studies, she examined comprehension instruction both in the classroom and as recommended in teacher manuals. She commented that:

almost no comprehension instruction was found. The attention that did go to comprehension focused on assessment, which was carried on through teacher questions (p. 481).

Durkin noted that reading comprehension instruction consisted primarily of asking comprehension questions. She determined that comprehension questions were more of an evaluative than an instructional exercise and concluded that little direct instruction of reading comprehension was taking place in classrooms at that time. According to Fielding and Pearson (1994), researchers responded to Durkin’s findings and “much research in the 1980s was devoted to discovering how to teach comprehension strategies directly” (p. 4). One model that was widely researched was called “explicit instruction, also referred to as the gradual release of responsibility model” (Pearson, 2009, p.17). Explicit instruction had four phases. These included teacher modelling and explanation, guided practice, independent practice with feedback, and application of the strategy.

In what Fielding and Pearson (1994) called “one of the biggest research stories of the time period” (p. 5), it was discovered that comprehension strategies could be taught successfully using direct instruction and were especially beneficial for students with poor comprehension. This research helped to clarify not only what should be taught but how to teach it. Although the research was conducted in the 1980s, it continues to be relevant and influential today. In their recent books about reading comprehension strategies, Gear (2006),
Keene and Zimmerman (2007), and Harvey and Goudvis (2000) continued to recommend and demonstrate the explicit instruction model of teaching comprehension strategies.

Fielding and Pearson’s research (as cited in Gear, 2006) pointed “to comprehension as a separate aspect of reading” (p. 11). Keene and Zimmerman (2007) referred frequently to students who read fluently but without understanding. Inversely, students who had difficulty decoding often demonstrated ability to comprehend and discuss texts that were read to them (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). However, this is not to undermine the importance of decoding. Harvey and Goudvis (2000), inspired by the works of Pearson and his colleagues, stated that “reading demands a two-pronged attack. It involves cracking the alphabetic code to determine the words and thinking about those words to construct meaning” (p. 5).

Gear (2006), commented that “if these [comprehension] strategies are what research has found to be what good readers do to understand text, then this is what we need to be teaching our not-so-good readers to do” (p. 10). However, there are those who do not agree with this statement. Smith (2006) stated that teaching poor readers the skills demonstrated by proficient readers does not work. According to Smith, the problem is that “this overlooks how or why experts acquired their skills in the first place and ends up getting most things backwards” (p. 141). Although Smith referred to phonological awareness, Kintsch (2004) believed that this disconnect is also true for teaching comprehension strategies:

Comprehension for [proficient readers] is fluent, automatic, and easy. Well-established knowledge structures and skills are the basis for this automaticity. The goal of instruction is to help students become such expert readers. Paradoxically, however, comprehension instruction requires students to behave in very different ways than experienced readers. Because for student readers comprehension is not the automatic, fluent process that it is for mature readers, students need to engage in active problem solving, knowledge construction, self explanation, and monitoring—activities very different from the automatic, fluent comprehension of experts. (p. 1323)
Kintsch did not say that we should not teach comprehension strategies but rather that more research needs to be done, not only on the reading strategies that proficient readers use, but to “determine the training sequence that leads to this expert performance” (p. 1323).

Researchers, such as Baker and Beal (2009), however, have examined a variety of studies that have “provided solid evidence that the metacognitive knowledge and comprehension monitoring of good and poor readers alike could be enhanced through direct instruction” (p. 377). These studies privileged approaches that focused on strategies to repair and monitor comprehension.

The ultimate goal of teaching reading comprehension strategies is to enable students to monitor their comprehension and choose the correct strategy to repair comprehension when it is lost. This view is supported by Pearson (2009) in the guidelines for teaching comprehension that he has developed based on research. Although the focus of my design of parallel learning for this study was on making connections, which could help to repair comprehension, strategies for monitoring and choosing appropriate strategies was an important part of my literacy program.

**Formative Assessment**

The efficacy of formative assessment for increasing student achievement has been well established. Black and Wiliam (1997) were commissioned to research the effectiveness of formative assessment for raising student performance. They compiled data from all of the studies they could find since 1988 that met with their standards of research rigour and addressed aspects of formative assessment such as the use of learning intentions, self evaluation, and feedback. After a year of research, Black and Wiliam concluded that
“formative assessment strategies do indeed raise standards of attainment, with a greater effect for children of lower ability” (Clarke, 2001, p. 3).

In his introduction to the book, Ahead of the Curve, Douglas Reeves (2007) pointed out that the contributors to the book, whom he calls “an illustrious group of thinkers, researchers, teachers, and writers” (p.9), do not agree with each other on all aspects of formative assessment although all are committed to research-based assessment methods. Davies (2007) discussed the four cornerstones of assessment which included co-constructing criteria, self-evaluation based on the criteria, descriptive feedback, and goal setting. Stiggins (2007) emphasized student-friendly learning targets (or learning intentions), using samples of students’ work as models, descriptive feedback, and use of assessment results to inform teaching practice. Guskey (2007) asserted that assessments must be used as sources of information for teachers and students and should be followed by corrective instruction, and that students must have another chance to succeed. Clarke (2001) outlined learning intentions, self-evaluation, feedback, target-setting, and celebrating success as the critical elements of formative assessment. In this admittedly small cross-section of experts, there are different views about the key elements of formative assessment. The common theme, however, is that assessment information about student learning can be used by teachers and students themselves to increase student learning.

However, the experts cited above also have differing approaches as to whether it is the student or the teacher who decides what needs to be learned next. Wiliam (2007) proposed that the “big idea of formative assessment is that evidence about student learning is used to adjust instruction to better meet student needs” (p. 191). Davies (2007) took a different approach to formative assessment. She maintained that “teachers need to go further and involve students as partners in the classroom assessment process” (2007, p. 38).
This apparent divergence in approaches concerned and confused me until I read the work of Popham (2008), who distinguished between the two models. He referred to the process of teachers using formative assessment to plan further instruction as Level 1 assessment. Students using self-assessment to make decisions regarding their own learning are participating in what Popham called Level 2 assessments. Popham did not use the numbers to assign a value but to distinguish between the two types of assessment. He argued that effective teachers should use both Level 1 and Level 2 types of formative assessments.

Earl (2003) also discussed these different approaches to formative assessment. However, she called them “assessment for learning (p. 23)” and “assessment as learning (p. 24)”. According to Earl, teachers use assessment for learning to “craft assessment tasks to open a window on what students know and can do already and use the insights that come from the process to design the next steps in instruction” (p. 24). Assessment as learning, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the student in taking charge of their own learning. Whereas Popham did not assign a value to what he refers to as Level 1 and Level 2 assessments, Earl (2003) was confident that assessment as learning (or Popham’s Level 2) is “the ultimate goal where students are their own best assessors” (p. 25). However, for this study I began by encouraging parents to use the Level 1 type of assessment, or assessment for learning, to monitor their children’s progress.

Both Davies (2007) and Earl (2003) discussed the role of parents in formative assessment. Davies (2007) emphasized the role of parents in increasing the amount of formative assessment available to students. Earl, however, had a much broader view of the role of parents in formative assessment. According to Earl, formative assessment is a means of informing parents about their children’s progress and, thereby, allowing them to make informed decisions about how to help them. She viewed formative assessment as “a
fundamental power shift” (p. 45). According to Earl, “assessment as learning requires the involvement of both students and parents. Earl insists that “it is not a private activity for teachers . . . [i]t is a personal, iterative, and evolving conversation in which teachers are assessing and describing performance in ways that are useful to others, who will make their own decisions about what to do next” (p. 45). However, Earl did not explicitly suggest that parents participate in formative assessment, as I have done in my design of parallel learning. Instead she recommended that formative assessments conducted by the teacher be communicated to parents.

Formative assessment is thought to improve student performance in two ways. First, it drives the decisions of the teacher about what to teach and secondly, it informs students and their parents about student progress and how to improve at a point in time when improvement is still possible. Furthermore, formative assessment redistributes the power and responsibility for learning, once the sole domain of the teacher, to the students and parents. The underlying assumption is that informing students of their progress will empower them to take control of their learning and motivate them to strive for higher levels of achievement.

Concluding Thoughts

The research literature reveals parent involvement and formative assessment as widely accepted activities for improving student achievement. The same cannot be said for the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. There is an array of conflicting views on the effectiveness of teaching the comprehension strategies used naturally by proficient readers to students who have not acquired the strategies naturally. Kintsch (2004) agreed that good readers use comprehension strategies but argued that teaching these strategies to poor readers may not improve their fluency and that more research is required. Other researchers such as Baker and Beal (2009) have argued that there are studies that demonstrate that some
programs for teaching comprehension strategies have been successful. However, while waiting for the experts to agree, as a classroom teacher, I plan to include the teaching of comprehension strategies in my reading program. In my experience, teaching comprehension strategies such as making connections presents literature to students in an interesting and motivating way and I believe that, for this reason alone, they are worth teaching.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHOD

This study was an action-based professional inquiry (Brown & Cherkowski, 2011), informed by the action and reflection cycle of action research (O'Brien, 1998) and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Its purpose was to design and implement a parallel learning strategy to improve parent participation that could increase student learning. The findings of this inquiry may be informative for other teachers, including French Immersion teachers, who wish to improve parent participation, as well as to policy-makers and researchers interested in classroom implementation of promising practices.

