Newcastle University

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

How are parents engaged in children's reading and what are the implications for Educational Psychologists?

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September 2013

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Learning to read is a fundamental, social and interactive process, which begins at home (Al-Momani, Ihmeideh, & Naba'h, 2010). Research generally supports the role of parents and the home literacy environment for children's reading gains (Foy & Mann, 2003; Loera, Rueda, & Nakamoto, 2011; Sénéchal, 2006), and it is recognised that parents are influential in fostering their children's early reading skills (Ladd, Martin-Chang, & Levesque, 2011). The aim of this paper is to further explore the role of parents in children's reading, whilst considering the implications for Educational Psychologists. It consists of three main parts:

1. A systematic literature review (SLR) investigating the effects of parent-delivered interventions for improving a specific area of children's reading: their knowledge of letter names and sounds.
2. A bridging document linking the SLR and empirical research, providing justification for, and reflection on, key methodological issues.
3. A piece of empirical research exploring parent and teacher views of home-reading more broadly, with a resulting framework for Educational Psychology practice.

The SLR includes 6 parent-delivered intervention studies measuring outcomes of children's letter name and letter sound knowledge, with a total of 163 participants. The empirical research includes 33 participants, 17 teachers and 16 parents, from 3 schools located in the North East of England.

Findings from the SLR suggest that there is limited evidence to support the role of parents in delivering interventions for children's letter name and letter sound knowledge. Whilst the empirical research highlights three areas pertinent to parents and teachers with regard to home-reading: (1) promoting positive experiences (2) promoting home-school links (3) reducing barriers. The implications for Educational Psychologists are discussed in light of the findings.

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible for me to write my thesis without the support of those around me, only some of whom I will be able to mention here.

Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dave Lumsdon, for his invaluable support and advice throughout my journey. Dave has been extremely kind and patient and has been an incredible support on both an academic and personal level.

Secondly, I would like to thank my wonderful family and friends for not only proof reading my work as it has developed, but also for their unequivocal support throughout my training as an Educational Psychologist.

I would also like to thank other members of Newcastle University (namely the tutors and trainees) for their encouragement and enthusiasm throughout my time studying on the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology course.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude to colleagues and participants within my placement Local Authorities.

Disclaimer

This thesis is submitted as a requirement of the Doctoral of Applied Educational Psychology course at Newcastle University. I confirm that this work is my own and has not been published elsewhere.

Contents

Part 1: A Systematic Literature Review of Parent-Delivered Reading Interventions for Improving Children's Letter Name and Letter Sound Knowledge

1.1 Abstract

Parental engagement is critical for children's reading success (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012). This paper reviews 6 parent-delivered interventions measuring outcomes of children's letter name and letter sound knowledge, and considers whether Educational Psychologists have a role in developing interventions of this kind. Results are mixed, with wide ranging effect sizes and confidence intervals for both treatment and control groups. Actual effects are unpredictable and the interventions could result in little or no improvement for children's letter name and letter sound knowledge. The review highlights concerns about the reliability of the research and raises questions about the role of parents in children's reading, as well as the role of Educational Psychologists in supporting parental engagement in this area.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 The role of parents in children's learning

Social constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) suggests that learning is embedded within the social and cultural contexts in which children develop. This perspective considers children's knowledge to be constructed through their interactions with close adults. Central to this theory is the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD); the distance between children's actual and potential ability, where potential ability can be reached through adult scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). When considering learning at home, parents have key opportunities to extend children's skills, by targeting learning within the ZPD.

There is a large body of research into the role and perceptions of involving parents in children's education (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Graves & Wright, 2011; Régner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009; Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams, & Keating, 2009); and it is generally accepted that parental involvement is a 'good thing' (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Wolfendale, 1983). Parental involvement has a positive impact

on children's academic achievement (Barnard, 2004; Dumont, Trautwein, Lüdtke *et al.*, 2012; Stylianides & Stylianides, 2011; Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

Harris and Goodall (2008) make the distinction between parental 'involvement' and 'engagement;' where the former refers to school-based activities which are not directly related to learning, and the latter refers to home-based activities, that further support children's learning at school. This review will focus on the impact of parental engagement for developing children's reading skills.

1.2.2 Parental engagement and children's reading

Research has identified that parents are critical in developing their children's reading skills (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sukhram & Hsu, 2012) and early storybook exposure has been positively linked to children's reading development (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Parents who read with their children help to encourage their children's enjoyment and motivation (Baker & Scher, 2002; Loera, *et al.*, 2011), as well as their interest in books (Moore & Hammond, 2011).

Studies have shown that parental engagement has positive effects on children's reading generally (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). For example, Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) compared 3-4 year old children's pre and post intervention scores from four conditions: (1) no reading (2) reading with a teacher at school (3) reading with a parent at home (4) reading at home and school. Results indicated that conditions involving reading at home determined the greatest gains for children. This is consistent with findings investigating the effects of parental engagement on specific elements of reading, such as reading accuracy (Fiala & Sheridan, 2003) and inference responses (Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, & Ross, 2004).

1.2.3 Reading skills

There are two broad skills involved in reading: decoding and comprehension (Ehri, 1998; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Høien-Tengesdal & Tønnessen, 2011; Shankweiler, Lundquist, Katz, *et al.*, 1999). Beginner readers need to recognise or decipher words before they can

attach meaning to them. Decoding refers to the process of learning and applying letter-sound relationships in order to decipher written text (Ehri, 2005; Høien-Tengesdal & Tønnessen, 2011) and is the foundation of the reading process (Aaron, Joshi, Ayotollah *et al.*, 1999).

Decoding success is closely linked with the development of 'phonological awareness' (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Høien-Tengesdal & Tønnessen, 2011); the ability to identify, pronounce and interpret sounds in spoken language (Alcock, Ngorosho, Deus, & Jukes, 2010; Clark, Yallop, & Fletcher, 2007; Demont & Gombert, 1996). Research highlights a strong relationship between phonological awareness and the development of children's decoding skills (Cologon, Cupples, & Wyver, 2011; Lenchner, Gerber, & Routh, 1990; Melby-Lervåg, Lyster, & Hulme, 2012; Snowling & Hulme, 2012; Stothard & Hulme, 1995). Lonigan, Burgess and Anthony (2000) found phonological skills to be the most robust predictor of later reading ability of children from kindergarten to first grade.

1.2.4 Letter sound and letter name knowledge

Phonological awareness is a precursor to the development of letter sound knowledge (Blischak, Shah, Lombardino, & Chiarella, 2004; Schiff & Lotem, 2011; Wasik, 2001) and the combination of these skills predict decoding ability (Foy & Mann, 2006). Letter sound knowledge (LSK) enables children to link letters to acquire grapheme-phoneme correspondences; the skill of mapping phonemes onto their visual presentations (Dodd & Carr, 2003; Foulin, 2005; Foy & Mann, 2003). Dodd and Carr (2003) suggest that LSK can be observed through a child's ability to demonstrate the following:

- Letter sound recognition – selecting a letter when a sound is given.
- Letter sound recall – saying a sound when a letter is given.
- Letter reproduction – writing a letter when a sound is given.

Hulme, Bowyer-Crane, Carroll, Duff and Snowling (2012) found that interventions teaching LSK and phoneme awareness, an area of phonological awareness focusing on the smallest

units of sound, produced significant improvements in these skills, and in later reading and spelling.

LSK is closely linked to letter name knowledge (LNK), also a predictor of learning to read (Adams, 1990; Evans, Bell, Shaw, Moretti, & Page, 2006; Foulin, 2005). LNK requires children to become familiar with different identities for each letter, for example their upper and lower case forms and their names (Foulin, 2005). Some studies have found LNK to have a causal effect on LSK (Kim, Petscher, Foorman, & Zhou, 2010; Share, 2004) as children use their knowledge of certain letter names, as well as their phonological patterns, to learn letter sounds (Foy & Mann, 2006; Treiman, Pennington, Shriberg, & Boada, 2008).

Measures of LNK and LSK have been combined to explore their collective impact on children's reading (Duncan & Seymour, 2000; Gallagher, Frith, & Snowling, 2000). This combination is often referred to as alphabet or letter knowledge (Jones, Clark, & Reutzel, 2013). Letter knowledge may provide more complete information about children's skills generally (Foulin, 2005), which can be used to predict variations in reading ability (Hulme & Snowling, 2013). Letter knowledge may also enable children to acquire the 'alphabetic principle' (Cardoso-Martins, Resende, & Rodrigues, 2002); the understanding that sounds in spoken language correspond with written symbols (Dodd & Carr, 2003).

Research supports the influence of letter knowledge on decoding ability (Hulme & Snowling, 2013), and unsurprisingly, has been the focus of school-based interventions (Ouellette & Haley, 2013). For example, the Department for Education (2011) proposed that schools should implement 'systematic synthetic phonics' (p.39), which teaches children to identify grapheme-phoneme correspondences (de Graaff, Bosman, Hasselman, & Verhoeven, 2009), thus focuses on children's LSK. Despite such interventions, reading standards remain a government priority (Department for Education, 2011).

The literature identifies that (1) parental engagement has a positive impact on children's reading, and (2) letter knowledge (including the skills of LSK and LNK) are central to

decoding ability. In light of this knowledge, this review focuses on the role of parents in targeting these skills, whilst considering whether Educational Psychologists have a part to play in developing and facilitating interventions of this kind.

1.3 Method

Petticrew and Roberts' (2006) seven stage process for conducting systematic literature reviews was used, and is summarised below:

Stage 1: Formulate the research question

Stage 2: Determine the types of studies that are relevant to the question

Stage 3: Search for all relevant studies

Stage 4: Screen relevant studies to identify those to be included in the review

Stage 5a: Map out the final studies

Stage 5b: Appraise the studies for quality

Stage 6: Synthesize the studies and assess heterogeneity among the findings

Stage 7: Disseminate the findings of the review.

1.3.1 Formulate the research question

Based on the literature, the following research question was formulated: what is known about the effects of parent-delivered reading interventions on children's LSK and LNK? In addition, a secondary question was developed: what do the findings suggest about the role of Educational Psychologists with regard to parental engagement in reading?

1.3.2 Determine the type of studies that are relevant to the question

To find the relevant articles, terms were generated and the relevant synonyms were identified, based on initial scoping searches. LSK and LNK were the focus of the review as these skills were considered central to decoding. Earlier reading had revealed that LSK and LNK are widely associated with the terms 'letter knowledge' and 'alphabet knowledge' (Jones, *et al.*, 2013). These terms were also entered into the searches in the hope of

generating a greater number of studies for the review. The following table shows the database search terms.

Table 1 Search Terms

Intervention terms:	(parent* OR carer* OR home) AND (program* OR interven*)
Outcome terms:	read* AND (letter sound OR letter name OR letter knowledge OR alphabet knowledge)
Target population terms:	child*

1.3.3 Search for all relevant studies

FirstSearch, Scopus, Ovid and EBSCO were the databases used to search for articles. Initial searches generated the following totals:

Table 2 Database Totals

Date	Database	Number of Articles Generated
October 2011	FirstSearch	10
October 2011	Scopus	2
October 2011	Ovid	15
October 2011	EBSCO	8
	Total	**35**

1.3.4 Screen relevant studies to identify those to be included in the review

In total, 35 articles were located through the search process. Of these, 12 were duplicates, therefore 23 remained. These articles were screened by title / abstract to decide whether they held relevance in answering the review question. An inclusion criterion was developed; this is a set of agreed conditions that studies must meet in order to be included in different stages of the review, based on the research question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Participants: Children aged between 3 and 6 were the target population. DeBaryshe and Gorecki (2007) suggest that the development of reading skills begins earlier than formal schooling, and preschool children with strong early literacy skills show advantages in their reading ability. Children as young as 3 can attend to sounds in words (Cummings, Kaminski, Good Iii, & O'Neil, 2011), which suggests LSK can be measured from this age.

