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Young Chinese ESL children's home literacy experiences

Hong Xu

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ABSTRACT

This article describes home literacy experiences of six Chinese ESL kindergartners. The experiences include the parents' provision of literate home environments as well as children's functional use of Chinese and English and engagement in Chinese and English literacy activities. The findings indicate the diverse and cultural nature of the home literacy experiences and the supportive roles of parents and other family members. Suggestions for teachers and parents to promote ESL children's literacy development are discussed.

As a teacher educator, I have had many opportunities working with kindergarten teachers who have children speaking English as a second language (ESL). Often, teachers wonder about how Asian parents support their ESL children in school learning. Given cultural and linguistic barriers, teachers often fail to communicate with parents to learn about their children's home literacy experiences. Similarly, parents seldom initiate conversations with teachers to show how they support their children's literacy development (Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1997). Many teachers turn to insiders, Asian educators or researchers like myself, for information about Asian ESL children's home literacy experiences.

I initiated this study in response to the inquiries from teachers about Asian ESL children's home literacy experiences. To maximize chances to obtain authentic information through effective communication with the children and parents, I decided to focus this study solely on Chinese children and their parents as they and I shared most aspects of the Chinese culture and at least one Chinese dialect. In particular, I was interested in varied home literacy experiences supporting literacy

development, a most important indicator of school success (Allington and Walmsley, 1995).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study was conducted from the perspective of emergent literacy. According to this perspective, young children acquire literacy concepts and knowledge through ample exposure to and interacting with print. In early years, such experiences with print occur in young children's active engagement in various home literacy practices. Existing research has documented the impact of home literacy experiences on young children's literacy development in these classic descriptive studies (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Children who were early and successful readers have seen adults' modeling of literacy behaviors, been read to, and interacted with capable and literate family members in various literacy practices (e.g., grocery shopping and reading labels and signs). Some recent correlation studies on home literacy environments and early reading development (Senechal, LeFevre, Hudson, and Lawson, 1996; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill, 1991) strengthened the findings of these classic studies.

Home literacy practices include parental provisions of literacy-rich environments, reading and writing environmental print, storybook reading, completion of school homework, coloring and drawing, and watching TV (Clark, 1976; Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1997; Durkin, 1966; Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984; Holdaway, 1979; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teal, 1986; Wells, 1986). These home literacy practices promote young children's literacy development by providing them with meaningful social contexts to explore use and meanings of print as well as its conventions. As parental support for home literacy experiences can range from provision of literacy materials to story book reading to school-related instruction (Rasinski and Fredericks, 1989; Taylor, 1997), the frequency and duration of home literacy practices can vary from home to home. The works of Purcell-Gates (1996), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), and Teal (1986) indicated that there appeared to be differences in the amount of literacy experiences that young children had at home. Purcell-Gates further pointed out that such differences are reflected in children's literacy knowledge.

Additionally, there is an emerging line of research with a focus on ESL children's positive home literacy experiences. For example, Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1997) described Hispanic children's home

literacy experiences. They found that children's literacy activities involved interaction with written texts beyond school learning. More importantly, regardless of English proficiency levels, the parents read materials in Spanish to children (e.g., letters from Mexico and newsletters from school) and sometimes in English. Some parents even made efforts to learn how to read books to their children by attending ESL classes. Oral translation for their parents became one of the common literacy practices for these children. Other studies (Caplan, Choy, Whitmore, 1991, 1995; Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989; Kang, Kuehn, and Herrell, 1996) examining Asian parents' support reported similar findings. The two large-scale and multiple-site studies on Indochinese refugees (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991, 1995; Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989) indicated a positive relation between parents' reading to their children as well as supervision of homework and the children's school success, regardless of parents' English proficiency levels.

Research to date on home literacy experiences focused on ESL children of all grade levels. With an evolving understanding in the importance of early literacy development, a great interest emerged among teachers and researchers in learning more about young children's home literacy experiences. Moreover, a rapidly increasing population of young ESL children in American schools has given rise to a need to better understand and value these children's home literacy experiences. Therefore, in this study, I addressed the following three research questions: What were the selected young Chinese ESL children's literate home environments? What were their Chinese literacy experiences? What were their English literacy experiences?

