Article

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Parents' responses to a kindergarten-classroom lending-library component designed to support shared reading at home

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Abstract
Teachers often recommend that families engage their children in shared book reading to support literacy learning at home. When teachers purposefully provide families with home literacy activities there are benefits for everyone involved. The purpose of this article is to report the findings of a study that examined parental participation and response to a home book reading component (i.e. a classroom lending library) that

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took place in 32 kindergarten classrooms as part of a larger study examining the efficacy of a curriculum focused on promoting kindergartners' positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Findings suggest that parents considered shared book reading to be enjoyable and beneficial for their children's language and literacy development. Additionally, parents' comments provided evidence that both they and their children learned a variety of new concepts, including those related to science and disabilities, through shared book reading. Implications for practice and ideas for future research are discussed.

Keywords
Shared reading, classroom lending library, home and school, kindergarten, disability, science

Introduction

Young children's journey through early language and literacy development includes the intersection of two salient crossroads: family literacy and parental involvement (Compton-Lilly and Greene, 2011). At the middle of this intersection are teachers with the desire to increase young children's emergent literacy skills by complementing the literacy activities already present at home and supporting parents' involvement with home experiences that relate to school. When teachers carefully choose strategies to engage families in literacy there are benefits for everyone involved: children, parents and the teachers themselves.

A popular and often suggested literacy activity for families is shared book reading (Dickinson, 2001; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2006). Book reading shared between parents and children is encouraged as a family literacy activity to support learning at home (Denney et al., 2010; Sénéchal, 2006, 2010). Interestingly, when the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics surveyed parents in 2007, they found that about 83% of preschoolers were read to by a family member three or more times a week (2011).

Through their experiences with shared book reading, children can learn several emergent literacy skills such as the properties of written language, letter knowledge, receptive and expressive language, and they benefit from adults' cultural knowledge and mediation (Denney et al., 2010; Otto and Johnson, 1994). In a review of several studies examining the influence of shared book reading on child outcomes, Sénéchal (2010) found that book reading contributed to children's vocabulary development, which later contributed to their successful literacy development in older grades. Additionally, young children who engaged in shared book reading with their parents were

more likely to read for enjoyment in later grades too. Furthermore, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Mol and Bus (2011) found that when families established a habit of shared book reading at home, they created a 'causal spiral' that supported children's language and reading skills. That is, the routine of shared book reading increased children's exposure to language, which in turn motivated children's participation in reading outside of school, and subsequently continued to support children's growth in language and literacy skills.

Teachers experience benefits when parents and children engage in literacy activities at home. For example, teachers' encouragement of parent–child home-learning activities, including family literacy activities, provides an opportunity to establish home–school connections (Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 2003). In return, through encouraging and supporting home learning activities, teachers create a sense of partnership between themselves and families that can eventually lead to improved outcomes for children and parents (Dickinson and Tabors, 2001). For example, Otto and Johnson (1994) noted that shared book reading could provide parents and children with the opportunity to take a break from busy schedules, enhance their attachment, and create positive shared memories together.

Strategies for supporting family literacy include initiatives that can begin in classrooms, schools or across school districts (Pomerantz, 2001). Teachers can introduce several types of family literacy activities at the classroom level including donating books to families, creating home-learning toolkits (Floyd and Vernon-Dotson, 2009), developing home-literacy bags (Grande, 2004), and establishing classroom lending libraries (Halsall and Green, 1995; Otto and Johnson, 1994; Robinson et al., 1996). Researchers investigating the impact of classroom lending libraries have reported numerous benefits. For example, Otto and Johnson (1994) noted that providing opportunities for students to bring home books was a great gift, especially for families with limited resources. In their study of lending libraries in Head Start classrooms, Halsall and Green (1995) echoed this belief, reporting that children enjoyed the process of choosing and taking books home to read with family members.

Robinson et al. (1996) investigated a take-home book programme, similar to a lending-library system. In this programme, kindergartners had the opportunity to take home one book each day for a 12-week period. Children took advantage of this opportunity 73% of the time. Moreover, teachers reported that managing the take-home book programme was easy as it was not overly time-consuming or disruptive to their curriculum. Taken together,

Pomerantz and Sampson (2001; as cited in Pomerantz, 2001) noted that many parents would like their children to take home more books, suggesting that increased access to books is greatly appreciated by family members. Supporting family literacy and shared book reading experiences can also be a way to transmit ideas, attitudes and values between parents and children, such as the acceptance of difference.