The focus of this action-based professional inquiry was on parent perceptions of their own learning and ability to support their child's learning when I, as a classroom teacher, provided them with support in the form of a parallel learning program. I monitored student achievement with the target strategy to triangulate data and gain understanding about whether increased parent understanding and confidence would have potential to improve student performance in this area. I provided parents support in the form of teaching them about connecting to literature, introducing activities for parents and their children to do together, and providing ways for them to give their children formative assessment with reference to the BC Performance Standards (2009) (see Appendix E). The literature review for this study provided a rationale for synthesizing research on parent participation, formative assessment, and reading comprehension in the design of a parallel learning program. In this application to classroom practice, parents are invited to coach their children in making connections as they read at home together. In this chapter, I have outlined procedures for data collection and analysis, followed by a rationale for my research method.
Research Procedures

In this section, I have outlined the structure of the inquiry actions as they took place in the classroom. This includes the procedures for giving, receiving, and keeping track of assignments, the time-line in which the classroom action occurred, and the procedures for collecting and analysing data.

This action-based inquiry project took place over a period of two months in the 2011–2012 school year. The participants were the 21 students in my class and their parents. All students in my class were assigned home reading assignments and all parents received weekly letters about the strategy I would be teaching and how to help their child with it. However, only data from parents who signed an informed consent form were used for the project.

The project included six lessons for parents. Each lesson was composed of an explanation of the concept to be learned, an activity for the parents and students to do together, and a student-friendly version of the Performance Standards for Reading (2009) to be completed. The lessons and activities were similar to those outlined for teachers in Reading Power (Gear, 2006). Each home lesson was also taught by me in the classroom.

The lessons for parents were in the form of weekly letters to parents distributed on Mondays. Parents then had the rest of the week to do the related activities with their child. The following lessons are presented in the order they were introduced to parents:

Week One: Introducing connections (to parents) and modelling connections
Week Two: Guiding your child’s practice through sharing connections
Week Three: Quick and deep thinking connections
Week Four: Classifying connections to the self, another text, or to the world
Week Five: Expanding your child’s connections through writing
Week Six: Help your child to prepare an oral presentation about a “special connect book” (Gear, 2006, p. 40)

Week Seven: Parents were invited into the classroom to read to their child and to enjoy a performance by the students (giving back to participants).

Each lesson, except for week three, included a student-friendly version of the Performance Standards for Reading for parents to fill out. For week three, the students and parents classified connections into quick and deep thinking categories. I thought that this was a form of assessment in itself so I did not include a formative assessment portion for that assignment. The completed assignments and assessments were to be returned to school on or before Friday.

I organized bins of books written in English from which students chose their home reading books. From Monday to Thursday, students chose a book from the book bins for a parent to read to them. They wrote the titles of their books in their student planners and parents were asked to sign the planners to show that they had read the book to their child. I checked the student planners each day and kept track of homework completion using a chart. Students and parents also had an assignment to complete together that was distributed on Monday and due on Friday. I also kept track of which students had completed the assignments on time and reminded students who had not handed in their assignments that they were due. These procedures were similar to those used in my classroom for home reading over the last ten years. Therefore, they required only a few minor changes to the usual daily routine in my classroom and were not difficult to implement.

Data Collection and Analysis

I analyzed data from the study using the research questions as an organizing framework, paying particular attention to the effect of the parallel learning strategy for
parents and students. A source of data for this study was the classroom assessments of students' ability to make connections according to the BC Performance Standards for Reading (2009), which I conducted before and after the parallel learning program. I also collected data from the Parent Satisfaction Surveys (Appendix B), and Parent Interviews (Appendix C). Using the data from the before and after assessments, I created a bar graph showing gains in student achievement. I also made a bar graph using data from the parent-student assignments to demonstrate parent-participation in both the connecting and formative assessment portions of the assignments. I analyzed data from the Parent Satisfaction Surveys by categorizing their responses as positive, negative, or non-committal. I used this categorization to create a graph comparing the responses to each question.

To gain a more in-depth perspective on information gained from the surveys and to represent different viewpoints of the parallel learning program, I used purposeful selection (Creswell, 2007) to choose four parents to ask for a one-on-one interview: two who found the project helpful, and two who did not. The interviews were conducted in my classroom and were recorded. I transcribed the recorded interviews and gave the parents a copy to read and sign attesting that the written copy represented accurately what was said during the interview. The parent interviews gave me a detailed perspective of parents' willingness and ability to participate as both learners and educators, their perceptions of their own learning, and changes in their confidence in their ability to support their child's learning. I analyzed the data from the interviews by highlighting key words or phrases and categorizing them as to themes.

**Rationale for the Research Method**

In this section, I explain why professional inquiry, informed by action research cycles and traditions of reflective practice, was a suitable method for the question I investigated.
In reflective practice, as defined by Schön, the practitioner allows him or herself to reflect on a problem that cannot be solved using "established theory and technique" (1982, p. 68). Schön writes that "the [reflective] practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation he finds uncertain or unique" (p. 8).

According to Schön, the practitioner "reflects on the phenomena before him and on the prior understandings that have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation" (1983, p.68). Schön described reflective practice as:

stepping into a problematic situation, to impose a frame [question] on it, to follow the implications of the discipline thus established, and yet to remain open to the situation's back-talk. Reflecting on the surprising consequences of his efforts to shape the situation in conformity with his initially chosen frame, the inquirer frames new questions with new ends in view. (p. 269)

It is worth noting that Schon's work remains relevant to teachers' professional learning today. For example, framing a new question in light of the consequences of the last one is similar to the "spiral of inquiry" referred to by Halbert, Kaser, and Koehn (2011, p. 10) for teacher learning based on action research cycles.

Indeed, Smith (2007) stated that the British tradition of action research is "very close to the notion of reflective practice as coined by Donald Schön" (p. 1). As with reflective practice, the structure of action research is cyclical. Each cycle has the steps of "plan, action, observe, and reflect" (O'Brien, 1998, p.4). Brown and Cherkowski (2011) referred to the traditional phases of inquiry in action research as the "plan, do, reflect, and revise cycle" (p. 68) and elaborated this basic cycle to wholeness, awareness, meaning, and commitment for school improvement through professional inquiry. Kurt Lewin (as cited in Smith, 2007) is credited with coining the term action research and defining it as a cyclical process beginning with an idea and following with research, planning, acting, evaluating,
making a new plan and repeating the cycle. When the reflective steps lead to a new question, the cycle of action and reflection begins anew, and becomes a “spiral of inquiry” (Halbert, et al., 2011, p. 7) that results in deepening understanding and sustainable changes in teaching practices.

As with reflective practice, action research is framed around a problem and supporting question that evolves as the practitioner’s understanding of the problem changes. The researchers are ordinary professionals who have identified a problem in their practice they wish to address. Both reflective practice and action research work toward “the enhancement of direct practice” (Smith, p. 1). Brown and Cherkowski (2011) emphasized that action-based professional inquiry for educators grows out of an authentic problem of practice and brings a sense of ownership of learning to inquirers who are professional educators. Halbert, et al. (2011) as well as Brown and Cherkowski (2011) stressed the potential for educators who engage in inquiry for themselves to be more receptive to current inquiry-based learning for their students.

The American tradition of action research often involves social change, which suggests that the researchers have an advocacy/participatory “inquiry paradigm” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21) involving advocacy for marginalized groups in society. However, as with reflective practice, action research can also be used to promote change in the professional workplace. According to Smith (2007), “the use of action research to deepen and develop classroom practice has grown into a strong tradition of practice” (p. 4).

Efforts to improve teaching in order to improve life’s opportunities for all children can be described as the “intense moral purpose” that characterizes schools concerned with learning more than with socio-economic sorting (Kaser & Halbert, 2009). Brown and Cherkowski (2011) believe that educators’ moral purpose in professional inquiry is
analogous to the participatory and emancipatory traditions of action research. Further, teachers themselves can be thought of as emancipated when they frame problems and implement solutions as self-directed professionals rather than as technicians merely implementing the recommendations of policy makers and other experts.

The American tradition of action research also differs from the construct of reflective practice in that it involves rigorous data collection and analysis. Rigorous data collection and analysis is systematic (Smith, 2007,). Creswell (2007) explained that in rigorous data collection procedures, “the researcher collects multiple forms of data, adequately summarizes—perhaps in tabled form—the forms of data and detail about them, and spends adequate time in the field” (p. 45). I believe this inquiry project follows the American tradition of action research in its approach to data collection. However, as professional inquiry, when a study is conducted by a classroom teacher rather than an outside researcher, the context is familiar and “time in the field” is not an issue.

Not all action researchers agree on the exact form that action research should take. According to Smith (2007), some action research proponents insist that action research must be collaborative to be recognized as being action research. Smith, however, questions the necessity of collaboration but admits that it reflects the “commitments and orientations of those involved in action research” (p. 5). Halbert et al. (2011) believe that “a deep focus on inquiry is most effectively realized through the active participation of teachers in a nested collaborative inquiry community” (p. 3).

Brown and Cherkowski (2011) consciously use the term professional inquiry to avoid some of the disputes in definition that have plagued action research and to describe a research method that has become so contextualized in the education profession that it is distinct from interdisciplinary action research. In their view, professional inquiry can be conducted alone
or with others. The benefits of dialogue with colleagues enrich a study but a similar dialogue can occur as the inquirer reflects on the literature and on the results of classroom or school-based actions. A key component of professional inquiry is the right and responsibility of educators to participate in knowledge construction for themselves and their colleagues.

**Informing Traditions for this Professional Inquiry**

I believe that this inquiry project is consistent with the principles of action-research as described by O'Brien (1998) and Smith (2007) and reflective practice as described by Schön (1982). In the traditions of reflective practice, I was surprised and puzzled by an authentic and problematic situation in my classroom. I posed a question that provided structure for investigating a research-supported potential solution to the problem and thereby improve my practice and student learning. In the American tradition of action research, I collected data from a variety of sources and analyzed it to make data-informed decisions about how to improve my classroom practice in light of the inquiry results. Finally, one action led to another and still another in a spiral of inquiry as described by both Smith (2007,) and O'Brien (1998).