METHOD

Given the research questions of this study requiring a focused and detailed examination of young ESL children's home literacy experiences, I used a multiple case study (Yin, 1994) as the appropriate research design. A multiple case study allowed me to investigate home literacy experiences as well as contexts where such experiences occur without my external manipulation (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

The kindergarten teachers who expressed their interests in learning about ESL children's home literacy experiences helped me obtain an

initial pool of potential participants. After I secured research permission from the parents, six parents were willing to participate in this study. The age of the children ranged from 5 to 6. Four children were born in the United States; two came to the United States at age 2. Table 1 provides a brief description of participating children and their families.

Table 1

A Brief Description of Participating Children and Their Families

Name	Chinese Dialects	Parents' Educational Levels	Parents' Occupations	Siblings	Grandparents Living in the Same Household
Ling	Mandarin YunNan	Both: literate in Chinese Father: advanced English communicative skills Mother: limited English communicative skills	Father: restaurant waiter Mother: no job	One younger sister	None
Eng	Mandarin Cantonese	Both: literate in Chinese Father: advanced English communicative skills Mother: literate in English	Father: factory worker Mother: acupuncture doctor	One elder brother	Both: no English
Fan	Cantonese	Both: literate in Chinese Both: basic English communicative skills	Father: casino dealer Mother: casino maid	One elder brother	Both: basic English communicative skills
Dao	Mandarin Taiwanese	Both: literate in Chinese Both: literate in English	Father: university professor Mother: registered nurse	Two elder sisters	None
Shen	Cantonese	Both: literate in Chinese Father: limited English communicative skills Mother: literate in English	Father: restaurant dish-washer Mother: assistant manager of front desk in a hotel	None	None
Wei	Cantonese	Both: literate in Chinese Both: advanced English communicative skills	Father: casino dealer Mother: restaurant waiter	One younger brother	Both: no English

The children were enrolled in five half-day English-only kindergarten classrooms in a large school district of a western state. Eng and Fan were in the same classroom. In the classrooms of Ling, Eng, Fan, and Shen, the teachers conducted daily 10-minute reading with a whole class. The children had little time to read books of their own choice. In the classrooms of Dao and Wei, however, children were read to on various occasions. They also had time to read books of their choice and participated in the activities for oral language development (e.g., show-and-tell and sharing). However, writing in the five classrooms was limited to coloring and drawing in worksheets.

DATA COLLECTION

To ensure data triangulation (Yin, 1994), I collected data from multiple sources over a six-month period. Multiple sources of data allowed me to capture the diverse and cultural nature of young ESL children's home literacy experiences. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the parents at the beginning and end of the study. The questions for both interviews focused on various aspects of home literacy experiences. After each interview, I asked the parents and children to carry out some literacy activities so that I could observe and document child-parent interactions.

For another source of data, I had at least 10 informal conversations with each parent between the first and second interviews. The purpose of informal conversations was to gather and update information about the children's home literacy experiences. An informal conversation took place when a parent picked up her child after school where I was observing the child's classroom. The conversation contained a parent's responses to my questions regarding update information on home literacy experiences (e.g., What kinds of books is your daughter reading now?). My questions were the same for all the parents. During the conversation, the parent also responded to my questions that arose from previous data analysis, and shared observations of the child's literacy behaviors. For two or three times during this study, the parents invited me to go home with them after school so that they could share with me some literacy activities.

The data were further gathered from the telephone conversations with some parents who sought my professional opinions about teaching literacy to their children. Data collected were in Chinese except those

from one parent. Gathering data in Chinese, with which the parents felt most comfortable, ensured authenticity and validity of the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews and informal conversations were tape recorded and later transcribed; telephone conversations and observations of child-parent interactions during home literacy activities were recorded as field notes. The transcripts and field notes, if in Chinese, were translated into English. To minimize the meaning loss, a bilingually literate colleague cross-checked the translation. I employed constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to analyze data. While data collection and analysis were ongoing, I focused initial data analysis on broad categories: literate home environments and literacy practices. As the subcategories emerged, previously coded data were recoded to reflect new subcategories. Coding and recoding continued until data saturation occurred (Guba and Lincoln, 1986). To minimize bias in data analysis, a trained colleague and I compared each other's analyzed categories and subcategories from a same set of data. The discrepancies in our data analysis were discussed and then adjusted. Furthermore, I used memo writing (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to assist me in deepening my understandings of each child's unique home literacy experiences and discovering the patterns across six children's home literacy experiences.

