To Ask Rather than to Tell: Using the Questionnaire of Home Environment Literacy Practices to Enhance Home–School Collaborations

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Abstract

Attempts to raise the emergent literacy of "at-risk" children have prompted programs to teach caregivers how to implement school-like reading and writing activities at home. As an alternative to these programs, which often overlooked families' funds of knowledge, critics have encouraged literacy educators (e.g., teachers, literacy specialists) to collaborate with families to co-construct activities that build upon their existing literacy practices. Thus, to help literacy educators identify practices that are already in place, this manuscript presents the 16-item Questionnaire of Home Environment Literacy Practices (Q-HELP). Drawing from an established conceptual framework, the Q-HELP addresses the types of literacy support that caregivers provide and the literacy strands to which those supports are applied. The manuscript offers a detailed description of the background and design of the Q-HELP, presents findings concerning the psychometric soundness of the instrument, and describes three ways that literacy educators can utilize the instrument to enhance their partnerships with caregivers. A copy of the instrument is appended for immediate application.

Key Words: emergent literacy, home literacy environment, parental involvement, home–school partnerships, survey design, collaborations

Introduction

Literacy practices such as shared book reading (Reese et al., 2010; Sylva et al., 2008) and the teaching of letters and sounds (Adams et al., 2021; Stephenson et al., 2008; van der Pluijm et al., 2019) have been shown to foster literacy development. To promote these and other evidence-based practices, literacy researchers have designed countless family literacy programs. As Lynch and Prins (2022) explain, *family literacy program* includes "any service or activity that seeks to provide education for adults and children, to encourage reading in families, or to help parents support their children's education" (p. 4). Many such programs aim to stock families' homes with books and other materials (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016; Brown et al., 2019; Byington et al., 2008; Nutbrown et al., 2015) and to teach caregivers how to facilitate literacy activities (Brown et al., 2019; Byington et al., 2008; de la Rie et al., 2021; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Stephenson et al., 2008; Note: terms such as parent and caregiver are used to denote any adult who acts as a child's primary caregiver). These efforts rest on the assumption that changes in the home environment will enhance children's literacy and optimize their chances for academic success.

Accordingly, a growing body of research has attested to the benefits of family literacy programs. Across several studies, caregivers who were taught how to facilitate home literacy activities reported greater confidence in their ability to support their children's academic growth (Axford, 2007; Brown et al., 2019; Gerzel-Short, 2018; Tilley-Lubbs, 2011). They were also more likely to employ strategies during shared reading and appeared to be more adept at doing so (Axford, 2007; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Sylva et al., 2008). Caregiver training has also been linked to positive outcomes for children. For example, children whose caregivers were trained in interactive reading scored higher on vocabulary and comprehension (Axford, 2007; Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Mol et al., 2008; Yüzbaşioğlu & Akyol, 2022), while those whose caregivers were taught to accentuate letter–sound relationships exhibited higher levels of reading proficiency (Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Swain et al., 2015). As these findings suggest, programs that support the use of evidence-based practices foster the growth of both meaning-related and code-related skills.

Yet despite these documented benefits, family literacy programs in the United States have faced scrutiny for failing to cultivate equitable partnerships with participants. Many programs have been accused of infusing participants' homes with activities that reflect the cultural and linguistic practices of White, middle-class families. By doing so, programs not only

invalidate caregivers' ways of engaging their children, but also suggest that they are inferior. Thus, Reyes and Torres (2007) assert that "despite having good intentions, these programs are motivated by the idea of 'fixing' non-mainstream families, rather than collaboratively identifying and solving the problems that alienate both the families and their children and obstruct their progress toward full literacy" (p. 75). As these programs usually serve racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse families, the imposition of whitestream practices disregards families' funds of knowledge (Reyes & Torres, 2007).

Heeding these concerns, critics have urged literacy educators (e.g., reading specialists, teachers) to cultivate respectful partnerships with families by working together to co-construct activities that not only build on their current practices and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), but also fit into their daily routines (Cyr et al., 2022; Egure et al., 2023; Kumar, 2016). To do so effectively, literacy educators must collect information regarding families' existing literacy activities, the frequency with which they engage in those activities, and the types of materials that they use. To facilitate the data collection process, this manuscript offers the Questionnaire of Home Environment Literacy Practices (Q-HELP), a 16-item survey that was informed by an established framework. Because the Q-HELP highlights everyday activities and materials, it can be applied to an array of educational settings (e.g., libraries, schools), including those that serve families from diverse backgrounds. Before detailing the design of the Q-HELP, the article summarizes the practices that have been shown to promote literacy development and the ways that caregivers can support their children at home.