My first inquiry project developed from the question of whether including parents in the formative assessment process would inform parents and increase student learning. My reflections during the course of that inquiry led to the present inquiry with parent involvement as the principal focus. While completing the project, I was puzzled by the lack of reading progress in a group of low-achieving students. I wondered if involving parents by having them teach the English version of *Spelling Through Phonics* (McCracken and McCracken, 1982) at home while I taught a French version at school would help increase student progress in reading. Conducting professional inquiry as systematic and ethical research, I have contacted parents to ask for their consent, collected student data, imposed a
time-line, and have developed a series of lessons for parents to do at home with their child. Furthermore, my project involved teacher, students, and parents in a way that was designed to do no harm and to benefit all parties, particularly students. I have shared and discussed my inquiry process, observations, and interpretations with my university supervisor, other educators in my Masters’ cohort, and my principal and colleagues. I will report my findings in a public document that is accessible in a university library and possibly in professional presentations and a published, peer-reviewed journal.

Chapter Summary

In chapter three, I outlined my data collection and analysis procedures and the steps I took to ensure that the study was conducted ethically. I also provided a rationale for my professional inquiry method, particularly by tracing the roots of this method in action research and reflective practice. As a qualitative method, professional inquiry provides rich and contextualized data and findings that are trustworthy and informative but not generalizable. Findings from this project will inform my own future practice in other areas of the curriculum with parents as learners and educators being the recurring theme. Perhaps the story of this study will inspire other educators to conduct their own inquiries into parallel learning and expand its design and application, consistent with Fullan’s (2007) belief that it is with parents that “the most powerful instrument for improvement resides” (p. 18).
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Because this inquiry is about parent involvement, it is important to demonstrate that parent involvement has occurred. Therefore, Chapter two begins by examining the degree of parent involvement in the project. Figures one and two illustrate the number of home assignments and formative assessments completed. Figures three and four represent data from the Parent Satisfaction Survey and address the central question of the project: How will a parallel learning program affect parents' understanding of what children are learning and their confidence to support that learning to increase student achievement? Qualitative data from Question three examines parent suggestions for improving the project. Also included in this chapter are the qualitative data from the parent interviews.

Chapter four ends with data showing student achievement before and after the parallel learning project. This aspect of data collection is important because a current theme in school improvement, as Kaser and Halbert (2009) have articulated, defines successful inquiry as having “a clear focus on improving student learning” (p. 146). Although the increases in student achievement evident in Figure ten are encouraging, this data does not demonstrate conclusively that parent participation was the cause of the increases. However, the student achievement data is important because, conversely, lack of student progress would indicate that parent involvement does not result in increasing student achievement.
Figure 1. Number of assignments completed each week.

Figure one demonstrates high parent participation in the parallel learning project. It is possible that the fluctuations in parent involvement on Week three and Week six were not due to lack of interest on the part of parents but were a result of the unfortunate timing of the project. Week three was a three day week due to a statutory holiday and a professional day. Week six was the second to last week before the Christmas Break. Because of my need to complete the data collection before the Christmas Break, however, I continued to give students and parents assignments at a time when I would not normally have done so. Nevertheless, the data exhibits a high level of parent participation.
Figure 2. Assignments completed compared to assessments completed.

Figure two compares the percentage of assignments completed to the percentage of assessments completed each week. As previously mentioned, there was no formative assessment data for Assignment three. For Assignment one, I decided to have parents use the Performance Standards for Grade one, two, or three depending on the child’s grade. As evident from the graph, many parents did not participate in formative assessment for the first assignment. I decided to make it easier for parents by simplifying the connections portion of the Performance Standards to criteria with check boxes. The data shows that parent participation increased after the modifications, peaked on week four, and decreased again for the last two assignments, possibly due to the busy holiday season. The low number of assessments done for week six parallels the low number of assignments handed in for the same period.

Figure two contrasts high parent participation in the assignments with much lower participation in formative assessment. During the parent interviews, one parent commented that the formative assessment criteria were “kind of vague”. Her perception may have been
due to the lack of clear distinctions between the levels of achievement in the formative assessment criteria. Although I adapted the criteria from the Performance Standards, they were concerned only with the level of support required by the student to make connections and with the number of connections the students could make. Another parent got tired of checking “no connection” each time and still another did not understand what to do. The difficulty parents were facing may have been that although the task for parents was clear for assignments, it was not as clear for assessments. It is reasonable to assume that all of these reasons contributed to the low participation of parents in formative assessment when compared to the high number of assignments completed.

![Figure 3. Responses to parent satisfaction survey.](image)

Although, the Parent Satisfaction Survey (Appendix B) was designed to be answered in complete sentences and not with a yes, no, or maybe response, some parents did respond briefly. For those who responded in sentence form, I was able to determine whether the response was positive, negative or non-committal. One parent said, “I found it was a really rewarding experience.” Obviously this response counted as a ‘yes’. “Not especially”
counted as a ‘no’. “I would consider it” was, of course, non-committal. I am confident that the data obtained in this way is accurate. Question four asked parents if they had ideas for improvement and was not included in the data represented in Figure four.

The fifteen Parent Satisfaction Surveys completed showed a high level of satisfaction with the project. However, it must be noted that six participating parents did not complete the survey. If all parents had done the Parent Satisfaction Survey, the results may have been less positive. Perhaps the reason the remaining parents did not complete the survey is that they were reluctant to share a less than favourable response. Another reason might have been that the surveys were distributed in the last week of school before the Christmas Break and some parents were simply too busy. Other than sending a note home reminding parents to complete the surveys, I made no attempt to collect the remaining surveys, respecting the fact that participation in the project was voluntary. I could have waited until school resumed in January to distribute the Parent Satisfaction Surveys but I thought that it was important to have parents respond to the project while it was still fresh in their minds. However, even if all of the six surveys not handed in expressed a negative view of the project, the majority of responses in the Parent Satisfaction Surveys would still have been positive.

Question Four on the Parent Satisfaction Survey was Do you have any suggestions about how your participation could have been a more rewarding experience? This information was important in an inquiry where the central question involved increasing parent confidence in their ability to support their child’s learning. I have classified the data into the following six categories: no suggestions (positive), no suggestions (negative), prefer other focus, better instructions, reading materials, and other.

Five parents who had a positive view of the project had no suggestions about how to improve it. Two parents who did not have a positive experience also had no ideas about how
to improve the project. Two parents expressed a preference for working with their child on other areas of reading such as phonics and word recognition. Three parents suggested more examples of connections and clearer instructions. Two parents noticed that the ability of their child to make connections depended on having the right book and therefore, these parents would have liked their child to have access to a more controlled selection of reading materials. One parent believed that it would have been beneficial if the project had been longer than six weeks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rewarding (no suggestions)</th>
<th>Not Rewarding (no suggestions)</th>
<th>Prefer other focus</th>
<th>Better instructions</th>
<th>Reading Materials</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>More examples</td>
<td>Help finding right book</td>
<td>Longer than 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Left blank</td>
<td>Word recognition</td>
<td>More examples</td>
<td>Teacher chooses books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left blank</td>
<td></td>
<td>Child not ready to do connections</td>
<td>Clearer instructions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left blank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Left blank</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Responses to question 4 on the Parent Satisfaction Survey*

The data from Question three illustrates that not all parents felt that participation in the project was helpful for them. Some parents who were satisfied provided suggestions about how the project could be improved, including providing more examples, clearer directions, and a better selection of connecting books. Some parents expressed a concern about their child’s ability to sound out or recognize words phonetically. Others wondered if their children were too young and inexperienced to make connections.
Another parent suggestion was to have a more controlled selection of books for students to choose from. One parent suggested that I should select the books. Although this suggestion does not seem practical to me, I could, in time, develop a classroom library with a selection of books that are more conducive for connecting to literature or ask the school librarian to create a connections book box. However, because connections are personal and can be made with any text, depending on personal experience, I believe it is more important to teach students to compare the lives of characters, settings, and situations with their own lives and with other books than to limit their choice of books.

None of the parents in the Satisfaction Survey mentioned formative assessment as either instructional or problematic for them. Perhaps this is because they did not believe that formative assessment was an important part of the assignment or it may have been the unfamiliar connecting strategy was enough to grasp without the added responsibility of assessment. Finally, parents may not have been comfortable with the role of providing assessment and they may not have understood how their feedback could contribute to teaching decisions tailored to their child’s needs and abilities.