FINDINGS

Case synopses of individual children

Ling, a quiet and sweet girl, lived in a print-rich environment with writing supplies, coloring and story books, and a television set. Ling seldom had school homework or was asked by her mother to do other reading or writing activities to reinforce school learning. Ling enjoyed coloring, drawing, watching TV, and reading supermarket advertisements. Her mother often read Ling's favorite books to or with her.

Eng, an outspoken and enthusiastic girl, was surrounded by English and Chinese books that her mother bought or borrowed from a local library. She was often busy with independent reading, doing homework, coloring and drawing, watching TV, and teaching her mother American English and her grandmother the English alphabet. In addition to supervising the completion of school homework, Eng's mother taught Eng Chinese and reinforced knowledge of print in English by using

environmental print with her, reading books to or with her to do extra homework.

Fan, a shy and self-reliant boy, had easy access to a number of English books. Although he was seldom read to, he spent much time reading independently and watching TV. He was an independent and strategic learner, who thought a lot while reading and watching TV and was skillful at solving problems during his reading. He was resentful at any kind of homework. Fan's mother taught Fan some Chinese words.

Dao, a shy boy with a sense of humor, had many English books that his parents bought or borrowed from a local library. He was often read to by or read with his elder sisters, as his parents were busy with their professional careers. He had a keen interest in various kinds of animals and always asked questions while reading books. His parents occasionally asked him to copy words from his reading books.

Shen, a quiet and diligent girl, lived in a print-rich environment with writing supplies, coloring books, and English books that her mother bought. Her after school daily schedule was always full of such activities as being read to, reading books to her mother, independent reading, copying, and watching TV. Shen's mother supervised her completion of school homework as well as home daily activities.

Wei, an outspoken and a confident boy, was always proud to show me what he colored and drew and what he could read. He enjoyed reading supermarket advertisements, and copying down road signs and learning about their meanings. His daily literacy activities were a blend of being read to, independent reading, copying words from his reading books, and watching TV. His parents offered him assistance when he encountered difficulties during literacy activities.

CROSS-CASE COMPARISONS

Literate home environments

Literate home environments were evident in the parents' provision of print and print-related materials. I noted during home observations, a television set, a number of English books, English newspapers, TV guides, writing supplies, and coloring books. In the homes of Fan and Eng, there were several Chinese books. Eng and Fan each had an electronic bilingual Chinese-English translator. Interestingly, there were always children's works completed at school or at home displayed on the refrigerators. Both Eng's mother and Dao's father took their children to local libraries to check out books. Shen's mother bought whatever books

Shen loved, and she just wanted Shen “to have a habit of wanting books and wanting to read.”

In addition, literate home environments were present in the way that parents and sometimes grandparents demonstrated interests in learning English, and modeled meaningful use of both Chinese and English. The parents considered reading books to or with their children as an opportunity to learn English. The parents of Ling, Eng, Fan, and Wei willingly accepted the children’s correcting their mispronunciations of English words. The parents of Eng, Dao, and Shen, though with a relatively higher English proficiency level, still asked their children about English equivalents for some Chinese words. During the second interview, some parents commented that their children had become more confident in their knowledge of English and more motivated to learn it.

Another aspect of literate home environments was the parents’ daily interactions with print that served as modeling for their children. Based on my interactions with the parents and observations, I noted that they read advertisements before going grocery shopping. Some parents wrote a grocery list in Chinese; others wrote it in English. The parents often read a TV guide for daily shows and newspapers in English or in Chinese.

Chinese literacy practices

Functional use of Chinese. The children’s use of Chinese was mostly oral communication with their parents, siblings, and grandparents. Some children also had experiences with written Chinese. The parents of Fan, Dao, Shen, and Wei mentioned that their children often showed interests in knowing what the characters on a calendar were. The parents also reported that their children wanted to learn about the characters on the store and restaurant logos in a Chinatown. Eng, Dao, and Shen often pretend-read a Chinese menu while dining at a Chinese restaurant. Eng explained, I read a Chinese menu, eat Chinese food, and really feel like a Chinese.”