In today's world, it is not uncommon to have a diverse group of children in early childhood classes, such as children with and without disabilities, children who speak multiple languages, children from different races and children from homes with a variety of family structures. These differences are a reflection of our increasingly diverse society, and as we see more differences reflected in children, it is essential that teachers and parents intentionally nurture acceptance of all children. Early childhood classes that promote a sense of belonging and acceptance of difference mirror the sentiments of the *DEC/NAEYC Joint Position Statement on Inclusion*, which states, 'Promoting development and belonging for every child is a widely held value among early education and intervention professionals and throughout our society. Early childhood inclusion is the term used to reflect these values and societal views' (DEC/NAEYC, 2009, 1). Books provide a medium through which acceptance of differences can be fostered.

The purpose of this article is to share the findings on family participation from an intervention study that focused on the acceptance of disabilities. Specific research questions were: (a) do families participate in shared book reading with their kindergarteners, when books are sent home as part of an intervention package? and (b) what feedback do families provide about their shared book reading experiences?

Method

All the family members and children involved in this study were participants of a larger, four-year, federally-funded research project. This larger study was designed to examine the *Special Friends* programme and its efficacy to promote kindergartners' positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Ostrosky et al., 2014; henceforth the 'efficacy study'). The efficacy study used a randomized-cluster research design and consisted of 16 experimental and 16 contact control classrooms. Based on randomized assignment, classrooms implemented either the *Special Friends* programme (i.e. experimental classrooms) or a *Science* programme adapted from the *ScienceStart!*™ curriculum (i.e. contact control classrooms; French and Conezio, 2007).

Both programmes were six weeks in length. In total, 32 inclusive kindergarten classrooms participated in the efficacy study across two states (i.e. Illinois and Rhode Island).

The *Special Friends* programme consisted of books and activities related to disability awareness, whereas the *Science* programme utilized science-themed books and activities. Despite the curricular differences, both programmes consisted of three similar components: (a) class-wide book readings (15 mins on each of three days/week for six weeks); (b) mixed-ability, cooperative learning groups (15 mins on each of three days/week for six weeks immediately after the book reading); and (c) home book reading (one book sent home each of the six weeks). In both interventions, teachers focused on similarities or connections between their students and characters in the books or the storyline (i.e. 'Tell me about some vegetables you like,' 'Do you know anyone who uses a wheelchair?' 'Would you squash the ant or let it live?'). The current study focused on the experiences of family members and children within the context of the home book reading component of the efficacy study. In particular, we were interested in disability awareness and acceptance.

Participants

There were 608 families who participated in the home book reading component at least once over the six-week intervention period. Family members' initials on a reading record (described in more detail later) served as a proxy for weekly family member–child participation in the home book reading component of the efficacy study. Therefore, of the 740 families who participated in the larger study, 82% (608/740) participated in the current study, indicating that 82% of the families reported reading at least one of the six books that were sent home as part of the interventions. It is possible that more family members read books but failed to return the reading record.

Qualitative data were then gathered from reading records that were initialled by parents and included written comments. Therefore, data from children who participated in the study's home book reading component, but who did not return their reading record or only returned their reading record with family member initials (i.e. no comments), were not included in the qualitative data analysis. Following this criterion, qualitative data from 349 families (57% of the 608 who returned signed reading records) were included (reflecting 354 children as there were five sets of twins). Children were evenly divided between the two interventions with 177 students participating in the *Special Friends* programme and 177 in the *Science* programme.

Of the 354 children whose parental comments were analysed more closely, 51.7% were male (n = 183), 45.8% were female (n = 162) and we did not have gender information for 2.5% (n = 9) of the children. Approximately 25% of the participating children were identified as having a disability (n = 90). Race/ethnicities represented in this sample included: Caucasian (n = 196; 55.4%), Hispanic (n = 59; 16.7%), African-American (n = 45; 12.7%), Asian (n = 29; 8.2%), other (n = 4; 1.1%) and missing data (n = 21; 5.9%). Eligibility for free or reduced lunch was used as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Overall, 46.6% of children qualified for free or reduced lunch (n = 165). Missing data occurred when children enrolled in a participating classroom following the start of the curriculum implementation; hence, their demographic information was not solicited. However, the parents of these children provided consent for their children's participation in all aspects of the larger efficacy study, including the home book reading component.