In future Reading Power (Gear, 2006) instruction involving parents as teaching partners, I will respond to parents’ suggestions and concerns. I will assure them that students are simultaneously acquiring phonological awareness or word identification skills and comprehension instruction as part of a balanced literacy program. Furthermore, parents need to know that primary students, including kindergarten and Grade one students, are not too young to engage in comprehension instruction. To meet the request for clearer instructions and more examples, I would provide more detailed instructions as well as examples of connections for each lesson to clarify the learning activities.
Parent Interviews

For the parent interviews, I chose two parents who had a positive experience working with their children with parallel learning and two who did not, based solely on their survey responses. After transcribing the interviews, I highlighted key words and phrases and sorted them into categories. The following figures represent the words of Mrs. A and Mrs. B, who had positive experiences and Mrs. X. and Mr. Y. who did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent involvement</th>
<th>Parent learning</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Negatives:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change in</strong></td>
<td>Effect of relating story</td>
<td>More trained</td>
<td><strong>Student learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenced by Book called Outliers</td>
<td>Able to get him to understand and identify things has in common with</td>
<td>Understand and identify thing he has in common with</td>
<td>A bit of difficulty in making the connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project was helpful</td>
<td>Talked about lots of other things that were going on as well</td>
<td>Helped his memory</td>
<td>Right level of assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More confident!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Couldn't see connection between homework and school work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking more responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding of story</td>
<td>Think child has missed some steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More (learning) coming from the home and the time that we do</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helps make the connections</td>
<td>Don't know if he can sound out letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time: before project</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't know steps of reading and what should come first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy, never made time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading books he could actually read (would be better)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time: after project</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Project design</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have made more time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sometimes directions unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less stressed time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Didn’t understand expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading more relaxed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Didn’t know if doing the right thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time that we’re spending with them is helping them to become better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband didn’t understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: Interview with Mrs. A.*
Mrs. A. has become more involved in her child's education and has gained confidence in helping her child make connections. She recognized progress in her child's ability to comprehend the stories they read together. Nevertheless, Mrs. A. had concerns about the comprehension focus of the parallel learning program. She wondered if it would be better to focus on phonics or sight words because her child was only in Grade one and was not yet reading. She also suggested that clearer directions for doing the assignments would have been helpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Involvement</th>
<th>Parent Learning</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teaching Reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Her reading grew and her comprehension of stories got a lot better.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Formative assessment kind of vague</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once they go to school, now they have a teacher to teach them things.</td>
<td>Asking her questions about the story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's like fly birdie fly I've done my work.</td>
<td>Have things that relate to different things in life</td>
<td>Very rarely was A. involved to the extent that this encouraged her to be involved</td>
<td>Really depended on book choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And (parent involvement) would only benefit her</td>
<td>Getting her involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It made me realize how much they can grow by having that additional interaction at home.</td>
<td>To actually know the proper things to ask her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helped me feel more confident helping her at home.</td>
<td>Examples of Increased Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading has become a whole new chapter in our daily routine.</td>
<td>Gave me ideas on how to challenge her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the paperwork wasn’t coming home, I might not be doing that with her, just because life’s busy.</td>
<td>I just never thought of doing it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use those tools for so many different things</td>
<td>Taught me that she was quite a bit better of a reader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actually feel like I’m making a difference and not wasting time.</td>
<td>To apply it to everyday life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6: Interview with Mrs. B.*
Of the four parents interviewed, Mrs. B. was the most positive. She felt that the project changed her view of parent involvement and increased her confidence in helping her child, not only with connections but in other aspects of reading as well. She noticed improvements not only in her daughter’s ability to connect but in her general reading and comprehension skills. She would have appreciated less “vague” formative assessment criteria and a better control of reading materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent involvement</th>
<th>Parent learning</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
<th>Helpfulness of project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of</td>
<td>I guess we didn’t ask a lot of questions after we read (before the project)</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Did not help J.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s vital.</td>
<td>One story. She had a connection about me and her dad.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Not help J.’s comprehension.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s very very important (has always thought so).</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Not help level of [parent]confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>I felt bad having to put “no,” “no,” “no.”</td>
<td>It made me feel that I’m not helping you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I’m not putting my “extra” in</td>
<td>Didn’t think it did a whole lot for J.</td>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some nights it was just an extra thing</td>
<td>She’d give me a blank look and say, “no.”</td>
<td>The [phonics] has been very positive. I feel like she’s grasping things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t give continual five nights a week care</td>
<td>For her there was just not a lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in more things than we need to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely busy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Interview with Mrs. X.*
Mrs. X. is the grandmother of a student in my class and she and her husband are this child’s and her brother’s full-time caregivers. Both Mrs. X. and her husband are also involved in many activities outside the home and are very busy. Sometimes her son, the children’s father, takes the children overnight so she worries that she cannot give consistent help with homework.

Mrs. X. did not feel that this project helped her or her granddaughter at all. Because of her schedule and because her son cared for the children some of the time, Mrs. X. was not able to devote time regularly to the project. She felt badly that she had to check “no connections” repeatedly for the formative assessment part of the assignments. Mrs. X. also felt badly because she did not think she was helping me with my project. Furthermore, her granddaughter was only able to make a connection once. However, Mrs. X. indicated that she was pleased to be involved in the phonics program that became the focus of parent involvement after the completion of the connections unit.

Mr. Y’s son was my non-speaking student. Mr. Y. realized that the expectations for parent involvement have changed from when he was a student and said that his view of parent involvement had changed during the project. The project helped him to realize that his son was not meeting expectations in some areas. Mr. Y. has two jobs. One of the jobs was in a restaurant owned by his family and his son often went there after school. When there were no customers, Mr. Y. and his son would work together on the connections assignments. Unfortunately, his son was not able to make many connections. Mr. Y. expressed a preference for helping his son with phonics or math.
Analysis of Parent Interviews

Missing in the other data but contributed in the parent interviews is the context of parent involvement. The interviews demonstrated that parent involvement is intimately connected to the other aspects of parents’ and children’s lives. The interviews represented a very small sample of parents, yet illustrated the difficult and complicated lives of many families. They provided important insights about why it is sometimes difficult for parents to participate as the teacher thinks they should.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Involvement</th>
<th>Parent Learning</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes in</strong></td>
<td>Made me realize what I can’t teach him</td>
<td>He has no connections</td>
<td>Not suitable for T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got more involved in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had more time (in</td>
<td>He wasn’t meeting expectations</td>
<td>Has no attention to</td>
<td>Too young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>areas T. wasn’t doing</td>
<td></td>
<td>things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself doing a</td>
<td>Other things I noticed he wasn’t doing well</td>
<td>Doesn’t recall what he did last week</td>
<td>For T.’s case, it might be too hard for him to comprehend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lot more than my</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see more how in a</td>
<td>I think it’s good to get the kids more connected to the story of experiences.</td>
<td>I’ll try to explain to him, “What does it remind you of?” and he goes blank.</td>
<td>Preference for other topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain area I could do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more as a parent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes more of my</td>
<td></td>
<td>No connection, no</td>
<td>I can help him more in math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td></td>
<td>connection at all.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do two jobs so don’t</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Phonics] is faster. It’s better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have free time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I bring his homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(to work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

*Figure 8. Interview with Mr. Y.*

As mentioned previously, I chose to interview two parents who had positive experiences participating in the project and two whose experiences were less than positive.
The choice of interviewees was based solely on the survey responses. I made no effort to represent or analyse differences between parents of students in different grade levels. Coincidentally, all of the parents interviewed had a child in Grade one. Although it did not occur to me at the time, I am now certain that this made a difference in their satisfaction with the project. Mrs. B., whose daughter was already reading well above grade level at the beginning of the project, was not concerned that her child was missing any other type of reading instruction. Mrs. X. and Mrs. A, whose granddaughter and son (respectively) could not yet read, were worried about their children’s progress in reading and wondering if Grade one students should concentrate on phonics and sight words before focusing on comprehension. Mr. Y., whose son could not make any connections, was concerned that he was too young for this type of learning activity. This insight has helped me realize that parents may need more basic information about how children learn to read. Parent education preceding this inquiry, therefore, should have touched on all aspects of a balanced literacy program.

In all of the interviews, concern for the child’s education was a persistent theme and parents made an effort to participate as well as they could. Three out of four of the parents interviewed expressed major difficulties finding time to participate. All of the parents, except Mrs. B., expressed difficulty in finding time to work with their children. Although Mrs. B. had a full-time job and a younger child to care for, she did not mention being busy as a factor preventing her from finding time to work with her child. One interviewee was the full-time care giver for her granddaughter. Her complicated life made it difficult for her to contribute to her granddaughter’s education on a consistent basis. Mr. Y., who worked two jobs and had no time for himself, still managed to find to help his son during slow periods at work. I think that Mrs. A. described best what it takes for most parents to find time to be
involved in their children's education. She explained that even though they did not have time, they made time by changing their priorities.

I found it interesting to consider differences in how parents perceived the study and their role in it. Mrs. X. was the only interviewee who did not say that she changed her attitude toward parent participation through the project. She already felt that parent participation was extremely important. Although Mrs. X. believed she did not learn anything by participating in the study, she did mention that, before the study, she did not "ask a lot of questions after reading". This suggested to me that through participation in the project, she did learn one way to extend her granddaughter's learning during story time. This makes me wonder if some parents may be unaware of their learning when participating in a study like this one.

Through the study, Mr. Y. realized that he needed to take a greater role in his son's education. Mr. Y. had an important learning experience through his involvement but it was not what I was expecting or hoping parents would learn. He learned that his son was not meeting learning expectations in some areas and that he was not able to help him. This suggests that, from participating in the project, Mr. Y. became more aware of what the expectations for reading were and that his son was not meeting these expectations. Contrary to my intentions, Mr. Y's efforts to participate in the project contributed to his belief that he could not help his son meet expectations. Not surprisingly, Mr. Y's confidence was not increased by his participation in the inquiry project.

Mrs. A. has significantly changed her view of parent participation as a result of participating in the project and of reading a book called *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Gladwell, 2008), which emphasized the value of practice. She and her husband have now made their children's education a priority amongst their other commitments. From the
project, she learned about using comprehension strategies such as making connections to improve her son’s comprehension and she now feels more confidence in her ability to do so.

Mrs. B. has also changed her idea about the importance of parent involvement. Whereas before she thought that education was the sole responsibility of the schools, she now realizes that parents have an important role to play. Mrs. B’s learning went beyond simply helping her daughter make connections. She saw ways to apply her learning to everyday life, challenge her daughter, and use the tools, or strategies, “for so many different things”. These interviews show a range of ways that parents responded to the project. Mrs. X did not believe that she had changed her attitude towards parent involvement at all, Mrs. A. and Mr. Y realized they needed to take a more active role, and Mrs. B seemed to be transformed by the experience.