The upper target age was chosen in view of the recent statutory phonics screening which is being rolled out across UK schools to confirm whether children have grasped the basic decoding skills by the time they have reached the end of Year 1 (aged 6), of which it is considered essential (Department for Education, 2010).

Studies with a mixed age range were excluded, unless children were grouped by age and the 3-6 year old range could be separated from the sample. Studies with participants learning a second language were excluded as they are likely to experience difficulties in understanding texts, and have lower levels of vocabulary knowledge (Burgoyne, Kelly, Whiteley, & Spooner, 2009), which could make comparisons difficult. To make the review context relevant, only studies where children were learning English were included.

Settings: Studies with interventions which were home-based but not parent-delivered were excluded as the role of the parents was the focus, regardless of the setting. Studies were not excluded because of the country in which they were located (unless the focus was not on the English language), however, UK or 'westernised' countries would ensure the findings were more relevant when drawing conclusions from the review.

Intervention: Reading interventions or activities delivered by parents and measuring outcomes of LSK and / or LNK were included. Studies which measured outcomes of spoken language alone (e.g. phonological awareness) were excluded; the link with the visual representation was of importance.

Study Design: Studies which involved a treatment intervention which measured at least one of the following outcomes were included:

- LSK – recognition, recall or reproduction of letter sounds (Dodd & Carr, 2003)
- LNK – identification of upper and lower case letters and names (Foulin, 2005).

Publication Year: To make the review as context relevant as possible, UK studies were the focus and therefore education reforms in the UK were considered when selecting the publication year criteria. In 1998 the National Literacy Strategy was rolled out across the

UK, which included a regular curriculum devoted to reading with a focus on phonics (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). Phonics includes learning letter sound relationships, and focuses on teaching children the skills of segmenting and blending (Rose, 2006). From the year 2000 onwards I anticipated that schools would have embedded the NLS principles within the curriculum. To account for studies which may not be UK based, I considered that those earlier than 2000 may not reflect the more current and changing societal and cultural influences.

Following screening 5 articles remained; however one article was an inaccessible US dissertation. This left just 4 studies for inclusion. The reference sections of these studies were read for possible signposting to other studies which could be included in the review. Two journal articles were located through this process, which resulted in a total of 6 studies for inclusion.

1.3.5a Map out the final studies

The final 6 studies were analysed. The key information is summarised in table 3 on the next two pages.

Table 3 Study Summaries

	Study Location & Type	N	Groups	Duration	Instruments	Procedure	Results
Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie (2003)	USA Home-based –dialogic intervention.	49 Age= 5-6 years	Treatment n=26 (9G, 17B) Control n=23 (6G, 17B) "At risk of reading failure" - identified by parents.	8 weeks	**Letter Name Knowledge** Time 1: asked to identify alphabet letters (uppercase) Time 2: **n**o alphabet measure, changed to reading / spelling measures. *Post intervention testing only.	1. Meeting with family 2. Video-taped instruction, written information, picture books provided. 3. Instructed to read each book with child at least 5 x during intervention. *no information on home-based activities already occurring	**Not Significant Results** **Treatment – LNK – Not Significant** **Control – LNK – Not Significant**
Graham, McNamara & van Lankeveld (2011)	Canada Alternative setting – reading related activities intervention.	14 Age= 4-5 years	Treatment n=14 (7B, 7G) No control "Weak readers" – identified by teachers then assessed by SALT.	5 weeks	**Letter Name Knowledge-** Shown 26 lower letters to identify. **Letter Sound Knowledge** Shown letters, asked to give corresponding sound. *Pre and post intervention testing.	1. 30min parent/child work together, 2.45min parent training on strategies/activities, 3. 30 minutes parent/child to practise strategies. 9 x sessions- 4pm-6pm *no information about home-based activities already occurring	**Significant Results** **Treatment – LNK- Significant** n=14 Mean 1 = 6.4, SD 1 = 4.5 Mean 2 = 12.2, SD 2 = 7.0 **Treatment – LSK – Significant** n=14 Mean 1 = 2.9, SD 1 = 3.6 Mean 2 = 6.1, SD 2 = 4.3
Justice & Ezell (2000)	USA Home-based - print referencing intervention.	28 Age= 3-5 years	Treatment n=14 Control n=14 (16G, 12B) "typically developing" – identified by researchers.	4 weeks	**Letter Name Knowledge** 10 letters of the alphabet- A-J (uppercase) *Pre and post intervention testing.	1. Peabody Vocab Test & Expressive Vocab Test 2. Pre-test of children's PA. 3. Materials distributed to parents- individual orientation and training on print referencing behaviours. 4. Parents to read 2 x books 4 x / week 5. Telephone contact made each week *information about home-based activities already occurring accessed- children matched based on this and placed in treat/control. *treatment fidelity- audiotapes returned weekly. Sessions chosen at random and analysed *Inter-scorer agreement- for coding parents' use of print referencing behaviours.	**Not Significant Results** **Treatment – LNK – Not Significant** **Control – LNK – Not Significant**

	Study Location & Type	N	Groups	Duration	Outcome / Instruments	Procedure	Results
Justice *et al.* (2011)	USA Home-based – print, sound, picture referencing intervention.	62 (43B, 19G) Post Attrition- **n=43** Age= 4-5 years	Print-Focused (treatment 1) n=17 Picture Focused (treatment 2) n=12 Sound Focused (treatment 3) n=19 "Language impairment" – diagnosis	12 weeks	**Letter Name Knowledge** Upper-Case Alphabet Recognition subtest of PALS-PreK * Pre and post intervention testing.	1. Children assessed for language impairment 2. Parent trained on programme and provided materials 3. Parents provided with new books each week, 4 x / week 4. Sessions audiotaped **3 x conditions** Print referencing- discussions about print Picture focused- discussions about pictures Sound focused- phonological concepts *information about home-based activities already occurring accessed *treatment fidelity- audio tapes returned weekly. Sessions chosen at random and analysed.	**Significant Results** **Treatment 1 – LNK - Significant** n=17 Mean 1 = 7.1, SD 1 = 9.4 Mean 2 = 10.6, SD 2 = 9.3 **Treatment 2 – LNK - Significant** n=12 Mean 1 = 11.6, SD 1 = 9.3 Mean 2 = 14.3, SD 2 = 10.4 **Treatment 3 – LNK - Significant** n=19 Mean 1 = 8.5, SD 1 = 9.1 Mean 2 = 11.0, SD 2 = 9.7
van Bysterveldt, Gillon & Moran (2006)	New Zealand Home-based – print referencing intervention.	14 Age= 4-5 years *gender numbers not specified	Treatment n=7 Down's Syndrome Control n=7 "Typically developing"- selected by researchers.	6 weeks	**Letter Sound Knowledge** – Gillon Preschool Phonology & Letter Knowledge Probes. **Letter Name Knowledge** – Gillon Preschool Phonology & Letter Knowledge Probes. *Pre and post intervention testing.	1. Suitability of parents determined - to report amount of time read with child / day on 4 x randomly selected days for 2 weeks prior to study start- baseline 10-20mins 2. Parents trained on print referencing behaviours. 3. 4 reading sessions / week- 10mins, administered by parents & videoed. 4. Pre / post assessment for treatment and control following intervention.	**Significant Results & Non-Significant Results** **Treatment – LSK - Significant** n= 7 Mean 1 = 0.17, SD 1 = 1.11 Mean 2 = 4.14, SD 2 = 4.67 **Control – LSK – Not Significant** **Treatment – LNK – Not Significant** **Control – LNK - Significant** n=7 Mean 1 = 15.71, SD 1 = 10.32 Mean 2 = 20.14, SD 2 = 7.49
Watson & Hempenstall (2008)	USA Home-based – parent feedback CD intervention.	16 + parents Age= 4-5yrs * gender numbers not specified.	Treatment n=7 Control n=9	Mean 6.53 months	**Letter Name Knowledge** Upper/lower case names- Revised Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills **Letter Sounds** Project Aim Letter-Sound Fluency Woodcock Test of Reading Mastery (Word Attack) *Pre and post intervention testing.	1. Training session for parents, provided with instruction sheet & CD guide- 100 sessions 2. Progress sheets & questionnaires completed by parents regularly. 3. Children's pre/post assessment data for the treatment and control were collected pre/post. (same materials) *no information about home-based activities already occurring.	**Significant Results** **Treatment – LNK – Significant** n=7 Mean 1 = 38.17, SD 1 = 13.02 Mean 2 = 48.43, SD 2 = 1.72 **Control – LNK – Significant** n=9 Mean 1 = 28.56, SD 1 = 16.2 Mean 2 = 43.89, SD 2 = 10.34 **Treatment – LSK – Significant** n=7 Mean 1 = 10.14, SD 1 = 12.7 Mean 2 = 44.0, SD 2 = 19.52 **Control – LSK – Significant** n=9 Mean 1 = 5.78, SD 1 = 5.61 Mean 2 = 21.44, SD 2 = 16.61

Below is a brief description of each study included in the review.

Study 1 (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003)

The role of the parents in this eight week intervention was to engage in 'dialogic reading' (p.77) with their children. Parents were required to deliver shared reading sessions whilst applying different dialogic methods e.g. asking questions, eliciting responses etc. Children were aged 5-6 and 'at risk of reading failure' (p.77). They were compared with a control group of the same age. The outcome of relevance was LNK which was measured once after the intervention, but not before.

Study 2 (Graham, McNamara, & van Lankveld, 2011)

Parents of this five week intervention study were required to engage with their children in reading related activities with different foci, e.g. rhyming skills, segmenting, blending. This study did not have a shared reading or print referencing focus. The children were those 'at risk for reading difficulties' (p.575) and aged 4-5 years. There was no control group used in this study. The outcomes of relevance were the measures of LSK and LNK which were assessed before and soon after the intervention.

Study 3 (Justice & Ezell, 2000)

The role of parents in this four week intervention was to engage in shared reading with their children whilst demonstrating print referencing behaviours. The children were considered 'typically developing' (p.257), aged 3-5 years, and were compared with a control group (n=14). The outcome of relevance to this review was LNK, measured before and shortly after the intervention.

Study 4 (Justice, Skibbe, McGinty, Piasta, & Petrill, 2011)

Parents of this twelve week study were required to deliver sessions to their children which aimed at promoting print knowledge. Parents used different methods; dependent on the 'condition' they were assigned to: picture focused, sounds focused or print focused. Children were identified as having 'language impairment' (p.526) and were 4-5 years of age.

Although there were comparison groups, there was no 'untreated' control. The outcomes of relevance were LSK and LNK, measured before and on completion of the intervention.

Study 5 (van Bysterveldt, Gillon, & Moran, 2006)

The role of parents in this six week intervention was to engage in shared reading activities with their children, whilst demonstrating print referencing behaviours. The children were 4-5 years of age with Down's syndrome and were compared with a control group of 'typically developing' (p.308) children. The outcomes of relevance were measures of LSK and LNK which were also measured before and soon after the intervention.

Study 6 (Watson & Hempenstall, 2008)

Parents in this computer based intervention study were required to implement a CD programme and provide feedback to their children. The average duration of this study was 6.53 months. The children were aged 4-5 years of age and were compared with a control group. The outcomes of relevance for this review were measures of LSK and LNK, measured before and on completion of the intervention.