Procedures

As part of the large efficacy study, the 32 kindergarten teachers led class-wide book readings and discussions three days a week for the six-week intervention period. Research staff organized each teacher's classroom lending library for the home book reading component following the completion of the third book reading each week. For the home book reading component, research staff provided teachers with ten copies of each book they had read that week (n = 30 books per classroom each week). Each week, children selected which book they wanted to take home and read with a family member. The selected book was sent home in a clear plastic bag along with the book's guided discussion bookmark (placed inside the book) and the child's reading record (materials described below). Each bag was labelled with the child's name and a reminder for a family member to sign the reading record and return the items the following Monday. If children forgot to return the book or lost their materials, they were still allowed to select and bring home a book the following week. After completion of the six-week intervention, the researchers collected all returned reading records from the classroom teachers, resulting in 608 signed reading records.

Materials

The materials used in the *Special Friends* and *Science* programmes were similar in nature. The only distinguishable difference between the programmes was

their topical focus (i.e. disability awareness or science-themed). However, in both programmes, teachers focused on the similarities between their students and book content (i.e. 'In this book Susie uses sign language to communicate. What signs do you know?' 'In this book we learned that plants are living things and need certain things to grow like water and sunlight. What things do you need to grow and be healthy?'). Therefore, the previous description about the procedures and the following information about the materials are applicable to both programmes.

Books. Each teacher read a total of 18 different books across the six weeks (see Appendix 1 for the list of book titles).

Reading records. The researchers created reading records on 8 by 10 inch cardstock. At the top of the reading record, there was space for the names of the child and teacher. A brief note was included on the reading record to remind family members of the reading record's purpose and what they were supposed to do with the materials sent home (e.g. read and discuss the book with the child, initial the record and return the materials on Monday). A six-row by four-column grid appeared after the note. There was one row for each week of the programme. The columns provided space for: (a) the title of the book chosen by the child to take home; (b) family member's initials; (c) a sticker, if family member's initials were provided; and (d) comments (see Appendix 2 for a sample reading record used in the *Special Friends* programme).

The purpose of the reading record was to gather quantitative data on families' engagement in shared book reading using the programme's books and to collect qualitative feedback about the book reading experience. Participating teachers or research assistants would affix a sticker to each child's reading record when it was returned to school with a family member's initials. If a child forgot to return or lost the reading record, a new one was provided. The researchers kept a master list of all book selections by each child across the six-week period.

One change was made to the reading record during the first year of the study after the initial four classrooms finished intervention. At first, there were only three columns on the form, and no space for comments. However, the researchers observed that family members across the participating classrooms had added comments on the reading record about their book reading experiences. Therefore, extra space for comments was added to the reading record, and this format stayed unchanged for the remaining 28 classrooms.

Guided-discussion bookmarks. The purpose of the guided-discussion bookmarks (see sample in Appendix 3) was to provide family members with a structure and some support for their shared book reading experiences with their children, and to bridge school and home by prompting a discussion about the cooperative learning groups that were a part of both interventions. A bookmark was created for each story, printed on cardstock, and placed inside the book prior to the children's weekly selection. While the content of each bookmark was focused on the specific content of each book, there were several common features across the 16 *Special Friends* and 16 *Science* bookmarks.

The first feature was that each bookmark included questions that highlighted similarities between book concepts or characters and the children reading the story. For example, a science-themed story about habitats included the question, 'How is the home on the last page of the story similar to your home?' A *Special Friends*' bookmark accompanying a story about a child with a language delay included the question, 'Are you ever misunderstood by your friends? How do you feel when someone does not understand you?' The second feature was the provision of simple explanations about the book's content, equipment or related vocabulary found in the story. For example, in the books from the *Science* programme, concepts such as nonliving and living are explained, or seeds and measuring cups are introduced. In the *Special Friends* programme, vocabulary such as autism is explained or hearing aid and wheelchair are introduced with a brief explanation. The third feature was that each bookmark posed several questions to support an adult's ability to assess their child's level of comprehension after reading the story. Most of these questions required an extended response from the child (e.g. 'What is the story about?' 'What did the seeds need to grow?' 'What should you do before you help a friend?' 'Why was she [the main character] so sad?').

