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The evaluation of a family literacy program

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THE EVALUATION OF A
FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

In

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by
Katrina Hopkins
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Abstract

Based on the literacy need in the state of Louisiana, this project was interested in whether the *Ready to Learn: Between the Lions* literacy workshop could equip parents to enhance and develop their child's literacy skills and to enhance family literacy interactions. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of a *Ready to Learn* literacy workshop in two Baton Rouge Head Start preschool centers, Banks and Southern University. Participants attended workshops once a month from January to April, lasting approximately 30 minutes each. The workshop was evaluated using a pretest/posttest instrument consisting of seven likert-type questions. Results show an increase in participant's scores from the pretest to posttest in four of the five workshop objectives. *Ready to Learn* workshops were valuable to participants in encouraging literacy in their families and successful in teaching participants new literacy strategies and skills to use with their family.

Introduction

Literacy is defined as “the ability to read English, write and use math, and sometimes to operate a computer” (Literacy Volunteers of America, 2002). Nationally, 22 percent of adults are considered to be illiterate, functioning at the lowest level of literacy (Literacy Volunteers of America, 2002). Forty to forty-four million American citizens demonstrate low levels (level one and two) of literacy proficiencies (National Center for Family Literacy, 2002).

In Louisiana, 32% of adults are only functionally literate. Functional literacy is the lowest (level one) of five levels of literacy. These adults struggle with the simple tasks of completing bank deposits, reading bus schedules, and identifying information in a brief article (Literacy Volunteers of America, 2002; National Council of Family Literacy, 2002). The illiteracy rate is the highest in New Orleans at 39% followed by Hammond at 31% and Baton Rouge at 28% (Literacy Volunteers of America, 2002).

The five levels of literacy defined by the National Institute for Literacy are as follows: “Almost all adults in Level one can read a little but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child. Adults in Level two usually can perform more complex tasks such as comparing, contrasting, or integrating pieces of information but usually not higher level reading and problem-solving skills. Adults in levels three through five usually can perform the same types of more complex tasks on increasingly lengthy and dense texts and documents” (National Institute for Literacy, 2002 website). In Louisiana, 54% of the adult population functions at a level one or two, being unable to transition into a high-skill profession. Of the 30 school

districts in the state of Louisiana, 76% of the 2nd and 3rd grade students are already below their reading level (Louisiana Department of Education, 2000).

Based on the literacy need and the literacy population for the state of Louisiana, three groups of people will most benefit from a literacy program: low literate adults, low income adults, and adults with limited English proficiency. These are the adults and their families we targeted working with local Head Start preschools.

Purpose

We are interested in whether the *Ready to Learn: Between the Lions* literacy workshop can equip parents to enhance and develop their child's literacy skills, improve family social skills, and enhance family literacy interactions. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the literacy program *Between the Lions* workshop in two Baton Rouge Head Start preschools. If successful, these programs will serve as model preschools to increase family literacy, family involvement and meet the needs of the community.

Roughly, 55% of the adult population living in the city of Baton Rouge function at a literacy rate of level one or two (Adult Literacy Estimates, Louisiana State Literacy Resource Center 2003). Louisiana adults who tested in the bottom two levels of literacy contained the highest percentage of food stamps recipients and contained people most likely to work less than 20 weeks a year (Louisiana State plan for Adult Education).

The goal of a successful family literacy program is to help break these cycles of economic disadvantage. Family literacy programs should positively affect the high school drop out rate, joblessness, and welfare dependency (Pedak, 2000). By working with

families, education becomes more important, family involvement in school increases, and life-long learning can begin.

Because there is an assumed relationship between parent literacy and child literacy, and often times there is a lack of unity between home and school settings (Arthur, 2001; Coleman, 1999; Jayatilaka, 2001), family literacy is an important factor to determine the literacy skills of young children. The development of literacy skills can begin as young as six months old and should be developed and encouraged through preschool age and beyond. Implementation of a family literacy workshop should increase the development of literacy skills within the family. This research will evaluate a new program/workshop model that incorporates family literacy training for teachers and parents to help children develop the literacy skills they need to succeed in school.

My research objective was to conduct an evaluation pilot study for *Ready to Learn* using the *Between the Lions* program and curriculum, implemented as literacy workshops and literacy training workshops for parents and teachers, respectively, of preschool aged children. I evaluated the effectiveness of the workshops in two Head Start preschools in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The workshop goals and objectives were specific to the needs of the Baton Rouge community and to the goals of Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) and its *Ready to Learn: Between the Lions* workshop. While developing this literacy workshop for LPB I considered the following components: (a) the educational and social needs of families in the community, (b) the current programs that assess the needs of the community, and (c) the necessary resources I needed to support this program (Hicks, 2001). When evaluating this program I was aware of the information the family

participants gained from being involved in this workshop and how I measured the workshop outcomes (Hicks, 2001).

Definitions

The following terms defined below are used throughout this study.

- Parent

The primary caregiver and financial provider for a child.

- Family

Any person that is influential in the child's development. A relationship formed where the child depends upon and/or looks up to the "family member". A mutual trust and respect among the "family member" and the child.

- Family Literacy

The federal definition of family literacy is integration of the following activities: (a) interactive literacy activities between parents, primary caregivers, grandparents, siblings or aunts/family members and their children; (b) training for parents/family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in their education; (c) parent/family member literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and (d) an age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences. *Between the Lions* is directed at three of the four definitions of family literacy. The third activity is not included in the *Between the Lions* literacy workshops.

- Emergent Literacy

The developmental precursors of formal reading such as: letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and letter knowledge. "[Emergent literacy] views literacy-related behaviors as

occurring in the preschool period as legitimate and important aspects of the developmental continuum of literacy” (Whitehurst, 2001, pp.12).

- Family Involvement

Parent, primary caregiver, grandparent, sibling, and family relatives (aunt uncle, cousin) that have consistent interactions with a child, affecting the child’s cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development.