Before the interviews I knew very little about the family lives of my students. Through the interviews, I developed a better understanding of the difficulties that these parents faced. Particularly in the cases of Mrs. X and Mr. Y, I now understand why their children’s homework was not completed as consistently as I would have liked. For example, now I know that when Mrs. X’s grand-daughter has not completed her homework, it could be because she spent the night with her father. When Mr. Y’s son has not done his homework, it could be because his father worked two jobs the day before. An unexpected result of the study concerning my own learning, therefore, is that I now believe that it is important for teachers to have more knowledge of the family background of their students.

Through analyzing the interview data, I have also come to believe that the reading level of the child was a factor affecting the satisfaction of the parent with the project. Parents of non-reading or low students wanted to focus more on phonics whereas parents of reading students were happy to focus on comprehension. Parents of non-reading students or students
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experiencing difficulty reading needed more information about how children learn to read so that they do not focus exclusively on phonics as a method of teaching reading.

Figure 9. Student achievement before and after the study.

Although 21 students participated in the inquiry, only nineteen are represented in Figure nine. This is because no data was collected from my non-speaking student and data for one other student was unavailable. Looking at Figure ten, the most dramatic difference in achievement was a shift between a high number of students not yet meeting expectations in September to a high number of students exceeding expectations in December. In September, eight students were not yet meeting expectations and there were no students exceeding expectations. By December, there were no students who were not yet meeting expectations and seven were exceeding expectations. There was little change between the number of students minimally and fully meeting expectations between September and December.

I have had training and experience working with the BC Performance Standards across the curriculum, as a framework for assessing students and making teaching decisions. However, the assessments for this study provided me with some challenges. Until this
inquiry, I had not closely examined the portion of the Performance Standards pertaining to connections. Now that I have, I found them to be confusing and less than helpful. The criteria in the Performance Standards distinguishes between the levels achievement by the amount of support the student requires to make a connection but offers little guidance concerning the quality of the connections. For example, the relevant section of the BC Performance Standards for Reading (2009) distinguishes between connections that are simple, concrete, direct, and obvious but does not explain exactly how connections described this way differ from each other. They do give some examples. A Grade three student who is fully meeting in the area of connections can make "several personal connections that are direct, concrete, and obvious (e.g., can identify ways a character is the same and different from self)" (BC Performance Standards: Reading, 2009, p. 77). However, I do not believe that this criterion distinguishes between "quick connections" that do not deepen comprehension and "deep-thinking" connections that do. To add to my difficulties, these examples do not correspond to the learning or the language that took place in the Reading Power (Gear, 2006) lessons.

However, the introduction to the Performance Standards also states that they "may be adapted as needed" (BC Performance Standards: Reading, 2009, p. 3). Therefore, for this project, I considered not only the amount of support the student required and the number of connections a student was able to make as suggested by the Performance Standards, but also the details that contributed to the relevance of connections, the level of abstraction demonstrated in connections, and the types of connections made, including text to self, text to text, and text to world. These are the concepts the students learned and practiced in the Reading Power unit. I checked my assessment of what the students were learning using the Performance Standards and the criteria I drew from Gear (2006), to improve the consistency
and accuracy for reflecting student learning. Nevertheless, I recognized that using the Performance Standards as an assessment tool is somewhat subjective. Therefore, the data that illustrates increases in student achievement may reflect, to some degree, my desire for students to improve their performance. One way that this potential source of bias could be reduced in a subsequent inquiry is to invite other teachers to collaborate on the assessment of each student's connections.

Figure ten demonstrates noteworthy changes in achievement in making connections between September and December, as determined by me with reference to the BC Performance Standards pertaining to the connecting strategy. Unfortunately, the positive results of this short-term project cannot demonstrate how much, if any, of this improvement can be credited to parent involvement. Therefore, I did not want to use student achievement as my only indicator of the success of my design and implementation of parallel learning. Although I believe that student achievement is the ultimate goal of parent participation, I chose to focus my inquiry on ascertaining whether parents were engaged in parallel learning and whether they became more knowledgeable and confident as a result. I expected that a positive change in student achievement data could result from increases in parent knowledge and confidence. Alternatively, a lack of improvement combined with an increase in parent understanding and confidence could mean that the innovation required further refinement through inquiry, or perhaps more time, for improvements for parents to impact student achievement substantially.

Chapter Summary

Data concerning parent involvement displayed good parent-student completion of assignments. Results for Weeks three and six, where the completion rate was lower, can be reasonably explained by factors not related to parent willingness to participate. Participation
in formative assessment, however, was much lower. Figure Three answers the central questions of the project with a resounding “Yes!” Even if the six surveys not completed were negative, the majority of parents still would have felt that participating in the project changed their understanding of how children develop reading comprehension, improved their understanding of concepts their children were learning at school, felt more confident in their ability to help with their child’s reading comprehension, and would like to participate in a similar project in the future.

The comments from Question Four on the Parent Satisfaction Survey offered some concrete suggestions that could be implemented to improve parent satisfaction. Data from parent interviews is represented in Figures Six to Nine and consists of the key words and phrases of two parents who had a positive experience with the project and two whose experience was less than positive. This data provides the inquiry with contrasting perspectives and tells the reader, in the parents’ own words, about their personal experience working with their child on the project assignments.

As a result of conducting these interviews, I gained information about some of my families that will help me to be more understanding of how home life sometimes conflicts with school life in spite of the best intentions of the parents. I discovered that parents’ willingness to participate depended somewhat on whether they felt the project was meeting their child’s needs. I realised that parents need to be better informed about how students learn to read and particularly about the importance of a balanced reading program.

Data from Figure 9 demonstrates significant improvement in student achievement. Unfortunately, this data alone cannot tell us how much of the progress, if any, can be attributed to parent involvement.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, I provide a summary of the project, reflections about my own learning, suggestions for two related studies, and possible contributions of the inquiry.

Summary of the Project

The central question of this project was: How will a parallel learning program affect parents’ understanding of what children are learning and their confidence to support that learning to increase student achievement. My interpretation of the data I collected was that the parallel learning project helped a majority of parents improve their understanding and confidence. This interpretation was supported by student achievement data that showed that nearly all students achieved the outcome, which I believe may have occurred as a result of the combined focus of parents and teacher.

This kind of classroom study is not methodologically designed to prove that the parallel learning program was the cause of students’ improved achievement. However, the professional inquiry method I have used does make my professional judgments and decision-making explicit so that others can analyze my experience and also learn from it – perhaps not the same lessons that I have learned. As Brown and Cherkowski (2011) have described it, action-based professional inquiry often brings lasting changes in teachers’ beliefs and practices that can be described as commitments. In these terms, my report of this study makes the source and substance of my commitments clear.

As a result of my inquiry, I will be more committed to provide support for parents’ involvement in their children’s learning through parallel learning and other methods such as sharing student assessment with parents. I will also seek understanding of students’ family situation and how it impacts their learning.
Parent involvement is a subject that has interested me for many years as well as being an area in which I wished to improve my knowledge and strategies. Previous to my first project, *Partners in Teaching: Involving Parents in the Assessment Process* (McFarland, 2011), I thought that parent involvement was important for giving students extra practice at home. Parent involvement in my class consisted of home reading and practicing spelling tests. Although these were traditional homework assignments for primary grades, I believed that they were more important for giving parents an opportunity for involvement than for improving student performance. This is especially true in a French Immersion classroom such as mine where most parents do not speak French, and therefore, cannot help their children with reading in French.

I see now that although I was friendly, I did not concern myself with developing relationships of mutual trust with parents. I believed that parents should be informed about curriculum content and instructional methods and participate in helping their children with academic content. I also realized that, in order to teach their children successfully at home, parents needed methods and curriculum instruction. Nevertheless, my efforts towards achieving these goals were inadequate. They consisted of the occasional activity sent home for parents to do with their child. What I needed, but did not know it yet, was a systematic approach to provide parents with methods and curriculum instruction and making parent involvement in academic content a routine component of my teaching practice.

My first inquiry project involved parents by having them assess their child’s reading and writing using criteria. Most parents appreciated the opportunity to learn what the expectations for achievement were and how their child was progressing. When I discovered that even my top Grade three students were not able to make a connection in DART, I
wondered if parent involvement would make a difference. This gave me the opportunity to involve parents in another project but with a different focus.

Using the lesson plans and learning activities from Reading Power (Gear, 2006), I developed a six-week plan to teach lessons on connecting to literature for both students and parents and to have parents help their children form connections as their parents read to them in English at home. I used parent surveys and interviews to assess the effectiveness of the project for increasing parent understanding of what their children were learning and also their confidence in their own ability to help. To look for indications that an increase in understanding and confidence for parents may have had a positive effect on student achievement of the target outcome, I assessed student performance before and after the project using levelled texts and the BC Performance Standards. I also collected data from completed homework assignments, parent satisfaction surveys, and parent interviews.

Ideally, an important source of data would have been the spring DART results. If this had been possible, I would have been interested to know whether students who worked with their parents on parallel learning could finally apply the connecting strategy independently in that situation. However, it was not possible for me to test most of my students using DART for this inquiry because I had only three Grade three students in my multi-level primary class. In addition, the unfortunate timing of a teachers’ labour dispute in BC interfered with the writing of the DART for this school year.

The study was an action-based professional inquiry that involved reflection about a problem (making connections), an action designed to change the outcome (parent learning and teaching), data collection and analysis, and conclusions and commitments based on the results. It followed a previous study with different content but a similar objective: parent involvement. Immediately after completing the “action” section of this parallel learning
study, I embarked on a new inquiry with phonological awareness as the focus for parent involvement. The phenomenon of one inquiry leading to another in a deepening spiral of learning (Halbert et al., 2011) is one of the hallmarks of professional inquiry.