Literature Review

Though "readiness" and formal instruction were once considered precursors to literacy, the idea that it emerges gradually is now widely accepted. As the term *emergent literacy* (Clay, 1966) suggests, literacy acquisition "is best conceptualized as a developmental continuum, with its origins in the life of the child, rather than an all-or-none phenomenon that begins when children start school" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 848). Early theorizations of emergent literacy, including Mason and Stewart's (1990) four-component model and Whitehurst and Lonigan's (1998) outside-in inside-out model, accounted for meaning-related (e.g., vocabulary) and code-related (e.g., alphabetic principle) elements. Incorporating subsequent research, Rohde (2015) articulated the comprehensive emergent literacy model (CELM), which consists of three key components: language (e.g., vocabulary), print awareness (e.g., alphabet, concepts of print), and

phonological awareness (e.g., segmenting, rhyming). The CELM also acknowledges the skills that reside at the intersections of these components (e.g., letter–sound relationships) and the contextual elements that promote or constrain emergent literacy development (e.g., culture).

As emergent literacy is foundational to children's academic success, considerable attention has been given to activities that promote language, print awareness, and phonological awareness. Research has shown that oral language exposure is necessary for children's language development (Hoff, 2003; Krijnen et al., 2020; Reese et al., 2010; van der Pluijm et al., 2019). As such, numerous studies have documented the benefits of informal activities such as singing (Krijnen et al., 2020), storytelling (Hoff, 2003; Krijnen et al., 2020), and talking about everyday experiences (Reese et al., 2010; van der Pluijm, 2019). To illustrate, Krijnen et al. (2020) examined the connections between home-based activities and the language development of over 200 children. Findings revealed a positive association between their vocabulary knowledge and engagement in *informal* language activities; however, the opposite was noted for activities involving the direct teaching of language. As this suggests, "informal talk and play activities" (van der Pluijm et al., 2019, p. 347) may be one of the best ways for caregivers to support children's language development.

Another activity that has been shown to support language development is shared book reading, either with physical books or their electronic counterparts (Shamir & Korat, 2015). As numerous studies have demonstrated, shared book reading that incorporates opportunities for two-way communication is particularly effective at supporting children's vocabulary (Elias et al., 2006; Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Raikes et al., 2006; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Yüzbaşioğlu & Akyol, 2022), print awareness (Altinkaynak, 2019; Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Rababah, 2017), and phonological awareness (Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Niklas & Schneider, 2017; Sylva et al., 2008). Activities involving books also serve as a platform for addressing alphabetic knowledge, which has been linked to higher literacy levels in the early grades (Chansa-Kabali, 2017; Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Swain et al., 2015). As such, studies have shown that alphabet books, whether paper-based or electronic (Willoughby et al., 2015), are useful for teaching letters and sounds (Both-de Vries & Bus, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2015).

Apart from alphabet books, research has shown that alphabetic knowledge can also be cultivated through engagement with environmental print (Neumann, 2014; 2018a), handheld devices (Neumann, 2018b), and other household items (Neumann & Neumann, 2009). For example, Neumann (2018a) studied the effects of an eight-week environmental print program

for children and caregivers in which caregivers supported their children in using "multisensory strategies to identify, trace, and write letters and words embedded in environmental print" (p. 337). Children in the program experienced gains in letter identification, letter writing, and letter–sound relationships. Apart from illuminating the usefulness of environmental print, these findings suggest that letter identification should be accompanied by writing practice. In addition to pencil and paper, children can also use materials such as chalk, sand, or cookie dough (Neumann & Neumann, 2009) as well as electronic tablets (Neumann, 2018b), to practice forming letters and words.

Existing scholarship illuminates the importance of engaging children in informal language activities, two-way communication, shared reading, alphabetic instruction, and writing. Yet perhaps the most critical factor in the success or failure of a particular home literacy practice is the extent to which it is "adapted to activities that occur in the families' daily lives" (van der Pluijm et al., 2019, p. 317). To bridge home and school literacy practices, educators must abandon the top-down approach to parent involvement and embrace a collectivistic approach that prioritizes interdependence and the well-being of the group (Trumbull et al., 2007; Trumbull et al., 2020). Thus, rather than "prescribing" school literacy activities for caregivers to implement at home, educators should work with families to co-construct activities that fit into families' existing routines and practices and also reflect their own funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Parent–teacher conferences, as well as other school- or community-based activities, are excellent opportunities for educators to learn about families' cultural backgrounds and literacy practices (Trumbull et al., 2007; Trumbull et al., 2020). To ensure that interactions are positive and productive, educators should refrain from dominating the conversation and *telling* caregivers how to work with their children at home. Instead, they should allow ample time for caregivers to discuss their concerns; teachers should also take care to validate caregivers' concerns and elicit more information about the concerns that are raised (Bridging Cultures Project, 1988). Additionally, educators should be prepared to ask about caregivers' own educational experiences and the types of activities that they feel comfortable implementing at home.