- Functional Literacy

“Literacy...(the ability to read, write and speak in English, and) compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals and develop one’s knowledge and potential” (The National Literacy Act of 1991) e.g., completing bank deposits, reading bus schedules and identifying information in a brief article (Literacy Volunteers of America, 2002; National Council of Family Literacy, 2002).

Assumption

All teachers and parents want their child(ren) to develop literacy skills and to succeed academically.

Limitations

1. Only preschools and homes that have a television can participate in the workshops and the study.
2. Public Head Start preschools will be included so the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond this setting.

3. The differences in families that influence the program will vary. Because we are only participating with Head Start preschools, families participating will be low-income.
4. All Head Start preschool chosen for this study are located in the East Baton Rouge Parish, limiting the geographic regions that exhibit low literacy rates.
5. We are only conducting this study in Head Start programs that have a high level of parent involvement.
6. It is difficult to isolate the effects of the program from the effects of family characteristics when evaluating the effectiveness of the workshop.

Literature Review

Family Literacy

The concept of family literacy was accepted in the early 1980's and family literacy programs emerged in the mid 1980's. Family literacy programs focused on the family as a whole unit unlike previous programs that focused on the adult and the child separately. The purposes of family literacy programs are to tackle the difficulties of child and parent literacy together. It is important to deal with literacy of both child and parent together because of the high correlation between the two (Tett, 2000). One dominant theme in family literacy is that parent literacy has a significant influence on children's motivation to acquire, develop, and use literacy. Thus parents help children acquire literacy and guide their child's learning. Parent-child activities are found to be related to later outcomes such as school performance, reading ability, and oral language development (Mendelsohn et. al., 2001). Parental involvement in reading to their children is the single most important component in developing children's reading ability for later life (High, 1998). Success as an adult depends on the early learning and development that takes place as a child.

There is no clear way to define family literacy (Auerbach, 1995; Cox, 1999; Janes, 2001; Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2001). The federal definition of family literacy integrates all of the following activities: (a) interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, (b) training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in their education, (c) parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and (d) an age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in life and life experiences (Hicks, 2001; National Center for Family

Literacy, 2002). Literacy is a social construct, defined by environment, culture, and history (Cox, 1999; Makin, 2000; Pellegrini, 2001).

In the joint position statement adopted by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) eight themes emerge for promoting literacy to preschool aged children (IRA & NAEYC, 1998): (a) the power and pleasure of literacy; (b) the literate environment of different text forms; (c) language development of vocabulary words; (d) building knowledge and comprehension about situations; (e) knowledge of print; (f) different types of text, like folktales, poems, myths and songs; (g) phonological awareness; and (h) letters and words (Rath, 2002). It is important to address these themes in family literacy programs to help foster and develop literacy skills for program participants.

Within the last 20 years, research shows the association between social disadvantages and low literacy (Makin, 2000). “We know that reading failure disproportionately affects children from socially and economically disadvantaged families and contributes to the continuing cycle of poverty” (High, 1998, p.459-460). Therefore, it is important to target low SES families with young children ages 0-5 for literacy-building efforts. Bringing together literacy and family involvement creates an opportunity to explore family systems and its relationship to literacy practices and to identify ways to support families in gaining access to literacy education. The purpose of family literacy programs is not to break the cycle of illiteracy but to give family members the ability to construct and achieve their own defined system of self-sufficiency (Gadsden, 1994). “Family literacy is not something that is done to families. It is

something done with families to give them greater adaptive control over their own future as literacy demands are constantly increasing” (Topping, 1996, p.149)

Family literacy as an interdisciplinary concept is relatively recent (i.e., emerging within the last five years). It developed from separate research domains including emergent literacy, adult literacy, family involvement, parent-child relationships, and child development (Gadsden 1994; Padak, 2000; Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2001).

However, little is known about the design of family literacy programs. The recurring focus of family literacy programs is on young children learning to read and classroom to home learning (learning across contexts). The characteristics of programs often contrast, providing confusing ideas of family literacy. Programs provide different guidelines and approaches to working with children. A literacy program model has yet to be developed around a specific theory and this proves to be a challenge when creating family literacy programs. There is little research in how program participation affects families. Most programs provide “how to” information for family literacy programs but few studies have been conducted that show the effectiveness of literacy programs, or if they are effective, useful or appropriate (Gadsden, 1994; Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2001). These issues seem to beg the question, “into what theoretical framework should programs and research on family literacy be placed?” Family literacy does not exist as a unified concept within a single, established theoretical framework. What we find then, is that literacy programs are limited and various with no clear theoretical foundation. They consist of varying activities, inconsistent processes and are unclear about the families they are intended to serve. These factors make meaningful program evaluation a huge challenge.

Family Diversity

“Family diversity is a way of characterizing the variability within and among families” (Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000, p.2). Families today are more diverse. We have single parent households, foster families, teenage parent families, older parent families, linguistic and cultural minority families, homeless families, families with children with special needs, and dysfunctional families (Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000). A literacy program needs to be implemented that can reach and relate to the majority of children in these families. Diversity among families includes racial, ethnic, cultural, and class diversity. African American, Latino American, and Asian American families have different cultures and relate to one another in their own unique appropriate way. Families that experience poverty or financial hardships experience diversity in their life circumstances. Each family is unique in its own way.

Family diversity cannot be narrowly defined as structural and demographical dimensions. There is no clear definition of family and there is no clear definition of diversity therefore we must conclude that family diversity is socially constructed (Allen, Fine, & Demo, 2000). These dimensions of family diversity are interrelated and must be taken into account together as families are studied. Family diversity needs to be addressed because of the contextual and cultural themes integrated into family literacy programs. Research on family literacy programs has a relatively narrow perspective in the population studied. Most of the research focuses on low-income African American families, yet data indicate that illiteracy cuts across all racial and ethnic groups. In order to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of family literacy programs we must first understand the families we are working with.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is important because it facilitates communication between schools and families, strengthens parent-child relationships, which enhances child development intellectually, socially, physically and emotionally. Family involvement provides children with a stimulating environment, increases positive behavior, and enhances student achievement (Pena, 2000).