Chinese literacy activities. Several parents engaged their children in learning Chinese. Fan’s mother sent him to a Chinese school, and also taught him to read some basic Chinese characters by asking him to read after her pages from a Chinese book. Using a different method, Eng’s mother taught her some Chinese sight words.

I teach her Chinese starting with the simple characters, for instance, how to write water and hand in Chinese. I also teach her how to write sun and moon in Chinese while Eng and I were reviewing English words, sun and moon. On the calendar, there are Chinese characters for

Monday, I teach her each character; then we review these characters for Monday when the next week comes.

By comparison, Shen's mother used Chinese as a tool to help Shen comprehend an English book. In the beginning, she first told Shen in Chinese about the book and then read it to her in English. As time proceeded, she first read the book to Shen in English and, if Shen did not understand it, her mother then translated the book into Chinese.

English Literacy Practices

Functional use of English. The functional use of English literacy was most evident in the three areas. First, there was an increasing use of English as a communication tool at home. Eng, Dao, and Fan talked to their brothers or sisters in English more often. Wei tended to speak English to his parents, grandmother, and whoever came to his home for a visit. Ling and Shen, in a detailed and fluent fashion, explained to their parents about school activities more often in English than in Chinese.

Second, the children became increasingly interested in and aware of using environmental print. The children, observed by their parents, often shouted out with excitement food labels at a supermarket. The parents, in turn, used environmental print as a rich source for their children to learn English. The mothers of the children, except Dao's, encouraged their children to read advertisements and coupons to select food to buy at a supermarket. Eng's mother asked her to cut words and pictures to paste on the sheet of a target letter (e.g., apples on an A sheet). Similarly, Shen's mother asked her to circle the pictures and words that started with a target letter. Fan was the only child who enjoyed reading the newspaper every day.

Third, the children, with assistance from a parent or sibling, often read a TV guide for their favorite shows. Ling, Dao, Fan, Shen, and Wei often checked with their parents to make sure that they were looking at the right page with the shows. According to her mother, Eng would read aloud several shows from a TV guide to obtain her mother's consent before watching.

English literacy activities. The parents of the six children agreed that the Chinese language was important; they, however, never overlooked their children's English learning. Ling's mother expressed the wish of the parents for their children, "In order for Ling to go to college, she has to have good English. After she gets a degree, she will have a decent job and win others' respect because she is well educated." The parents engaged their children in a variety of English literacy activities to

“help them become successful readers and writers,” as Shen’s mother remarked.

The first literacy activity was being read to. Five of the six children were often read to except Fan whose mother was not sure that her English was good enough. The books, mostly related to school learning, consisted of stories and information. Each book was read at least two or three times. Based on the accounts of the parents and my observations, the parents were reading books as if telling stories. The parents seemed to share the belief “that learning English is just like learning Chinese. It requires a lot of practice and memorization. They [the children] should practice and practice so that they will remember English words.” The parents frequently stopped reading to assess the children’s knowledge of print. For example, Eng’s mother, after reading the page of colors, asked Eng, “Now, how to spell yellow?” Shen was often asked to find a word on a page beginning with a target letter that she was learning at school. The parents of Eng, Shen, and Wei concluded each book reading by asking them to copy words from the book. The parents often checked the children’s comprehension at the end of story reading as well as asked children’s personal responses to the story (e.g., Do you like this book? Is Cinderella happy now?). Additionally, some parents assisted the children in developing an awareness of speech-to-print match. Eng’s and Shen’s mothers as well as Wei’s parents finger pointed every word on a page while reading.

As the study proceeded, two new patterns of parents’ story book reading emerged. One pattern indicated that the parents were reading, not telling stories to the children. This new pattern likely resulted from children’s increasing interests in and knowledge of print. Eng, Ling, Shen, and Wei noticed a discrepancy between their mothers’ oral reading and words on the page. Ling, for instance, questioned her mother when she skipped unknown words.