Insights that emerge from communication between caregivers and educators provide the basis for the co-construction of activities that bridge home and school cultures. The resulting activities may be implemented in the home-literacy environment as well as in the classroom. However, school-based activities such as conferences and open houses are not the

only means by which educators can learn about families' backgrounds and literacy practices. Written communications such as questionnaires and surveys can also be used to gain information from caregivers. The 16-item Q-HELP survey, which is the focus of this manuscript, was developed to help literacy educators collect preliminary information regarding families' routines and practices.

Conceptual Framework

The development of the Q-HELP was informed by the Opportunities Recognition Interaction Modeling (ORIM) framework (Hannon, 1995), which draws from decades of family literacy research. ORIM delineates four ways that caregivers can support their children's literacy development at home (Hannon, 1995). Accordingly, caregivers can provide:

- Opportunities: materials, time, and space for literacy activities;
- Recognition: praise for children's literacy efforts;
- Interaction: co-participation in literacy activities; and
- Modeling: personal displays of reading, writing, and speaking.

Each type of caregiver support may be applied to environmental print, books, oral language, and writing (Hannon, 1995; Morgan et al., 2009). These four literacy strands, together with the four types of caregiver support, produce 16 varieties of home literacy practices. Greater complexity occurs when these four strands also incorporate the "digital, technological, and multimedia practices that are now part of [children's] literacy experiences" (Nutbrown et al., 2015, p. 268).

Because ORIM illuminates a plethora of home literacy practices, it has guided the design of programs such as the Peers Early Education Project (Evangelou et al., 2007) and Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (Graham et al., 2014; Hannon et al., 2006; Husain et al., 2019). In the vast majority of these programs, early childhood educators were trained to serve participating children and caregivers through a series of home visits. During the home visits, educators created a qualitative "map" of each family's existing literacy practices and then used their own expertise to facilitate the (co-)construction of appropriate home-based activities. Studies on teachers' perceptions of ORIM, though few in number, have yielded positive results (Graham et al., 2014; Nutbrown et al., 2015). For example, Nutbrown and colleagues interviewed early childhood teachers regarding their experiences with ORIM. Most teachers indicated that ORIM was not only easy to understand, as it afforded them a clear conception of family literacy, but also useful for helping caregivers cultivate a more well-rounded repertoire of activities.

Apart from teachers, research has also examined ORIM's effects on caregivers (Hannon et al., 2006; Nutbrown et al., 2015) and children (Evangelou et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2014; Hannon et al., 2019). Hannon, Morgan, and Nutbrown (2006) interviewed 85 caregivers about their experiences in an ORIM-based program. Approximately three-fourths of the caregivers reported that the program had inspired changes in their home literacy practices, among which the most salient included an increase in literacy-related opportunities and interactions and a greater emphasis on texts and oral language. These and other changes have been linked to improvements in children's literacy skills (Evangelou et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2014; Hannon et al., 2019). For example, Hannon et al. (2019) compared the literacy gains of children in an ORIM-based program to those of matched controls. Findings indicated that children in the ORIM group made significantly higher increases on letter recognition and other emergent literacy skills, and the greatest increases were experienced by those whose caregivers had the least education. These documented benefits are a testament to the utility and efficacy of the ORIM framework.

Yet as Hannon and Nutbrown (n.d.) explain, "the value of the ORIM framework is that it can be used to describe how particular families support children's literacy…and to plan work with parents." These purposes are fulfilled through home visits in which educators use a graphic organizer to map families' literacy practices and (co-)construct new ones. This process is ideal for building rapport and gaining an understanding of families' daily realities; however, heavy workloads and restrictive visitation policies preclude many educators from following it in its entirety for each student. To address this obstacle, I (researcher) developed a 16-item survey that educators can use to collect data on families' existing practices, which can inform the development of home and classroom activities. To develop the Q-HELP (see Appendix), I drew from the ORIM framework, my 25+ years as a teacher and teacher educator, my own research on family literacy, and my experiences designing and implementing a family literacy program for racially and ethnically diverse caregivers. The remainder of the manuscript describes the development of the Q-HELP, presents findings from a content validity study and a small-scale pilot study of the instrument, and shares several ways the instrument can be used.