History of Family Involvement in Education. Before 1850 most families lived in small communities in rural America. Church and home were responsible for educating and socializing children. During 1870-1910 in industrialized America, many rural families moved to the city. Students went to school in the morning, and teachers made home visits to families in the afternoon. The focus was on parent education, nutrition education, health education, and cleanness education. Parents were viewed as learners and recipients. Between 1916 and 1950 the growth of nursery schools occurred. There was a focus on the whole child and child development. During World War II, women entered the work force therefore decreasing family involvement and increasing childcare facilities and programs.

There was a general lack of concern at the federal, state, and local levels in the 1950's for early childcare programs for low-income children. Family involvement consisted primarily of the membership in the Parent Teacher Association. In the 1960's national societal programs increased. Title I and Title II funds were made available from the government to meet the needs of low SES families. Programs like Head Start created more opportunities for families to become involved. A national emphasis on family programs and policy making emerged. During this time the term "family involvement"

was used, shifting from parent involvement to encompass other family members and the community (D.C. Burts, personal communication, June 2002). IDEA '97, individuals with disabilities Education Act amendment passed “strengthening academic expectations and accountability for children with disabilities, bridging the gap that too often exists between what children with disabilities learn and what is required in regular curriculum” (IDEA '97 website). This act allowed children with disabilities to attend public school and be placed in regular classrooms. The purpose of IDEA '97 was to provide high quality education to all children (IDEA '97 website).

What is Family Involvement? Family involvement is defined and perceived differently by teachers, parents, family members, and community members (Coleman, 1997; National Center for Family Literacy, 2002). Family involvement is parent, primary caregiver, grandparent, sibling, and family relatives (aunt uncle, cousin) that have consistent interactions with a child, affecting the child’s cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development. Personal two-way communication is essential to foster a healthy developing child. It is important to become part of the child’s world when creating a healthy environment. Following are a few ways to relate to children to foster learning and positive development:

1. Understand, be able to identify the child’s temperament, understand the child’s need, interests and strengths and understand the social and cultural situation in which a child lives.
2. Observe and assess, watch and listen to the child. How does the child function? How does the child learn best?

3. Establish a relationship with the child. Interaction and communication is necessary. Ask open ended questions. Speak about thoughts and feelings, set expectations; show respect and expect respect; respond to the child's words, actions, and needs.

Family involvement may include a variety of different ways for getting parents involved in the lives of their children: (a) providing parents with facts about their child's development, (b) teaching parents to become advocates for their child, (c) providing resources that will assist parents to guide and teach their child or exchanging information about a child between parents and teachers, (d) hosting joint teacher/parent activities, (e) helping parents to get access to community services, and (f) helping parents or families invest resources in their children (e.g., volunteering at school or helping children with homework or after school activities).

Family involvement plays a critical role in the success of a child's literacy development. Family members as educators can influence their child's learning and development. Many literacy programs are being created to support family participation in preparation for child literacy for low-income and middle class families through home literacy programs or public events like workshops.

Research in the last five years has consistently found the following recurring themes. Family involvement is linked to family expectations of achievement (Finn, 1998). Family members want their children to succeed (Dever & Burts, 2002). There is inadequate information about the effectiveness of family involvement strategies and what works (Coleman, 1997). The theoretical foundation for family involvement is stronger than the research base at this time (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999).

There are many gaps in the research concerning the topic of family involvement. The most prevalent are: inconsistent operational definition of family involvement (Coleman, 1997); failure to isolate family involvement effects from other program features (Tice, 2000); and inaccurate representation of family influence (Pena, 2000).

Many barriers exist to encouraging family participation and involvement with their child's education. Some of the most common barriers occur because of: cultural misunderstanding, limited resources and skills, health, and work responsibilities. Time constraints, transportation, and failure to get involved can also limit family involvement (Coleman & Churchill, 1997).

Ready to Learn: Using Between the Lions

Ready to Learn is a national program funded by the US Department of Education. *Ready to Learn* goals are to (a) encourage co-viewing of television among adults and children, (b) encourage adults to be more selective in their choices of television programs for children, and (c) encourage adults to seek out books and activities to reinforce the information contained in Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) children's series. *Ready to Learn* serves as an umbrella to PBS's children television programs. One popular literacy program is *Between the Lions*. *Between the Lions* is designed to increase family literacy, increase family involvement, and meet the needs of the community. Researchers would like to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of *Ready to Learn: Between the Lions* literacy workshop in enhancing and developing children's literacy skills and enhancing family literacy interactions.

Between the Lions is a *Ready to Learn* program created by PBS to enhance literacy learning for teachers, parents and children. This program series is targeted toward

beginning readers, and emphasizes the pleasures and value of reading. *Between the Lions* picks up where Sesame Street leaves off, focusing on a phonemic approach by introducing children to beginning sounds of words. It is a comprehensive literacy curriculum that provides children with the skills to read. *Between the Lions* is named for a family of lions, Theo, Cleo, Lionel and Leona who lives in a library and invite their audience inside to experience adventure and excitement. The series combines puppetry, animation, live action, and music to entertain and teach children. *Between the Lions* has aired since April 2000. It is viewed in more than a million households nation wide (L. Brown, personal communication, October 17, 2002).

Mission. The mission of the *Between the Lions* series is “to help children enhance their early reading skills through a fun and extensive curriculum that introduces stories and activities through T.V.” (Between the Lions, 2002). *Ready to Learn* has a magic formula, which they call the Learning Triangle: view, read, and do. View a *Between the Lions* episode, read aloud a book that is related to the episode, and do a hands-on activity that extends learning in a fun manner. See appendix D to view the *Ready to Learn* Learning Triangle.

Curriculum Objectives. Between the Lions series was created with these curriculum objectives in mind.

1. Show the benefits of access to the world of print.
2. Demonstrate that learning to read and write can be a struggle, but worth the effort.
3. Show that there are many reasons to write.
4. Introduce new vocabulary words and their meanings.
5. Demonstrate how words work.

6. Use key words and related words in simple, connected text, words that are presented on screen.
7. Showcase high-frequency “sight” words.