Translated materials. Six participating classrooms included children whose primary language spoken at home was Spanish. Subsequently, a native Spanish speaker translated both the *Special Friends* and *Science* books and the bookmarks into Spanish. For the book-translation process, the translator typed the Spanish book narrative into a handout to be included in the clear plastic bag with each book. On average, the translated handout was between two and three pages long. Translated versions of the reading records and guided discussion bookmarks looked identical to the original English versions (i.e. same size, same illustrations, same discussion features as previously described). In addition, project staff provided all children in the six classrooms with the materials in both English and Spanish so as to not single out children whose family may

have needed the translated materials. Data were not gathered to assess whether parents read the books and engaged in discussion in English or Spanish.

Directions to family members

During the first week of intervention, the researchers included a note about the importance of shared book reading with the book reading materials. The note included tips for shared book reading and gave suggestions on how to get started (e.g. 'Sit in a place where you are both comfortable and can see the pages easily. Let your child hold the book and turn the pages.'), and what to do if a child was not interested in reading (e.g. 'Invite your child to "say-along" repeated words or phrases found in the story.'). This note highlighted the importance of family members reading aloud to children. We did not encourage family members to ask their children to read the book independently or to test their children on alphabetic or print knowledge, as the goal of the home book reading component was to engage families in an informal literacy activity.

Data analysis

The first three authors (henceforth the researchers) analysed the data using the content-analysis methods described by Johnson and LaMontagne (1993). First, a research assistant typed each comment from the reading records into a Word document. A native Spanish speaker translated all comments written in Spanish. Next, to gain familiarity with the data, the researchers independently read all data from the first year of the study and then proceeded to identify units of analysis. The written comments on the reading records ranged from a single word to multiple sentences. Therefore, the researchers made a decision to consider the entire written comment as a unit of analysis. The researchers met and identified emerging categories, wrote corresponding definitions and then coded Year-1 data based on the categories.

Next, the researchers independently read the remaining data and coded the comments based on previously established categories. In this way, the codes emerged inductively from a review of Year-1 data and were then applied to the rest of the data. The categories and definitions were refined over time and are presented in Table 1. Once the researchers were confident with the developed categories and definitions, they re-read all the data and reached consensus on the coding for all comments to ensure they were placed in the appropriate categories. For comments that fit within multiple categories, the researchers applied a coding hierarchy rather than divide comments into smaller segments

Table 1. Reading record categories and definitions.

Category	Definition
1. Language, Literacy or Learning	The comment mentions children's reading ability, vocabulary learned, sign language learned and concepts learned and understood. This includes the children's ability to ask or respond to questions, ability to summarize or discuss the story, ability to listen or pay attention to the story, comments about engaging in shared-book reading that extend beyond just liking or enjoying the story or family members' comments about explaining or teaching children concepts related to the book. Additionally, comments that show children's increased understanding, acceptance or awareness of the story's content are included here.
2. Enjoyed or Liked	The comment mentions children enjoying/liking the book, enjoying the shared reading (i.e. reading with a family member) or some element of the book (e.g. illustrations, book characters, part of the storyline). This category includes comments about children's favourite parts of a book or parts of the story that the child found funny. The enjoyment or liking can be inferred and does not have to specifically mention the words *enjoy* or *like* and does not specifically have to mention the book by name. This category is for all comments that suggest liking or enjoying a book that cannot be placed in another category.
3. Similarities or Differences	The comment links children to the book (e.g. shared experiences, similarities in physical or personal attributes, differences or things the child wants to do similar to the book character). The comments emphasize how children are related to or different from the book's theme or characters. This includes personal connections made between book characters and a family member, child, society at large or with another book character.
4. Negative Comments	The comment mentions negative aspects about the book (e.g. length, difficultly to read, topic difficult to explain), children's ability (e.g. short attention span, low level of comprehension, difficulty in understanding a concept) or negativity towards the book characters, content or theme.
5. Social–Emotional Skills, Play, or Friendship	The comment mentions social skills (e.g. sharing, helping others, being kind), emotions (e.g. feeling frustrated), play and friendship.

Note. A coding hierarchy was applied during data analysis as follows: 4 > 5 > 3 > 1 > 2.

and diffuse the meaning (see Table 1 for clarification of the coding hierarchy). For example, if a comment included something about *Similarities or Differences* and *Enjoying or Liking* the book, the comment was placed in the *Similarities or Differences* category.

Table 2. Number of comments for each reading record category.

Category	Total number of comments (%)	Number of comments in SF classes	Number of comments in S classes
Language, Literacy or Learning	444 (35%)	223	221
Enjoyed or Liked	433 (35%)	187	246
Similarities or Differences	216 (17%)	133	83
Negative Comments	87 (7%)	52	35
Social–Emotional Skills, Play and Friendship	65 (5%)	54	11

Note. SF = Special Friends; S = Science. The categories in this table are presented in the order they are introduced in the 'Results' section of this article.