Another pattern found parents gradually moving away from asking the children too many questions to check their knowledge of print. Instead, the parents focused on children’s comprehension of books. Based on numerous informal conversations with the parents and the second interview, the parents came to realize that the children were interested in what was happening in a book. Such interest was demonstrated in children’s retelling books after being read to at home and at school.

The second literacy activity was independent reading. The data revealed variability in the children’s frequencies in independent reading. Fan was the only child for whom independent reading was the main literacy activity at home. Dao, Eng, Shen, and Wei read books more often

than Ling, although Ling read more toward the end of the study. The children read favorite and easy books more than one time, and often abandoned difficult books in the middle of reading and seldom picked them up to read again unless the parents or others first read to them and repeated it several times. Over the course of the study, the children had also developed their unique interests in different types of books. Ling continued her love for fairy tales but started exploring informational books. Eng still considered informational books as her favorites. Both Dao and Fan were fascinated with books of different animals. Shen still only loved fairy tales. Wei, on the other hand, developed a wide variety of interests in books, including those about animals, fairy tales, and fantasy.

Even though the children were reading independently, they could always obtain assistance from their parents. The children considered their parents' prompt and satisfactory responses to their questions very important. Wei would get very upset and even lose his temper if his father did not immediately tell him the meaning of an unknown word. When Ling's mother did not have an explanation for Ling's unknown words, she would tell Ling to copy down the words and later ask her dad. Eng's mother did not permit Eng to use an electronic English-Chinese translator for an unknown word because "Once she used the translator, she would depend too much on it and she was not going to memorize words." As I observed, Eng's mother first said the word, then explained it by using it in different sentences, and later asked Eng to copy it. Shen's mother used a similar approach to explaining to Shen unknown words.

Fan was a persistent learner in that he would ask everyone about unknown words, starting with his mother, brother, and grandmother until he got relatively satisfactory explanations. Then, he cross-checked the explanations in his electronic English-Chinese translator. Like other children, Dao asked questions about his reading books. Unlike other children, his questions changed over the course of the study, which indicated his developing knowledge of print. In the beginning, Dao tended to ask questions about pictures (e.g., What is it?). Toward the end of the study, his questions were primarily about words (e.g., What does this word say?).

The third literacy activity involved reviewing school learning. The parents assisted, to some extent, the children in reviewing content of school learning by supervising completion of school homework and providing extra homework. Ling did not have homework from her school or home, but Ling's mother checked Ling's knowledge of print during her

reading aloud to Ling. Fan was often required to finish his homework before watching TV; like Ling, Fan never did any copying words at home. Eng and Shen were asked to do a lot of copying based on what was taught at school. Eng's mother checked out library books related to what Eng was learning at school. Shen's mother bought activity books to help Shen with the alphabet and sight words. Both Eng and Shen copied words from the books. In addition, Shen was required to read to her mother the books from school and to name pictures starting with a target letter.

The fourth literacy activity was coloring and drawing. The six children enjoyed coloring, but at first paid little attention to print associated with the objects or people that they were coloring. For instance, Shen pointed at the picture of Mickey Mouse as a response to my question, "Where on this page can you find the words, Mickey Mouse?" Only three out of six children tried to label their drawings. The labels may or may not be associated with the drawings. Ling wrote down Dad, Mom, and the names of her sister and herself in her drawing. Eng put down numbers, letters, and some color words; Wei often put a stop sign, and some color words and numbers in his drawing.

Toward the end of the study, the parent and my observations of the children indicated that the children started making sense of the relationship between words and pictures. For example, the children often asked their parents about the names for the pictures in their coloring books. In the drawings by Dao, Fan, and Shen, there appeared more and more words, although perhaps not related to the drawing. Ling, Eng, and Wei, in their drawings, made a closer connection between words and pictures.

The fifth literacy activity was watching TV. All parents viewed TV as an important source of perfect American English input. Dao's mother explained, "I don't want to teach Dao English because I am afraid that my Chinese accent will affect Dao's English. He can learn perfect American English from different TV shows." The children watched TV shows ranging from those with primary educational focus (e.g. Sesame Street) to those with a combined focus of education and entertainment (e.g., Wishbone). The mothers of Ling, Shen, and Wei reported spending at least one hour per day watching TV with their children. They asked the children questions related to the ongoing events on TV and responded to their inquiries.