Data produced from this project persuaded me that parents increased their knowledge of curriculum, strategies for learning, and confidence in their ability to help their children at home. Data from the study demonstrated that students progressed in their ability to make connections. However, the methodology of this study is limited in that the data cannot be interpreted as proving that students' progress was due to parent involvement in parallel learning.

Parent involvement in the project was high, although the completion of the formative assessment portion of the project was much lower, which indicates that there are refinements that could be made to the parallel learning program so that parents understand what their children need to learn and are also able to assess how well they are learning it. The parent satisfaction survey and interviews showed that the majority of parents believed that they had a better understanding of concepts their child was learning at school (responses to Question one), were more confident in their ability to help with their child's reading comprehension (responses to Question two), and were willing to participate in a similar project again (responses to Question five).

Although parent satisfaction with the project was high, there was room for improvement. Parents provided valuable suggestions about how the project could have been more rewarding for them. These include more examples, clearer instructions, and making sure that a specific selection of books appropriate for making connections is available. Now that I understand the value of examples for parents, I can collect and share examples of deep connections that enhance comprehension from students. Parent responses also remind me
that Gear (2006) recommends that schools using her Reading Power approach prepare bins of books that are appropriate for practicing each strategy. I can refer to her recommended lists of books to prepare such a collection. Alternately, I can prepare a list of helpful connections that former students have made for books that are available to students in my class.

Although this inquiry took place in a multi-grade primary French Immersion classroom, it could be useful for teachers in any classroom who wish to involve parents in academic activities. In the design of parallel learning, I have contributed to the development of an approach to supporting parent involvement that could be used in other subject areas. Finally, this report provides a window into one episode of intentional teacher learning about literacy instruction and supporting parent involvement, so that readers have an opportunity to develop understanding of a problem that other teachers may face and one example of how one teacher has applied the information that was available. If my interpretations are seen to be incorrect or my decision-making is viewed as flawed, I look to the community of more experienced teachers and education scholars to share the additional information that was needed.

Reflections

Coleman (1998) warned that teachers wishing to improve their practice with respect to collaboration need to make changes in their attitudes and practices consistently and obviously over a whole school year. Few, small, and temporary changes are not helpful. Both breadth of change and persistence of change are essential (p. 142). Through this parallel learning project, I have developed a commitment to working with parents and sharing the knowledge, responsibility, and rewards of teaching with them. I am willing to spend more time preparing academic activities for parents and students to share at home. For example, after completing the Reading Power unit and after having had many conversations
with parents about how they could help their children at home, I promised parents that I would evaluate each student’s reading ability in English and send home on a weekly basis a book at each child’s reading level that can be photocopied (for which I have a licence). This takes me an extra hour of preparation each week. (However, the amount of time required will be lessened in the future when all of the books are prepared for easy photocopying).

This is not a new idea for me but in past years I thought it was too much extra work and time over and above my other responsibilities inside and out of school. Now, because I have changed my mind about the value of parent involvement, I consider it a top priority and well worth the extra preparation. (Interestingly, this is the same type of “prioritizing” that I am asking parents to do). I am planning to continue to help parents teach their children to read and spell in English in the future and planning to continue to search for still other ways to inform parents and involve them in academic content.

Suggestions for Further Study

It may be enlightening to do a parent involvement inquiry using DART as the assessment tool. Because I had a multi-grade class with only three Grade threes this year, it was not possible to include the DART as data. However, the need for investigating students’ ability to make connections arose during the administration of DART. Moreover, there are advantages of using DART in a study. All Grade three students, except for those with severe learning disabilities, are required to do DART in the fall and spring of each school year. Therefore, the administration and assessment of DART is mandatory and would not be an extra chore. Furthermore, there would be a high probability of finding a control group with similar demographics, class composition, and marks for the fall test. Finally, if parallel learning continues to appear successful without improving DART performance for making connections, it would be worth asking if there could be some flaw in the test itself.
In DART, all students have the same text and the same questions. The tests are evaluated using the PM Benchmarks by a group of teachers working together. These factors would help to make the assessment of DART less subjective. By limiting the number of known variables as much as possible and having both a control and experimental group, a DART inquiry could explore the question of whether or not parent involvement increases student achievement.

This parallel learning study and the follow-up with DART assessment that I am proposing focus on parent involvement in a single classroom. What is needed, however, is parent involvement on a school-wide basis. According to Rosenholtz (1989), parent involvement is one factor differentiating a “stuck” school from a “moving” school (p. 149). Coleman (1998) viewed the effect of parent involvement as going far beyond that of individual student achievement. He concluded that until collaboration between parents and teachers is “the norm for all schools, and until they become part of the (almost) universal experience for students, the social problems associated with alienated and under-educated students, with drop outs, with unemployed and unemployable youth are unlikely to be solved” (p. 43). In this statement, Coleman is calling for nothing short of a revolution in the role of parents in education.

Obviously, to accomplish Coleman’s vision of parent involvement, parent participation on a large scale is required. A small step towards this goal could be made by a group of teachers working on a collective inquiry to answer the question, How can we involve parents in their children’s learning on a school-wide basis? Teachers working collaboratively could involve a far greater number of parents than one teacher working alone. Through mutual support, teachers working collaboratively would find it easier and more rewarding to design, implement, and sustain such a study. Their actions would have a greater
impact on the school, and hopefully, inspire other teachers to form their own collective
inquiry groups focused on increasing parent involvement.

**Contributions of the Study**

The responses to the Parent Satisfaction Survey in this study clearly showed that these
parents appreciated the opportunity to be involved in their child’s education in a meaningful
way and that the majority of them were willing to continue to participate in similar projects.
Unfortunately, in my research, I have found only one example of a program involving
parents in academic content. The *Learning Together* program (Philips et al., 2006)
demonstrated an effective way to involve parents in academic content. However, *Learning
Together* was costly, did not involve teachers, and lost its influence over time. Coleman
(1998) mentioned some successful action projects involving parents that were, as was my
inquiry into parallel learning, “small and of short duration” (p. 43) and it is likely that there
are others. Parallel learning, consequently, represents one of a number of possible
frameworks for teachers to use to involve parents in academic content in a more systematic,
sustained, and collaborative way. It is a pragmatic approach that utilises a unit of study
created by an expert teacher (Gear, 2006) that is already in use by many teachers in British
Columbia. The routine I developed for implementing parallel learning is similar to the
procedures for a common approach to Home Reading programs. Therefore, implementing
parallel learning as I have done in this project does not require the teacher to learn new
content or methods or change the daily routine significantly. Most importantly, parallel
learning is flexible and can serve as a structure for teaching and encouraging parent support
in a variety of subject areas. It remains for other inquirers to identify other key strategies and
essential skills that may be enhanced by parallel learning, and to develop the materials for
them.
Conclusion

My experience with parallel learning supports one of the conclusions of Coleman’s (1998) five year study on parent involvement in BC schools: “Parents are keen to be taught exactly how to help, including not only what their children have learned in class but also how it has been taught to them. They would appreciate training from the school” (p. 47). The project was successful in involving parents in academic content and most parents expressed a positive attitude and a willingness to be involved in similar projects. Parents who did not have a positive experience contributed valuable information about how the program can be modified or about the need for alternate kinds of support for some students. However, I believe that the greatest contribution of this study is that it provides a practical and easily implemented approach to parent involvement that can modified for other areas of the curriculum.

When considering the contributions of the study, I was referring to possibilities. Perhaps someone would like to use the connections unit, assignments, and letters to parents from this study. Perhaps someone will modify parallel learning to suit their own purpose. Perhaps someone else will be inspired to do a DART inquiry or to form a collective inquiry group to study parent involvement on a school-wide scale. However, it may be that the greatest contribution of the inquiry is my own personal growth and the growth of some of my parents and students. For this outcome alone, the inquiry has been worth the effort.
References


PARTNERS IN TEACHING


Appendix A

Partners in Teaching
Involving Parents in Parallel Learning

Information Letter and Informed Consent for Study Participation
As part of a Masters of Education program at UNBC, I am working on a research project in my classroom. The purpose of the project is to find out if teaching parents about a reading comprehension strategy, making connections, and encouraging them to practice this strategy at home will improve parent’s knowledge and confidence for supporting their children’s learning.

What am I asking participants to do?
Students will be bringing home a book of their choice, in English, for you to read to them. I will send home a weekly letter to parents outlining the concept about connections we will be focusing on that week. I will also give you a simple assignment, related to the relevant concept, to complete with your child at home. I will encourage you to use student-friendly performance standards to assess your child’s progress in reading comprehension. At the end of the project, I will send home a Parent Satisfaction Survey asking you if you felt the Home Reading activity was worthwhile. I will also select some parents to ask for an interview.

Who will have access to your data?
Data for my conclusions will come from the student assessments I will do at the beginning and end of the project, the work students have completed at home, the parent satisfaction surveys, and the parent interviews. Only I and my supervisors will have access to the assignments parents complete with their children, student assessments, Parent Satisfaction Surveys, and transcripts of parent interviews. No names of students or parents will appear in my research results. Data pertaining to this research project will be destroyed at the end of the project (September, 2012).

Participation in this study is voluntary
Although all students in my class will do the activities involved in the project, participation in the research project is voluntary. Parents may choose not to participate in the project and may withdraw at any time. In this case, data pertaining to them or their child will not be included in the data and will be destroyed.

This study poses no risk to your child. He/she will actually benefit from the extra practice and support he/she will receive at home. Parents will benefit from knowing what is expected of their child and having the opportunity to support their learning at home.