1.3.5b Appraise the studies for quality

To synthesise the information, it is necessary to ensure the evidence is sufficient, of appropriate quality and relevance to the review (D. Gough, 2007). Studies were reviewed and appraised using the 'Weight of Evidence' tool (D. Gough, 2007). The studies were separated by research design and an overall judgement was made relating to the four questions (A-D) in the table on the following page:

Table 3 Weight of Evidence Judgements

	A: Is it trustworthy in terms of its own question?	**B:** Does it have an appropriate design & analysis for this review?	**C:** Is it relevant to the review question?	**D:** What is its overall weight in relation to the review question?
Design: Treatment/Control Post				
Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie (2003)	Low	Low	Low	Low
Design: Treatment/Control Pre & Post				
Justice & Ezell (2000)	Medium/High	Medium	Medium/Low	Medium
van Bysterveldt *et al.* (2006)	Medium/Low	Low/Medium	Low	Low/Medium
Watson & Hempenstall (2008)	Medium	Low	Low	Low/Medium
Design: Treatment/s Pre & Post				
Graham *et al.* (2011)	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Justice *et al.* (2011)	Medium	Low/Medium	Low/Medium	Medium

It is recognised that the weight of evidence tool is limited by the subjectivity of the judgements, and it is based on the researcher's interpretation alone. However, it is useful to consider the 'quality' of studies in comparison to one another to identify possible strengths and weaknesses in design. Drawing conclusions about the 'weight' of the studies was an iterative and time consuming process which occurred on several occasions. Once a conclusion about the weight of one study had been achieved, this was used as the basis of judgements regarding the remaining studies.

Justice and Ezell's (2000) study with a treatment and control group and a pre / post design, rated more highly overall. The use of control groups enables researchers to make comparisons between a 'treated' and 'untreated' group. This study was more rigorous in its methodology; controlling for confounding variables by assessing pre-intervention scores and using a non-treatment comparison. The authors ascertained the activities already occurring in the home, and matched similar treatment-control children. Justice *et al.'s* (2011) study was assessed slightly lower as it included three treatment groups and no control.

van Bysterveldt *et al.'s* (2006) study had treatment and control groups with a pre / post design. The treatment group included children with Down's syndrome, whilst the control group were children with 'typical development' (p.308). By comparing these two groups, it was intended that intervention effects could be generalised. This left no 'untreated' group and made comparisons difficult. The control group scored significantly higher on pre assessment; therefore this was considered an unsuitable comparison for statistical analysis.

Watson and Hempenstall's (2008) study was judged as 'low / medium' overall. It was rated more highly for research design, though it held less relevance to the review question, with one of the experimental groups not meeting age range criteria, and with the additional focus of a *computer-based* intervention.

Two studies were judged as 'low' overall (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003; Graham, *et al.*, 2011). Although Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie (2003) included a control group, only post intervention data was collected. Graham *et al.* (2011) used an experimental group only, with no control, and a small sample. No information regarding existing home-reading activities was obtained for either study.

There were concerns about the generalisability of the sample in Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie's (2003) study, with more than double the ratio of boys (n=34) to girls (n=15). There was also inconsistency in the measures used at time 1 and time 2 of post assessment.

Below is a summary of the overall weight of evidence judgements:

- Medium: Justice *et al.* (2011) and Justice and Ezell (2000).
- Low / Medium: van Bysterveldt *et al.* (2006) and Watson and Hempenstall (2008).
- Low: Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie (2003) and Graham *et al.* (2011).

1.3.6 Assess heterogeneity among the findings

Four studies were set in the USA, one in New Zealand and the other in Canada. No UK studies were located. Five studies were conducted in the homes of the children and one

required participants to attend an alternative setting. Participant totals were small, from 14 to 48 parent-child dyads. Most interventions lasted 4-12 weeks and required 2-5 parent-child sessions per week. One study (Watson & Hempenstall, 2008) lasted 6.53 months and did not specify the number of sessions.

Participant eligibility procedures varied; two studies required children to be 'weak' or 'at risk' readers, two required children to have a 'specific language impairment', whilst one required children to show 'typically developing language skills.' The final study was aimed at children with Down's syndrome. Although a 'minority' group, it is of paramount importance to promote inclusion and to have this study in the review. Age ranges differed slightly; one used 3-5 year olds, four used 4-5 year olds, and one used 5-6 year olds.

Some studies measured both LSK and LNK, others examined one. From the 6 studies, there were 15 study groups in total; 10 measuring LNK and 5 measuring LSK. Although LNK and LSK were the outcomes of relevance, the interventions had very different expectations of the parents. Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie (2003) required parents to ask questions, to provide feedback and to elicit responses and involved parents making reference to rhyme, print concepts and the alphabet. Three studies (Justice & Ezell, 2000; Justice, *et al.*, 2011; van Bysterveldt, *et al.*, 2006) focused on 'print referencing behaviours' where parents were asked to draw their children's attention to target letter names and sounds. Justice *et al.'s* (2011) study consisted of three treatment groups, one of which focused on print referencing, whilst the other two required parents to focus on sounds and pictures. Graham *et al.'s* (2011) intervention focused on eliciting a plethora of emergent literacy skills, including book awareness, rhyme and syllables, letter / sound identification, symbols and their meanings, book understanding and retelling of a story. Finally, Watson and Hempenstall (2008) used a computer-based intervention, where the role of the parents was to provide feedback, corrections and representations of sequences when the child made mistakes.

Due to the review focus, only parts of the studies were relevant. These components were separated from the statistical analysis. In some cases the means and standard deviations were used to calculate separate effect sizes. For example, the study by Watson and Hempenstall (2008) provided in depth statistical analysis of age differences; from 4-5 and 5-7 years. Only the younger age range was relevant, so the means and standard deviations were separated and calculated independently.

1.4 Results

1.4.1 Disseminate the findings of the review

The purpose of the review was to investigate the effects of parent-delivered interventions for the following outcomes:

- LSK – recognition, recall or reproduction of letter sounds (Dodd & Carr, 2003)
- LNK – identifying upper and lower case letters and names (Foulin, 2005).

Of the 15 groups, 11 showed statistically significant results. For these, effect sizes were calculated. Effect sizes show the magnitude and direction of differences between two groups, therefore assess the strength of findings (Durlak, 2009). They determine the size of the effect of the intervention as opposed to the statistical significance or the probability the difference would occur by chance (Coe, 2002).

As many studies did not report effect sizes, an effect size calculator tool was developed with guidance from Nakagawa and Cuthill (2009), and was used for each study group. Cohen's *d* was the chosen statistic as it can be used when comparing independent or dependent groups, *d* is the difference between the two means divided by the pooled standard deviation for those means (Nakagawa & Cuthill, 2009). Effect sizes are generally considered small at 0.10, medium at 0.30 or large at 0.50 or above (Cohen, 1992). The effect sizes for the significant results for both measures are shown on table 5 on the following page

.

Table 4 Effect Sizes

Letter Name Knowledge (LNK)					
Component Study Group	***Within or Between?***	***Treatment or Control?***	***Significant Results?***	***Effect Size***	***Small Medium or Large?***
Fielding-Barnsley (2003)	Between	Treatment	No		
Graham (2011)	Within	Treatment	Yes	0.99	Large
Justice (2000)	Between	Treatment	No		
Justice (2011) group 1	Within	Treatment	Yes	0.37	Medium
Justice (2011) group 2	Within	Treatment	Yes	0.27	Small
Justice (2011) group 3	Within	Treatment	Yes	0.27	Small
van Bysterveldt (2006)	Within	Treatment	No		
van Bysterveldt (2006)	Within	Control	Yes	0.49	Medium
Watson (2008)	Within	Treatment	Yes	1.10	Large
Watson (2008)	Within	Control	Yes	1.13	Large
Letter Sound Knowledge (LSK)					
Component Study Group	***Within or Between?***	***Treatment or Control?***	***Significant Results?***	***Effect Size***	
Graham (2011)	Within	Treatment	Yes	0.81	Large
van Bysterveldt (2006)	Within	Treatment	Yes	1.17	Large
van Bysterveldt (2006)	Within	Control	No		
Watson (2008)	Within	Treatment	Yes	2.06	Large
Watson (2008)	Within	Control	Yes	1.26	Large

With the exception of Justice and Ezell (2000), the effect sizes were calculated as 'within groups'; pre and post results within the treatment group. This was necessary when:

(1) No control or 'untreated' group data was gathered (Justice, *et al.*, 2011).

(2) The control group was considered an inappropriate comparison to the treatment group (van Bysterveldt, *et al.*, 2006).

(3) It was difficult to separate the age relevant group from the non-age relevant group from the statistical analysis, therefore effect sizes were calculated from the raw data using means and standard deviations (Watson & Hempenstall, 2008).

Comparing pre / post results for treatment groups, therefore calculating 'within group' effect sizes quantifies the effect of the intervention. However, the validity of the results may be reduced because there is no untreated group with which to compare the results. Where possible, control group results are also presented to examine whether children who did not

receive interventions showed statistically significant results. Where significant results were evident, effect sizes were calculated.

For LNK 7 / 10 groups showed statistically significant results. Of these, two were control groups with medium to large effect sizes, suggesting that children who were not exposed to the intervention may have also made large gains on their LNK. Two 'between-group' results indicated no significant treatment effects. For LSK 4 / 5 groups showed statistically significant results with very large effect sizes. The group that did not show significant results was a control group.

Confidence intervals were calculated for the study groups with significant results. These help evaluate the accuracy of findings as they show a range of likely values around the calculated effect size (Durlak, 2009). Effect sizes and confidence intervals are presented, for LNK (figure 1), and LSK (figure 2). Each diamond with the horizontal line represents the study groups, which are labelled in abbreviated form to show the study it belongs to.

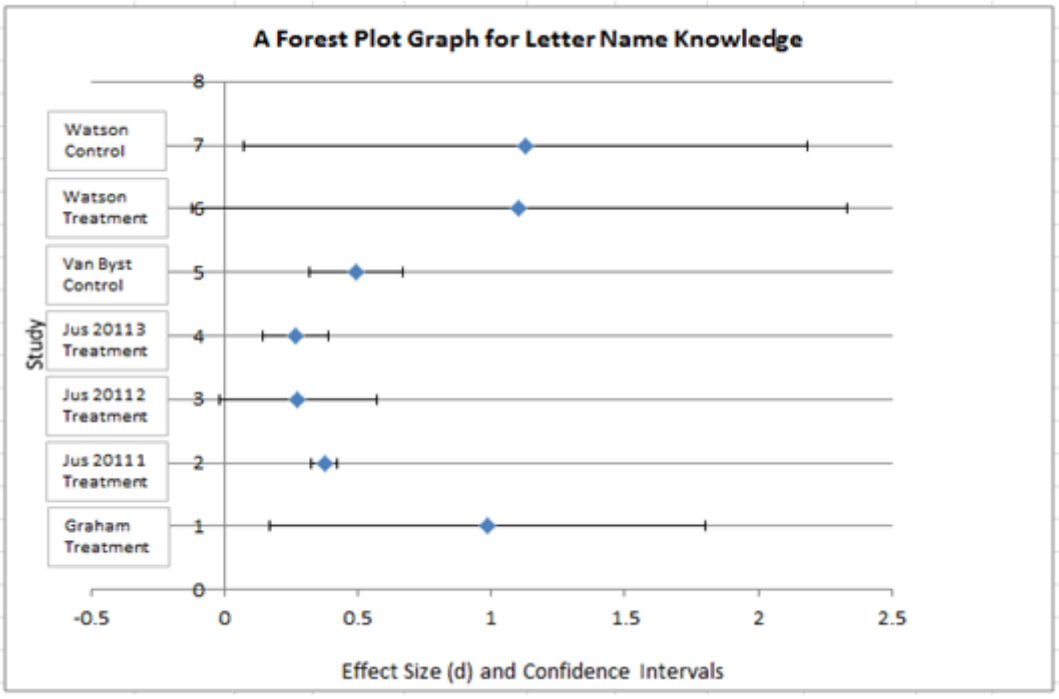

Figure 1 Forest Plot Graph for LNK

Studies with significant results had effect sizes ranging from medium to large; however, groups 1, 6 and 7 have very wide confidence intervals. Usually large effects with wide confidence intervals infer that the study is small therefore does not have the 'power' to estimate the precise true effect (Davies & Crombie, 2009). Although the effect could be large, it could also be small and the intervention could have had little or no effect.