Survey Development and Validation: Methods and Results

Survey Design

Survey design is a complex and multifaceted process that requires extensive background knowledge and the application of research-based concepts

such as validity and reliability. As such, one of the features of a well-designed survey is *construct validity*, which denotes how well an instrument represents an "abstract, complex characteristic or idea that typically has numerous ways to measure it" (Nardi, 2006, p. 59). Since constructs can be conceptualized in many different ways, the validation of a particular construct may require years of investigation by numerous scholars (Litwin, 2003). For that reason, I chose to design the Q-HELP around the ORIM framework which was already backed by decades of research. Since its inception in the 20th century, ORIM has been used to guide inquiries concerning four types of caregiver support, each pertaining to four specific strands of literacy (i.e., books, environmental print, oral language, and writing). To date the ORIM framework, which is represented as a 4x4 grid, has been used to document the home literacy practices of thousands of families across several countries (e.g., Nutbrown et al., 2022; Nutbrown et al., 2005). Thus, ORIM is widely accepted as a valid representation of the ways that caregivers can support four aspects of their children's literacy development.

In accordance with the ORIM framework, four survey items, including one for each literacy strand, were drafted for each type of caregiver support. To illustrate, *opportunities* (the "O" in ORIM) was addressed through survey items pertaining to each of the four literacy strands: environmental print, books, oral language, and writing. The same step was completed for each of the remaining types of literacy support, including recognition, interaction, and modeling. Consistent with the 4x4 grid that had been used with families for decades, this process yielded a total of 16 survey items. It also ensured that that each element of ORIM was reflected in a total of four survey items. The final steps of the drafting stage involved the addition of instructions and a Likert scale for denoting the frequency of each item (e.g., 1–2 times per week, 3–4 times per week).

Another quality of an effective survey is *content validity*, which has been conceptualized as "the representativeness [relevancy] and clarity of an item" (Rubio et al., 2003, p. 95). With regard to the Q-HELP, *clarity* was defined as the ease with which an item could be understood and *relevancy* as the extent to which it seemed pertinent to the caregivers of young children. A preliminary evaluation of the instrument's content validity was completed by a content expert with an advanced degree in literacy education and numerous years of experience as a reading teacher and school administrator. The expert was asked to rate the clarity and relevancy of each item on a scale of 1–4 (i.e., low to high), and to provide suggestions for improving individual items as well as other aspects of the survey (e.g., scale, organization). The expert reviewer was also made aware that the survey items were

designed to align with the ORIM framework, with which she was well-acquainted. Thus, the extent to which the items represented ORIM became a focal point of the review. This aspect of the review not only helped to verify the connection between the Q-HELP and ORIM but also helped to minimize reviewer bias. In this regard, the content validity study was, perhaps, the most important aspect of the survey design process.

Though all 16 items received a 3 or 4 for clarity and relevancy, a number of helpful suggestions were provided by the initial reviewer. Accordingly, numerous changes were made to enhance the clarity and relevancy of the Q-HELP survey. To ensure that each item was worded in a manner that was appropriate for respondents with no formal literacy training, technical terms and jargon were supplanted with more colloquial words and phrases (Bourque & Fielder, 2003). For example, the term *modeled*, which has a specific meaning in education, was replaced by the phrase, "let your child see you." Another change was the removal of the phrase, "on his or her level" from items two and six of the survey. For example, item two which originally stated, "praised your child for reading a book on his or her level," was changed to "praised your child for reading a book." This change helped to prevent the items from becoming unnecessarily wordy.

Examples were also incorporated to enhance the clarity of each survey item. For example, the phrase "cereal boxes, packages, or mail" was added to the item pertaining to opportunities with environmental print, and "notes, grocery lists, [and] application forms" was added to that concerning the modeling of written language. Additionally, the four items related to books were revised to include "books, e-books, and magazines." As research has attested to the efficacy of e-books (Both-de Vries & Bus, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2015), which have become increasingly common in homes and schools in recent years, this was a particularly important addition to the four book-related survey items. Tablets, which are effective for facilitating writing practice (Neumann, 2018b), were also incorporated into the survey items. Thus, examples were chosen to ensure that they not only represented the ORIM framework, but also included both traditional and digital materials. However, since it would be impossible to incorporate an exhaustive list of examples into each survey item, I have also provided a table (see Table 1) that summarizes the types of materials associated with each literacy strand.