Because *Between the Lions* is a *Ready to Learn* program it is free to every household with a TV, making it easily accessible. It targets children ages zero to eight and provides outreach services to parents, child-care providers, and childhood professionals, providing opportunities for family literacy programs. *Between the Lions* promotes family involvement by focusing on parent/family-child interaction.

Between the Lions, Family Literacy and Family Involvement

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s joint position statement of 1998 (Rath, 2002) gives eight themes of how to promote literacy to preschool aged children. *Between the Lions* addresses each theme in a unique and different way. *Between the Lions* first starts by addressing: (a) the power and pleasure of literacy: each *Between the Lions* episode celebrates reading, episodes convey reading as fun and exciting; (b) the literate environment: different text forms are shown throughout a *Between the Lions* episode, books come alive with characters, folktales are introduced, and “click the mouse” discusses web sites and signs, even cookbooks are presented in “What’s cooking?” a recurring segment on *Between the Lions*; (c) language development: vocabulary words are introduced and characters ask questions about words; (d) building knowledge and comprehension: the main characters, through conversations, questions and misunderstandings, discuss knowledge and comprehension of stories and situations; (e) knowledge of print: print is continuously flashed top to bottom and left to right on the screen throughout an episode of *Between the Lions*; (f) types of text: *Between the Lions*

uses different genres like folktales, poems, myths and songs; (g) phonological awareness: each episode involves many rhyming and within word sounds, vowel sounds are also emphasized; (h) letters and words: words are described and dealt with sound-by-sound, letter-by-letter, each episode shows high frequency sight words. *Between the Lions* investigates, extends, and modifies words for children's understanding and learning (Rath, 2002).

Literacy programs seem to have a common goal to strengthen the ties between school communities and home communities by transferring aspects of the school culture to the home. The existing program models focus on giving parents guidelines and training to carry out school-like activities at home. The problem with this model - one that seems to be dominant in our society - is that it is based upon societal and cultural assumptions rather than research. Some wrong assumptions include: (a) homes of low-income minority students are literacy impoverished; (b) the natural direction of literacy flows from the parent to child, where in reality many times literacy flows from child to parent; it is a two-way communication effort between the parent and child; (c) children who do specific skill-like literacy tasks at home are better prepared to succeed in school. Home activities should not be limited to skill tasks. There are many ways to improve a child's literacy skills. A child might improve his/her literacy skills through a meaningful conversation with an adult; (d) a cause and effect relationship between school success and home, home literacy success as the key to school success. Although there is a relationship between home and school, home is not the only determining factor in a child's school success. Often times other variables are forgotten; and (e) cultural values are obstacles to children's literacy development. It is true that cultural values and skills

differ in other cultures but are not obstacles to a child's literacy development (Auerbach, 1995).

Overall there is little information about the design of family literacy programs (Gadsden, 1994). Family literacy program models have evolved from a narrow definition of reinforcing school like literacy activities at home to a broader definition, that includes practices that are a socially significant part of daily life (Auerbach, 1995).

Research suggests that a new literacy model be created that incorporates literacy practices, social issues, and community culture into the curriculum (Auerbach, 1995). The question schools should be asking is "how can we support parents in accomplishing their own aims and learn from their cultural experience to inform instruction" (Auerbach, 1995, p.23)? The research suggests that we need to reverse the "from school to family" model and let families and communities influence schools. This alternative model can be found in the work of Friere and Auerbach on a family literacy model: (Auerbach, 1995)

1. Parents or other caregivers working independently on reading and writing.
2. Parents using literacy to address family and community problems
3. Parents addressing child rearing concerns through family literacy class
4. Parents supporting the development of their home language and culture.
5. Parents interacting with the school system

Method

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the literacy program *Between the Lions* workshop in two Baton Rouge Head Start preschools.

Framework

In this project literacy workshops were implemented using the Freirean approach. The Freirean approach bases the content of language lessons on learners' cultural and personal experiences. There are two main features of the Freirean approach. First, there is dialogue, an "I-thou relationship" between subjects, the mutual process of reflecting upon and developing insights into student's culture. In this case, students are both family members and children. Teachers possess knowledge of reading and writing, and students possess knowledge of their culture. Second, the approach emphasizes problem-posing, where the teacher asks the students open-ended questions to facilitate discussion. This allows students to incorporate their real life experiences into the material being learned. Spener summarizes that Freire argues "that social conditions are the cause of illiteracy and that the purpose of adult basic education is to enable learners to participate in liberating themselves from the conditions that oppress them" (Spener, 1990, p.1).

Ready to Learn is a children's program funded by the U.S. Department of Education and serves as an umbrella for Public Broadcasting Systems children's programs. *Sesame Street*, *Arthur*, and *Between the Lions*, are all examples of *Ready to Learn* programs that PBS places under this umbrella. I utilized the *Ready to Learn* program as an additional resource to develop children's social and literacy skills by using *Between the Lions* as a model for learning and teaching literacy skills to parents and

teachers. *Ready to Learn* program's primary audience were parents, teachers and caregivers.

I used *Between the Lions* television program and curriculum to increase parent/family involvement in family literacy through a workshop format. The Workshop Format and Content can be found in Appendix A. The objectives for this workshop focus on better understanding of early literacy concepts and concrete skills or ideas to implement within the family. The workshop format was introduced by Ms. Lenora Brown, LPB *Ready to Learn* Coordinator, and I created and conducted the workshops along with Ms. Brown. Following are the workshop agenda goals: (a) participants will be able to use the *Ready to Learn* learning triangle model with their children, (b) participants will understand and value the importance of sharing stories with children every day, (c) participants will be able to locate and select developmentally appropriate books for their child(ren), (d) participants will be able to model and encourage literacy in the home environment, (e) participants will demonstrate strategies for reading and sharing books with children.

Research Design and Instrument

The research design is best described as a separate-sample pretest-posttest design with random assignment to testing conditions (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Two Head Start centers (i.e., Southern University and Banks) were selected to receive the evaluation instrument in pretest and posttest form, and two Head Start centers (i.e., New Horizons and Progress) were selected to receive the evaluation instrument in posttest form only. The pre-test allowed me to determine the current level of family involvement in literacy

activities. The posttest evaluation allowed me to determine (ideally) the impact of the workshops on change (i.e., improvement) in family involvement in literacy activities.