Ideally significant results would be accompanied by a large effect size with narrow confidence intervals. Narrow confidence intervals suggest a small range of effect sizes, therefore the estimate of the 'true' effect size is precise (Davies & Crombie, 2009). Groups 2 and 4 have particularly narrow confidence intervals with effect sizes ranging of 0.27 and 0.37, indicating that Justice *et al.'s* (2011) print and sound focused groups have precise medium effects for increasing LNK. However, the picture focused group has a smaller and more imprecise effect. Given the nature of LNK, it would be more likely that interventions focusing on print would result in greater gains for children in this area.

van Bysterveldt *et al.'s* (2006) group also had narrower confidence intervals and required parents to refer children to elements of print. Despite this, Justice and Ezell's (2000) study, which also had a print referencing focus, resulted in non-significant effects.

The groups showing imprecise effects had different requirements of the parents. Watson and Hempenstall (2008) required parents to offer feedback to children, though there was no explicit reference to print. Similarly, Graham *et al.* (2011) required children and parents to participate in different reading activities and games, but there was no explicit reference to shared reading or print referencing behaviours. This perhaps indicates that interventions with a print referencing focus result in more likely gains for children's LNK.

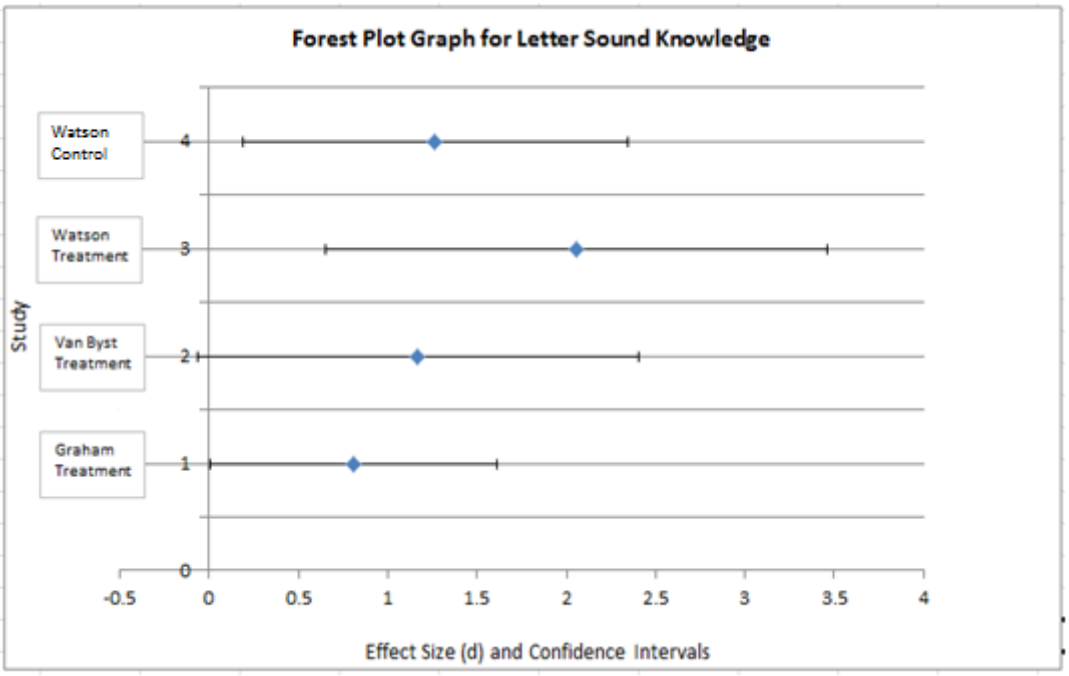

Figure 2 Forest Plot Graph for LSK

Figure 2 shows the same information for LSK. Overall the effect sizes are large to very large from 0.81 to 1.26. The confidence intervals are wide ranging, suggesting that the effects could be from below 0 up to 3.5. There are fewer study groups presented for LSK and a smaller sample total. However, when comparing to LNK, the interventions appear to have more promising effects on the outcomes of LSK as the control group made non-significant gains in this area.

1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

A small number of studies representing a total of 169 participants of different populations was used in this review, limiting its external validity; the extent to which it is possible to generalise the results (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Studies representing a larger sample are likely to result in more accurate effect sizes (Coe, 2002), which suggests that results need to be interpreted with caution.

Some of the researchers in the studies used a similar process, e.g. in the training of parents and the assessment of children's skills. However, variations between the studies were evident, for example the length of interventions, session structure, and materials used. This

could have implications for how far the findings of the review can be accurately compared. This review focused on intervention outcomes, rather than the process (the specific role of the parents). It may be of interest to compare different intervention approaches, for example dialogic or print-referencing, and the impacts on a broader range of reading outcomes. As there were no UK studies for inclusion, it would also be interesting to explore whether UK parent-delivered interventions result in similar findings.

The specificity of the review question resulted in 6 studies for inclusion; though it was considered that the degree of specificity was necessary to locate studies exploring this area of children's reading skills and the role of parents. It was not possible to access the unpublished source, which may have implicated the findings of this review.

The purpose of the SLR was to explore:

(1) What is known about the effects of parent-delivered reading interventions on children's LSK and LNK?

(2) What do the findings suggest about the role of Educational Psychologists in supporting parental engagement in reading?

Overall this review highlights that the quantifiable evidence for parent-delivered interventions for improving children's LSK and LNK is not necessarily reliable. Actual effects are relatively unpredictable and could result in little or no improvement, thus questioning the role of parents in delivering specific interventions focusing on these skills. For LNK, the groups with largest effect sizes were those in Watson and Hempenstall's (2008) study, including the two control groups, which received no intervention. This suggests that children in this study made the same improvements in the measures without the parent-delivered programme. This study was judged as 'low / medium' for quality, indicating that the results are not necessarily trustworthy. The studies with the smaller effect sizes (Justice & Ezell, 2000; Justice, *et al.*, 2011) had smaller confidence intervals, suggesting that the precise effect is likely to be more accurate. These two studies were also rated more highly in terms of overall

quality; therefore the results are likely to be more trustworthy. The outcome of LSK had slightly more promising results, with only treatment groups showing significant improvements. However, the wide ranging confidence intervals question the precision of the effects.

As the interventions had limited success for improving children's LSK and LNK, it is assumed that it is not beneficial for Educational Psychologists to develop and support parent-delivered interventions to target these skills. The findings question whether there is a role for parents in a different part of the reading process, for example in fostering children's enjoyment in books and contributing towards LSK and LNK more implicitly. The review also raises questions about how Educational Psychologists can facilitate parental engagement in this area. Further research is needed to investigate how parents can be effectively engaged in children's reading, which could include exploration of what parents are doing to develop their children's skills at home and how teachers are supporting their initiatives.

Part 2: Making Links between the Systematic Literature Review and Empirical Research

2.1 Abstract

The purpose of this document was to:

(1) Reflect on the SLR process, considering how the findings implicated the empirical research.

(2) Highlight the key methodological issues to be considered when planning and conducting my empirical research.

2.2 Formulating the empirical research question

2.2.1 Linking the SLR to the empirical research

My experiences as a Trainee Educational Psychologist have enabled me to recognise and appreciate the importance of children's reading skills and my role in supporting achievement in this area. I have become aware of the diversity of parental engagement practices occurring in the educational settings in which I work, and the effects on children's educational outcomes. Although the SLR findings (Part 1.5) raised questions about the role of parents in delivering specific interventions for children's LSK and LNK, the wider literature (Parts 1.2.1, 1.2.2) confirmed that parental engagement is crucial for children's reading development, and is closely linked to children's success in this area.

In view of my knowledge and experiences, I recognised a role for Educational Psychologists in linking these three factors: the home and school contexts, and children's reading development. Through the empirical research, I wanted to explore how the role of parents is constructed and aimed to develop a framework for Educational Psychologists to effectively engage with parents and teachers, to enhance home-reading activities. To decide how to carry out the research I needed to state my epistemology and ontology, considering how this implicated my research methodology.

2.3 Epistemological and ontological assumptions

Where epistemology asks 'how can we know?' ontology asks 'what is there to know?' (Willig, 2008). Epistemology refers to how we recognise knowledge, what we regard as 'evidence' and what we consider the 'truth' (Sullivan, 2010). In contrast, ontology is concerned with how we regard 'reality' (Krauss, 2005), or the nature of knowing (Bracken, 2006). The theoretical paradigm about the nature of knowledge and reality is important in understanding the researcher's perspective in designing and conducting a study (Krauss, 2005) as our epistemological and ontological beliefs will underpin our practice.

My epistemological position has developed to reflect what is referred to as 'social constructivism,' a variant of social constructionism (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism views human experience, knowledge and understanding to be historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003). Therefore what is perceived is not a direct representation of the environment, rather an interpretation of the conditions at a certain point in time (Willig, 2008). From this perspective, human-beings are regarded as perceivers, constructors and sense-makers (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Social constructionism focuses on the role of social processes in knowledge creation (Milutinović, 2011) highlighting the role of language (Willig, 2008). Gergen (1997) refers to this notion as the 'interpretive mix within society' (p.117) which, he suggests, takes us in new directions and affects our actions towards each other. In other words, social constructionists believe an individual's perception cannot be separated from their experiences as a human being.

In contrast to social constructionism, social constructivism accepts that human beings can derive meaning from objects in their environment, in the absence of direct social interaction. However, this meaning is coupled with social interpretations and previous experiences (Kim, 2001), therefore is socially 'rooted.' My view as a social constructivist places emphasis on the individual's unique interpretation and 'sense-making' of phenomena, which occurs as a result of social processes. For example, in the process of analysing data, I would be constructing my own understanding without directly interacting or communicating with

another human-being. However, I would acknowledge that my experiences (e.g. the cultural, historical and societal influences) would be shaping my interpretations at that moment in time. Having stated my epistemology, I considered my ontological beliefs.

My beliefs regarding the nature of reality reflect a 'relativist' ontological position; appreciating the diversity of interpretations of events or phenomena (Willig, 2008). From this position, I recognise that individuals bring their own unique perspective to the way they view and understand the world, therefore multiple 'realities' exist (Krauss, 2005). In line with my epistemological beliefs, I consider reality to be an individual experience, therefore no 'shared reality' or universal perception can be achieved (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). We can never 'detach' ourselves from our own reality; therefore we cannot ever be completely objective.

Researchers need to be clear about the objectives of their research and on what it is possible to find out (Willig, 2008). Having expressed my views on 'knowledge' and 'reality,' I needed to be explicit about the goal of my empirical research. My aim as the researcher was to interpret the ideas, experiences and constructions (as expressed through language) of parents and teachers, relating to the role of parents in home-reading. I needed to be explicit about the influence of the unique 'lens' I was looking through to interpret information, considering my previous experiences and who I am. I also needed to be clear about my role as the researcher in 'constructing' the research process and findings. After stating my beliefs, I went on to consider methods of data collection.

2.4 Data collection methods

Language is the main means of accessing people's perceptions of the world and qualitative research allows exploration of this (Sullivan, 2010; Willig, 2008). I was keen to facilitate unstructured discussions using open ended questions to allow participants to voice their views without being 'bound' by a pre-existing set of questions and constructions. After looking into different ways to collect data, namely focus groups and individual interviews, I considered focus groups to be the most suitable method.

Focus groups typically bring together around 4-8 people with similar characteristics which are of interest to the researcher (Gibson & Riley, 2010). They are appropriate where the aim of the research is to explore how meanings are collectively constructed amongst groups and how consensus may be achieved through discussion (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Willig, 2008), which reflected my research goal. The researcher naturally adopts a facilitator role and the dynamics of the group guide the discussion (Parker & Tritter, 2006). It is therefore more likely that topics are explored which the researcher had not considered (Gibson & Riley, 2010).

In focus groups it can be difficult for the researcher to develop and clarify points (Barbour, 2008) as it is easier to summarise discussions with fewer participants. This may be more difficult where there are multiple participants who talk over each other and lead the discussion along an ever changing course. However, this could be considered the purpose of focus groups and the researcher's role; for participants to respond to each other's comments by challenging, affirming, or extending points to jointly construct meanings (Kidd & Parshall, 2000), whilst the researcher brings the discussion back to its original focus (Willig, 2008).