Table 1. Materials for Engaging the Four Literacy Strands

Strand	Definition	Examples
Books	Texts that are connected to create a beginning, middle, and end	Physical books, magazines, e-books
Environmental Print	Household objects that display letters and/or words	Posters, signs, televisions, computer screens, packages, mail
Oral Language	Verbal communication of thoughts, ideas, and experiences	Songs, nursery rhymes, poems, sounds, storytelling, parent–child discussions
Writing	Forming letters, words, and/or sentences	Playdough, chalk, crayons, pencils, markers, shaving cream, electronic tablets (stylus)

Finally, to make certain the survey was accessible to those with lower levels of education and/or reading ability, the readability of the revised Q-HELP was examined using five well-known indices (see Table 2). As the results indicated that the grade-level equivalence ranged from 6.6 to 9.5 (M = 8.2), the survey seemed suitable for most English-proficient caregivers, regardless of their level of formal education.

Table 2. Readability of the Q-HELP

	Readability Indices				
	Flesch-Kincaid	Flesch Reading Ease	Fry	Gunning Fog	SMOG Index
Grade Level	7.1	8.5 (8–9)	9.1	8.1	6.6
Relevant Criteria	Words per sentence and syllables per word	Number of words, sentences, and syllables in a given text	Number of syllables, words, and sentences per 100 words	Words per sentence and percentage of complex words	Frequency of words with multiple syllables

Content Validity Study

After revising the Q-HELP, a more comprehensive content validity study was carried out. To that end, a five-member panel, representative of both content experts and lay experts, was assembled to evaluate the clarity and relevancy of the instrument. The panel included two university professors with extensive experience in family literacy, both of whom were made aware that the items were meant to align with the ORIM framework. The

panel also included three caregivers (i.e., lay experts) whose children were enrolled in a university tutoring program that was designed to ameliorate reading difficulties. "Using potential research subjects as experts ensures that the population for whom the measure is being developed is represented [and] addresses issues such as phrasing and unclear terms" (Rubio et al., 2003, p. 96). Each expert who agreed to evaluate the instrument received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the Q-HELP and the process for evaluating it (Rubio et al., 2003). As with the preliminary evaluation, the experts were asked to rate each item's clarity and relevancy and to provide suggestions for improving the instrument. The experts were also informed that the evaluation would not be anonymous and that they may be contacted regarding any pertinent follow-up questions.

All five experts who had agreed to evaluate the Q-HELP did so in a timely and thorough manner. The ratings provided by the five-member panel were used to measure, quantitatively, the clarity and relevancy of each item (Item-level Content Validity Index, or I-CVI). To calculate the I-CVI of each item, the number of experts who rated the item at 3 or 4 was divided by the total number of experts (Polit et al., 2007). According to published standards, content validity studies involving five or fewer experts require an I-CVI of 1.00 on all survey items (Polit et al., 2007). Consistent with that standard, the experts' ratings of clarity and relevancy yielded an I-CVI of 1.00 for all 16 items (see Table 3) and no further suggestions for improvement were provided. Thus, the content of the revised Q-HELP was considered to be sufficiently valid (Rubio et al., 2003). Such favorable results were attributed to the systematicity of the design process, quality of the preliminary evaluation, and revisions made prior to assembling the expert panel.

Pilot Test

In addition to the content validity study described above, a small-scale pilot test was carried out. Pilot testing, which involves administering a survey to a small yet representative sample, is critical because it exposes unforeseen problems with the instrument. Thus, Nardi (2006) explains that "the best way of assessing whether the [survey] flows, the instructions are adequate, the wording of the items and format are clear, and the survey takes a reasonable amount of time to complete is to pilot test it" (p. 95). The problems that emerge from the pilot test serve to illuminate the types of changes that must be made before a survey is administered on a wider scale. The pilot test also serves as an opportunity to observe how respondents react to the content of the survey (Bourque & Fielder, 2003).