In the end, the following five mutually exclusive categories emerged from the comments on the reading records: (a) language, literacy or learning; (b) enjoyed or liked; (c) similarities or differences; (d) negative comments; and (e) social–emotional skills, play or friendship (see Table 1). A list of all categories along with the number of comments from each programme can be found in Table 2.

Reliability measures

An undergraduate student majoring in special education served as a coder for inter-rater reliability. The coder was trained on the categories and definitions using 10% of comments randomly selected from each category. The coder was asked to sort the comments into the appropriate categories and a point-by-point method of agreement (Kazdin, 2010) was utilized. Training continued until inter-rater agreement equalled at least 80% on all categories (M = 91%, range = 83–100%). Once training was completed, 30% of the comments from each category were randomly selected for reliability coding. Reliability ranged from 83 to 93% and averaged 87% across all categories. The researchers discussed all disagreements identified during the reliability process, including training, and consensus was reached on the appropriate code for each comment.

Results

The first question the researchers sought to answer was whether parents would read with their kindergarteners when books were sent home as part of an intervention package. Each participating child had the opportunity to bring home and read six books with their family (i.e. one book each week for a six-week period). Across the 608 participating families, there were 2,556 instances of shared book reading recorded. On average, each family read four books with their child over the six weeks, as identified by our proxy of signing the reading record. The percentage of family participation by classroom, indicated by whether a family participated at least one time, ranged from 63.2 to 100% (M = 85%).

The second question focused on the qualitative feedback parents provided about their shared book reading experience. As stated earlier, there were five sets of twins who participated in this study. At times, the twins' family members wrote comments on the reading records that were similar, if not identical, for each sibling. However, there were instances when family members provided unique comments for each sibling for a given week. As a result, we included all comments provided by family members, regardless of whether or not they came from a family of twins. With this in mind, approximately 57% of the families (i.e. 349 families) from 32 classrooms contributed a total of 1,245 comments (649 *Special Friends*, 596 *Science*).

Each category that emerged during data analysis is described below along with representative quotes from the reading records. Each quote is followed by an abbreviation. This abbreviation identifies the intervention group in which the family providing the quote participated (i.e. *Special Friends* [SF] or *Science* [S]). All names are pseudonyms.

Language, literacy or learning

In this category, families in the *Science* programme (n = 221) and *Special Friends* programme (n = 223) provided similar numbers of comments. It was common for families to discuss vocabulary or concepts that children learned from the books (e.g. 'Louise learned what plants need to grow and what she has to do to keep them growing [S].' 'Erin learned that there are other ways that people can communicate like sign language [SF].'). Additionally, families wrote about children's ability to ask or respond to questions, summarize and discuss a story and pay attention during reading (e.g. 'Inha really looked at the photos to figure out some of the more difficult words, it was a great tool [SF].' 'He read the whole book and he answered the questions. He did a good job [S]!').

Enjoyed or liked

Families from the *Science* programme contributed the majority of the comments in this category (246 *Science*, 187 *Special Friends*). The comments from *Science* families typically referred to liking a specific part of the book such as the illustrations or photographs (e.g. butterflies, birds and ecosystems) or enjoying how informative the books were (e.g. 'Great info on all different types of birds. Allen liked the illustrations [S].'). Other comments focused on children's favourite parts of the story, parts of the book that were interesting or funny and enjoying the literary style of the book (e.g. 'It was a great story and Miya enjoyed it very much. She liked the part about the boy with the puppet, making the other boy laugh [SF].').

Similarities or differences

There were more comments from *Special Friends* families in this category (83 *Science*, 133 *Special Friends*). Many of the comments discussed a link between the book content and relevant personal experiences at home and school (e.g. 'We talked about types of beans that can be planted and about the bean that Yejin planted at pre-school [S].' 'Brant and I discussed how his sister, Kristen, has a friend in high school who is in a wheelchair and speaks through a computer [SF].') Some comments emphasized how the child who read the story might have been similar to or different from the book's characters (e.g. 'It's good to know how someone different has similar feelings, just like me and you [SF].' 'We shared knowledge about the various habitats we live in and how in many ways we are similar to the animals we share the planet with [S].').