How do you get a copy of the results?
Interested parents can request a copy of the summary for this project in June, 2012.

Questions or concerns about this study
Concerns or complaints about this project may be addressed to the Office of Research at UNBC through The Research Ethics Board (REB) at (reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735).

Parent name: ____________________________________________

I give my consent for my child to participate in this project:
Yes: ________ No: ________ Date: __________

---

Parentname: -----------------------------------
I give my consent for my child to participate in this project:
Yes: ________ No: ________ Date: __________
Appendix B
Parent Satisfaction Survey

Dear Parents,

Thank you for participating in this project. I hope you have enjoyed the experience and feel that it has been worthwhile. I would like to know more about the value of this project and would appreciate it if you could fill out this survey for me and return it to school as soon as possible.

1. How has your understanding of how children develop reading comprehension changed, or not changed.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Do you feel you have a better understanding of concepts your child is learning at school?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you feel more confident in your ability to help with your child's reading comprehension?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
4. Do you have any suggestions about how your participation could have been a more rewarding experience?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Would you like to participate in similar projects in the future?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Parent Interview

Thank you for agreeing to do an interview with me today. I would like to assure you that this interview will be confidential. No-one but me will listen to the recording of this interview. Your name will not appear on any written document and the recording of this interview will be destroyed after completion of the project. I would like to know about your point of view concerning the project and I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with me today.

Parent Interview

1. Has the project had any effect on your level of confidence in helping your child at home? What prompted these changes, if any?

2. Has your view of parents' involvement in their child's learning changed? What prompted these changes?

3. What did you think of the formative assessment aspect of the project?

4. Has anything been missed?

5. I am trying to find ways to involve parents in their child's learning. Students. Do you have any advice for me?
Appendix D

Materials for Parents

What Are Connections?

Research has shown that making connections is one of the strategies good readers use to understand text. For the next seven weeks, the students in my class will be learning about making connections and they will have an assignment about connections to complete with their parents at home.

To do the unit on connections, I am using a book by Adrienne Gear called Reading Power. This is what Adrienne Gear says about connections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When readers learn to connect when reading:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• the story reminds them of something they have experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• their minds are flooded with memories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they are making sense of the text in terms of events and people in their own lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they can make connections to pictures, plot, characters, and feelings from the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they are most likely reading books about real-life situations, such as family, friendship, school, siblings, pets, vacations, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We need to be constantly modeling our own connections and allowing children to share theirs. Just as we do not connect to every book we read, we cannot expect our students [or our children] to connect to every book. If a child does not connect to a story one day, it’s okay. We can gently nudge the children in the direction we want them to go by continually modeling our thinking and encouraging them to be more confident in their connections...

We need to be careful, however, that we are guiding students to make connections that are meaningful. While it may be easy to look at a picture of a dog and say, “My uncle has a dog,” that is not elevating our students’ [or our children’s] thinking or understanding. It is up to us to guide our students towards making connections that are going to move them forward in their thinking (Gear, 2006).
Week One: Modeling Connections

1. While you are reading to your child this week, stop reading when you have a connection and tell your child what you are thinking. You could say "This reminds me of . . ." Or "I have a connection to . . .". Encourage your child to share their connections to you when you have finished the story.

2. Fill in the connections worksheet

3. Do the assessment on the Performance Standards by checking or highlighting the appropriate boxes:
(Assignment 1)

Name: ___________________ Date: ___________

Reading Comprehension

1. Before reading: Look at the cover. What do you think the book is about?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. (After Reading) What was the story about? Or: What happened first, next, last? Or: Can you retell the story for me?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Does this story remind you of something that happened to you? Or: Does this story remind you of something else? Or: Do you have any connection?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Week Two: Guided Practice

(used with worksheet on p. 47 of Reading Power)

Now that students have listened to many examples of modeling connections to text, it is time for them to practice making their own connections with the help of a parent or teacher. Here is the lesson adapted from Adrienne Gear’s Reading Power.

• Read a good connecting book aloud and ask your child to put a sticky note where they had the strongest connections.

• Read the book again, this time ask your child to put a sticky note where they had the strongest connection, or as Gear says “their thinking was the loudest”.

• Continue to model by placing your own sticky note.

• Model your connection by saying “This reminds me of . . .”, or “I put my sticky note on the page where . . .”

• Have your child share their connection with you.

• When you are finished the book, please don’t leave your thinking behind (another gem from Gear), take the sticky note out and save them for the next book.

I noticed that many parents did not do the performance standards last week. However, you might find it informative to know what your child will be expected to do to succeed in reading this year. Here is an alternative to the performance standards:

☐ no connection yet    ☐ shallow connection    ☐ deep connection

Week 3:
Quick and Deep Thinking Connections

It is important that students know the difference between a shallow connection that does not help them to better understand the text, and a deep connection that does. This week’s lesson is about Quick connections that don’t improve our understanding of the text and Deep Thinking connections (that do). Adrienne Gear gives the examples of “My uncle had a dog like that.” for a quick connection and “That reminds me of the time I got teased at school for wearing dresses every day and I felt really embarrassed” (Gear, p.39) for a deep thinking connection. In the deep thinking connection, the child is able to empathize with the character and understand her feelings.

Please read your child’s home reading book (or a book from home or from the library) and let them put a sticky note on the pages where they have connections. They can have as many connections as they like (at school they only get to have one!). Feel free to help your child make deep thinking connections. When you have finished the book, discuss each connection with your child and decide if it is a quick or deep thinking connection. Choose one of each kind of connection (if possible) to write about on the T-chart.
Week Three Assignment

Name: ____________________ Date: ____________________

Quick Connection

Deep thinking Connection
Week Four: Classifying Connections to the self, another text, or to the world

(used with worksheet on p. 46 in Reading Power)

This week’s lesson is about expanding students’ connections to include “text to self”, “text to text”, and “text to world”. When the student has a text to self connection, something in the book reminds them of their own experience. A text to text connection elicits a connection with another book or other form of representation such as a film or video game. When an element of the story reminds the student of something that affects other people as well as themselves, it is a text to world connection. Examples of text to world connections could be topics such as bullying, pollution, war, and so on.

For this assignment, both you and your child can place sticky notes in the book to mark your connections as you are reading. It would be helpful if the adult reader tries to model each kind of connection, if possible. After reading, go back to the pages where the sticky notes are, and, using the Expanding Your Connections worksheet, help your child to classify their connections. Choose one of each type of connection to write about on the worksheet. It is not necessary or possible to have each kind of connection for every book so please do not worry if you only have one or two types.

The following self-assessment has been adapted from the BC Performance Standards for reading for Grade one. Please help your child to choose one box to tick, with the understanding that it is not necessary to have a connection with every book.

☐ I did not have a connection
☐ I made connections to my own life with help
☐ I made connections to my own life
☐ I can make connections to my own life and to other stories
Week Five: Expanding Connections through Writing

(used with worksheet on p. 46 from Reading Power)

For this week's lesson, allow your child to place their sticky notes in their Home Reading Book when they have a connection. After reading, please invite them to share their connections with you. Then ask your child to choose the connection that was the strongest (most meaningful). Help them to write about the element in the book that gave them the connection and, in the thinking side of the worksheet, help them to expand their connection by including names, emotions, and other details. Have them illustrate their connection in the space provided. Students who wish to may share their connection with the class.

The following self-assessment has been adapted from the BC Performance Standards for reading for Grade one. Please help your child to choose the appropriate box to tick, with the understanding that it is not necessary for your child to have a connection with every book.

☐ I did not have a connection

☐ I made connections to my own life with help

☐ I made connections to my own life

☐ I can make connections to my own life and to other stories
Week Six: Finding Your Own Connect Book
(used with worksheet on p. 49 from Reading Power)

This will be our last assignment on making connections! This week students (with your help) will choose their own “special” connect book and will prepare an oral and written presentation for the class. With your help, they will write a brief summary of the story, discuss their strongest connection, and explain why the book is special to them. As usual, they can choose a book from home, from school, or from the library.

As well as helping your child with the written portion of the assignment, please have your child practice doing their oral presentation at home. They should practice looking at their audience, speaking in a voice loud enough for their audience to hear, speak with enthusiasm for their special book, and remember to smile at their audience from time to time.

The following self-assessment has been adapted from the BC Performance Standards for reading for Grade three. Please help your child to choose the appropriate box to tick, with the understanding that it is not necessary for your child to have a connection with every book.