Focus groups rely heavily on group processes and some participants are likely to be more willing, confident and able to disclose information than others. Stokes and Bergin (2006) found that group processes had considerable influence over the views expressed in focus groups, which did not always reflect the 'true' views of individual participants. In this respect, other methods (such as individual interviews) have the advantage of being more personal. However, focus groups have higher ecological validity as they are more naturalistic than other methods (Kidd & Parshall, 2000).

Encouraging discussion relating to issues which participants are familiar with may highlight areas of their successful practice at home or at school. This could promote self-efficacy; a person's belief in their competence to carry out a certain task (Bandura, 1997). In line with

this, Kjellin (2008) suggests that when teachers discuss and explore teacher knowledge, a joint language may be created which highlights teacher competence.

With my ontological and epistemological assumptions in mind, I considered focus groups to be the most suitable method of data collection to rely on group processes to guide discussions, whilst acknowledging my active role in arranging, coordinating and facilitating the groups. This method was likely to be less scrutinising than other methods, with which some teachers and parents may have been less reluctant to engage. Focus groups may also have highlighted competencies, which I anticipated would result in a positive experience for participants. I intended to compare the views of parents and teachers, therefore planned on running separate groups. After exploring ways to collect data from participants, I explored how I could analyse the data.

2.5 Analytical methods

After investigating different approaches to analysing qualitative data, I chose to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis (TA). TA allows researchers to use data in a systematic way that increases their sensitivity in interpreting participants' accounts of events (Boyatzis, 1998) and is appropriate for investigating a diversity and range of experiences (Lack, Noddings, & Hewlett, 2011). TA can be used where multiple participants construct data collection, for example in the context of focus groups. Other methods, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focus on individual interpretations, relating to the theory of 'hermeneutics' (Shaw, 2010) so could be restricted by the underpinning principles, and less suitable where there are multiple participants.

TA requires the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns in data and focuses on *what* is said, rather than *how* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme can be described as a pattern in the data that, at its basic level, describes and organises information, and at a more complex level, interprets aspects of phenomena (Boyatzis, 1998). There are two levels of themes; those which are directly observable, and those which reflect underlying ideas and

interpretation of the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two main 'types' of TA, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

(1) Inductive (data driven) - where patterns come from the data itself and are not a result of a pre-existing framework or the researcher's preconceptions.
(2) Deductive (theory driven) – where patterns are driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area.

The data collected from the focus groups would act as a set of observations to interpret, using the information to formulate ideas (Hayes, 2000), therefore I would be using inductive TA to 'give voice' to participants whilst acknowledging my active role in constructing the findings. An advantage of TA is that it is not attached to any pre-existing framework which allows flexibility of the approach. Other methods, such as Grounded Theory, suggest that the researcher should not carry out a literature review prior to the data collection and analysis as this is likely to provide them with theoretical ideas, and may influence their theoretical understandings (Gordan-Finlayson, 2010). In contrast, TA encourages the researcher to be explicit about their influence in interpreting the data and creating the themes, acknowledging that the researcher cannot deny their active role in the process.

In conclusion, TA has advantages over other methods and draws parallels with my epistemological and ontological assumptions. Further, it is a systematic, rigorous and accessible method, and a good starting point for qualitative researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt, 2010). Through the process of planning how to collect and analyse data, I considered a number of ethical actions necessary to ensure the wellbeing of my participants, of which are discussed below.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

'Ethics' involves the study of assumptions which influence decision making, and includes how people are guided by their moral values in specific contexts (Webster & Bond, 2002). Qualitative research brings with it a broad range of ethical issues and there is no 'how to'

guide (Haverkamp, 2005). Ethical guidelines convey that there is a standard approach or 'checklist' to adhere to prior to beginning research, where instead ethics should be considered at every stage of the process (Shaw, 2008). Having an awareness of some of the ethical challenges is a necessary step in ethical decision making (Haverkamp, 2005). Throughout my research journey I took a number of actions to strive towards ethical practice. In the first instance, my study was approved by Newcastle University's Ethics Committee in accordance with the British Psychological Society's ethical codes (The British Psychological Society, 2010; The Ethics Committee of the British Psychological Society, 2009). I also referred to The Health and Care Professional Council's (2012) ethical guidance. Other actions were taken where 'foreseeable' circumstances and issues may have arisen, though I recognised ethics as an unpredictable and on-going process.

2.6.1 Obtaining 'informed' consent

The term 'informed consent' poses challenges for researchers as it implies that they know what is going to happen and can fully 'prepare' participants for their involvement (Shaw, 2008). Unsurprisingly, it is difficult for researchers to predict the issues which may arise, particularly given the nature of qualitative research (Haverkamp, 2005).

Prior to meeting with the participants, I sent out an information sheet (Appendix 1) which summarised the study aims and contained my contact details. At the start of the focus groups I referred to the document and, as I understood some participants may not be able to read themselves, I read it aloud to ensure everybody had access to the information. I re-iterated the following 'key points':

- Participants' right to withdraw at any time.
- Confidentiality / anonymity issues and the sharing of information.
- The unpredictable nature of research.
- Accessing research 'findings' on completion.

I also provided an opportunity for questions to be asked and initiated a discussion regarding group 'ground rules.' I adopted an 'opt in' consent method (Appendix 2), where participants were required to provide their signature to confirm their involvement after being provided with information covering what I perceived as the more 'predictable' ethical considerations at that time.

2.6.2 Storage of and access to data

It was stated on the information document that the data recorded during the focus groups would be transcribed by me, therefore I was the only person with access to the data. The data was stored on a single Dictaphone which was kept in a secure box in my house. The data recordings would remain stored until 18 months had passed since their collection. This decision was made in line with The British Psychological Society's Professional Practice Guidelines (2008), which states that recordings should '…be kept for as long as the purpose is fulfilled for which the client has given consent….it must be destroyed at the agreed time limit if no longer used.' (p.14). I anticipated that I would have completed the research within this time frame. The typed transcriptions were stored on an encrypted memory stick and were password protected.

2.6.3 Experiences of participants

Ethical practice can represent a thoughtful commitment to creating a trustworthy researcher-participant relationship (Haverkamp, 2005). As researchers we encourage people to retell the 'stories' in their lives, influencing its course and becoming part of the narrative (Shaw, 2008), therefore I needed to consider the experiences of the participants. By choosing to use focus groups to collect the data, I anticipated that the situation would be more naturalistic and comfortable for participants to share their views in a familiar setting and situation.

As it is difficult to predict research and its affects (Haverkamp, 2005), I provided participants with my details, should they wish to contact me at any point, for example for 'debriefing.'

School staff had kept a list of the parent / teacher participants so I sent out a summary of the research findings to the head teachers, with whom I had liaised at the start of the process and asked that they distributed this information to participants. At this time I also offered the opportunity for parents / teachers to contact me if they had any queries, questions or comments relating to the findings, or any other aspects of the study. I also stated that documentation of the full study could be requested and sent on completion.

2.7 Reflexivity

2.7.1 Personal reflexivity

Willig (2008) describes personal reflexivity as how the research has changed the researcher's thinking on the subject matter. Prior to the SLR and empirical research I had made a number of assumptions regarding the role of parents in children's reading, which I will briefly discuss and reflect on.

I assumed that parent and teacher views of parents' role in children's reading were likely to be inconsistent. I considered teachers to be the 'experts' in the teaching of reading and assumed that parents would not necessarily have that level of expertise. Rather naively, I considered parents' role to be rather restricted to 'shared reading' activities. Through the research process I came to understand that parents have a lot of reading related knowledge based on their experiences with their own children. They made reference to many of the same strategies as teachers and spoke of a wide range of ideas for engaging their children in reading at home. My research highlighted the stark similarities between parent and teacher views.

Running parallel, I viewed some parents as 'hard to reach' and in some ways I attributed the lack of engagement to be 'caused' by the parents themselves. Through the research process, I have come to understand that parents are not 'hard to reach,' rather; there are often contextual barriers which need to be identified and addressed to promote and enhance engagement.

2.7.2 Epistemological reflexivity

Epistemological reflexivity prompts consideration of how the research question could be explored differently, including limitations of the process (Willig, 2008). In School A's parent focus group; participants attended a weekly coffee morning and were used to engaging in discussions about school related issues. This group appeared to know each other well, which contributed towards the ease of the discussion. Participants were keen to voice their opinions and there were often multiple parents speaking at the same time, which meant that the role of the researcher was reduced. In contrast, the parent group in School B included a smaller number of participants (n=3) who were members of the 'School Fundraising Committee.' This suggests that these parents were willing to readily engage with school and knew each other from regular school meetings. I considered I had much more of an influence in directing the discussion when the conversation 'dried up'. In other groups there were comparably fewer pauses and silences. Similarly, School B's teacher group involved members of staff who appeared to dominate discussions, seeming to speak on behalf of the rest of the participants. I did not feel as though the views of all participants were accessed.

2.8 Summary

I have reflected on various methodological issues to enable me to explore parent and teacher views with regard to home-reading. This has supported me to: (1) consider the aims of my research (2) state my beliefs and consider how I can engage in the research process in line with these (3) give consideration to the experiences of participants and ways to promote 'ethical practice' (4) consider how the research process has altered my views on the subject area.

Part 3: What do Parent and Teacher Views suggest about Parental Engagement in Reading? : A Framework for Educational Psychologists.

3.1 Abstract

Studies have shown that parents have a critical role to play in developing their children's literacy skills (Sénéchal, 2006), including their ability to read (Loera, *et al.*, 2011). Positive links have been made between parental engagement and children's reading development; though the link is somewhat unclear (Part 1.5). The aim of this study was to investigate how parents and teachers construct the role of parents in home-reading, with the view to (1) draw conclusions about how parents can be effectively engaged in children's reading, and (2) consider the implications for Educational Psychologists.

Six focus groups, including a total of 33 participants, were run in three primary / first schools in the North-East of England. Parent and teacher views were analysed through inductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process. Implications are discussed and a resulting framework for Educational Psychology practice is proposed.

3.2 Introduction

3.2.1 Learning to read and the role of parents

Learning to read is a fundamental, social and interactive process, which begins at home (Al-Momani, *et al.*, 2010) and parents have an important role in fostering their children's early skills (Ladd, *et al.*, 2011). The role of parents in children's reading is incorporated into the broader conceptualisation of the 'Home Literacy Environment' (HLE), which includes children's exposure to shared reading experiences, parents' beliefs and attitudes towards literacy, and parents' own literacy experiences (Foy & Mann, 2003). Niklas and Schneider (2013) identified two types of HLE: active and passive, as defined by Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002) who developed a model of HLE based on the type and level of parent-child interaction. The components of the model are summarised on the following page.

- The limiting environment: parents' ability and disposition to expose children to literacy activities.
- The literacy interface: parents' motivation, interest and views.
- Passive HLE: parental activities which indirectly expose children to literacy, e.g. modelling reading.
- Active HLE: parental activities which directly expose children to literacy, e.g. shared reading.
- Shared reading: joint attention towards a text.
- Overall HLE: an overall weight of the above HLE aspects.

Studies have explored the relationship between different elements of the HLE and children's reading outcomes. For example, Senechal and LeFevre (2002) found early book exposure and parental teaching about reading and writing words (active HLE) was linked to the development of early literacy skills, which predicted reading ability. Similarly, Wood (2002) found children who engaged in a variety of pre-school activities had the best reading achievements a year later.

Studies have also explored the role of parental attitudes and beliefs in children's reading development. Collins and Svensson (2008) investigated the HLEs of 10 'competent readers.' Parents had similar attitudes towards reading, including valuing their role in their children's literacy development, and providing regular and consistent literacy routines. Similarly, Baker and Scher (2002) found a positive association between parents' beliefs and children's reading motivation; reading for pleasure and believing their children were interested in reading were predictors of children's reading motivation.