The evaluation instrument consisted of seven, 5-point, Likert-type questions and one open-ended question. Each instrument gathered the participant's demographic information such as the child's name, child's teacher, time the child has been in attendance at Head Start, and the relationship of the participant completing the instrument to the child enrolled in the center. The evaluation instrument can be found in Appendix B.

Participants: Head Start Centers

The study consisted of four multi-session workshops at different Head Start Preschools throughout East Baton Rouge Parish. The four Head Start preschools were Southern University Head Start, Banks Head Start, New Horizons Head Start, and Progress Road Head Start. These Head Starts were set up by LPB as model Head Starts for Louisiana and the nation, using *Between the Lions* as their primary literacy program to improve academic and social skills and introduce books to children and families. One Head Start center, New Horizons initially agreed to, but then did not participate in the LPB program for various reasons outside the control of this project. Three Head Start Preschools participated in the LPB workshops: Southern University Head Start, Banks Head Start, and Progress Head Start. For reasons that are explained below, only data from Southern University and Banks Head Start Centers are analyzed and reported in this study. The family members of students enrolled in the Head Start centers were recruited into the monthly workshops by verbal invitations from the preschools' directors and classroom teachers and by flyer announcements encouraging their attendance. The

workshop content was scheduled as one of the activities for families in their regularly scheduled, monthly Head Start parent meetings. The workshops were scheduled in the morning between 8:30 am and 12:00 noon, lasting 30-45 minutes. They were offered once a month from January to April.

January was an introductory workshop explaining the project and the purpose of the workshop. The participants were introduced to the LPB company, the LPB staff and the positions these staff members would take in the workshops. At the end of the first session parents left with a take-home video, instructions, and book to use with their children. The second and third workshops were held in February and March and focused on what the parents observed and learned in the tapes that were sent home with them. The group discussed literacy strategies and skills to use with their children (see Appendix A), and if parents were reading to their children. The final workshop was a wrap-up session and was held in April. Parents were encouraged to ask questions, the posttest instrument was administered, and plans were announced for LPB to return during the *Week of the Young Child* to read and distribute books to the children.

Participants: Head Start Families

As noted above, only three of the four Head Start centers ultimately participated in the workshops. The participant families from all three centers were African American and had either one or two children attending the center. The participant families that attended the LPB workshops were parents, guardians, and family members who attended the Head Start parent meetings on a regular basis. The Head Start director stated that “the reason for these [parent] meetings is for you to become advocates for your children,” and those in attendance seemed very concerned and involved in their child’s physical,

emotional, and educational well-being. I was able to observe the participants strong concern for their children in the monthly Head Start parent meetings I attended. These meetings allowed me to be better acquainted with the parent participants, the school personnel and the program policies. One policy of the Head Start program is to include parents in decision making affecting the school and therefore their child. These parents took an active role in making this a reality. They organized fund raisers for the school, planned field trips for the children, shared resources with one another, and informed one another of issues that may be of concern to them as a group. The Head Start parent meetings were organized with a parent president, secretary, chaplain, and treasurer. The concern and care shown for their children was genuine as they tried to create and plan events that would expose their children to new and fun things. It was in this context that the workshops, and family literacy generally, were presented to the parents.

Each parent in attendance at the first workshops in January participated by completing the informed consent forms. I explained through a step-by-step process the study, its purpose, how it will be used, and the participants' right to leave the study at any time. I told the participants that their answers would be kept anonymous at all times. In workshops two and three, I informally polled participants by a show of hands, their viewing of the *Ready to Learn* video distributed to them in the first workshop. Majority of participants reported that they watched the video between workshops.

A workshop every month at each of the four Head Start Centers was planned. Banks, Southern University, and Progress Head Start Centers participated in all four months from January to April. Participants at Southern University and Banks (n = 20) completed the pretest instrument for this study; 17 participants at these two centers

completed the posttest instrument; only 10 participants completed both the pretest and the posttest instruments and attended multiple workshops at these two centers.

Progress Head Start center participants were designated to complete the posttest instrument only; only 5 participants attended multiple workshops and completed the posttest instrument. New Horizons Head Start Center did not participate in any of the workshops; this was the other center designated to be a posttest only site. Because there were so little posttest only data, the research design was altered and only data from matched, pretest-posttest pairs from Southern University and Banks Head Start centers were analyzed (n=10).

Results

Data on matched pretest-posttest evaluations for ten participants were analyzed. The participants were all parents, grandparents, or in one case, an aunt, of the children in the centers. Naturally, then, there was a wide range in ages for the persons completing the instrument. All participants were African-American. All of the children whose family members responded to the instrument had been enrolled in Head Start for one year, except one child who had been enrolled for two years. The children ranged in age from three years to five years, and 4 were boys and 6 were girls. Although both centers from which data are analyzed had several teachers, it happens that all of the children represented in this study had one of only two of the teachers in each center.

The independent samples t-test was used for analysis in this study. The t-test is used when comparing two group means and is best used with a small sample size ($n < 20$). This method assumes the population distribution is normal. The pretest group mean scores were compared to the posttest group mean scores to determine if there was a difference between the group mean test scores. These data are often called matched pairs, where each observation in sample one matches with an observation in sample two. Dependent samples most commonly occur when each sample consists of the same participants.

The analysis proceeded as follows: Each participant's response on each of the seven Likert-type items was summed and averaged for the pretest and the posttest. These means were compared: (a) between the pretest and the posttest for the entire group for each item; (b) between the pretest and the posttest for the entire group for the entire scale; and (c) between the pretest and the posttest for the mean of the items comprising each

objective. I used a one-tailed test because I hypothesized a direction for change in scores - that posttest scores would be higher than pretest scores. Therefore, for my results to be statistically significant, I expected a $t > 1.83$. The alpha level was set at $p = .05$. The tables that follow include significance levels for two-tailed tests, but I discuss the one-tailed results.