While watching TV, the children demonstrated different behaviors, which indicated their active engagement in the ongoing events on TV. Ling exhibited varying facial expressions and often repeated words from a TV show. Eng and Shen were able to retell events in a show

immediately after it and even a few days later. Dao and Wei were proudly shouting out the words that they could understand. Most interesting was Fan's behavior. His mother recounted, "He practices saying what is learned [from TV shows] every day. He talks to himself [while watching TV]. While he is talking, nobody can be talking. He says, 'You interrupt my story in my head...'"

DISCUSSION

The diverse and cultural nature of home literacy experiences

The findings of this study reflect the diverse and cultural nature of the home literacy experiences of the six Chinese children. The diverse nature is present in (a) literate home environment; (b) a wide range of literacy activities both in Chinese and in English; (c) and different degrees of parental and other family members' involvement. The children had easy access to a variety of print materials and writing supplies. An important element of literate home environments involved the adults' interests in learning English, functional use of print within meaningful social contexts, and engaging the children in purposeful use of print.

Not all the children participated in the same amount of literacy activities in both Chinese and English, although they all experienced similar types of literacy practices (being read to, independent reading, reviewing school learning, coloring and drawing, and watching TV). Eng for example, had more experiences with Chinese literacy practices than Wei. Fan read English books independently more often than other children did. Some of these activities centered more on reinforcing school learning; others reflected a combined emphasis of reinforcing school learning, and promoting enjoyment of learning. Through these literacy activities, the children exhibited different levels of growth in literacy knowledge as well as interests in and love for books.

The parents and other family members were involved in the children's literacy experiences more often in some homes than in others. Fan's mother was least involved in his literacy learning as she stated that her English was not good enough and could not help him. The support from the mothers of Eng and Shen was the greatest compared to that from the mothers of Ling, Dao, and Wei. Only the fathers of Ling, Dao, and Wei and the grandmothers of Eng and Fan had some levels of involvement. Dao's sisters were the only siblings who played the unique role of parents and were involved in his home literacy learning experiences at home. Although there existed variability in the degrees of

involvement, parents and other family members provided the children with as much support as they could.

In addition to the diverse nature, the Chinese ESL children's home literacy experiences mirror the influence of cultural beliefs and practices that their parents held. Regardless of English literacy levels, the parents held the similar beliefs about the importance of their children's education. Driven by this set of beliefs, the parents engaged the children in varying literacy activities every day or at least provided a nurturing environment as in the case of Fan's mother. Furthermore, the way that the parents and other family members engaged in the children in various literacy activities, such as copying, reflected their own cultural beliefs and Chinese learning experiences. That is, the adults learned to read and write Chinese by rote memorization and ample practices when they were at school in the Mainland China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong.

Another aspect of the cultural nature reflected in the children's home literacy experiences was the use and maintenance of Chinese. Chinese was evidently a tool for communication between the children and other family members. It was also a crucial tool for the children to develop an interest in and knowledge of print as a result of seeing Chinese in their environments and observing family members using Chinese. To Eng, Fan, and Shen, the experiences of listening to stories of English books read in Chinese or learning about Chinese might have helped them with connecting Chinese literacy with English literacy in terms of a love for books and stories.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study, with a focus on six Chinese kindergartners and their parents, explores young ESL children's literate home environments and their Chinese and English literacy experiences. This study is important in two ways. First, the findings of the study produce further support for the premise that young children's home literacy experiences support literacy development to various degrees, regardless of factors such as low SES status and speaking English as a second language (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1997; Goldenberg, 1987; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Purcell-Gates, L'Allier, and Smith, 1995; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Second, the findings suggest some implications for teachers and parents of ESL children.