Although research generally supports the role of the HLE for children's reading gains (Foy & Mann, 2003; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Loera, *et al.*, 2011; Manjula, Saraswathi, Prakash, & Ashalatha, 2009; Sénéchal, 2006), Stainthorp and Hughes (2000) found no 'systematic differences' in the HLE of fluent and non-fluent readers. They concluded that although the

home environment is valuable in nurturing literacy development, it is not enough to account for reading ability. Similarly, Baroody and Diamond (2012) compared children's decoding skills with their literacy interests and HLE. Children's literacy interests correlated with their decoding skills, but their HLE did not. As the HLE is difficult to define, the differences in study findings could be a result of the varying conceptualisations.

3.2.2 Targeting reading through home interventions

Parent delivered interventions targeting children's reading levels have been trialled. Faires, Nichols and Rickelman (2000) investigated the effects of a parent training programme, consisting of shared reading and follow-up activities. Children whose parents received the intervention made significant gains compared with the control. Similar effects were found as a result of other home-literacy projects, such as the 'Family Literacy Bags' (Dever & Burts, 2002) the 'Literacy Early Action Project' (Feiler, 2005), the 'Fast Start' training programme (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005) and the 'Reading Together Program' (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

Sénéchal and Young (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of home-based interventions for children's reading. Interventions where parents tutored their children in targeted activities had more positive effects than parents who simply listened to their children read. Foy and Mann (2003) made similar observations, reporting home-reading activities with a 'teaching focus' and exposure to 'reading related media' had positive effects on pre-reading. Similarly, Orlando (2005) observed the key to successful literacy experiences occurs through 'active learning' (p.247) where children are encouraged to interact with the text.

Sénéchal and Young (2008) found interventions where parents simply read to their children resulted in non-significant reading gains. In contrast, Saracho and Spodek (2010) found this activity to have positive effects. Despite the unclear link, it is well documented that parental engagement is beneficial, though may have limited effects on certain areas of children's reading, for example in improving their LSK and LNK (Part 1). This raises the question: what

are the *other benefits* of parental engagement in reading for children, their parents and teachers?

3.2.3 Engaging parents in children's reading

Harris and Goodall (2008) made the distinction between parental 'involvement' in schooling, and 'engagement' in supporting and extending learning. Although models have been developed to categorise parental engagement opportunities (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008; Epstein, 1997) to provide an approach for schools in developing home-school partnerships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) and to highlight potential 'barriers' (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), they seem to convey a 'one size fits all' approach. There appear to be few studies which have explored the views and experiences of parents and / or teachers with regard to parents' engagement (Al-Momani, *et al.*, 2010; Bæck, 2010), and with specific reference to reading. Parental engagement practices developed by the school (with parents) are likely to be more effective than those which are externally imposed (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Therefore this research aimed to explore parent and teacher views relating to home-reading activities to make suggestions about Educational Psychology practice.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Design

The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of parent and teacher views of home-reading activities, including how the role of parents was constructed. It was also to develop a framework for Educational Psychologists to enhance home-reading practices. The study was guided by a social constructivist epistemology; the view that knowledge is created through interactions, or social processes, between people (Milutinović, 2011). Views were accessed through focus groups using open ended questions.

3.3.2 Participants

A total of 33 participants were recruited; 16 parents and 17 teachers from three schools, selected from a convenience sample. All participants were female, though this was not a requirement of the study. Head teachers were briefed about the study and were asked for their school's participation. If they agreed, the head teachers shared information with teachers and asked for them to volunteer to join the focus groups, which were run after school.

Parents were recruited in different ways. In School A, the focus group was timed during a weekly parent group; parents were briefed about the research and were asked to attend if they were interested in sharing their views. In Schools B and C, parents were approached directly by school staff. These parents were identified by staff as representing 'different levels of engagement' to provide a range of views. I recognised that the method of participant recruitment was not ideal. I envisaged that school staff may choose certain 'types' of parents to voice their opinions relating to school-based issues. However, my intention was to gain some insight into how the role of parents was perceived / constructed by parents, including those who are perhaps 'more readily' engaged.

Participants were recruited from one primary school and two first schools located in the North East of England. The following information was taken from the schools' latest Ofsted reports:

- School A was a primary school with children from Nursery to Year 6, aged from 3-11 years. It was located in an area of considerable social disadvantage with a high number of children entitled to free school meals; the number of children with difficulties associated with learning was well above average (OfSTED, 2007a).
- School B was a first school with children from Nursery to Year 4, aged from 3-9 years. The number of children with difficulties associated with learning was lower

than most schools and fewer children had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (OfSTED, 2011).

- School C was a first school; the number of children eligible for free school meals was well below average, as was the number of children with difficulties associated with learning (OfSTED, 2007b).

3.3.3 Procedure

The study was approved by Newcastle University's Ethics Committee in accordance with the British Psychological Society's (2009) ethical code. Other ethical considerations are detailed in Part 2.3. The focus groups were facilitated between May and June 2012 and were recorded on a Dictaphone. They lasted between 20 and 35 minutes in total and I transcribed each one verbatim. Participants were provided with my contact details, should they wish to see or edit their contribution.

At the start of the focus groups, I introduced myself as the researcher and explained the nature of the study. Participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix 1) of which was read aloud and key points were highlighted. I then encouraged some discussion regarding 'ground rules' of the group and re-iterated the intention of gaining each participant's views on the topic. Following this, participants were asked for their written consent (Appendix 2).

After consent was gained, the Dictaphone was turned on to record (of which participants were informed) and an introductory question was asked to evoke conversation and to help to maintain an informal environment (Krueger & Casey, 2009), e.g. 'Can you think back to your school days, was there anything that you particularly enjoyed or didn't enjoy?' Following this, the key study question was asked: 'What are your thoughts on engaging parents in home-reading activities?' Prompting questions were also asked for example when the discussion 'dried up' or when there was a particular line of conversation which was considered appropriate to follow e.g. 'you said… why do you think that is?' In addition, to try

to access the views of all participants and to avoid some participants dominating the discussion, questions such as 'does anybody else agree or disagree?' and 'what do other people think about that?' were used to evoke contributions from other participants.

3.3.4 Analytic procedure

I used inductive or 'data driven' thematic analysis (TA) to identify themes across the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. This model consists of six phases:

Phase 1: Familiarisation with data.

Phase 2: Generate initial codes.

Phase 3: Search for themes.

Phase 4: Review themes.

Phase 5: Define and name themes.

Phase 6: Write the report.

This type of TA involves coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006); looking across the data to find repeated patterns of interest or meaning. Inductive TA was chosen to acknowledge my active role in constructing and interpreting data and creating themes. Views of parents and teachers were analysed separately so comparisons could be made.

I repeatedly read the transcripts and noted and compared 'areas of interest' or 'repeated patterns' each time, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. After the fourth reading, I generated a final list of 'codes.' I selected and organised data extracts with the relevant codes; some extracts supported multiple codes and were used several times. At this stage, Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of giving full and equal attention to each data item; looking for themes across the entire data set. Therefore I worked systematically and methodically through each data item.

After this phase, I recorded the final lists of codes (parents=18, teachers=21) and re-read the data extracts in relation to one another, to identify similarities or potential themes. This process was informed by the earlier phase, where often extracts were coded more than once or overlapped.

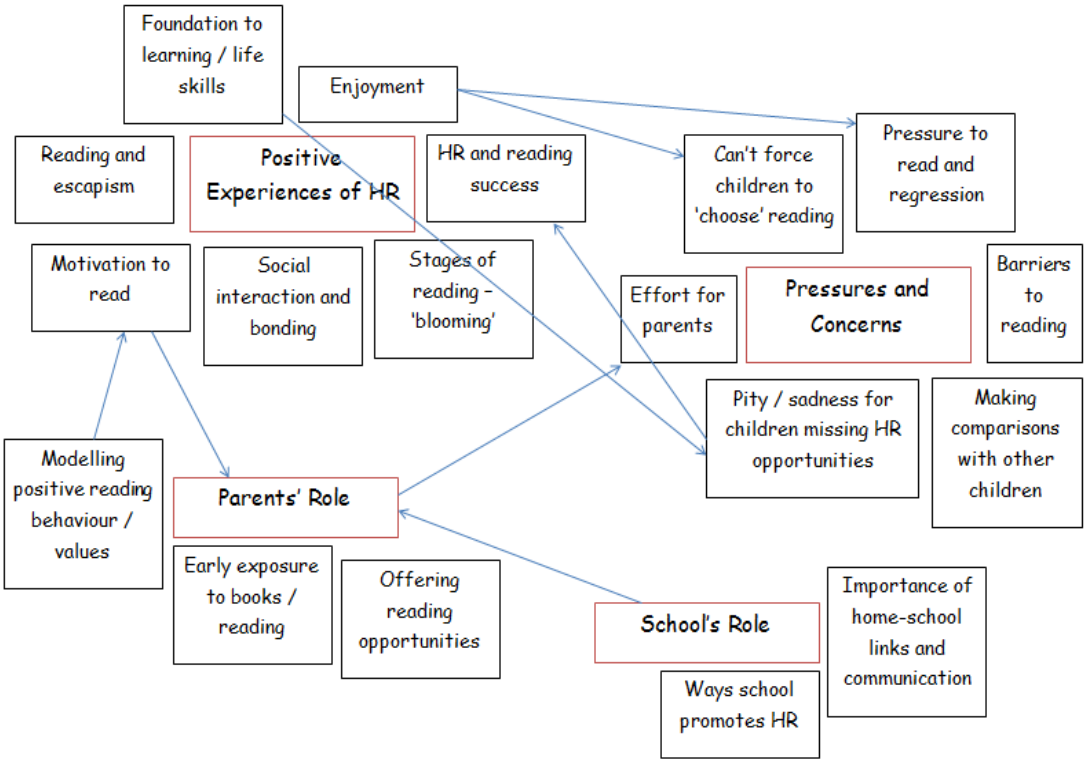

Figure 3 Initial Thematic Map - Parents

During this process, some codes were combined. For example on figure 3, for the parent groups, I noted repeated meanings between codes relating to the difficulties of engaging parents with home-reading (such as parents' values regarding reading, their effort or inclination to provide reading opportunities, and the pressures of comparing children's reading attainments). These codes were collated under the umbrella term 'barriers to home-reading,' with the view that this may later become a theme. This process allowed links and overlap between codes to be seen. A subsequent thematic map was developed and the candidate and sub-themes were then reviewed to check that they still captured the 'essence'

of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Final amendments were made before the entire data sets were re-read to ensure that the final themes reflected focus group discussions.

3.4 Results

The aim of the study was to explore parent and teacher views of home-reading, including how the role of parents was constructed, to draw conclusions about parental engagement in this area and to consider the implications for Educational Psychologists. Through thematic analysis, three main themes were identified from both parent and teacher groups (see figure 4): (1) Positive experiences (2) Home-school Links (3) Barriers. The next section describes the themes in detail and includes direct quotes from the transcriptions[1], coupled with my interpretation of discussions.