Negative comments

The numbers of comments in this category from families in the *Special Friends* ($n = 52$) and *Science* ($n = 35$) programs were similar. These comments typically focused on a negative, physical aspect of the book (e.g. it was too long, too hard to read) or families described their children's inadequacies in terms of literacy and attention skills (e.g. 'Some long words were hard for Sara to read [S].' 'She had a hard time paying attention [SF].').

Social–emotional skills, play or friendship

The majority of comments in this category were from families in the *Special Friends* programme (54 *Special Friends*, 11 *Science*). These comments typically

included examples of social–emotional skills, play or friendship that families read about in the stories (e.g. 'Yuna was happy about the spider and worm being friends. She kept telling me how the worm helped the spider dig [S].' 'Felicia liked this book. She said that the boy plays alone because he is comfortable that way [SF].'). Comments also included family members sharing their experiences with feelings, play or friendship (e.g. 'Joanna says she gets frustrated when we can't understand her [SF].' 'She had compassion for the ant! [S].').

In summary, families shared an array of reactions about their shared book reading experiences at home. Notably, the theme mentioned most often was children's development in language, literacy or learning concepts related to the books being read. The second most popular theme focused on families sharing their pleasure in participating in shared book reading with their children. There were some family members who wrote about the struggles their children were having with reading or their children's disinterest in the selected book. Lastly, while the two curricular foci were relatively different (i.e. disability awareness and science) families participating in both programmes contributed comments in the *Similarities and Differences* category. This is not surprising, given that both programmes' guided discussion bookmarks included questions that focused on similarities.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to investigate whether families would participate in the home book reading component offered within two different curricula, the *Special Friends* and *Science* programmes, and to analyse the qualitative feedback that families provided about their shared-book reading experiences. While we did not gather data to investigate differences between families who participated and those who did not, even in the classroom with the lowest percentage of family participation, more than half (63.2%) of the families participated at least once and some classrooms experienced 100% family participation.

The number of families who voluntarily chose to share comments with us via the reading records was impressive. Looking at key themes that emerged across all comments, our data suggest that by using strategies such as reading records teachers can learn about (a) family literacy experiences at home, (b) children's and families' interests, and (c) family involvement in supporting children's development including positive attitudes towards disabilities (Greene and Long, 2011). These themes are discussed in further detail below.

First, 35% of the families' comments focused on children's ability to read, discuss the books or learn new concepts. Although this study did not focus on the home book reading component's influence on children's language and literacy skills, many of the families monitored children's reading ability and their progress. In other words, even while teachers may use lending libraries to support informal literacy experiences at home (i.e. with a focus on families reading together and enjoying the story) versus formal literacy experiences (i.e. children's attention to print, teaching letter names; Sénéchal, 2010), parents might consider shared book reading as an opportunity to teach, support and increase their children's emerging literacy skills. These results are consistent with previous research that suggests shared book reading provides a natural context to influence children's language and literacy development positively (Denney et al., 2010; Mol and Bus, 2011; Sénéchal, 2010).

Second, equal percentages of comments (i.e. 35%) represented children's and families' enjoyment in the shared book reading experience. In these comments, families reported their preferences, interests and pleasure in receiving the books. They also shared their enthusiasm for having opportunities to read books together as a family. As suggested by Pomerantz (2001), these results support the idea that shared book reading at home is a valuable literacy activity that provides parents and children with an opportunity to engage positively with one another.

Finally, many families commented that children learned new concepts, including those related to disability, from the books they read together. For example, families participating in the *Science* programme reported that their children learned various science-related concepts and families participating in the *Special Friends* programme reported that their children increased their knowledge and understanding of disabilities. A few families from the *Special Friends* programme appreciated the shared book reading as an opportunity openly to discuss family members with disabilities. These comments support previous research that emphasizes shared book reading as a vehicle for children to learn a variety of things, including positive attitude development towards individuals with disabilities (Favazza and Odom, 1997) and theory of mind (Adrian et al., 2005).

Limitations and implications for future research

Several limitations must be considered when evaluating the findings reported in the current article. First, our data were generated as a part of a larger study examining the efficacy of the *Special Friends* programme. Therefore, teachers

received support and books from research staff in order to implement their classroom lending library for the home book component. Additionally, the books used in the study were limited to disability- or science-related content. Future studies might investigate whether or not teachers continue to use a classroom lending library without the support and provision of books from researchers and whether teachers would extend the content of books that go home to include other curriculum areas.