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis between the pretest and the posttest for the entire group for each item. For the first item, question number one, “I talk with my child each day about stories we read”, the results show a mean score increase between the pretest and posttest of (.40), with a significance of (.18). For question number two, “My child and I share stories or songs together each day”, the results show a mean score increase between the pretest and posttest of (.60), with a significance of (.15).

Table 1

Compared means for question 1 through 7 between pretest and posttest scores

		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean	Mean Difference
Question 1	0	.95	18	.35	3.20	.40
	1				3.60	
Question 2	0	.11	18	.31	3.50	.60
	1				4.10	
Question 3	0	.62	18	.55	4.10	.30
	1				4.40	
Question 4	0	.00	18	1.0	3.40	.00
	1				3.40	
Question 5	0	-.85	18	.41	4.90	-.20
	1				4.70	
Question 6	0	.25	18	.81	4.30	.10
	1				4.40	
Question 7	0	.58	18	.57	4.50	.20
	1				4.70	

*Equal variances assumed for question 1 through question 7

For question number three, “It is important to me to share stories and songs with my child every day”, the results show a mean score increase between the pretest and posttest of (.30), with a significance of (.27). For question number four, “I have a plan for

daily reading and sharing stories with my child”, the results show the mean score stayed the same between the pretest and posttest, with a significance of (.50). For question number five, “I am confident that I can select appropriate reading material and books for my child”, the results show a mean score decrease between the pretest and posttest of (-.20), with a significance of (.20). For question number six, “I use some of my child’s TV viewing time to promote my child’s interest in reading”, the results show a mean score increase between pretest and posttest of (.10), with a significance of (.40). The last item, question number seven, “My child is learning and using new words, sounds, and letters”, the results show a mean score increase of (.20), with a significance of (.28). In sum, change occurred in the expected direction for five of the seven items, while one item remained neutral and one item changed in the undesired direction. This unexpected change is discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis between the pretest and the posttest for the entire group for the entire scale. The averaged mean score of the summed items increased by .254 from the pretest to the posttest, with significance of (.17). In sum, the average of the scores from pretest to posttest changed in the expected direction. The sum of the mean scores increased from the pretest to posttest and also changed in the expected direction.

Table 2

Pretest/posttest means for the entire group for the entire scale

	POSTEST	N	Mean	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
AVERAGE	0	10	3.93		
	1	10	4.18	.254	.340

*Pretest is 0, posttest is 1.

In the final step of the analysis, I clustered the items according to the workshop objectives addressed by each item, and examined change between the pretest and the posttest score means by objective. Table 3 presents the workshop objectives and the items that pertain to each objective. Table 4 shows average change in means from pretest scores to posttest scores for the relevant items for each objective. Each of the questions referenced specific research objectives. For the first objective, “Participants will be able to use the *Ready to Learn* triangle model with their children”, the results showed an average change in means from pretest scores to posttest scores for the two relevant items of (.10), with a significance of (.37). The second workshop objective, “participants will understand and value the importance of sharing stories with their child”, the results showed an average change in means from pretest to posttest scores for the three relevant items of (.43), with a significance of (.11).

Table 3

Instrument Questions Relating to Research Objectives

	Objective #1	Objective #2	Objective #3	Objective #4	Objective #5
	Participants will be able to use the <i>Ready to Learn</i> triangle model with their children.	Participants will understand and value the importance of sharing stories with children every day.	Participants will be able to locate a select developmentally appropriate books for their child(ren).	Participants will be able to model and encourage literacy in the home environment.	Participants will demonstrate strategies for reading and sharing books with children.
Q #1		X			
Q #2		X			
Q #3		X			
Q #4	X				X
Q #5			X		
Q #6				X	X
Q #7	X			X	

Objective number three, “participants will be able to locate and select developmentally appropriate books for their children”, the results showed an average change in means from pretest to posttest scores for the one relevant item of (-.20), with a significance of (.20). This is the only objective that did not show an increase in participant scores. Objective number four, “participants will be able to model and encourage literacy in the home environment”, the results showed an average change in means from pretest to posttest scores for the two relevant items of (.15), with a significance of (.31). Objective number five, “participants will demonstrate strategies for reading and sharing books with their child(ren)”, the results showed an average change in means from pretest to posttest scores for the two relevant items of (.10), with a significance of (.37). In sum, the most notable change occurred around the objectives marking the value and importance of sharing literacy activities with children (objective 2) and modeling and encouraging literacy in the home environment (objective 4). As previously noted, there was some decline in confidence in the participants’ ability to select appropriate materials for their children. This outcome is explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

Table 4

Mean score changes for each objective

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5
Average mean difference	.10	.43	-.20	.15	.10
Significance (2-tailed)	.75	.22	.41	.61	.75

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the literacy program *Between the Lions* workshop in two Baton Rouge Head Start preschools. This study was conducted within Baton Rouge Community Head Start Centers for parent participants that attended the monthly parent meetings. The data analyzed in this study came from Banks Head Start and Southern University Head Start parent meetings. The parent participants attended at least two of the four workshop meetings. Participant's attendance from Banks and Southern University workshops were as follows: 30% attended three or more workshops, 70% attended two of the four workshops. The participants were administered a pretest in workshop one and a posttest in workshop four. The pretest and posttest consisted of an evaluation instrument with seven, Likert-type questions for parent participants to complete. The surveys were collected and analyzed using an independent samples t-test to compare the group means between the pretest group and the posttest groups.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop through implementation of these five objectives or agenda goals: (a) participants will be able to use the *Ready to Learn* learning triangle model with their children, (b) participants will understand and value the importance of sharing stories with children every day (c) participants will be able to locate and select developmentally appropriate books for their child(ren), (d) participants will be able to model and encourage literacy in the home environment, and (e) participants will demonstrate strategies for reading and sharing books with children.

Although the results of the data analysis were not statistically significant, the mean scores did show overall change in the expected direction for the group. Therefore, I conclude the *Ready to Learn* workshops were valuable to participants in encouraging literacy in their families. Because I was performing a one-tailed test and hypothesizing a direction for change, it was more difficult for results to achieve statistical significance. The results of this study may have been significant with a larger sample size.