After I completed this study, I shared the findings with the five teachers of the six Chinese ESL children. The teachers were somewhat shocked by the findings. They were surprised to learn that the Chinese

ESL children had such diverse opportunities to interact with print as opposed to their assumption that the parents probably asked the children to do some extra homework in addition to school homework. The teachers of Ling, Fan, Dao, and Shen were amazed at the vast knowledge about print that they demonstrated during various home literacy experiences. At school, the children were often too shy to actively participate in classroom literacy activities to demonstrate their literacy knowledge. Dao's teacher could hardly believe that his parents were not as much involved in his home literacy activities as she expected, because Dao's parents who were highly well-educated, should know the importance of parental involvement. The teachers of Ling and Fan, however, were happy to learn that the children's mothers, though not very proficient in English, were also supportive of school learning.

The teachers' reactions to the findings of the study lead to one fundamental implication related to teacher perceptions and knowledge of ESL students. The diversity in the children's home literacy experiences urges teachers to challenge the stereotypes of ESL children as "Asian models" portrayed by the media (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991, 1995). Each child needs to be perceived as a unique individual from a unique home environment with varying home literacy experiences and knowledge in English and native language. It is detrimental to overlook differences in ESL children's home literacy experiences and to assume that all ESL children from one ethnic background possess rich literacy knowledge while those from another ethnic background do not. Stereotypical assumptions could prevent classroom literacy instruction from addressing the needs of individual ESL children.

Another implication focuses on teacher pedagogical practices that support and complement ESL children's home literacy experiences (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Teacher support can be accomplished by continuing to engage ESL children's actively in various literacy activities that would strengthen and enhance their literacy knowledge, which have developed through home literacy experiences. Additionally, teacher support needs to extend to ESL children's native language. Although I do not consider it possible for every teacher to learn their ESL children's native language, I do believe it is important for every teacher to learn *about* ESL children's native language. Teachers can gain knowledge of a common native language through bilinguals in a community or an uncommon native language from international students from a local university.

Knowledge of ESL children's native language, along with their home literacy experiences in native language, would provide teachers with insights into similarities and differences in literacy development and

transfer literacy skills between the two languages. Such insights would build foundations for responsive literacy instruction for ESL children. In particular, a teacher's interest in learning about ESL children's native language, in turn, promotes their self-esteem (Cummins, 1994). Teachers can also encourage ESL children to share their native language with the class in a language project or thematic unit (Jiang, 1997).

In complementing home literacy experiences, teachers must gear classroom literacy instruction toward the areas in which ESL students have limited experiences and literacy knowledge (Xu, in press). For example, Fan had little experience with being read to at home. It became vital for Fan to have many opportunities to hear books read aloud to him at school in order for him to develop literacy knowledge such as speech-to-print match and reading with fluency and expressions.

A third implication is associated with parent provisions of home literacy experiences for their ESL children. Similar to teacher reactions to the findings of this study, the parents were surprised but relieved to learn that what they were doing with their children at home was supportive of school learning. Their responses may indicate that parents of ESL children often lack confidence in their abilities to assist their children's English literacy development. Communicating with teachers about their children's English literacy knowledge may validate and reassure the value of home literacy experiences for parents. On the other hand, some home literacy activities (e.g., copying words), often colored by cultural beliefs and practices, may not be the most effective ways to develop ESL children's literacy knowledge. Therefore, parents need to be open-minded to teacher suggestions of authentic literacy activities, which would maximize ESL children's active interactions with print. For example, teachers can introduce to Ling's parents interactive storybook reading (Klesius and Griffith, 1996) and model it for them to facilitate Ling's active participation and to assist her in making a transition from being read to independent reading.

Additionally, parents' over-emphasis on their ESL children's learning English may cause a possible loss of children's ability to communicate in native language. Parents need to be informed by their children's teachers of the empirical and research evidence, which supports the important role that native language plays in their ESL children's English literacy development. The parents of ESL children, while celebrating their children's accomplishments in English literacy, need to remember promoting native language literacy, starting with simple and easy activities, like read-aloud and use of environmental print.

If ESL children are to receive mutual and continued support from school and home for literacy learning in English and native language, it seems essential that both teachers and parents (or other family members) are familiar with their literacy experiences in both settings. Teachers and parents need to frequently exchange valuable information about home and school literacy experiences. Only when teachers and parents of ESL children become partners, the children's chances to successfully develop literacy both in English and native language can be maximized.

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