Table 3. Content Validity Study: Ratings and I-CVI Results

	Survey Items	Clarity/Relevancy Ratings (1–4)					I-CVI Value	
#	Item Verbiage	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Clarity I-CVI	Relevancy I-CVI
1.	Given your child books, e-books, or magazines to read?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
2.	Praised your child for reading a book, e-book, or magazine?	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	3/4	1.0	1.0
3.	Read books, e-books, or magazines with your child?	4/4	3/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
4.	Let your child see you reading books, e-books, or magazines?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	1.0	1.0
5.	Provided materials, such as pencils, chalk, or a tablet, to practice writing?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
6.	Praised your child for writing (words, sentences, etc.)?	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	3/4	1.0	1.0
7.	Practiced writing (words, sentences, etc.) with your child?	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
8.	Let your child watch you write (notes, grocery lists, application forms, etc.)?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
9.	Given your child household items, such as cereal boxes, mail, or packages, to practice reading?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	1.0	1.0
10.	Praised your child for recognizing letters or words on household items?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
11.	Worked with your child to pinpoint letters or words on household items?	4/4	3/3	4/3	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
12.	Let your child see you reading print on household items?	4/4	4/4	4/3	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
13.	Given your child opportunities to practice oral language (singing, storytelling, sayings, etc.)?	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
14.	Praised your child for their use of oral language (storytelling, singing, sayings, etc.)?	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
15.	Practiced oral language activities with your child (storytelling, singing, sayings, etc.)?	4/4	3/4	4/3	3/4	4/4	1.0	1.0
16.	Let your child listen to you tell stories or engage in other oral language activities?	4/4	4/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	1.0	1.0

To pilot the Q-HELP, potential respondents were recruited from businesses, schools, and residential areas. To ensure that the pilot sample represented the target population (Fowler, 2014), the recruitment process sought to enlist the participation of caregivers with children between three and six years of age. This age range was selected because it aligned with scholarship on the use of the ORIM framework (see Table 4). The vast majority of ORIM-based interventions have included children between three and five years old; however, six- and seven-year-old children were also included in some interventions. Additionally, the age range of three to six was chosen because it constitutes a period of tremendous growth in children's literacy skills and corresponds to the preschool and Kindergarten years.

Table 4. Select ORIM-Based Interventions

Author	Children's Age Range	Participants
Evangelou et al. (2005)	0–6	600 families
Evangelou et al. (2007)	3–5	64 children
Graham et al. (2014)	2–5	497 families
Hannon et al. (2019)	3–7	176 children
Nutbrown et al. (2015)	0–5	20 practitioners

Potential respondents were informed of the purpose of the Q-HELP and asked if they would be willing to spare 5–10 minutes to complete the survey and to provide suggestions for improving it. Respondents were told that their responses would be used to identify the survey's weaknesses so that it could be improved for future implementation. The following prompt was used to elicit open-ended feedback from the respondents: "What changes could I make that would improve the survey?" The respondents were told that their suggestions for improvement could be written directly on the form or stated verbally upon completion of the survey. Feedback that the respondents provided verbally was transcribed so that it could be analyzed later. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed, as respondents were also asked to identify another caregiver of a 3- to 6-year-old child who might be willing to complete the survey and provide suggestions for improving it.

The survey was completed by 26 caregivers representing a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (see Table 5). The majority of the respondents identified as women (n = 22; 85%). However, the overrepresentation of women did not pose a threat to the pilot study, given that women have

often played a more active role in children's literacy development and have constituted the majority of participants in family literacy programs. Thus, with regard to gender, the sample of the pilot study was acceptable given that it met the criterion for representativeness.

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of the Pilot Sample

	Gender			Race & Ethnicity					Total
	Men	Women	Oth-er	Asian	Black/ AA	Latino/a	White	2+ Races	All
n	4	22	0	0	2	8	14	2	26
%	15%	85%	0%	0%	8%	30%	54%	8%	100%

Respondents' comments were analyzed to identify the types of changes that should be made to the instrument. The majority of the respondents indicated that it was not only easy to comprehend but also required very little time to complete. Though seemingly trivial, such comments are important since caregivers are unlikely to complete surveys that are challenging or labor-intensive, due to the many demands on their time. However, only four of the 26 respondents provided written feedback. One of the four feedback comments attested to the value of the literacy activities addressed through the survey items. In that comment, the respondent indicated that doing home literacy activities had made an incredible impact on her children's literacy skills. Two respondents offered comments that were explanatory in nature: one noted that she did Item 6 only in the context of homework help, while the other indicated that her children could do Item 9 on their own. In the final comment, the respondent asked whether the provision of writing materials involved "access or to literally say here are your writing materials." Based on that feedback, one minor revision was made to boost the clarity of Item 5.