Five of the seven items showed an increase from the mean pretest scores to the mean posttest scores just as I expected. Item one, “I talk with my child about stories we read”, item two, “My child and I share stories or songs together each day”, and item number three, “It is important to me to share stories and songs with my child every day”, all showed increased scores from the pretest to the posttest. I expected results to show an increase in scores from the pretests to posttests; specifically for these three items because those themes were reoccurring in the workshop, in the video, and highly emphasized by the Head Start teachers.

Item number four on the instrument “I have a plan for daily reading and sharing stories” showed no change between the pretest and posttest. This question could have been worded in a more effective way. The answer is very limiting, in either you have a daily plan or you don’t have a daily plan for reading. Participants who had a plan scored consistently high on this question and participants who did not have a daily plan scored consistently lower. The workshop did emphasize the importance of using a daily reading plan but failed to instruct participants on how to create a daily reading plan or give guidelines to direct parent participants on how they should structure a daily reading plan.

Item number five on the instrument, “I am confident I can select appropriate reading material and books for my child” was the only item for which participants scored

in the unexpected direction, that is, that their scores were higher on the pretest than the posttest. This might have been because parents were confident that they knew how to choose developmentally appropriate books for their child before attending the workshop. During the workshop, information about how to pick books out for children depending on their age and reading level was discussed. When the parents then completed the posttest, they may not have felt as comfortable and secure in choosing appropriate reading material. Again, although this outcome was not significant, I can cautiously encourage workshop leaders to reassure participants that they can make good choices and that the workshop information will equip them with strategies to make good choices.

Item number six “I used some of my child’s TV viewing time to promote my child’s interest in reading”, showed an increase in scores from the pretest to the posttest. This item was emphasized heavily toward the beginning of the workshop, when LPB programs and TV shows were introduced as a tool to help children read. Participants then, may have had time to watch a LPB program with their child and use a TV program as a tool to increase reading with their child.

Item number seven, “My child is learning and using new words, sounds, and letters”, showed an increase in scores from the pretest to the posttest. I expected this item to increase because of the developmental stage of the children. Most children were learning new words, sounds and letters daily.

Each of the item numbers were grouped together in specific combinations to meet the workshop objectives. In terms of the objectives for the workshop, change occurred in the expected direction for four of the five objectives. Objective one, “participants will be able to use the *Ready to Learn* learning triangle model with their children”, showed scores that increased from pretest to posttest. I conclude that the participants understood

the *Ready to Learn* triangle and could implement the model when encouraging literacy development with their child(ren).

Objective number two, participants understanding and valuing the importance of reading to their child and sharing stories with their child showed the greatest increase between pretest scores and posttest scores. This is an expected increase because much of the emphasis during the workshop time focused on the importance of reading to children. Also parent participants continuously heard encouragement from teachers and media about the importance of reading to children.

Objective number three, “participants will be able to locate and select developmentally appropriate books for their child(ren)” showed a decrease between pretest and posttest scores. This is due to the fact that objective three is determined only by question 5. Using only one (item) indicator to test the effectiveness of an objective limits the possible results that may have come about. And as stated earlier, parents may not have felt as comfortable and secure in choosing appropriate reading material for their children as they were before attending the workshop.

Objective number four, “participants will be able to model and encourage literacy in the home environment”, showed that scores increased from pretests to posttests. Participants seemed to be interested in learning new ways to read to their child and support their child in learning words, sounds, and with literacy development.

Objective number five, “participants will demonstrate strategies for reading and sharing books with children” showed increased scores from pretest to posttest. Participants seemed to have a plan for increasing literacy development with their child. They understood the importance of reading to their child consistently. The workshop discussed the importance of reading to children daily.

Recommendations and Limitations

This study was limited because of the length of the workshop. The workshop may have shown a significant difference if it had continued over a longer time period. Participants would be able to model their use of new strategies and practice their newly learned literacy skills with their children. Administering four sessions of a workshop is not enough time to make a significant difference in literacy development. The posttest scores showed that parent participants understood the importance and significance of reading to their child and using television as a tool for literacy development. Parent participants reported an increase in reading to their child on a regular basis after attending the workshop.

The sample group I used from these two Head Start centers was not randomly chosen. Parents who attended parent meetings and chose to participate formed my sample. The parents who chose to participate in this study were probably more involved at the school their children attended, and have higher participation in their child's schools than parents who chose not to participate. We could also assume that parents that did participate are more likely to be similar to one another than different, expecting these parents to be more educated, more involved, and to value education more than the parents that chose not to participate in the survey pretests and posttests. If parents with lower participation were included, I might expect the gap between pretest and posttest scores to widen, creating a wider range and the difference between mean scores to be larger producing a more significant t-value.

Due to the scheduled morning time of the workshops and participants work responsibilities, many parents could not attend. The workshop dates and times were set months in advance to allow parents the opportunity to shift their schedule, but many of

the participants were single parents and their work schedule would not permit them time to attend the workshops. Changing the workshop time to early evenings, when participants were free from work responsibilities, may have increased participant turnout.

Suggestions for future research would be to create a workshop with sessions available to participants throughout the nine month school year which is the intended purpose for the *Ready to Learn* literacy workshop program for the next academic school year. A challenge to extending the workshop sessions over a longer time period is the possibility of workshop attendance declining as sessions continue. Also, future researchers and practitioners may consider following up the workshop with home visits to the parent participants. This approach creates a comfortable environment for participants and researcher to implement workshop information into home literacy activities.

In the future, a study that compares two groups against one another, needs a revised research method to include a control group to improve statistical results. The control group would not receive literacy skills through attending a *Ready to Learn* Workshop and would be compared and measured to the treatment group (participants who attended the *Ready to Learn* workshop) to see which group has higher pretest scores. Also, obtaining a sample (from these Head Start centers) of $n > 30$, while controlling for other variables, would allow this study to be generalizable to the low-income, African American families in the city of Baton Rouge.