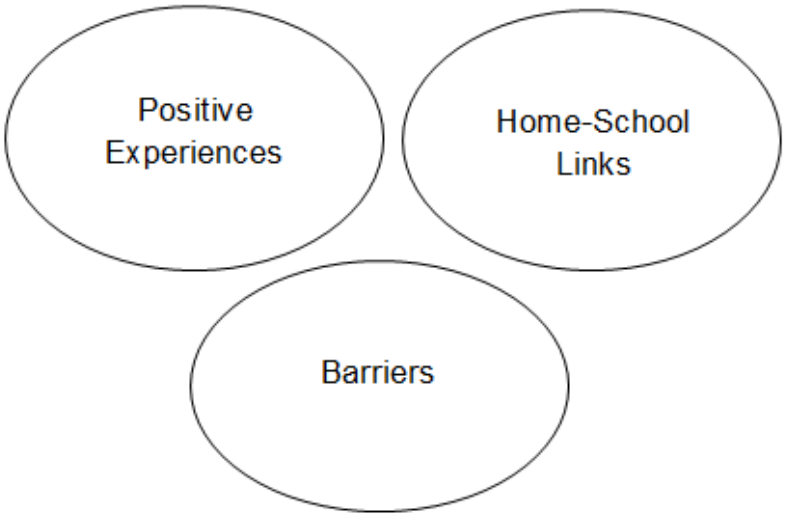

Figure 4 Final Thematic Map - Parents & Teachers

3.4.1 Theme one: positive experiences

This theme consisted of two sub-themes: 'enjoyment' and 'foundation for learning.' Overall, this was the most frequently spoken about theme.

[1] (SB: T2: p3) refers to a quote taken from School B, Teacher 2, on page 3 of the transcript. Parents are represented by a 'P'.

Enjoyment

Parent and teacher participants spoke about the importance of home-reading being an enjoyable experience. Teachers viewed home-reading to be an opportunity to foster enjoyment by allowing children to explore their interests and develop a 'want' for reading books, by choosing different authors or topics:

> *'...children who are getting like a real like love [for] a particular author like 'can I have another Jeremy Strong book,' 'can I have another Roald Dahl book' (SB: T2: p3).*

> *'… [home-reading] develops an enjoyment of reading and it's not a task' (SA: T4: p5).*

Similarly, parents spoke about not 'forcing' children to read, and viewed that conducting reading in this way could have adverse effects. They also considered it important for children to want to read and to be given a choice:

> *'…it's sometimes too much and you don't want to feel like they're being forced into it- because you want them to enjoy it' (SA: P2: p1).*

> *'..he's able to choose and if he doesn't get through every book that he gets sent from school, then that's his personal choice.' (SC: P2: p2).*

Both parents and teachers placed importance on home-reading being fun. Teachers described some of the ways they aim to achieve this in school; by running competitions, dressing up as book characters and sharing resources with parents. They also discussed the importance of children developing a 'positive attitude' to reading. Similarly, parents identified home-reading should be more than the parent and child sitting together whilst the child reads the text; they discussed their approaches to home-reading:

> *'…I've created a den so I've actually hung a curtain up across me wall with lights under and I've put a quilt and cushions and I've created the reading corner.' (SA: P5: p3).*

> *'…it's finding their niche' (SB: P3: p4).*

'…we play games, we play a lot of games, board games, not on the Wii, board games and cards and that help' (SC: P1: p.3).

Parents conveyed enjoyment in home-reading did not solely relate to their children, but also to themselves. Parents from one school talked about their children's reading skills *'…just click[ing] into place' (SB: P1: p2)*. There were lots of comments made that began with 'I like' or 'I love,' reflecting that reading at home was regarded as a pleasant experience. Parents also communicated reading is not just a function of learning, but is also about interaction. Home-reading was viewed as an opportunity for parents to spend quality time with their children and a chance for children to bond with parents and siblings:

'I love it when my big girl reads to my little girl, I love that, they just sit and read.' (SB: P5: p7).

'…she'll choose a book that we can read together' (SA: P5: p2).

This view was echoed by the teachers of two schools who also referred to home-reading providing time for parents to bond with their children:

'It's also that very closeness and close bond between the parent and the child' (SA: T2: p4).

Overall, the words and phrases used by the parents and teachers conveyed positive views of home-reading experiences for example, 'passionate', 'captivated', 'enjoyment', 'pleasurable,' 'exciting'.

<u>Foundation for learning</u>

Teachers perceived home-reading to be the foundation of learning and the basis of other skills; one teacher said home-reading, *'…facilitates the rest of the curriculum' (SA: T1: p1),* whilst another commented reading is one of the first skills they hope for children to achieve. Teachers of one school highlighted the benefit of home-reading for other areas of literacy, such as helping develop children's imagination in story writing. Teachers believed children who have home-reading opportunities are more likely to succeed generally:

'…children who are engaging with books at home more tend to be the better readers' (SC: T3: p1).

This view was mirrored by the parents, who believed children who read at home have better chances in school than those who do not:

'I think parents that don't read at home have children who struggle at school' (SC: P1: p1).

'…the sooner they can read, the sooner they can start learning other stuff' (SB: P1: p1).

Parents also considered reading as the foundation for other skills needed throughout life and in order to function in society generally. They identified marked differences in the development of children who do and do not participate in home-reading activities:

'…you can't claim, you know, claiming benefits will be difficult, everything will be difficult, so I think everything depends on being able to read' (SB: P3: p2).

'…it's their own independence as well they want to be able to read an instruction to do something without always having to be there' (SC: P3: p1).

3.4.2 Theme two: home-school links

This theme also consisted of two sub-themes; 'communication and sharing strategies,' and 'parents' role.'

Communication and sharing strategies

There was consensus amongst participants that home-school links are paramount. For example, teachers viewed it as 'incredibly important' or 'vital' to engage parents. All teacher groups discussed approaches to encourage parents to engage with home-reading, through parents' evenings, reading meetings, reading logs etc. Teachers generally appeared open and keen to encourage home-school links:

'…we thrive to do it all the time' (SA: T1: p1).

'…it's important that the parents are trained if they're going to teach their children at home' (SB: T2: p1).

Both parent and teacher groups talked of the advantages of home-reading and acknowledged there is a limit to how much staff can do to facilitate these skills:

> *'…there's only so much we can do, we're limited and we've got to cover a whole curriculum' (SA: T4: p4).*

> *'…there's only one teacher to 30 students so it's impossible to bring them on, I think that students who do well at school are because of their parents' (SC: P1: p1).*

Parents expressed some concern relating to the changes in teaching strategies used at school, with which the parents are often unfamiliar. Parents of one group knew about courses held in a local centre which they had actively sought to enable them to keep up-to-date. All parent groups conveyed some frustration about having to find out about teaching strategies rather than being informed by staff:

> *'I did say from the beginning when I learnt that it'd be nice when children start the school if the parents could be given some sort of pack on "this is how we teach" ' (SA: P4: p6).*

Two parent groups mentioned the difficulty of relying on children for information regarding school and commented that it was often inaccurate. Both parents and teachers highlighted the importance of consistency in the reading strategies used at home and at school. One parent group referred to the 'technical language' teachers use to discuss children's learning at parents' evening and said they felt 'silly' asking what the teachers meant by their terminology. Similarly, one teacher group acknowledged the difficulty for parents in understanding school concepts and empathised with them. Another parent group perceived communication with school staff to be one-sided (on the part of the parents). Generally, parents expressed that they would like further communication with teachers:

> *'I think we need more of that to say "this is what we're doing and this is how we teach your children" ' (SA: P2: p13).*

> *'…if [school] can bring parents in with the children to do sessions where they learn how to do homework and read and write together' (SC: P1: p12).*

Teacher views of the purpose of parental engagement in reading were largely consistent. For example all schools mentioned sharing information with parents, such as 'strategies,' 'tips,' and 'resources.' Two teacher groups talked of their efforts to bring parents into school to share books with their children, conveying that home-reading should be a joint parent-child activity, as opposed to an adult-led activity. They also talked of home-reading resources such as puppets and games, and ways schools encourage home-reading at school, for example, getting dressed up, running competitions, which draws parallels with theme 1.

Parents' role

All parent groups made reference to modelling-type behaviours where parents read to their children or read for their own enjoyment, of which children observe and follow. They demonstrated a strong sense of their role with regard to reading and conveyed they should introduce children to reading and provide them with a range of experiences. For example, parents viewed it to be their responsibility to find their niche and engage children in reading:

> *'…it's finding what triggers them to read it though, it's no use reading a story that they're not going to get' (SC: P3: p5).*

> *'…it's part of your job when they start school as getting them to read' (SB: P1: p1).*

> *'…if you have a passion as a parent to read you pass that on don't you' (SC: P1: p2).*

Similarly, all teacher groups discussed their views of what parents should be doing with regard to home-reading; they expected parents to be doing home-reading regularly, giving children their full attention, but not necessarily for long durations of time. Teachers also highlighted that children should be exposed to a wide variety of texts for reading, not solely the school 'scheme' books:

'…but not just reading books, they can read anything' (SA: T5: p4).

'…it's just giving them a variety of texts, listening to them read on a regular, daily basis' (SA: T5: p1).

Parents considered early exposure to reading as important as children still 'take it in' from an early age. They suggested children should be exposed to reading before formal schooling begins:

'…when they're in a cot even whilst they're still in your tummy' (SA: P4: p2).

'…I've encouraged them when they were little' (SB: P2: p3).

Parents discussed their approaches to home-reading, which took many different forms; in reading 'dens,' playing games, dressing up, whilst watching television, whilst on the bus etc. They conveyed reading should incorporate what children like and enjoy and be tailor made, for example, one mother described how she uses *'funny voices' and 'play[s] completely crazy' (SA: P7: p3)* which draws parallels with theme 1. Parents highlighted the need to look for opportunities to engage children in reading, using their interests as a lever for motivation. One mother described her son:

'…he's into acting and he can learn a play script in a day because he wants to' (SB: P1: p3).

Overall there seemed to be a range of ways parents approached home-reading, away from the perhaps traditional view of reading where parent and child sit together in a formal way.

3.4.3 Theme three: barriers

All groups referred to some of the difficulties associated with home-reading though these varied between parents and teachers. Teachers perceived one of the biggest barriers to be parents' 'misconceptions' about what home-reading is or should be, including what is 'appropriate' reading for children. Teachers suggested parents have inaccurate views of what 'good readers' are and what home-reading should entail:

> *'…sometimes parents think they know how to help with reading but actually they don't' (SC: T1: p1).*

> *'…if [parents are] going to teach their children at home, they need to be consistent with what we're doing at school' (SB: T2: p1).*

Two teacher groups mentioned the difficulty of parents 'pushing' children to develop their expressive reading skills, but noted some parents do not place equal importance on children's understanding. The main barrier for parents was time; one parent commented:

> *'…it's hard to have that time and that enthusiasm to go and sit and read because you know it's not going to be a page or two pages, you know it's going to be a long winded story' (SC: P3: p6).*

One parent group talked about the difficulty in finding time to read as children get older and develop other commitments. Teachers also highlighted time and work commitments as being a difficulty for home-reading, for example the time constraints of the curriculum and the difficulty of reading regularly with every child in the class. All teacher groups referred to the importance of parents taking time to have discussions with their children at home. This was perceived as important for skills such as their understanding of texts, describing characters, for parent-child bonding, for their communication skills and vocabulary. Teachers seemed to believe there is a lack of talk in children's homes, which was attributed to time and other commitments. Some teachers at one school had recently received training on the importance of talk; the comments they made may have reflected their recent experiences.

Parents perceived some parents to have different values and priorities to themselves and suggested a parents' likeliness or 'inclination' to read with their children was an inter-generational issue. For example, it was viewed that if parents had been read to as children and had observed their parents value reading, they were likely to pass this onto their children. One parent viewed different groups, such as teenage mothers, to be less likely to see the value of reading in the same light as other parents; she suggested that appreciating

the importance of reading is a value that develops with age. Teachers also perceived parental attitudes towards reading and the purpose of education more broadly, as a barrier to home-reading. Two teacher groups spoke of parents' ability and confidence, suggesting that parents can feel as though they are less able to support their children with reading.

One parent group discussed the relationship between modern-day technology and a lack of reading activity in homes, suggesting that some parents consider it easier to occupy children with things like DVDs than to 'bother' with reading. They also highlighted that parents themselves are often pre-occupied with technology, which also precludes reading practice. Similarly, one school spoke of modern day technology e.g. television and Facebook as inhibiting parent-child interactions and home-reading activities. Generally it was perceived that reading at home is a 'good thing' and it is the parents' responsibility to ensure this happens.