Second, the findings were solely based on family members self-reporting. That said, there was no verification of who, when or for how long family members engaged in shared book reading at home. Future studies might include more systematic forms of data collection (e.g. direct observation of family interactions, audio recordings, parental interviews) to measure more accurately family engagement in reading as such data could strengthen our understanding of what occurs during shared book reading experiences (Park and Ostrosky, 2013). Also, there is a need for more information on the family demographics of respondents and non-respondents to better understand variables that might impact on participation and the findings. For example, the topic of disability awareness might have influenced some family participation, as opposed to an interest in the development of their children's literacy skills.

Third, the structure of the reading records did not provide a lot of space for comments, and no attempt was made to evaluate the length of comments or to double-code comments that included more than one topic. Future studies might examine whether a larger space for comments and the inclusion of detailed instructions regarding types of responses expected would impact on families' communication and use of reading records.

Fourth, all books used in this study included a guided-discussion bookmark that was meant to support family members' interactions when reading with their children. While some family members indicated through their comments that they used the guided-discussion bookmark, we know very little about how well the bookmark supported family members when reading with their children. Future research might examine the use of guided-discussion bookmarks during shared book reading and determine whether additional forms of support (e.g. workshops or video models) might be needed for some families to feel successful as they read books with their children.

Finally, we do not know which intervention-package components motivated families to participate in the shared book reading experience. Specifically, there were several elements used in addition to the books in both the *Special Friends* and *Science* programmes: (a) teachers first read the books at school before children selected one to take home, (b) children received a sticker each time they

returned their signed reading record, and (c) all families received guidance on how to discuss the book with children (i.e. the guided-discussion bookmarks). Given these intervention components, future research might investigate each component to distinguish which variables impacted on family participation in shared book reading at home.

Implications for practice

Several ideas emerged from this study that can be used to support family-literacy activities at home. First, the combination of well-designed materials (e.g. guided-discussion bookmarks, reading records) and a classroom lending library may not only supplement a grade-level curriculum but also may encourage family participation in shared book reading and promote communication between home and school.

Second, when books are sent home that represent an extension of curricular topics currently being taught at school, teachers may learn about personal experiences children have had with the topic, facets of the topic they or their families find most interesting or elements of the topic that children are struggling to understand. Teachers can use this knowledge to further enhance, support or challenge students' learning in the classroom. Furthermore, when sharing curriculum-related books with families, teachers provide families with the opportunity to learn about the content that their children are being exposed to at school. However, this type of family-literacy activity (i.e. shared book reading) and method of communication (i.e. reading records) may not be ideal for all families. In instances when families do not voluntarily participate in the shared book reading experience or contribute comments to a reading record, teachers will need to consider other ways to engage families (Hoover-Dempsey and Whitaker, 2010).

Third, to support the implementation of classroom lending libraries, teachers should work collaboratively with librarians, parents, fellow teachers or researchers to create a list of high-quality books that complement topics covered in their curricula. The creation of a high-quality book list would support parents' and teachers' ability to find enjoyable books that address topics of interest (c.f. Ostrosky et al., 2015).

Fourth, teachers should inform parents about the benefits of shared book reading and strategies that parents can use during shared book reading to guide children's literacy development (Porche, 2001). Teachers cannot assume that parents have or use effective strategies during shared book-reading to support children's skills development (Britto et al., 2006).

Guided-discussion bookmarks, such as the ones used in this study, may provide sufficient guidance for family members to engage successfully with their children during shared book reading. No matter what, teachers should be observant and responsive to the needs of each family, increasing or adjusting the type of support provided based on family feedback.

Conclusion

This study took a closer look at shared book reading at home with a focus on disability awareness. Our findings suggest that families found the shared book reading experiences enjoyable and beneficial for their kindergarten children's development. Our findings suggest that sending books home along with a reading record can be a low-cost, low-tech tool for gaining feedback from families. As a result, teachers can use this type of feedback not only to strengthen children's learning at school, but to support additional family activities in the future and encourage continued parent involvement in their child's development at home.