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Appendix A
Workshop Format

Language and Literacy

Workshop 1

Introduction of workshop team: Lenora, Sonia and Katrina

Collaboration between LPB and Head Start

Evaluation process (pretest)

Explanation of *Ready to Learn* program

Description of Sesame Street and Between the Lions Television Programs

Introduction of Parents

Pass out *Ready to Learn* Sesame Street beginnings video: Talk, Read, Write!

Workshop 2

Introductions

Discussion of Parents as first teachers

- Active communication between school and home

Listening and speaking

- Discuss the importance of having conversations with their child and explain how listening and speaking are the foundations of reading and writing.
- Sing songs with children

Reading together

- Stress the importance for reading
- Talk about things children can read in everyday life, such as signs or food boxes and labels
- Share information about places to find in your community. Encourage parents to get a library card and use the library.

Workshop 3

Introduction of LPB staff

Discussion of television watching and video watching

Listening and speaking

- Talk together during daily routines such as cooking, laundry, etc.
- Talk together while watching your favorite LPB television shows or programs
- Let your children tell you stories, write them down and read them together

Reading Together

- Read to children every day or allow children to read to you
- Use rhyme repetition and playing with sounds
- Read signs, labels, and expose children to other kinds of environment print

Workshop 4

Welcome and Introduction

Group discussion on Language and Literacy Development

LPB Programs children can watch to facilitate Language and Literacy Language and Literacy activities with LPB books and on www.pbskids.org

Evaluation process (posttest)

Wrap up

(Personal communication with Lenora Brown, PBS Kids Web Guide for Ready to Learn Coordinators, & Sesame Street Beginnings: Talk, Read, Write!, 2003)

Appendix B

Instrument

My child's first name: _____ My child's teacher: _____

Age of my child _____ My child has been attending head start for _____ years.

I am the child's:

- parent grandparent aunt/uncle brother/sister
 other _____

Rate the following questions on a scale from 1 to 5. Please circle the number that best answers each question.

1-no, never 2-seldom, not very often 3-sometimes 4-most of the time 5-yes, always

1. I talk with my child each day about stories we read.

5 4 3 2 1

2. My child and I share stories or songs together each day.

1 2 3 4 5

3. It is important to me to share stories and songs with my child every day.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I have a plan for daily reading and sharing stories with my child.

5 4 3 2 1

5. I am confident that I can select appropriate reading material and books for my child.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I use some of my child's TV viewing time to promote my child's interest in reading.

5 4 3 2 1

7. My child is learning and using new words, sounds, and letters.

1 2 3 4 5

What was the most useful information you learned today and why was it useful?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Part 4: Consent Form for Participants

Study Title: The evaluation of a family literacy program

Performance Sites: Banks Head Start, Southern University Head Start, New Horizon Head Start and Progress Road Head Start all in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Contacts:	Pam Monroe, Ph.D.	Phone: 578-3885
	Katrina Hopkins, Graduate Student	Phone: 291-8362, 578-1723

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to evaluate a family literacy program workshop with Head Start teachers, children and families. The study will help LPB decide on possible implementation of a family literacy program in the future.

Subjects: The participants will include teachers, parents and directors of the four Head Start Centers listed above.

Study Procedures: The researchers will collect program evaluation sheets and may conduct personal interviews. Evaluation sheets can be completed in about 5 minutes. The first workshops will last approximately 2 hours; each workshop thereafter will last approximately 1 hour a month.

Benefits: The researchers will know if this family literacy program is useful.

Risks/Discomforts: There are no known risks.

Measures taken to reduce risk: Trained staff members administer workshops on a consistent basis. All participation is voluntary and the information the participants share will be confidential.

I understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate in or may withdraw from this study at any time without being penalized in any way.

I understand that my name and the name of any other participants nor any information identifying me will be used under any circumstances.

I understand that this form does not authorize the release of any identifying information to any party under any circumstances. I agree that this information may be used by the researchers with the stipulation that my name not be attached to this information.

I understand that the results of this research may be published or otherwise disseminated but that these results will not contain any identifying information.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligations to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

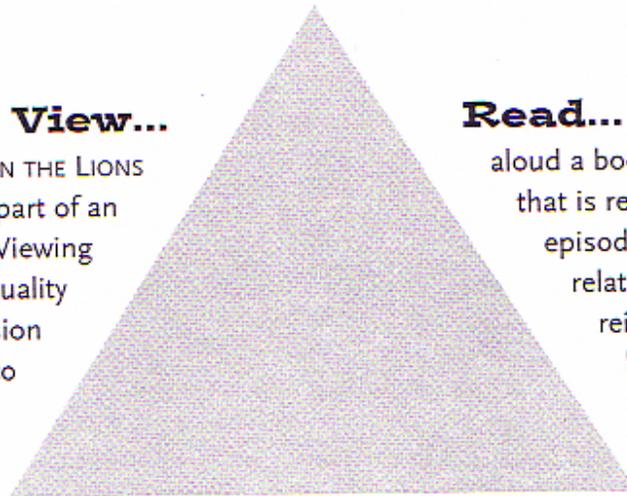
Your child's name

Appendix D

Ready to Learn Triangle



Ready To Learn Learning Triangle



View...

a BETWEEN THE LIONS episode (or part of an episode). Viewing high quality children's television is a great way to introduce a topic.

Read...

aloud a book that is related to the episode. Reading related books reinforces literacy skills.

Do...

a hands-on activity that extends the learning and the fun! Activities help children practice self-expression and listening skills, learn vocabulary words, and acquire new information through personal experience.

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BETWEEN THE LIONS in the Classroom

Vita

Katrina Denise Hopkins was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. She received her Bachelor of Science from Oregon State University in the spring of 2000 from the college of Home Economics majoring in family, child, and consumer science. After graduation she worked for a child's entertainment and education company, Flying Rhinoceros, where she had the privilege of traveling throughout the country giving cartooning presentations at elementary schools. She entered Louisiana State University in the fall of 2001 to pursue a master's degree in the field of human ecology with a focus in family literacy. In the fall of 2003, she will be begin her studies as a doctoral student in the School of Human Ecology.