3.5 Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate parent and teacher perceptions of parents' role in home-reading activities, with the view to:

(1) Draw conclusions about how parents can be effectively engaged in children's reading.

(2) Consider the implications for Educational Psychologists.

Although there were variations in the exact content of parent and teacher discussions in this research, the themes were largely consistent, despite the broadness of the initial question. The research highlights the importance of promoting communication between parents and teachers, with a focus on increasing parents' confidence in their ability to engage in home-reading. This includes sharing information with parents in an accessible, jargon free, way, as well as being clear about parents' role in 'active' and 'passive' home-reading. This finding supports previous research by Al-Momani *et al.* (2010) who found parents expressed a

willingness to be involved in the teaching of reading when provided with the opportunity, though felt they needed to be told about the appropriate methods.

In this study, parents and teachers considered it paramount to promote activities which are 'tailor made' for children based on their interests and unique learning styles; thus making reading enjoyable. This supports Audet, Evans, Williams *et al.* (2008) who explored the goals of parents reading to their children. They found five main goals, with enjoyment and bonding being the most highly ranked. Although perceptions of barriers differed in this research across schools, teachers and parents, all groups highlighted 'time' as a restricting factor, suggesting that expectations of home-reading should be realistic. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) found 'gaps' in educational practice aimed at engaging parents, which included: a lack of specific strategies to involve 'diverse' parents, a limited focus on teacher education, and a lack of teacher training working with parents.

As a result of the research, a model of parental engagement in reading has been developed and is presented in figure 5. From the views of parents and teachers, three areas were considered as most important with regards to home-reading. Therefore, it may be interesting to explore whether practices focusing on these areas (promoting home-school links and positive experiences, as well as reducing barriers) may result in the 'optimal' conditions for parental engagement in reading.

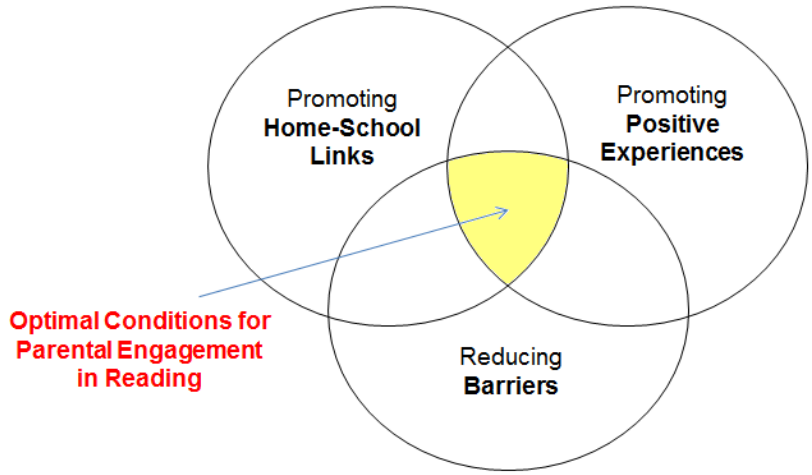

Figure 5 Model of Engagement

Although the knowledge created through the research is unique to the context in which it was obtained, the intention was to consider implications for educational practice, specifically for Educational Psychologists. As a result, a number of questions have been generated in response to each of the areas (see figure 6), which may assist in promoting parental engagement in reading, whilst considering the individual needs of the school. The questions provide a 'framework' for Educational Psychologists.

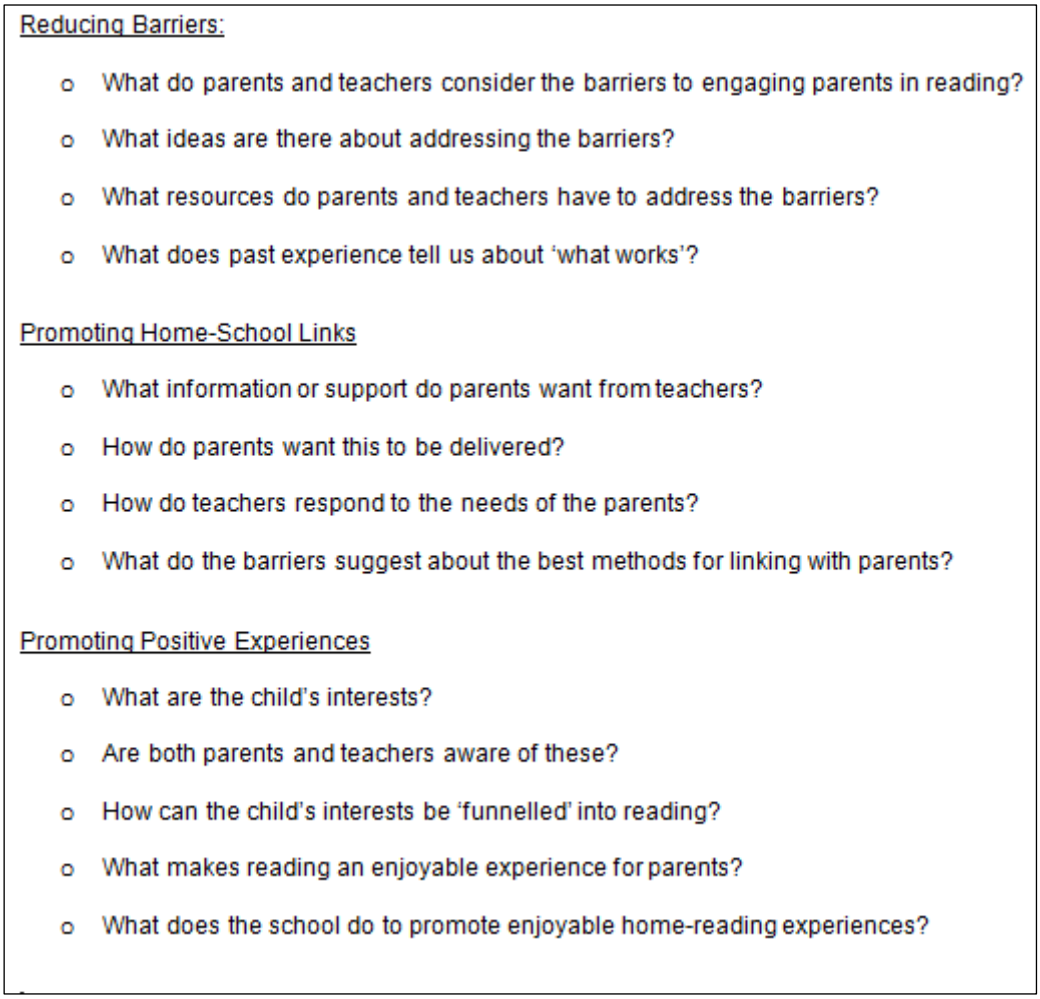

Figure 6 Framework for Educational Psychologists

3.5.1 Limitations

Prior to conducting the research I had read related literature and had developed an understanding of key ideas in the field. As a result, I was aware that my active role in planning, conducting and analysing the research would be influenced by my pre-conceived

ideas and assumptions. Although steps were taken to address some of the issues associated with inter-rater reliability; the process of independently coding data and comparing codes for a shared understanding (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997), I was the sole interpreter. The research findings may have achieved greater reliability if a general consensus for each set was agreed from a team of data analysts. Further, the data was analysed in two separate sets; I became aware of the impact of the thematic analysis process on the second data set. Increased validity may have been achieved if this process was completed by different analysts.

Although the same initial question was used for each group, the subsequent questions varied depending on the group dynamics and what had already been explored. Undoubtedly the questions I posed led the participants to respond in a certain way and 'shaped' the data, which relates to the assumptions I 'brought' to the research process. Greater reliability may have been achieved if I had recruited an individual who was more 'detached' from the research process.

Overall the sample size used in this research was small (n=33) and covered a small geographical area. Most parents volunteered their participation and were likely to have been more involved in school generally. Research validity may have been greater if steps were taken to gather views from parents who were less 'readily' engaged. When focusing on 'parental engagement' it is important to think about the different 'levels' of engagement which occur and trying to learn from a wider range of parents.

3.5.2 Conclusion

The questions below reflect those posed in my overall thesis title:

(1) How are parents engaged in children's reading?

(2) What are the implications for Educational Psychologists?

How are parents engaged in children's reading?

It may not necessarily be the role of parents to deliver targeted reading interventions, rather, their role is likely to be much broader and perhaps more implicit, as was conveyed through the focus group discussions. In light of parent and teacher views, it may be beneficial to focus on the positive experiences element of home-reading, as well as the home-school links and barriers, to promote parental engagement in this area.

What are the implications for Educational Psychologists?

Educational Psychologists are well placed to encourage a change in thinking with regard to parental engagement, moving the emphasis away from 'blame' and the notion of 'hard to reach' parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007). The framework proposed as a result of this research is intended as a discussion and reflection tool, which can be used by Educational Psychologists to coach school staff to develop and extend their practices in this area.

Educational Psychologists can reflect on the psychological underpinning of the model to develop the most successful parental engagement practices. For example, when considering the 'positive experiences' element of the model, Psychologists can draw on their knowledge of operant conditioning (Skinner, 1948) and understand that actions which are followed by positive reinforcement are more likely to be repeated. With this in mind, Educational Psychologists' role may be working with teachers to promote positive interactions with parents, in order to increase and sustain engagement. They may also work with parents to develop home-reading activities, using their knowledge of reinforcement, motivation and learning theories (e.g. the concept of the ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978), to ensure activities are both accessible and enjoyable for children.

In light of the research, it is clear that parental engagement in reading is viewed to be more than simply developing children's reading skills; it is also about the bonding between the parent and child. Educational Psychologists have knowledge of interpersonal skills, such as inter-subjectivity (Trevarthen, 1979), to work with parents to enhance their interactions with

their children, for example, through the application of Video Interaction Guidance (Kennedy, Landor, & Todd, 2011). Similarly, when addressing the 'home-school communication' and 'barriers' components of the model, Educational Psychologists can draw on frameworks for finding solutions and moving forward e.g. solution oriented practices (O'Hanlon, 2000).

Educational Psychologists bring the unique understanding of psychology to the application of the model and framework as proposed in this paper. Early learning and intervention is a key priority for the government (Tickell, 2012), and by adopting a proactive approach to parental engagement, it is intended that children's successes in reading will be achieved, as well as the wider benefits. As small changes begin, bigger changes may follow, which may enable the application of the model and framework to wider community issues.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Information for Parents

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at *[university name in original]* and working at *[service name in original]*. I work in different schools in the area. For university, I need to carry out some research and would like parents and teachers to join in.

What is the purpose of my study?

My study will look at parent and teacher views of activities at home which help children's reading. I am asking the parents and teachers of primary school children to get involved.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked to share your ideas/views of home reading activities, with other parents from your child's school in a group discussion. I will ask some questions to start the conversation.

The session will last for no more than one hour and will involve between 4 and 6 parents. I will record the discussion on a voice recorder so that I can play it back and listen to what has been said. Parents and schools won't be named.

The completed study may be sent to be printed in books and journals so that it can be shared.

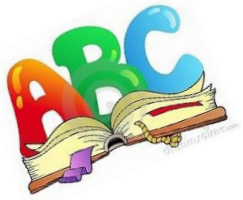
If you have any questions about the research, please contact me (Lucy Todd) by email or phone: *[email / phone contacts in original].*

If you decide to become involved, thank you. You will need to fill in a consent form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Lucy

Appendix 2



Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to join my study, please complete this form.

Study: Reading Activities and Parental Engagement

Researcher: Lucy Todd (Trainee Educational Psychologist, *[university and service names in original]*)

1. I have read and understand the information sheet. I have had chance to ask questions, which have been answered. ☐
2. I am volunteering to join in and I understand I am free to leave at any time, without giving reasons and without any consequences for me. ☐
3. I understand that all the information I provide will be confidential, and will not be named. ☐
4. I agree to the recording of the discussion. ☐
5. I agree to take part in this study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date