Simply demonstrating that a survey is valid is not sufficient, as "validity means little if the measure used is not reliable" (Nardi, 2006, p. 60). Hence, data from the pilot test were also used to examine the reliability of the Q-HELP. One important aspect of reliability is *internal consistency*, which reflects the extent to which all of the items on a survey address a single phenomenon (Nardi, 2006). Because a Likert scale was used for the frequency of each item, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was the most appropriate way to measure the instrument's internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Given that the Q-HELP was designed to align with a longstanding, well-researched, and cohesive construct, I hypothesized that the pilot test would yield a high level of internal consistency.

Although an alpha coefficient equal to or greater than .7 would have been acceptable (George & Mallery, 2004), the internal consistency of the Q-HELP was considerably higher ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 3.65$), thus suggesting a strong degree of homogeneity among the 16 survey items. This indicates that all of the items on the Q-HELP address the same phenomenon, that is, ways that caregivers can support their children's literacy development. This finding, together with the results from the content validity study, indicate that the Q-HELP is a valid and reliable measure of caregivers' support for their children's literacy development. Although home visits are incredibly valuable for building rapport and partnering with families, the Q-HELP can be used to inquire about caregivers' existing practices. Thus, it is particularly useful when constraints on time and money make it difficult to conduct home visits to collect this information.

Discussion

Findings regarding the psychometric soundness of the Q-HELP suggest that it is an effective tool for inquiring about families' existing home literacy practices. Following an established conceptual framework (i.e., ORIM), the instrument addresses the types of literacy support that caregivers provide as well as the literacy strands that they incorporate. Given that families' home literacy practices are of interest to literacy educators in a variety of settings and contexts, the Q-HELP can be applied in many different ways. Below, I describe two ways that literacy educators can use the Q-HELP to enhance children's literacy development and build more collaborative partnerships with caregivers.

Integrating Home and School Literacy Practices

Although many educators expect caregivers to support their children's literacy development by facilitating school-like reading and writing activities at home, research has shown that such activities are more effective when they are made to align with families' existing practices (van der Pluijm et al., 2019). Using the Q-HELP to ascertain what caregivers are already doing to support their children's literacy development allows teachers to identify relevant school-based concepts and skills. Imagine that a subset of children in a given class are already participating in shared book reading several times per week. Based on that information, the teacher might assign

home-based activities that can be completed during their shared reading sessions. Such activities might address book-based concepts and skills such as naming the parts of the book (e.g., front cover, spine), identifying the characters and setting of a story, or recounting the beginning, middle, and end of the story. The same decision-making process would be used to select home-based activities for children whose caregivers engaged them in other types of home literacy support (see Table 6). For example, if caregivers indicated that they routinely engaged their children in storytelling, the teacher might ask caregivers to have their children retell stories that were read throughout the school week. To support caregivers in this endeavor, the teacher could post the title and a synopsis of each book for a given week (e.g., "What we're reading this week"). Integrating school-based concepts and skills with families' existing literacy practices shows respect for caregivers' endeavors and promotes parental involvement without disrupting families' existing routines. Creating synergy between school literacy goals and home literacy practices helps to build partnerships with families (Elias et al., 2006; Kumar, 2016; Nutbrown et al., 2015).

Table 6. Examples: Integrating Home and School Literacy Practices

Home Literacy Activities	Integration of School-Related Concepts and Skills
Engaging children in shared book reading	Naming the parts of the book (e.g., cover, spine), identifying the characters and setting of a story, and recounting the events that occurred at the beginning, middle, and end of a story
Asking children to identify letters and/or words on cereal boxes and/or other items	Finding each letter of the alphabet, identifying words that begin with a specific letter, identifying instances of a repeatedly used word, sounding out words with a particular pattern (e.g., words comprised of two consonants separated by a vowel, such as mom or bat)
Listening to oral language such as songs and traditional stories	Identifying pairs of rhyming words, defining key vocabulary words, listing other words from the same "category," discussing a relevant personal experience, reciting lines with repeating sounds or lines that are tongue-twister-like

Incorporating Aspects of Home Literacy in the Classroom

Apart from integrating home and school literacies, data from the Q-HELP can also be used to inform the integration of classroom activities that build upon and extend families' existing literacy practices. For example, if several caregivers indicated that they engaged their children in shared

reading activities on a regular basis, the teacher might request the titles of recently read books so that they could be incorporated into the classroom environment. For caregivers who reported regular engagement in oral language activities such as singing and storytelling, the teacher could ask them to share their favorite stories and songs for use during classroom-based language and literacy instruction. As such, the teacher could use stories, songs, and books to reinforce the learning that took place at home, while also extending it by addressing a wider array of literacy competencies (see Table 7). For example, a story, song, or book from home could be used to teach vocabulary (Elias et al., 2006; Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Raikes et al., 2006; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Yüzbaşioğlu & Akyol, 2022), alphabetic knowledge (Both-de Vries & Bus, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2015), and print concepts (Altinkaynak, 2019; Hidayatullah et al., 2023; Rababah, 2017) in a classroom setting. As with the integration of home and school literacies, incorporating elements from home into the classroom demonstrates that families' contributions are valued and signals a desire to partner with families and celebrate their existing funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Table 7. Examples: Bringing Home Literacy Elements Into the Classroom