- I made a connection with help
- I made connections to my own life
- I made connections to my own life and to other stories
- My connection is unusual and shows that I understood the story
## Quick Scale: Grade 1 Reading

This Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not Yet Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)</th>
<th>Fully Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNAPSHOT</strong></td>
<td>The student may engage in reading-like behaviour, but relies on an adult or peer to read stories or other selections.</td>
<td>The student reads short, simple illustrated selections (see chart on page 18), with some support; may be able to reread familiar selections independently.</td>
<td>The student reads short, simple illustrated selections (see chart on page 18); rereads selections independently.</td>
<td>The student reads a variety of short, simple materials independently; often chooses to read; needs little support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong>&lt;br&gt;• phonics&lt;br&gt;• predict and confirm meaning&lt;br&gt;• letter and word recognition&lt;br&gt;• print conventions</td>
<td>often seeks support&lt;br&gt;• may identify most letters; beginning to match initial consonant sounds and letters in familiar words&lt;br&gt;• knows how books work (e.g., front-to-back sequence, left-to-right print)&lt;br&gt;• beginning to match printed words with words read orally&lt;br&gt;• recognizes that books tell stories</td>
<td>often hesitant with new selections&lt;br&gt;• identifies all letters; tries to use phonics to sound-out words&lt;br&gt;• uses illustrations and prior knowledge to predict and confirm meaning if prompted&lt;br&gt;• recognizes some common sight words (e.g., in, on, the, at)&lt;br&gt;• knows some basic print conventions (e.g., question marks)</td>
<td>usually confident; uses various strategies to figure out meaning&lt;br&gt;• uses phonics to sound-out new words&lt;br&gt;• uses illustrations and prior knowledge to predict and confirm meaning&lt;br&gt;• recognizes many common sight words (e.g., family, they)&lt;br&gt;• uses basic print conventions (e.g., question marks) to support meaning</td>
<td>increasingly confident and self-reliant&lt;br&gt;• uses phonics and word families to identify new words&lt;br&gt;• uses prior knowledge and various clues to predict and confirm meaning&lt;br&gt;• recognizes an increasing number of sight words&lt;br&gt;• uses print conventions effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSION</strong>&lt;br&gt;• predict&lt;br&gt;• retell&lt;br&gt;• locate details&lt;br&gt;• make inferences</td>
<td>predictions are often guesses&lt;br&gt;• may use picture clues to retell some events&lt;br&gt;• uses illustrations to provide details&lt;br&gt;• after supported rereading, identifies some characters and events</td>
<td>makes reasonable predictions when prompted&lt;br&gt;• retells some key events or ideas; identifies main characters&lt;br&gt;• locates some details; may need clues or support&lt;br&gt;• focuses on literal meaning</td>
<td>predicts story events&lt;br&gt;• retells some key events or ideas in sequence; identifies main characters&lt;br&gt;• locates some specific, relevant details&lt;br&gt;• makes simple inferences about characters</td>
<td>predicts story events; shows some insight&lt;br&gt;• completely retells a selection&lt;br&gt;• independently locates specific, relevant details&lt;br&gt;• makes inferences about characters; may be able to identify the message in a story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSE</strong>&lt;br&gt;• personal connections&lt;br&gt;• express opinions</td>
<td>has difficulty making personal connections&lt;br&gt;• expresses like or dislike for a story</td>
<td>can make a simple connection to self after teacher-led discussion&lt;br&gt;• expresses like or dislike for a story and tries to tell why</td>
<td>can make a simple connection to own experiences if given a simple frame to complete&lt;br&gt;• expresses like or dislike for a story; can give a reason</td>
<td>makes obvious connections to own experiences or to other selections&lt;br&gt;• offers simple opinions; gives some reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Quick Scale: Grade 2 Reading Literature

This Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not Yet Within Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)</th>
<th>Fully Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNAPSHOT</strong>&lt;br&gt;Note: the snapshot can be used alone as a holistic scale in some situations.</td>
<td>The student needs one-to-one support to read short, simple stories and to attempt comprehension activities.</td>
<td>The student reads a variety of short, simple stories with understanding if given some support. Work is partially accurate.</td>
<td>The student reads a variety of short, simple stories independently and with understanding. Work is generally accurate.</td>
<td>The student reads an increasing variety of simple stories independently and with understanding. Work is clear, accurate, complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong>&lt;br&gt;• oral reading&lt;br&gt;• comprehension strategies&lt;br&gt;• predictions&lt;br&gt;• word skills&lt;br&gt;• sight vocabulary</td>
<td>*uncomfortable reading orally; reads words rather than sentences; may lose place&lt;br&gt;often needs intensive, sustained support&lt;br&gt;predictions are often guesses&lt;br&gt;may try to use phonics; often waits to be given the word or strategy&lt;br&gt;recognizes some common sight words (e.g., the, at, want, they, little)</td>
<td>*reads slowly, with little expression; often stops to self-correct or get help&lt;br&gt;looks for support with new selections&lt;br&gt;if prompted, uses prior knowledge and picture clues to make simple, obvious predictions&lt;br&gt;relied on phonics to figure out new words; if given support, can use word structure, context&lt;br&gt;recognizes common sight words</td>
<td>*confident in most oral reading activities&lt;br&gt;checks to make sure the selection is making sense (may need prompting)&lt;br&gt;uses prior knowledge, picture clues, knowledge about &quot;story&quot; to make obvious predictions&lt;br&gt;combines phonics, word structure, context clues; usually successful with simple words&lt;br&gt;recognizes increasing variety of sight words</td>
<td>*oral reading is fluent, confident, expressive&lt;br&gt;checks to make sure the selection is making sense; self-corrects efficiently&lt;br&gt;uses prior knowledge, picture clues, knowledge about &quot;story&quot; to make logical and sometimes insightful predictions&lt;br&gt;successfully combines phonics, word structure, context clues&lt;br&gt;recognizes a wide range of sight words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSION</strong>&lt;br&gt;• accuracy, completeness&lt;br&gt;• characters&lt;br&gt;• events&lt;br&gt;• retells; explains relationships&lt;br&gt;• inferences</td>
<td>*unable to attempt questions or tasks alone; work is incomplete, may be inaccurate or vague even with help&lt;br&gt;may identify the main character(s)&lt;br&gt;needs support to retell the story; may invent material based on the illustrations&lt;br&gt;recalls few details&lt;br&gt;unable to make inferences</td>
<td>*responses to questions or tasks include some accurate information; parts are inaccurate or incomplete&lt;br&gt;identifies main character&lt;br&gt;often focuses on one event; may miss big picture&lt;br&gt;provides a few accurate details; may invent some&lt;br&gt;focuses on literal meaning; has difficulty making basic inferences</td>
<td>*responses to questions or tasks are accurate and complete; parts may be vague, unclear&lt;br&gt;accurately identifies main and supporting characters&lt;br&gt;retells main events in correct sequence&lt;br&gt;includes some details&lt;br&gt;makes basic inferences about characters (feelings, motivation) and events</td>
<td>*responses to questions or tasks are accurate, clear and thorough&lt;br&gt;accurately describes main and supporting characters&lt;br&gt;provides a detailed, accurate retelling&lt;br&gt;uses relevant details&lt;br&gt;makes inferences about characters, events&lt;br&gt;may offer insight into author's purpose, message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS</strong>&lt;br&gt;• connections to experiences and other selections&lt;br&gt;• opinions</td>
<td>*often unable to make connections; limited reading or listening experiences to draw on&lt;br&gt;opinions are often unrelated to story</td>
<td>*with teacher support, makes simple, concrete connections to own experiences, other stories&lt;br&gt;expresses simple opinions about stories or characters</td>
<td>*if asked makes concrete connections to own experiences, other stories&lt;br&gt;expresses simple opinions about stories or characters, and provides simplistic reasons</td>
<td>*may make several direct, concrete connections to own experiences, other stories&lt;br&gt;expresses simple opinions or judgments with some support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quick Scale: Grade 3 Reading Literature

This Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not Yet Within Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)</th>
<th>Fully Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNAPSHOT</td>
<td>The student may be able to read and recall simple, short selections with familiar language. Often needs one-to-one support for both reading and comprehension activities.</td>
<td>The student is able to read simple, direct fiction and poetry, and complete basic comprehension and response tasks with some support. Work often lacks detail.</td>
<td>The student is able to read simple, direct fiction and poetry, and complete comprehension or response activities independently. Work is accurate and complete.</td>
<td>The student is able to read materials that have some complexity, and complete comprehension or response activities independently. Work often shows insight or exceeds requirements of the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIES</td>
<td>• relies on sounding-out; has difficulty using context clues; predictions tend to be guesses, may not be logical; may attempt to recall or guess rather than reread for details</td>
<td>• uses phonics and context clues (with support); makes simple, obvious predictions using prior knowledge; rereads to find details needed; may be inefficient</td>
<td>• uses phonics, word structure, and context clues (may need prompting); makes logical predictions using prior knowledge and story structure; rereads and skims for details needed</td>
<td>• combines phonics, word structure, and context clues efficiently; independently uses prior knowledge and story structure to support reading; rereads and skims for details; efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adjust for purpose</td>
<td>• word skills</td>
<td>• comprehension strategies</td>
<td>• makes logical predictions using prior knowledge and story structure; makes some inferences; may need prompting</td>
<td>• makes inferences; shows insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• accuracy, completeness</td>
<td>• characters</td>
<td>• events</td>
<td>• retells events in sequence; explains cause-effect</td>
<td>• makes and explains connections to self and to other selections; offers opinions with logical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• responses to questions or tasks are generally accurate, but may be vague, lack detail</td>
<td>• accurately recalls main characters and most events</td>
<td>• may have difficulty with sequence</td>
<td>• makes connections to personal experiences and opinions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cannot make inferences (&quot;read between the lines&quot;) due to difficulties with literal meaning</td>
<td>• focuses on literal meaning; may have difficulty making inferences</td>
<td>• makes direct, obvious connections to self and to other selections</td>
<td>• makes concrete connections to own experiences and opinions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• makes concrete connections to own experiences and opinions</td>
<td>• offers simple opinions with some support</td>
<td>• offers simple opinions; provides support when prompted</td>
<td>• offers opinions with unusual and insightful support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
November 15, 2011

Lorraine McFarland  
Box 1004  
Houston, BC  
VOJ 120

Dear Lorraine:

Your request for permission to continue your research regarding the effectiveness of parents assessing their child’s progress in reading comprehension during the 2011-2012 year was approved at the meeting of the Board of Education, School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes), on Monday, November 14, 2011.

I have reviewed the project and look forward to seeing the results. Please ensure once that again participation of students and teachers is voluntary and that confidentiality is adhered to. Good luck on your project, Lorraine.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Charlene Seguin  
Superintendent of Schools

CS/ta

cc: Lisa Ketlo, Principal of William Konkin Elementary