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Appendix 1

List of Books used in the *Special Friends* and *Science* Programmes

Special Friends	Science
Week 1	
Let's Talk About It: Extraordinary Friends by Fred Rogers	*What's Alive?* by Kathleen Weidner Zoehfeld
Susan Laughs by Jeanne Willis	*I Love Our Earth* by Bill Martin Jr. & Michael Sampson
Cookie by Linda Kneeland	*Over in the Meadow* by Ezra Jack Keats
Week 2	
All Kinds of Friends, Even Green! by Ellen B. Senisi	*Me and My Amazing Body* by Joan Sweeney
Sarah's Surprise by Nan Holcomb	*Everywhere Babies* by Susan Meyers
The Night Search by Kate Chamberlin	*Something Special* by Nicola Moon
Week 3	
Someone Special Just Like You by Tricia Brown	*Hey Little Ant* by Phillip Hoose, Hannah Hoose, & Debbie Tilley
Be Quiet, Marina! by Kirsten DeBear	*Feathers for Lunch* by Lois Ehlert
My Friend Isabelle by Eliza Woloson	*Castles, Caves, and Honeycombs* by Linda Ashman
Week 4	
We Can Do It! by Laura Dwight	*It's a Good Thing There are Insects* by Allan Fowler
We'll Paint the Octopus Red by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen	*I'm a Caterpillar* by Jean Marzollo
Ian's Walk by Laurie Lears	*Waiting for Wings* by Lois Ehlert
Week 5	
Andy and His Yellow Frisbee by Mary Thompson	*Wonderful Worms* by Linda Glaser
Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability by Pat Thomas	*Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin
Moses Goes to a Concert by Isaac Millman	*Inch by Inch* by Leo Lionni
Week 6	
Friends at School by Rochelle Bunnett	*One Bean* by Anne Rockwell
The Deaf Musicians by Pete Seeger, & Paul Dubois Jacobs	*I am a Seed* by Jean Marzollo
Can You Hear a Rainbow? by Jamee Riggio Heelan	*Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert

Appendix 2

Example of a Reading Record

Child's Name:

Teacher's Name:

Dear Family Member,

This form will enable us to keep up with the home reading component of the *Special Friends* program. Please keep this form in the clear bag until the program is complete.

All of the stories that your child chooses to bring home will be listed below across the six-week program. When the story is read and discussed with your child, place your initials in the middle column. Return the book and this Reading Record on Monday.

Thank you!

	Story Title	Read and Discussed	Parent Initials	Parent/ Child Comments
WEEK 1	*Let's Talk About It: Extraordinary Friends*			
	Susan Laughs			
	Cookie			
WEEK 2	*All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!*			
	Sarah's Surprise			
	The Night Search			
WEEK 3	*Someone Special Just Like You*			
	Be Quiet, Marina!			
	My Friend Isabelle			
WEEK 4	*We Can Do It!*			
	We'll Paint the Octopus Red			
	Ian's Walk			
WEEK 5	*Andy and His Yellow Frisbee*			
	Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability			
WEEK 6	*Moses Goes to a Concert*			
	Friends at School			
	The Deaf Musicians			
	Can You Hear a Rainbow?			

Teachers: When this Reading Record is returned to school, the child is given a sticker to be placed under the Read and Discussed column. If the book was not read (indicated by absence of parent initials or signature), the child may take the book home again, so he/she can have another opportunity to read it at home with a family member.

Appendix 3

Example of a Guided Discussion Bookmark

Title: *Cookie*
Author: Linda Kneeland
Disability: Language Delay (non-verbal)

Content of Story (select 1–2 questions, if time allows; optional)

- Who is the girl in the story? (Molly)
- What are some things Molly made with blocks? (towers, a train)
- When Molly got hungry, what did she want? Some cheese? Some lettuce? Some milk? (she wanted a cookie)
- Could she reach the cookie? (no, she had to climb on a chair)
- Why was her mommy upset when she saw Molly on the chair? (she thought she was going to fall – it was dangerous to climb so high)
- How did Molly feel when her mommy did not understand her? (angry, upset, she cried)

Explanation of Disability or Related Vocabulary

- Why didn't Molly just tell her mommy what she wanted? (she could not talk)
- Some people cannot talk or have difficulty talking but they have other ways to tell you what they want. How did Molly learn to tell her mommy what she wanted? (using her hands, sign language)
- What two words did Molly learn with her hands? (cookie, juice) Can you show me the signs for them?

Highlight Similarities

- Even though Molly could not talk, she could do lots of things just like you. What are some of the things that you both could do? (build things with blocks, eat cookies, help mommy set the table etc.)

Equipment Related to Story Content: None

Cooperative Learning Group Experiences

- Tell me about your Cooperative Learning Group experiences at school with your friends.
- Who played with you? What did you play?

Encourage discussion. Address issues that arise such as communication difficulties.

Thanks for taking 15 mins to read and talk about this book with me!