Home Literacy Activities	Home Elements for Classroom Use	School Activities to Build on Home Literacy Activities
Engaging children in shared book reading	Books from shared reading activities with caregivers	Teaching key vocabulary from the story; discussing, drawing, and/or writing about the characters, setting and plot of the story
Asking children to identify letters and/or words on cereal boxes and other items	Environmental print artifacts that were found at home	Tracing letters in environmental print, practicing writing letters and words in environmental print (Neumann, 2014; 2018a), identifying words that begin with the same letter as a word found in environmental print
Listening to oral language such as songs and stories	Songs and traditional stories that children and caregivers enjoy at home	Connecting sounds in oral language to the letters that represent them, identifying rhyming words

Conclusion

Given the importance of emergent literacy development, it is important to maximize children's opportunities to engage in activities that promote

oral language, print awareness, and phonological awareness. Yet all too often, caregivers are asked to incorporate school-like reading and writing activities that differ from their existing home literacy practices. To engage caregivers and their children in ways that are respectful and relevant, literacy educators can begin by identifying the practices that are already occurring in the home environment. To that end, this manuscript presents the Q-HELP, a brief and psychometrically sound survey that addresses the types of support that caregivers provide and the strands of literacy that they address. Using the results from the survey, educators can build home-school connections by assigning relevant home-based activities and by incorporating aspects of the home literacy environment in the classroom. By honoring and respecting families' literacy practices, educators can improve their partnerships with families.

Yet despite the utility and efficacy of the Q-HELP, there are certain limitations that must be noted. Perhaps the most critical issue is the absence of translated versions of the instrument. Given that the linguistic diversity of the U.S. student population is increasing with each passing year, the provision of caregiver materials in languages other than English is more important than ever. While translation apps are incredibly useful, translating the survey from English to another language is not sufficient; a translated version of an existing survey should be reviewed by at least two fluent speakers, revised based on their feedback, and then piloted with respondents who are fluent in the target language (Litwin, 2003). Therefore, future research on the Q-HELP should seek not only to develop translated versions of the instrument but also to ensure that those versions of the instrument are psychometrically sound. Such a process might consist of a content validity study involving content and lay experts who are native speakers as well as a pilot test to measure the internal consistency and alternate-forms reliability of the instrument. This research direction will allow literacy educators to partner with caregivers whose home languages differ from their own.

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Appendix. Revised Questionnaire of Home Environment Literacy Practices

Considering your behavior over the last few weeks, indicate how often you have...						
	Please select one answer	None	Once or twice a week	Three or four times per week	Five to six times per week	Daily
1.	Given your child books, e-books, or magazines to read?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
2.	Praised your child for reading a book, e-book, or magazine?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
3.	Read books, e-books, or magazines with your child?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
4.	Let your child see you reading books, e-books, or magazines?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
5.	Given your child materials, such as pencils, paper, chalk, or electronic tablet to practice writing (e.g., letters, words, sentences)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
6.	Praised your child for writing (e.g., letters, words, sentences)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
7.	Practiced writing with your child (e.g., letters, words, sentences)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
8.	Let your child watch you write (e.g., notes, grocery lists, application forms, etc.)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
9.	Given your child household items, such as cereal boxes, packages, or mail, to practice reading?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7

10.	Praised your child for recognizing words or letters on household items?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
11.	Worked with your child to pinpoint letters or words on household items?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
12.	Let your child see you reading print on household items?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
13.	Given your child opportunities to practice oral language (e.g., storytelling, singing, sayings, etc.)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
14.	Praised your child for their use of oral language (e.g., singing, storytelling, sayings, etc.)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
15.	Practiced oral language with your child (e.g., storytelling, singing, sayings, etc.)?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7
16.	Let your child listen to you tell stories or engage in other oral language activities?	0	1–2	3–4	5–6	7

Please indicate the following:
Your Gender _____
Your Race/Ethnicity _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated!