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HOW FOSTERING PARENT/TEACHER COMMUNICATION IMPACTS LITERACY
DEVELOPMENT IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literacy Education.

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Saint Paul, Minnesota

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ABSTRACT

The research question addressed is, *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades?* This capstone provides research proving the importance of communication between educators and families to increase literacy success for children. To answer the research question a resource toolbox was created and included in the Appendix as a practical tool for teachers and parents to utilize. The resource toolbox includes two categories of tools; communication tools, and literacy tools. The focus in regards to teachers, was tools to enhance efficient, and effective communication with parents. The focus in regards to parents, was to provide reading tools to assist with literacy at home. Chapter Four contains the rationale, explanation, and an example for each resource included in the Appendix.

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To my husband for all of your support and encouragement throughout this process.
To my father and mother for bestowing the gift of literacy upon me at an early age.
For my children that I hope to inspire to be lifelong learners.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

For most people, literacy is inspired by another person's passion for it. The challenge or encouragement can be contagious as people confer about reading and writing. Contagious inspiration can travel through family members, friends, teachers, or co-workers. For me, that inspiration came through my creative father and my dedicated mother. I grew up in a home with book baskets filled to the brim in every bathroom, bedroom and playroom. My mom was a quiet encourager, constantly modeling a love for reading. My dad was the dramatizing reader, giving life to each word that he read. My parents were reading advocates and gifted me with a passion for reading that I hope to bestow on my children and students. My mom was a teacher in the district I attended school therefore, my mom was always connected to my teachers. She knew when I was in trouble and received a pink slip for talking. She also knew when I was praised for helping another student. My dad worked from home and was available to join my class on field trips and attended every parent/teacher conference.

As I reflected on my childhood as a learner and reader through the beginning stages of this capstone, I kept pondering some of the same questions. What about my students who do not have involved parents? What about the parents that want to be involved yet do not know how? What portion is the teacher, parent, or student responsible for the learning process? The inquiry of all of these questions, my childhood experiences, and my experiences as an educator brought me to my research question. *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development*

in the primary grades? As an educator, I want to encourage my students to love reading as my parents did for me, but is that enough or can I do more? In this capstone I will dig into my curious thoughts about this issue, but before I do, I will share my journey, from a young girl sitting in an oak tree to a passionate educator, passing on my knowledge to the next generation.

My Parents: Childhood Reading Advocates

The quiet, dedicated encourager; my mother was one of the first reading influences in my life. I specifically remember books that we read over and over together. One of my favorite books was *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. I would climb up on her high bed with as much effort as a mountain climber with the goal of getting to the top. Mine was not for the mountain peak view, but the sacred book time with my mom. She would often fall asleep halfway through, but I did not mind, as I loved snuggling up next to her as I paged through the pictures of my favorite book. On weekends I would find her sprawled out on a lawn chair in the sun or on the couch in the living room with her newest book in hand. I could describe my mom as being a reading warrior, always ready, prepared, and dedicated. My mom's dedication to reading was contagious and remained with me as a reader.

I remember the first author that hooked me due to of my mom's recommendation, Francine Rivers, a talented fiction writer. River's book *Redeeming Love* captured me immediately and left me yearning to read her next novel. It was my first reading addiction. I could disappear from my own life and truly be a character from the novel, fighting their challenges, and reveling in their triumphs. I loved the feeling of adventure, yet safety, as I read cuddled in my bedroom after a long day at school.

Along with my mother's love for reading, she also was a talented writer. In her career, she is a reading and writing middle school teacher and desires to help her students be successful in literacy. While working on her master's degree in writing, she needed a guinea pig for her case study. As I was the right age, I was the lucky one to be "paid" with candy to participate in her practice group for Kansas Writing Strategies. However, at the time I would have rather been glazing across the smooth glassy lake on a slalom waterski than practicing to write an essay. It was not until later in life, that I realized, I needed to thank her for her writing training. Like a soldier getting equipped during boot camp with the skills she needs for war, I trained for the countless essays and papers ahead of me. Being prepared and dedicated was her wish for me, as I began my professional writing journey through high school and college. Now I am onto my capstone, and she has joined my team as I cross the threshold from bachelor's degree to master's degree student.

The creative, imaginative one, my father, was the role model that inspired me to crave reading. He would bring books to life with his expression and playful attitude about literacy. On Saturdays when my mom worked, my dad packed snacks and books and took us kids on a "mission" to the neighborhood park. We would climb up the twisted old oak tree with one branch low enough for us reach. All three of us squished together on that branch, as he would read a story aloud. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was my favorite story adventure! He could read it over and over again making me cry every time when Aslan was killed, while my brother sat next to me terrorizing me about how emotional and sentimental I was. The scene was so real to me as he altered his voice

for each character and single handedly transformed the book into a magnificent play. My father did not just teach me how to read, he made reading come alive for me.

Fortunately, I caught my dad's creative imagination. When I taught sixth grade, I taught the book *Freak the Mighty*. We did not just read the book together; I helped my students make the book come alive through character studies and our innovative version of the story through theater production. The energy and anticipation my students had everyday while practicing, gave me much joy. At the commencing of the show, my students were as excited as four year olds waking the morning of Christmas and running to the tree. In retrospect, I do not know if it was my passion that was contagious to them or theirs to me. However, it did not matter. What did matter, was that I was being able to pass on the passionate love for reading my dad gave to me.

Motherhood: Being the Reading Advocate

Now, as a parent myself, I observe my eager and fearless two-year-old daughter Lucy as she engages with the unfamiliar, rousing world around her. She is eager to learn, and I feel fortunate to be able to be the one to teach her. As a proud mother, I have to share that she has memorized her favorite books running her finger over the words as she imitates reading which has given her a large vocabulary. She is obsessed with books and asks daily to go to the library. I *love* this and feel so rewarded for the modeling I have done. Thus far, motivating Lucy to treasure books and reading has been easy thus far. Currently, my favorite moments in my personal life as a mother require my husband, daughter, our fireplace, the couch, and books! When Lucy imitates the characters from *The Snowy Day* by dragging her feet across the carpet, it melts my heart. I know I am giving her the imaginative part of reading that my dad gave to me. While she sits

diligently reading her books in her enormous, leather rocking chair, and I read my professional journal articles for graduate school, I know I am modeling the importance of literacy as my mom did for me.

Recently, Lucy started attending a Spanish Immersion preschool. This experience was extremely difficult for her in the beginning. She is a naturally verbal child. Therefore she was unaccustomed to being confused or not easily understood by people around her. I regularly connect with her preschool teachers to discuss this challenge. We work together as a team, and I am always willing to hear new ideas as to how I can support in her literacy development at home. Being in a parent role has given me a new appreciation for the parents I am in contact with as an educator.

While writing these sections about my childhood and how I will raise my children surrounded by rich literacy, I reflect on the extreme privilege of the world I was born into. I was blessed beyond measure with the gift of literacy my parents bestowed upon me. I understand that not all children have been given this gift. I will unpack more of this privilege divide among teacher and student through Payne and Edward's research in subsequent chapters.

A Teacher: Being a Reading Advocate

District. I entered my new classroom at a level four setting Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) school excited, with a happy smile and hope in my heart. This did not last long as my nine EBD middle school students shuffled through the threshold of my classroom ready for sleep and with a look of disgust on their faces. My real smile faded, but the fake one remained as I continued to have hope that I would be the one to develop a love for literacy within these students. Teaching is not an exact science and magic does

not happen in a day. However, I will forever remember the first day I gained these middle schoolers trust as they started to understand the purpose of literacy in their lives.

During this time, I taught a writing strategy and we practiced filling out job applications. One of the boys had an upcoming job interview at UPS, and he was more engaged during class than my daughter while watching a Disney movie. The day after the interview, he announced to the class that he had received the job offer! For him, it was the rebirth of allowing literacy to belong in his life again. Through getting the job by using a writing strategy he realized the importance of reading and writing and how it can impact his life outside of school. That night, I called his parents to tell them how proud of him I was for getting the job and more importantly, allowing himself to explore literacy again. However, as a naive first year teacher, I did not expect the type of phone call I encountered. First, the mother seemed very short and distant, as if she wanted me off the phone as soon as possible. When I told her that I was calling to tell her how proud of her son I was, she was shocked! She explained to me that she had not had a positive teacher phone call about her son in four years. Once again, my mind explored the question: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development?*

Teaching abroad. The following year my experiences drastically shifted as I stepped off a plane in a foreign country. That year, as I entered my third grade international school classroom in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, I had a similar smile on my face and hope in my heart again. However, I had not a clue of what my time there would hold. My twelve students originated from all over the world because their parents worked for international companies. They were very busy people; my students had drivers, maids, and cooks. The fathers were often traveling out of the country, and the

mothers were engaged in many philanthropic groups and social events. It was extremely difficult to connect with the parents about their child's progress or to explain school activities.

Literacy development for third graders in Brazil was considerably different than for EBD middle schoolers. With such a small group, we were able to study biographies and make them authentic with a live museum of the historical characters. We also partnered with a public school for reading buddies. These children loved to read! During this teaching experience, developing their love for reading was the easy part. Unfortunately, involving their parents in these activities was the greater challenge.

Charter school. After being two years apart from my special someone, I returned to Minnesota to get married. Obviously, I needed a new job and through a friend that volunteered as a reading buddy, I found a perfect fit in a charter school. At the time, the population was 91% EL and 95.3% free and reduced lunch. Again, I began teaching in a radically different demographic than my last setting. It was a unique model, with a co-teaching triad of myself, a grade alike grade teacher and an EL teacher. We co-planned, co-taught, and co-assessed all lessons for our two classes of students. Over the course of five years, I taught both sixth and second grade at this school. I observed different needs between the grades for literacy, yet similar needs with communication between school and home.

My teammate, the English Language (EL) teacher was my co-teacher, translator, and was exceptional at parent communication. He always erred on the side of sharing too much; ultimately, wanting parents to not only be involved, but empowered. Unfortunately, the language barrier for some parents was extremely

intimidating and some felt inadequate to help their children at home. One of the parents we met with only had a third grade education and was visibly anxious in her seat at conferences. To be sensitive and flexible, we would often meet at a student's home or invite the parents in before or after school. We wanted to give them options to be in an environment where they would feel comfortable and empowered to discuss their child's education. With sensitivity in mind, we always made the importance of the connection between parent and teacher extremely clear. We were a team, and they were a necessary part of their child's literacy success and overall learning. Most importantly, we wanted them to internalize our beliefs.

At the time, our school had nine years of 100% parent participation for parent/teacher conferences four times per year. In regards to literacy development, the majority of my students were behind grade level. With an excellent team, effective data analysis, focused literacy strategies, and parent support, our students often advanced two grade levels before they exited our classroom for the year. This was a major accomplishment. Ultimately, our team of teachers also wanted to educate our parents on how they could maximize educating their children at home by partnering with us. In addition, we wanted them to understand that although our instruction was in English, reading in Spanish to their child was extremely valuable for their language development. As a result, we started hosting a reading and math fair twice a year where parents could come and learn how to do activities with their child at home. They would also leave with practical takeaways for helping their child at home and were empowered by their new knowledge and ability. Again my question arose: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development?*

Conclusion

The characteristics of dedication, passion, creativity, encouragement, and imagination were modeled to me through my literacy experiences in my childhood. My dream as a mother is to present this rich legacy of literacy from my family to my children. I recognize not all children possess the same privilege and recognize I need to try to bridge that gap as an educator with the families I serve. I want to be a reading advocate for my students like my parents were for me and inspire the next generation through my influence and advocacy. As a teacher, I believe I am well on my way to inspiring children to become lifelong readers. However, I also accept the responsibility to educate parents, help them to be connect to the school and empower them to truly make the difference in their child's literacy development.

In Chapter Two, I will share a synthesis of my research from the major researchers, and theorists on this topic. Next in Chapter Three, I will provide the methodology I used to answer my research question. Then, in Chapter Four I will follow by providing artifacts and specific tools and strategies for communication and literacy. In an effort to articulate my results, I used a resource toolbox format to be used by teachers and parents. Finally, in Chapter Five I will revisit the literature and reflect upon my learning during the capstone process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In Chapter One, I offered personal memories and career experiences that I encountered in my childhood and professional journey. This revealed how my perspective is ever changing about the topic of communication and its impact on literacy development. As a child, I was enthralled by literacy, primarily due to my parent's advocacy and their strong involvement in my education. Additionally, becoming a mother changed my views on the topic to include empathy for parents by understanding of the "other side." As an educator, my journey as a novice teacher, working for a district, teaching at an international school and finally teaching at a charter school has broadened my ever changing perspective. I believe continuous learning is the key to growth and I want to continue to grow in my understanding of this topic. Therefore, I ask the following essential question for my capstone project: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades?*

As described in Chapter One, I care deeply about this topic. Therefore, in this literature review, I will synthesize the work of knowledgeable researchers in the field to provide a deeper understanding for the major components of my topic. To organize this research I will present the following sections: understanding communication, community building as a foundation, building parent/teacher partnerships, and tools to enhance parent communication. Furthermore, I will discuss the equally important sections that support my topic: parents impact on literacy development, rationale supporting parent impact, and strategies for engaging parents in home support of reading acquisition.

Understanding Communication

Communication varies in action by each individual, with their personality and their circumstances. In general form, it is defined by Merriam-Webster as, “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, to someone else or a message that is given to someone.” In terms of communication in an educational institution, many people instantly think of written report cards and updates, as well as parent/teacher conferences. However, Epstein (1986) suggests that school to home communication can often be a one way movement- from the school directly home sharing information on schedules, report cards, or school procedures. Communicating these forms of information can be deliberated as *parental involvement*, however, Epstein believes this can be misconstrued. She explains the distinct difference between *parental involvement* and *parental information*. For example, some schools try to combat parental involvement by holding parent/teacher conferences, however, this can also often be a one way teacher-dominated information dump. Other schools can be more parent oriented, and seek to ask questions, leaving room for parent feedback and ensure meetings are held at a comfort level for the families, not just the educator. Furthermore, Epstein explains that the educator needs to be a positive liaison between home and school. Frequently, parent information leaves no room for parent communication and often is not reciprocal. Therefore, Epstein believes that true parent communication must be a two way street with the exchange of information *and* involvement, not solely school information sent home to read.

Before proceeding further, it is important to note some essential definitions for better understanding of this capstone. I have chosen to use Patricia Edward's definitions from her book *Tapping the Potential of Parents* as a guideline in my research. "The word *parent* is used to refer to all those who are involved in a child's education, because we realize that other adults such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, stepparents, and guardians may carry the primary responsibility for a child's education and development" (Edwards, 2009, p.8). Edwards also defines *parent involvement* as, "the participation of parents in every facet of children's education and development from birth to adulthood, accompanied by the recognition that parents are the primary influence in children's lives" (Edwards, 2009, p.8).

Most educational institutions and families would agree that communication is an important aspect of a child's growth. Therefore, the question is not if communication is worthwhile; the question is, *how* to effectively design and implement a communication plan? Schmidt and Izzo (2003) created a year long project on school and parent communication along with culturally relevant literacy instruction. One of the most important and familiar statements they used in their document included the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." Therefore, it is necessary for many people to be involved in the literacy process, not solely the teacher. Ultimately, parents and educators need to work together to ensure success for the children.

Therefore, if it takes a village, that means many people are required to be engaged and connected in the process of raising a child. These efforts build effective communication. However, bridging the gap between parents and teachers is not simple. Often times parents are extremely busy and have many priorities to juggle

including, employment, taking care of their household, and balancing various schedules and demands. This process can also consist of hardships such as, job loss, homelessness, abuse, and lack of finances to support basic needs, among many others.

Teachers have a similar conundrum with time and priorities as they balance, lesson planning, assessments-created and mandated, expectations of administration, behavior management, and last, however not least, parent communication. Therefore, with all these barriers, how can parent communication be effective between educators and parents?

Community Building as a Foundation

To begin, communication can only happen when a community of social acceptance is provided. This is mandatory before progress can take effect. This is a complicated process and involves a variety of people. Students must feel safe and successful in the classroom and ultimately, children must feel the same at home. In addition, parents must feel safe and welcome in school and their personal life. Without any of these important channels, communication may be hindered.

All individuals have basic psychological needs that must be met in order to be successful. They also need nourishment, sleep, to feel safe, and be loved. When these basic needs are met, people are capable of doing other tasks; however, when they are not met, their attention is focused on seeking what needs are missing. In Edwards chapter, *Getting More Parents Involved*, she refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the direct correlation between parent involvement and parents who are having a difficult time moving through Maslow's five hierarchy of needs (2009). When a parent is stuck in a lower phase of the pyramid such as safety, they are unable to participate in their child's

learning and development the same way as a parent in the self-actualization phase. The same is true for children, yet often a greater cost.

In addition, Schaps (2003) explains that it is essential for students to have their basic psychological needs met, feel emotionally and physically safe, and experience supportive relationships before academic progress can happen. For example, we can teach Minnesota State Literacy *standard 2.3.0.4; read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension* all year and still not see progress if a child does not feel safe in the classroom environment. The same can be true for learning at home. If the child does not feel safe or supported, learning growth will be stunted. Communication is also extremely difficult when a family unit is struggling with safety or basic needs. Although it is a challenge, in addition to other tasks, the educational institution must accept, that an initial avenue of communication between the teacher and the parent is basic to achieving student success in school. Edwards (2009) ensures it is the responsibility of the school to inquire and learn how to include and welcome parents into the educational process.

After initiating communication with parents, it is then the teacher's role to follow up and assist in ways needed to take care of the foundational aspect of safety and social acceptance at school and in the home. This could include: having breakfast ready for a student in the morning, connecting the family with a food shelf, having a social worker meet with the family, and an endless list of other supports. Listening first and being available to connect families with the community and services accessible are a few of the most important keys to assisting families and children. "Participation will mean different things to different parents" (Edwards, 2009, p.17).

Building Parent/Teacher Partnerships

After the basic needs are met for children and families and communication is initiated, the next step is figuring out what each unique individual has to offer. “In the world of community and volunteerism, deficiencies have no market value; gifts are the point. Citizens in community want to know what you can do, not what you can’t do” (Block, 2008, p.12). Therefore, when we seek true community for our schools and classrooms looking at deficiencies amounts to nothing. Focusing on the gifts people in the community possess is the key. As a result, it is more important and helpful to know what you *can* do versus what you *cannot* do. Through effective listening and communication, we can identify how parents can be helpful in their child’s education. This may include volunteering in school, supporting their child at home, or many other creative ways, I will discuss later in this capstone. It takes time and effort on the teacher’s behalf to figure out how the parent is valuable, yet it is essential. “Parents are a resource that must be tapped and cultivated” (Canter, L., & Canter, M., 1991, p.5).

That being said, if we know partnership is important, then what are the barriers? There are many possibilities in answering this question. One, is that teachers often simply do not ask. Epstein (1986) states the following:

“Teachers could do more to involve parents. Despite positive attitudes about schools and teachers in general, parents reported that teachers could do more to involve parents in learning activities at home. About 58% of the parents rarely or never received requests from the teacher to become involved in learning activities at home” (p.280).

Simply stated, parents cannot be partners if they are never invited. As educators, teachers need to find time in their day to ordinarily, “just ask.” To reiterate due to the importance, everyone has something to offer, it just needs to be tapped.

Another example came from Canter’s book *Parents on your Side* (1991), where they shared their experiences about parent involvement. Most parents are willing to be involved in their child’s education, yet they do not know how, or have not been asked. An overwhelming majority said that when requested by the teacher, they would spend 15 minutes every day working with their child. “In short, when parents are contacted by skilled, trained teachers who communicate effectively, they will respond” (Canter, L., & Canter, M., 1991, p.7). They believe, it is a myth and an excuse that the majority of parents do not want to be included in their child’s education. According to Waller & Waller (1998), “Most parents wish to support their child at school but they are looking for ‘partnership,’ not ‘power’” (p.106). Although Canter and Waller’s work was earlier research, it was foundational to build upon.

At the very least, it is essential to give parents the chance to participate. In more recent research, in his book *Community*, Peter Block conveys an idea and important fact that people will live up to what is expected of them and what they have some power over. When parents are mutual partners in the creation, much more accountability comes naturally along with it (2008). When parents and teachers sense the bond of partnership, both are willing to be accountable and put forth extra effort which ultimately impacts the child in a positive way. Edwards (2009) adds her input that parent’s resources, abilities, and background knowledge, vary greatly. Teachers need to

consider using differentiated ways of supporting parents through flexibility and sensitivity when identifying how to make them partners in the education process.

Children are impacted when the parent and teacher make the decision to establish a partnership. This partnership will look different for each parent and teacher, yet it is essential in some form. “An uninvolved parent, justifiably or not, gives a child the message that the child just isn’t important enough to warrant close attention. An involved parent, on the other hand, can provide the boost to a student’s self-esteem that will lead to greater success in school and a more fulfilling and accomplished adulthood” (Canter, L., & Canter, M., 1991, p.5). Children deserve the whole team playing on their side. Block understands this notion of teamwork and reiterates the concept that it takes a village to raise a child.

As was implied earlier, partnership is a necessity for a child’s educational well being. Lee and Marlene Canter relate the profession of a pediatrician in their book *Parents On Your Side* to convey a partnership relationship with parents. They describe a pediatrician and the extreme need for parents to play their part in their child’s well being. If the pediatrician prescribes a medication, and the parent is unwilling to give it to the child, or they make excuses, the pediatrician goes on to explain that the child will not get well without the parent doing their part. Ultimately, teachers deserve the same support as pediatricians. The child’s emotional and academic well being is just as essential and can severely impact their future the same as a physical illness would (1991). As a result, educators must ensue the same type of confidence when approaching parents about the needs of the student. Without hesitation or apologies, the teacher must regard the relationship to be a partnership.

However, even upon request, some parents may choose not to participate or communicate reciprocally. Karther & Lowden (1997) articulated that often the parents the teachers most desperately want to see at conferences, are the ones that do not show up and are hard to get in touch with. Unfortunately, there is no magic to making this easier. However, schools need to think outside of the box and try alternative practices in order to reach these families instead of sticking to the same traditional forms of *parent-school activities*. As a teacher, I can relate to this issue and I know that it can be extremely frustrating. We teachers have limited “extra” time to reach out to parents who do not respond. Yet, those are often the families that need the gap bridged the most. Epstein (2013) defines this as *equitable partnerships* - all parents deserve to be connected with, not just the easiest to reach or most available. Many of the parents are uncomfortable connecting with their child’s school due to their own negative past experiences with education. Other reasons they may not want to connect with the school, may be lack of transportation, or lack of resources. Providing parents an option of where to meet for conferences such as, a coffee shop, their home, or a local park, may alleviate a parent's deep rooted fear of the school conferences from their past experiences. In the next section, I will share helpful tools to assist in creating meaningful partnerships with parents who want to be involved and with parents who have more complicated situations.

Tools to Enhance Parent Communication

Basic communication tools that teachers have been using for years to increase parent communication include, surveys, face to face conferences, informal

communication, and more recently, technology. All of these tools can be effectively used to learn about the child and the family.

Surveys. Surveys can be utilized to collect information about the student from the parents' perspective. They can also be referenced throughout the year to gain feedback from a family's vantage point on how the child is doing in school, opinion of the curriculum, homework, etc. Surveys are a simple way to include parents and start the partnership relationship by asking questions and listening. Waller & Waller (1998) wrote their book using a case study of Moordown St. John's school to describe practical approaches to strengthen the link between home and school. There are many practical tips, tools, and practices that could be used or modified for any school. One of the most important chapters I read was, *Parental Feedback as a Catalyst for Change*. The chapter gave methodological approaches to communication between parents and the school. In order for educational institutions to increase school-home communication they must become better listeners. Surveying the parents is one way to make feedback from families available. Waller & Waller (1998) give a detailed account of what to think about when asking for parental feedback:

- Be clear about the purpose of the survey.
- Choose the right time.
- Select the most appropriate survey method.
- Design the survey carefully.
- Use representatives from your survey audience to help design the survey.
- Selectively test and retest before embarking upon the main survey.
- Be aware that the respondents might not wish to give an open assessment.

- Carefully consider whether the respondents' assessment can be taken at face value, especially if the survey question is too generalized.

Using Waller & Wallers' advice, an example would be a quick informational survey at the beginning of the year. It may only need to be a one or two question survey including how, where, or how much time parents can commit to a conference. Two examples of questions that could be helpful are the following:

1. In what capacity is a face to face conference possible for you: school, home, coffee shop, or community library?
2. How much time are you willing to set aside for a face to face conference: 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes?

Having this type of knowledge ahead of time from a survey helps you plan how to effectively communicate with each type of parent as well as plan for the amount of time you will have in the meeting. It also holds the parent accountable and sets the expectation for success considering the parents chose where and how long they are willing to sacrifice for an update on their child. The survey can be done as a paper copy or digitally on a website such as www.polls.com. Giving the parents a choice of how they would like to complete the survey may elicit a more detailed response.

Edwards (2009) offers an example of a School Climate Assessment Survey in order to gather valuable information about the overall school atmosphere. She believes this type of survey can provide significant, relevant information, which can make a critical impact on involving parents in their child's education.

Face to face conferences. Face to face conferences are another widely used and typical form of parent/teacher interaction. This can be a positive meeting if it is

collaborative in nature and helpful to the parent. Listening to parents is fundamental in the process to discover if the meetings are actually constructive or what can be changed to make the meetings productive for the parent. There is also some difficulty with face to face conferences such as, the time it takes, parents not feeling comfortable in the school setting, and language barriers. “Acknowledging, understanding, and acting on the changing characteristics of families and family structures are critical if family involvement is to become a reality in schools...reliance on familiar forms of involvement is a recipe for failure” (Gambrell & Morrow, 2011, p.441). Changing the familiar structure may require teachers to move out of their comfort zone to meet parents in a place where they feel safer or where it may be easier for them to travel. This may mean meeting outside of the school's walls in order to have a face- to- face conference involving meaningful conversation about the child.

Informal communication. In addition to face to face meetings throughout the year, it is important to have a variety of modes of communication: informal meetings, phone calls, newsletters, kid calls home, and bulletin boards, are just a few examples of ways teachers can communicate less formally and more frequently. Edwards describes types of informal communication that teachers could include in their practice to make parents feel welcome and safe in the educational environment:

- Welcome signs/banners/parent bulletin boards
- Welcome letters to parents
- Communicate through parent newsletters
- “What We Learned Storyboards -displaying student work
- Parent survey or school climate assessments

- Create and post your school's mission statement for parent involvement
- Parent and student vision statements
- Parent focus groups
- Parent bags including resources for families to take home
- Author teas
- Traveling science or reading boxes

Additionally, Edwards suggests conducting a climate survey or parent focus groups early in the year to have a better grasp on how parents feel about the school environment. Doing this early in the school year also gives the school time to create and implement a parent plan in order to effectively build parent/teacher partnerships.

Written communication. Teachers have a limited amount of time, which can be quickly absorbed into other tasks at school. Good intentions for informing parents about school curriculum, sending positive reports home, or written communication can easily dissolve as the days fly by. Have students address four "Good news from school" postcards to their homes at the beginning of the year or print off four address labels per student. This prep work makes sending positive news home quarterly accessible and easy. You can also quickly see which families you have communicated with and which families you need to increase positive communication. Planning a time in your schedule can also be helpful in order to hold yourself accountable. For example, every Friday from 3:00-3:20, write out five postcards to families.

Technology. The communication tools we have available in this age of education are extensively more than we have had in the past with technology accessible to so many. "The use of technology- digitally as well as online resources-for enhancing teacher

learning, has been increasing dramatically during the past 10 years” (Gambrell & Morrow, 2001, p.470). This can be exceptionally helpful for the use of professional development for teachers learning how to communicate effectively with families. However, it can be equally as meaningful to use as communication tools between educators and families. Gambrell & Morrow (2001) also suggest blogs, wikis, and podcasts, as good places to start. Wikis relay specific information or school related topics and can be shared with teachers and families. An example is www.wikispaces.com. Podcasts are a source where teachers and parents alike can gain access to professionals in the field and strategy learning outside of their district or school. A great, free resource to begin understanding how to use a podcast is ReadWriteThink’s strategy guide for teaching with podcasts. <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/teaching-with-podcasts-30109.html>.

The Journal is a website where I found an article by Bridget McCrea (2013) titled *7 Free apps For Keeping Parents and Teachers Connected*. She stated, “A growing number of K-12 teachers are turning to free online and mobile applications to communicate and collaborate with busy parents who want to know what's going on in class and how their students are performing, and who want to give feedback to teachers in a way that's accessible to them” (McCrea, 2013). These applications include:

- Buzzmob- a private network that requires a password to access but is conveniently obtainable from mobile devices.
- The Teacher App and Gradebook- this mobile and free app has many free resources that give parents and teachers the flexibility to view, plan, and organize

on the go. It has contains an interactive calendar, event notification, and course grade notifications. Parents can also see attendance records and submit absences.

- Collaborize Classroom- a discussion platform that is a closed network for teachers to share student progress, upload links, and post articles. Parents can offer feedback, ask questions, and collaborate keeping them up to speed about what is happening in education as a whole and specifically with their child.
- Remind 101- gives reminders for parents in the form of a text message. Reminding parents of a school event or field trip and giving updates on bus schedules due to weather, are just a quick text away without having to send an email or make parent phone calls.
- TeacherKit- contains student profiles that can be added to throughout the year for attendance, allergies, etc. Teachers and parents can email about the child through the app itself and do not need to create a separate email.
- Running Start- geared toward physical education teachers, this app helps connect parents or get them involved, not only academically, but also with their physical development.
- Google Apps For Education- offers a free suite of productivity tools such as gmail, calendar, and drive, that give an alternative to lost papers in transition from school to home in their backpack.

(<https://thejournal.com/articles/2013/06/11/7-free-apps-for-keeping-parents-and-teachers-connected.aspx>)

Clearly, technology can be an exceptionally helpful tool for teachers and parents. However, not all families have easy access to technology. It is important to be sensitive

the families with limited access to technology and help supplement resources if they are necessary for communication. Furthermore, each institution and teacher needs to decide how to communicate with families. Ultimately, it is up to them to maximize the use of technology. It is imperative that they have a plan developed in order to do this prior to the year commencing.

Professional Development and Parent Involvement Plans

“It is well known that from the first day to the last day of their professional careers, educators communicate with students and their families in many ways and at every grade level. It is high time- indeed, it is way past time - for future teachers and administrators to be ready for this reality” (Epstein, 2013, p. 117). Teacher preparation courses, professional developments, and school parent involvement plans are essential to meet this reality. Epstein makes the case that in order to make a plan and to organize good partnerships, the teachers and administrators need “to know” their students and families on a more personal level. As a result, Epstein (1986) details that teachers can work as individuals, or in groups to develop parent plans that will build involvement with at home learning due to increased understanding of the curriculum goals. Teachers need to plan how to find and link common goals of home and school.

One important way to get “to know” the school population is to develop what Edwards (2009) suggests as a demographic profile. She grapples with the changing family and argues, “Schools must acknowledge that the cultural makeup of classrooms is changing in conjunction with the ethnic, cultural, and economic changes occurring in families in this country” (Edwards, 2009, p.48). Edwards lists the benefits of utilizing a demographic profile in the parent involvement plan:

- Allows teachers to develop tailor-made parentally appropriate activities
- Helps teachers to take a look at the history of parent involvement at the school level
- Allows teachers to determine whether parent involvement has been effective or not
- Gives teachers a way to pinpoint where problems may be occurring
- Allows teachers to interact with families in a way that is specific to their needs
- Provides teachers with an in-depth look at the strengths of a family/community
- Gives teachers real data and removes the guesswork/judgments/assumptions about families
- Allows teachers to connect to families on a grade-by-grade basis

Edwards has multiple demographic profiles schools can use or adapt for parental involvement plans. An example from Edwards can be found in the appendix.

Similarly, Gambrell & Morrow (2011) agree there must be plan if we are going to modernize the way we involve families. To assist, they developed three action categories to keep in mind while planning:

1. Develop parent and teacher relationships through the exchange of information rather than simply giving information
2. Aid families in the understanding of school and classroom programs
3. Provide family learning interventions

Epstein (2004) understands the unique need to create specific and individualized plans; however, she believes it is necessary to include all six types of involvement in every plan. The six types of involvement are, parenting, communicating, volunteering,

learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. She provides practical examples of how to include them in a plan, this includes, workshops for parents, newsletters, parent-teacher-student conferences, volunteers and interactive homework.

Additionally, the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University (www.partnershipschools.org) is a great resource for teams or administrators to reference as they continually try to improve their parent involvement plans, make committees, or lead professional developments on the topic.

Teamwork between parents, teachers and administrators is crucial to make this process successful. All of these stakeholders need to be active in giving advice, feedback, planning and implementing the steps in the parent involvement plan.

“Teamwork requires teachers and administrators to establish and maintain a school-based team- an official committee - of teachers, parents, administrators, and others who will work together to plan, conduct, evaluate, and continually improve goal-linked activities that engage all families and selected community partners in productive ways. A partnership team extends concepts of “distributed leadership” by enabling parents on the team to take leadership, along with principals and children’s education at school and at home” (Epstein, 2013, p. 116).

It is also helpful to create a timeline with the team for when, where and how you will connect with families and implement the plan throughout the year. An example of a timeline will be provided in the Appendix of this capstone. “Many studies confirm that

when schools develop excellent programs of partnership, even hard-to-reach families become involved in their children's education" (Epstein, 2004).

Thus far in the literature review, the research has been clear that effective communication between teachers and families is essential for a child's development. Secondly, community building is foundational for creating positive relationships. Additionally, there are an abundance of resources available to utilize to enhance connections between school and home. Lastly, strategic created professional development and parent involvement plans are essential for effective communication.

Rationale Supporting Parent Impact on Literacy Development

Literacy is increasingly more important with every passing generation. Children who learn to read and write have more power in the world and control over their lives due to the access they have to the world around them. Hannon (1995) defines literacy as:

“Literacy is the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning. In the teaching of literacy one generation equips the next with a powerful cultural tool. Written language enables members of a culture to communicate without meeting: to express and explore their experience; to store information, ideas and knowledge; to extend their memory and thinking; and, increasingly nowadays, to control computer-based processes” (p.2).

Therefore, literacy is a tool that is extremely valuable for children to learn and utilize throughout their lives. It needs to be taught and passed on by the previous generation through teachers, community members, and parents.

As has been revealed in the previous sections, parents can have a powerful impact on student success. Gnotta, & Schneider (2000) also discuss the impact on literacy development. They contend that, “Parents are their child's first teachers. What parents choose to do, or not do in their home can have a lasting effect on their child's future reading skills and literacy development” (p.2). Whether positive or negative, parents have a significant role in a child’s development. Motivation in learning for kids and motivation for involving parents in their child’s learning is talked about all the time in schools. Spandel (2005) adds to the discussion with a strong voice that truly our biggest motivator is our interest in our students’ lives and their opinions. What could be a better motivator for students, than to be interested in them, to be interested in their families and to help them achieve their goals in school and literacy by effectively communicating and assisting their parents in the education process. Modeling for parents what and how to help their child in literacy at home is key and can be a powerful motivator. Many parents simply do not know how their actions are impacting their child’s literacy development.

To illustrate the differences in various children’s exposure to home literacy, I have chosen three scenarios from my previous teaching experiences.

Sam, a seven year old, comes home from school to a dinner and homework time with help from his mother and older sibling. After he finishes his homework for the night, he gets to play. He chooses building a tower out of blocks. As he builds, he provides commentary about the people that live in the tower, their actions, and their imaginary lives. When playtime is over, he cleans up, has a snack, and takes a bath. As he is washing his hair, there are foam letters floating around that he grabs to

talk about, spell words, and stick them to the wall. Later, he puts on pajamas and reads books with his parents before drifting to sleep.

Another child, Sarah is a seven year old as well. She arrives home from school to an empty house. She tries to do her homework, but cannot read the directions well, so she quickly gives up and turns on the television. Her mother and father get home later in the evening, but are busy so she continues to watch more television. For dinner she eats some cereal from the cupboard she can reach. She is up until ten o'clock before her parents realize it is late, and scold her about going to bed.

John, twelve years old and in sixth grade, is a slightly different scenario. He is a little older than the other two children. He has missed many days of school throughout the year when he gives his parents a hard time about going. He often gets his way because his parents are late for work and do not have time to argue with him. John is behind in social studies, science, and language arts, because reading is hard for him. He asked his parents to help him in the past, but has given up. When he asked previously, they said they did not remember anything from sixth grade and told him he should ask his teachers for help. John does not want to ask for help at school because he is embarrassed. When he gets home from school, he retreats to something he is very good at, his *Call of Duty* video game. He feels successful while playing and can escape the reality of his hard day at school.

These scenarios are typical examples of many of the children we have in our classrooms. These children have different home lives and have adapted to them as needed. Darling (2005) discusses five fundamental activities included in literacy development: singing, playing, talking, reading, and writing. In one scenario, Sam's

parents facilitated all of those in simple ways. In Sarah's situation, her parents did not facilitate those activities, and in some cases, hindered her from being creative and learning. John's parents did not foster the importance of school and did not help facilitate literacy at home. The scenes differed with parents either promoting or dismissing home literacy, and fundamental needs such as enough restful sleep, and nourishment. These can greatly impact development as Schaps (2003) discussed earlier in this literature review.

As we study these scenarios, we need to keep in mind that none of these adults are bad parents, one just may have more knowledge than the other about how to aid in the development of a child. Therefore, as educators, it is our responsibility to communicate with parents what the developmental needs are of the child and help provide assistance whenever possible.

In addition, Payne (2008) provides knowledge about children living in poverty and how it impacts their literacy development in her article *Nine Powerful Practices*. She relates it to the formality of language and provides the example that children with families on welfare are exposed to only one-third as many words by age three as children living in homes where their parents were classified as professional. Having three times the amount of vocabulary when entering school gives those children a much greater advantage at literacy development than the children exposed to a much smaller amount of language.

Furthermore, Edwards argues that literacy and education is the greatest gift. "It is the tool that gives a child life choices" (Edwards, 2009). As a result, it is necessary to

connect with families and aid in their understanding of literacy development as early as possible.

As Darling (2005) contends, “Children benefit when teachers and parents reinforce the same concepts and ideas. For this to happen, teachers and parents must have some knowledge of what happens in the classroom and what happens at home that support reading acquisition” (p.476). Communication and knowledge sharing must happen about routines at home and school. It is also important for the teacher to explain the learning content to parents. When parents and teachers are on the same page, development can bloom and grow. It also gives the teacher a better understanding of a student’s behavior and interactions with peers.

Clearly, many parents do not have teaching degrees. Therefore, teaching may not be a natural process for all adults. In most cases, educational institutions need to teach parents what they want them to do and how they want them to do it. This can be accomplished through parent involvement programs such as, parent nights, reading fairs, and parent learning sessions including the kids. “Studies indicate that high-quality (parent) programs not only increase levels of parent involvement, but can also help parents acquire and use strategies that correlate with higher rates of students’ literacy performance (as cited by Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Krol-Sinclair, 1996). Clearly, creating parent involvement programs takes time and energy and require the support of administration and other staff. Therefore, the school needs to work together to make a plan for how to involve parents in a way that works for them. They need to decide as a team how to disburse the knowledge from the

teacher to parents about literacy and learning. Edwards (2009) suggests developing a scope and sequence of parent involvement.

Similarly, the National PTA has six standards for family-school partnerships that support the rationale for parent impact on literacy development. They are as follows:

Standard 1: Welcome all families into the school community.

Standard 2: Communicate effectively

Standard 3: Supporting student success

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child

Standard 5: Sharing power

Standard 6: Collaborating with community

These standards directly reflect the research from the theorist in the field reviewed in this capstone. As a brief overview, standard one and six reflect Schaps' research, building community as a foundation. Epstein would support Standard two, communicating effectively. Waller & Wallers' research mirrors standard five of sharing power. Supporting student success in standard three, and speaking up for every child in standard four, is parallel with Edwards' work. These six standards are foundational, and would be valuable to have accessible for any school that is creating a partnership plan.

If a teacher believes they can do it alone without parent involvement they are mistaken. The role of the parent is exceptionally important and should not be taken for granted. Van Steensel, R., McElvany, N., Kurvers, J., & Herppich, S (2011) justify reasons for parent involvement in literacy education at home. They state four major reasons:

- One to one contact

- Individual feedback
- Positive routine changes at home for long term growth
- Increasing culturally relevant awareness

These are just a few of the many benefits to teaming with parents and sharing the responsibility in a child's literacy development. Ferlazzo (2011) concedes, "These connections can also improve parents' feelings of efficacy and increase community support for the schools" (p.10).

Strategies for Engaging Parents in Home Support of Reading Acquisition

In order to answer the research question: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades*, tools must be provided for parents to be able to aid in the literacy development of their child. Many parents are unsure how to be involved in their child's early literacy development. The following sections suggest such tools.

Libraries. Celano & Neuman (2015) suggest that a useful resource right around the corner for most people, is the community library. Through a program called *Every Child Ready to Read*, most libraries around the nation are connecting with parents. They help parents realize that being involved in their child's early literacy is not as difficult as they think. As previously noted, it can be as easy as doing five activities with their child: singing, talking, reading, writing and playing.

Libraries are a free public tool that can provide advice and teaching about literacy. In the journal article, *Libraries Emerging as Leaders in Parent Engagement*, Celano & Neuman (2015) reveal an example. Rasolva, a Spanish-speaking mother of two children gave her account about how libraries helped her to understand books and

the role they play in her children's lives. She also stated through going to the library, she learned that sharing book time with her kids was a great way to become closer and get to know them better. Public libraries can be a free and resourceful place for teachers to direct parents.

Literacy take homes. Another way teachers can assist parents in those five activities at home is to create literacy bags for easy home access. Parents do not always have a toolbox of ideas for literacy in their background knowledge. Therefore, educators often need to provide the resources for the toolbox. In Dr. D. Reece Wilson's (2013) project, literacy backpacks were created in order to encourage family literacy participation. High quality and age appropriate books were included along with creative and engaging activities to include the whole family. Overall, there were highly positive responses from families regarding the literacy backpacks.

Parent literacy workshops. "If teachers want parents to feel confident that they can help, they must organize and conduct workshops for parents in *how to help*" (Epstein, 1986 p.292). Gnotta & Schneider (2000) discuss another example of how strategies are disbursed to families. It describes the impact of *parent-child verbal interactions* and how they impact literacy development in the child. The study offered a six session parent reading workshop for first grade parents. The workshop shared information on brain development and developmental stages of literacy. The workshop also gave a balanced literacy approach, offering parents ideas for reading and writing at home with some "make and take" materials to use at home with the child. In addition to parents having increased knowledge about how to assist their child in literacy at home,

the communication between the parent and the teacher was also enhanced through the workshops.

In addition, Avallone, Carson, Henderson, & Whipple (2011) use a unique, enticing workshop style to reach parents by making it focused on the child. They use the term Author's Tea for these family-friendly evening learning events where students would share their written work. Throughout the night teachers asked the parents to share their ideas for improving their student's reading abilities. Parents were put into groups and asked open ended questions relying on their advice and feedback. The teachers felt that the responses from the parents were overwhelmingly positive and helpful. The parents realized the school's priority on reading was intense and impressive. Relationships were built and learning materialized for both the parents and teachers in the process. Author's tea night was not only a way for students to share their work, and parents to provide feedback. The night empowered parents to feel belonging and that they have a voice in their child's education. Through a simple sharing time, a partnership relationship was formed.

Technology. There are many resources available via the internet for parents and educators to reference. For example, the International Literacy Association and the National Council of Teachers of English teamed to create an extremely useful website www.Readwritethink.org.

On this website parents will find, articles, videos, podcasts, activities/projects, tips & how to's, games/tools, printouts, and more. They are accessible by theme, learning objective, resource type, or grade level, to make it easy for parents or teachers to find the resources sought.

Written resources. Distributing knowledge about literacy through articles or books is another strategic tool teachers can offer. A great article to begin with is by Darling (2005) *Strategies for Engaging Parents in Home Support of Reading Acquisition*. This article reviews the importance of parent involvement at home in literacy and gives research examples to support its effectiveness. Following, Darling gives the definition of each of the major literacy focus areas: *phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, print concepts, and writing*. For each area, she explains how they may be taught at school and gives practical ways parents can help support at home, categorized by those specific seven areas. For example, she describes phonemic awareness and what parents can do to help their child with this area at home. She suggests:

- Sing alphabet songs
- Help the child clap the beats or syllables in words
- Point out letters
- Play with language and rhymes
- Sing songs that manipulate phonemes, such as the Name Game

Other applicable written articles can be found through the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) or the International Literacy Association (ILA). One example of an article they produce is *Read Together: Parents and Educators Working Together for Literacy* (2000), which lays out simple, helpful ways parents can help their child: read aloud, learn to read, and what to do when the child is stuck. It also lists books for each stage of readers: emergent, early, and fluent along with excellent read-aloud

choices and signs of reading development. Brief, clear articles that are bulleted such as this one make it simple for parents to help their child with their reading development.

Providing practical tools and strategies for parents gives parents knowledge and understanding for how to help their child at home with literacy. Directing families to communities' resources such as the public library is one important tool. Another helpful method is through sending home books and resources such as literacy bags. Workshops to teach parents how to teach reading or educate parents on ways to incorporate literacy at home are a more intensive but very engaged, hands on approach. Lastly, equipping parents with printed resources such as quality articles, books on literacy, or technology tools, is another valuable option.

Conclusion

In Chapter Two, a variety of authors and researchers in the field of parent and teacher communication and literacy development were presented in an effort to answer, *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades?* To organize this research I highlighted sections addressing, understanding communication, community building as a foundation, building parent/teacher partnerships, and tools to enhance parent communication. Following, I elaborated on my research by providing rationale supporting parent impact on literacy development and strategies for engaging parents in home support of reading acquisition. Next, in Chapter Three I will provide the methodology to answer my research question. Chapter Four will offer the components for how I developed this methodology including artifacts and specific strategies. These are organized in a resource toolbox

format to be used by teachers and parents. Finally, Chapter Five will revisit the literature and reflect upon my major learnings from this capstone process.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

Parent/teacher communication and how it impacts literacy development is a centrally discussed topic for educators, politicians, and the community. It has also been a personal quest for me as I have advanced in my career as an educator and became a parent. Due to the impact it has on myself and so many others, I chose to research the question for my capstone project: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades?* As revealed in the literature review included in Chapter Two, there are many voices in the field of education that agree, parent and teacher communication significantly impacts a child's literacy development. In this chapter, I will review the setting, participants, and methods, that I employed to aid in the creation and organization of a resource toolbox.

Setting

Due to the vastness of this topic as well as the broad range of people that this concept influences, there could be many different settings in which this toolbox could be utilized. There is not a specific school or district that this is written for. This is also the reason I chose not to implement the resources as an action research plan, rather develop resources through the curriculum development process. The purpose is to make it effective and efficient for educators to choose what would work best for them in their specific setting. The resources they need may also change year to year as their participants change. Each family culture is unique and may need a different style of communication. As was discussed in Chapter Two, not all uniformed, standard styles of

communication work with every family. “The greater point is that parents, like students, are best served when treated individually. This means knowing them, listening to their own stories, understanding what will be most helpful to them in raising their children, and supporting their children’s school learning” (Edwards, 2009, p.57-58). In any educational setting, it is the role of the teacher to reach out to the parents and communicate. Empowering parents to participate in their child’s education by creating a partnership is a powerful part of the process. Teamwork between parents and teachers is one important way to make school institutions more successful.

Participants

Similar to setting, there is not one specific school, type of teacher, student, or parent these resources are limited to. For the most part, every teacher can use additional resources to communicate more effectively with parents throughout their career. Therefore, the communication tools could be widely used across grade levels from preschool through higher education.

However, the literacy strategies specific to my curriculum development are more geared toward primary grades. Elementary teachers and parents of kindergarten through fifth grade will find this section the most helpful, although some tools may be adapted for higher grades by the teacher or parent. Some suggested uses for this resource toolbox are as follows:

- Individual teachers - use the communication resources to connect more effectively with parents.
- Individual parent teacher conferences - teachers provide literacy resources to parents to help at their child at home.

- Individual parents - access and use the literacy strategies at home with their child.
- Groups of parents in a workshop setting - directed by the school or teacher in order to provide literacy strategies for parents to use at home with their child.
- Groups of teachers in a professional development setting - directed by an administrator to disperse information to be used in individual classrooms.
- Clusters of collaborating teachers - working together on methods to increase communication with parents.
- Clusters of collaborating teachers - working together to support and empower parents with home literacy strategies.
- Library classes for parents - directed by a librarian or teacher to support and empower parents with home literacy strategies.

Methods

When thinking about the procedure of developing and collecting the resources needed for this toolbox, I began by using a backwards design model. Starting with an end result in mind, provided guidance for where to begin and how to proceed. For this reason, I choose to create a teacher survey. The survey will identify where the teacher's strength and growth areas are in terms of communicating with parents. It is only fair to follow by surveying the parents to understand their communication needs and what channel best fits them to have a successful partnership with the teacher. Collecting of the digital resources and literacy strategies was completed by research done through the internet, journals, and books. Each of these researched strategies were categorized into two different groups for ease of accessibility, communication tools and literacy strategies.

Within this toolbox and for each strategy, I have chosen to use the *rationale, explanation, example* format. I provide a rationale and purpose as to why the tool or strategy was chosen. Then, I follow with an explanation of how and when to use the tool or strategy. Lastly, I give an example of each tool or strategy. I use this format for each tool in order to keep consistency and structure when trying to find or access a tool from the resources I have provided. A timeline has also been included as a long range plan that can be used for a teacher to see how these resources could be incorporated together. This timeline is only an example and should be adapted to fit the specific needs of the teacher and families.

Conclusion

Due to the need articulated in the research presented in Chapter Two, I decided to collect tools and resources for use by educators and families. The purpose of this project is to bridge the gap with communication and reading strategy resources for families to support literacy development at home, therefore answering my research question: *How can fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development in the primary grades?* I collected information from a variety of sources in order to have one cumulative resource for people to access. The objective is to use a resource toolbox to positively impact communication and literacy development. Next, in Chapter Four I will offer the artifacts and specific tools and strategies. These are organized in a resource toolbox format to be used by teachers and parents. As previously shared, the format will provide a rationale, explanation, and example for each tool. Finally, in Chapter Five, I reflect and conclude my learning from this capstone process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

In this chapter, I will present methods and procedures to answer my capstone question: *How can fostering positive parent/teacher communications impact literacy development in the primary grades?* This includes the creation of a toolbox of resources made accessible for teachers and parents. In regard to educators, in the first section of this chapter I designed and organized a bank of options for quick and easy tools to choose from in terms of communication with parents. Pertaining more to the parents, in the second half of the chapter I developed a resource kit of literacy strategies that may be useful when working with a child at home in reading or writing. These resources can be adapted or translated to best fit the needs of specific students and families.

Parent Survey

Rationale. A parent survey is necessary to gain background knowledge on the parent perspective of school climate, information on each individual student, and to elicit feedback. Surveys are a simple way to include parents and start the partner relationship by asking questions and analyzing feedback.

Explanation. Surveys may be created as a paper copy or in digital form. Having the same survey available in both versions may assist in gaining more response from parents. It is important to use a survey at the beginning of the year in order to receive the information needed to start a partnership with each family. However, surveys may be sent home at anytime throughout the year. To create a digital version one useful resource is www.polls.com.

Example. Appendix A.

Demographic School Profile

Rationale. Before starting a parent involvement plan and beginning to communicate with families it is important to know the demographics of a school population. As I cited in Chapter Two, Edwards (2009) stresses the importance for educators to create a demographic school/classroom profile. This is especially true with the current changing family, economic, ethnic, and cultural structures, in the United States. While creating this profile with staff, it could be an effective time to discuss with teachers the gap between the privileged literacy background many teachers may have had, and the literacy reality the children may be experiencing at home.

Explanation. A demographic profile can be created in a variety of ways; there is not one correct way to design a demographic profile. Having a team of administrators and teachers can be helpful, and having access to student records is also valuable in the process. I have adapted and attached a demographic profile I believe to be detailed and relevant from Edwards' book, *Tapping the Potential of Parents* (2009). She also has others available in her book and online for reference.

Example. Appendix B.

Class Messenger

Rationale. Teachers and parents often have extremely busy schedules. Therefore, it is important for teachers to use multiple modes of communication to connect with parents. Edwards (2009) contends that most often communication is a one-way street sent from teachers home in written form. One easy, innovative way to add additional communication is through technology.

Explanation. There are many technology applications and tools available. One that I choose to highlight in this toolbox is, *Class Messenger*. It is an online tool where teachers can communicate efficiently and simply with a whole group of parents or individual parents. It provides a two-way communication; parents can ask questions, respond to a survey, or schedule a time to meet with the teacher. Teachers and parents can also get a receipt to let them know their note was viewed.

Example. Appendix C.

Parent Focus Groups

Rationale. Communication between the educational institution and the parents of the children that attend that institution is critical for success. As discussed in Chapter Two, the National PTA's standards reiterate this idea; standard number two states, *communicate effectively*, and standard six states, *collaborate with the community*. Focus groups of parents are an excellent way to understand how the parents are feeling about the school, classrooms, curriculum and teachers. It is an important way to share the power between parents and teachers by giving parents a voice.

Explanation. Focus groups can be implemented in a number of ways. One way is to randomly select a certain number of families to be involved, another is to open the focus group to anyone who would like to join. Edwards (2009) suggests chunking the session into three parts: an introduction, focus questions, and wrap up. It is also helpful to have the focus questions ready prior to the meeting and sent out to those involved in order for them to have adequate time to prepare and formulate a response. It is important for the facilitator to try and keep the conversation productive by asking clarifying questions and requesting the specific "how to" for follow up to criticism.

Example. Appendix D.

Parent and Student Vision Statements

Rationale. A positive beginning to the school year impacts much more than a good first few days. Engaging parents in the process, in addition to children, provides shared partnership and hope for the entire school year ahead. Charney (2016) gives her input on hope, “The process of developing hopes and dreams each year in our schools is a process of reviving hope, and I am convinced that hope is one of our most critical community resources.” Edwards (2009) also shares a similar perspective, including that parents know their children the best and when asked to support and share their vision for their child’s education they can better help them to succeed. Vision statements provide a channel to give parents and students a voice. They are a unique tool to refer back to throughout the year to motivate and re-engage the triad of educator, parent, and student, in the process for success in a positive way.

Explanation. Vision statements are typically done at the beginning of the school year. Teachers send home vision statement questions for parents to share about their child’s needs, capabilities and goals for their child. The child completes their hopes and dreams vision statement in school, which can be done in a variety of ways: artistically, through writing, or a combination. It is best to hang them in a visible spot in the classroom so they can be referenced throughout the year.

Example. Appendix E.

Good News from School

Rationale. Positive reinforcement can be a powerful tool to motivate students. Engaging parents in their child’s education in a positive way can be an

exceptional motivator as well. As referenced in Chapter Two, Spandel (2005) writes that a parent or teacher's interest in a student's life is motivation, and is a tool for success. When a teacher recognizes a positive attribute or complements the specific work of a child, it is motivating and thus creates more drive to succeed.

Explanation. *Good news from school* is simple and quick, yet can make a lasting impact on a child or parents. At the beginning of the year the teacher has the student's address a postcard to their home address. When the teacher observes something positive from a student throughout the year, they jot down a quick note and drop it in the mail. This can be done once or multiple times a year per student. It is significant to note the importance of sending at least one to each child. Having the stack of postcards noticeable on or around your desk can help to remind you to specifically look for something positive from more challenging students. *Good News from School* helps to build rapport with parents and families. You can buy postcards premade, make your own through Microsoft Word, or create them through a website such as www.vistaprint.com.

Example. Appendix F.

Two way Communication Conference Questions

Rationale. It is essential to give parents the chance to participate in their child's education. It also increases the chance for success for the child when the parent and teacher work together forming a partnership. In order to form a partnership, listening to parents is fundamental in the process. There may be a stigma for parents that conferences are just a meeting where the teacher talks, the parent listens, and grades are shared. Therefore, it is important to break this stigma early in the school year so a true relationship and partnership can be formed.

Explanation. Breaking the preconceived notion of conferences being one way communication from teacher to parent can be difficult at times. As a result, it is important for the teacher to begin the conference with open ended questions and attentively listen to the parent. Having questions ready ahead of time can help with the flow of the conference. It can also be helpful to send the questions to the parents ahead of time so parents can be prepared.

Example. Appendix G.

Communication Timeline

Rationale. As was explained in the first section of the literature review, communication is a critical tool in partnership between an educational institution and the families enrolled. Although most staff have good intentions of reaching out to families, it is often hard to follow through due to busy schedules and other demands. Therefore, it is critical to be intentional about a strategic communication timeline for the year. As referenced in Chapter Two, Epstein (2004) challenges that when a well developed, thought out plan is created for communication and parent partnership, even the more challenging families become involved in their child's education.

Explanation. Multiple modes of communication create more opportunities to connect. It is possible to find out how best to communicate with each individual family at the beginning of the year through a parent survey. This can provide information for connecting one on one, however, there are inevitably times where communication with the whole group is necessary. Taking the knowledge you have from the parent survey, it is important to make a realistic timeline for how and when to communicate with

families. Making an annual goal for yourself to try one new way to communicate with families can be another benefit of creating a communication timeline. _

Example. Appendix H.

Literacy Strategies for Home to Work on the Five Key Areas of Reading

Rationale. As referenced in Chapter Two, Darling (2005) discusses the impact of parents and teachers working together on the five areas of reading instruction and how it will increase a child's reading ability. Parents need to understand each of these areas and be given ideas of how to assist with each concept in order to support their child at home.

Explanation. It is important to explain to parents each of the five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. After the explanation, it is crucial to follow up with specific activities parents can do with the child. I adapted Darlings' article to form a chart for teachers and parents to use to assist with each reading skill area. Teachers can give parents one area at a time to coincide with what they are working on in school. They could also send the whole chart home and ask parents to use any of the strategies that they feel would best help their child.

Example. Appendix I.

National Geographic Website for Nonfiction Reading

Rationale. Finding nonfiction reading material for primary grades can be a challenge. However, it is essential for younger students to have exposure to nonfiction text. The text structure, text features and vocabulary is often drastically different when comparing fiction and nonfiction literature. Many free online tools such as National

Geographic’s website for kids, are effective tools for parents to access to help their children gain exposure to nonfiction reading material.

Explanation. Parents can access this free National Geographic website by going to <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com>. The site includes: stories read by text, read aloud by video, word work games, facts, news, and contests. On this website, parents can read with their child or the child may read independently. Either way, they are being exposed to nonfiction text. The word work games help incorporate learning the parts of speech, being creative and rereading into a child’s literacy practice.

Example. Appendix J.

Critical Literacy Connection Stems

Rationale. While reading narrative or informational texts, one of the foundational aspects of comprehension is making connections. Making connections aids in understanding by making a bridge from a person’s background knowledge to new information. It is important to teach children *how* to make connections.

Explanation. Connection stems are one way to teach children how to make connections. It is critical to encourage students to reflect and talk about what they are thinking while reading. Writing, drawing, or orally sharing, are all modes of engaging with the text about the connections made while reading.

Example. Appendix K.

Word Work Alphabet Chart

Rationale. Word work can be practiced at all ages and literacy levels to increase vocabulary. Often times, new words are learned through experimentation and play. Documenting words and having them posted in view for maximum exposure helps with

word retention. There are several easy ways for parents to participate in word work with their children at home. Giving parents the resources and tools for how and what to do is key for assisting parents in implementing vocabulary work at home. Directing parents to the Readwritethink website can be very valuable. The website has many resources for parents leveled by grade and age, for example, activities and projects, games and tools, tips and how to's, printouts, and podcasts.

Explanation. Word work can be practiced in a variety of ways and at all ages. A word chart such as the *Alphabet Organizer*, found on the readwritethink website, can be a helpful tool for parents to help their children with vocabulary at home. This chart could be used by K-1 students to fill in words they know or find words in a story to associate beginning letters and letter sounds with words. Older children could use the chart to fill in new vocabulary from a specific subject area, such as their science unit. This organizer could also be adapted to use pictures or drawings. The online version of the chart found on ReadWriteThink's website is a great way to add technology use at home by uploading images to the letters. A printable version of the chart is also available.

Example. Appendix L.

Reading Tips for Parents

Rationale. As discussed in Chapter Two, Gnotta, & Schneider (2000) assert the importance of parents reading with their children at home. They acknowledge that the parent is the primary teacher in a child's life, and they must be involved in their literacy for growth and success. Many parents are not teachers and do not have much background knowledge on literacy; it is the teacher's role to provide resources and tips for parents to assist in literacy at home. Reading Rockets (2008) explain, "A child's success as a

reader begins much earlier than the first day of school. Reading, and a love for reading, begins at home.”

Explanation. Parent bags with literacy tips and tools is a way to disperse academic material to parents. ReadingRockets.org has one page reading tips by grade level for parents in eleven different languages: Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Creole, Hmong, Korean, Diné (Navajo), Russian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The tip sheets can be sent digitally via email, printed and sent home, or discussed at conferences and used as a take away for reference. Also, as a teacher you can create a list of tips you would like your families to try with their children at home.

Example. Appendix M.

Summarizing Plot Chart

Rationale. Summarizing a narrative story can be a difficult task for primary age children. However, this is a necessary task, and children are asked to summarize frequently in school, orally, and written, for classwork, and assessments. The more opportunity for practice that children have, the easier the task will become. Recruiting parents to assist at home with summarizing through a simple, yet strategic graphic organizer, can positively impact many children.

Explanation. Summarizing is a difficult task, yet with parents’ support and more consistent practice, it will inevitably get easier. It is helpful to have a structure for children to follow that breaks down the task into smaller portions. The *Somebody Wanted But So* chart is straightforward for parents to easily understand, but critical for children to grasp the concept of summarizing. Teachers can explain this strategy to students, parents, or both, and have them use it at home while reading a narrative

story. There are many ways to adapt the strategy: only having the child orally restate, written, written with pictures, or a combination of them all. This chart can also be used across grade levels and ages to support with summarizing and comprehension skills.

Example. Appendix N. (Parents can adapt by using a piece of plain paper and folding it into fourths.)

Literacy Backpack

Rationale. Providing home resources for parents to read with their children at home is an essential tool. In Chapter Two, research was shared on how literacy backpacks were successful through Dr. D. Reece Wilson's (2013) project. Parents reading with their children even for a few minutes each day can provide positive reading and social growth.

Explanation. A literacy backpack can be as simple as a bag filled with books, or can include more resources: a reading log, academic reading material for parents, and reading strategy work. It is important to explain the literacy backpack to parents before sending it home. It is also significant to encourage parents and positively reinforce any amount of reading time between parents and children at home. Literacy backpacks can be sent home at any point throughout the year. It may be helpful to have a designated day each week to send the literacy backpacks home and expect them to be returned to school.

Example. Appendix O.

Read Aloud Tips

Rationale. There are many benefits to reading aloud to children. Koralek (2003) stresses the importance of reading aloud to children and the benefits it brings.

Reading aloud conducts feelings of bonding, imparts social and emotional skills, builds background knowledge, expands vocabulary, exposes children to new literature styles, develops the imagination, and advances thinking skills. Reading aloud to children of *all* ages is significant to foundational literacy development. Trelease (2014) also shares many tips and free resources on his website www.trelease-on-reading.com.

Explanation. Reading aloud to a child is as simple as it sounds, however many researchers share valuable tips to make it even more effective. Keep in mind some ideas while reading aloud: choose developmentally and age appropriate books, select books with interesting characters, set a routine time to read, read spontaneously, and actively involve the listener in the process.

Example. Appendix P.

Read Aloud List by Age

Rationale. Reading aloud to children is an essential part of literacy development, as discussed in the Rationale above in *Read Aloud Tips*. Reading aloud supports thinking skills, reading literacy development, and social/emotional growth. In addition to the growth benefits of reading aloud, it can be exciting and fun!

Explanation. As soon as parents are ready to implement a read aloud plan, it is essential to aid in the decision of what books to choose and where to find them. Providing a book list that is categorized by age or grade can be exceptionally helpful for parents. Parents can use the list to find quality, age appropriate books in the school library, public library, bookstore, or online, quickly and efficiently.

Example. Appendix Q.

Helpful Websites for Parents.

Rationale. Technology provides teachers and parents many more accessible tools than we have had in the past. However, technology can be a frustrating and daunting task to some; having tools available will encourage more parents to use technology at home. Some children are often extremely motivated by technology, and are often more comfortable with technology. If given the opportunity many children will choose to learn through a device. Keep in mind sensitivity when suggesting technology resources to families, as some may have limited access to technology outside the school building.

Explanation. Technology can be challenging and overwhelming for parents, so it is convenient and helpful to have a list of useful resources to present to parents. Begin by brainstorming a list of website resources you use in the classroom that could be valuable tools for parents at home. This centralized list could be sent home to families. I suggest making sure all of the websites are free, or let parents know in advance which sites cost money and the amount.

Example. Appendix R.

Teacher Self Assessment

Rationale. It is important for teachers to self assess their skills in communication with families. Self-assessing gives the teacher a foundation to build upon when making goals and continuously improving in the area of communication. With a consistently changing classroom, families and society, it is essential for teachers to learn new ways to improve their practice.

Explanation. Self-assessment at the beginning or end of the school year is an effective way for a teacher to reflect on their current practices. It is helpful to have a

simple tool to use when self-assessing like a one page survey. It can be much easier to create a practical and attainable goal after reflecting on your strength and growth areas within communication.

Example. Appendix S.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

In Chapter Five, I will analyze my learning through the capstone process. I will revisit the literature review, consider implications of the findings, discuss limitations of my research, and review possible future study topics. As I reflected on my personal life and professional career as an educator, I formulated my research question: *How does fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development?* Through my focused research on this topic, I became increasingly aware of the impact this question has played on both my personal life, and professional career. I was intrigued by what researchers in the field of education had to say on the topic and how I could use it to impact children's literacy skills. The research compelled me to create a resource toolbox as a practical tool to help answer my research question.

Revisiting the Literature Review

As I dove into the abundance of research, I was overwhelmed by the diversity on the topic and the sheer amount. While researching for the literature review in Chapter Two of this capstone, I learned the following: recognized current truths, learned new facts, and understood this topic at greater depth.

Recognizing current truths. Before starting to research this topic, I believed that parent/teacher communication was extremely important. My beliefs were confirmed as I read through the work of Epstein, Edwards, and many other accomplished researchers. They confirmed children are much more likely to succeed when parents and

teachers work together as a team. As discussed in Chapter Two, Canter (1991) proves the point that the way a parent interacts with a child sends the child a message, either positive or negative, that ultimately impacts their self-esteem and success in education and life.

The research also confirmed my ideas about safety and community building serving as an important foundation for learning. Communication evolves much easier after Maslow's levels of hierarchy have been met. The work of Block and Schaps confirm this important knowledge.

New facts. Researching this topic allowed me to learn new facts in regards to communication, literacy skills, and their correlation. For example, previously I had not read many studies assessing the statistics of parents wanting or not wanting to be involved in their child's education. The assumption is that parents who do not reciprocate communication do not want to be involved. The research from Karther & Lowden (1997), Epstein (1986), and Waller & Waller (1998) advocate that is untrue; rather, most parents want to be involved, yet they often do not know how.

Additionally, there were many new facts that I learned about the use of technology for communication. I read about numerous helpful, free apps through the Internet and journal articles that I had not previously known existed. I understand that these tools will constantly change, as technology is quick paced and ever changing. In the future, I will do my best to consistently be up to date on technology that can aid in parent/teacher communication.

Understanding at a greater depth. Epstein's work with labeling *equitable partnerships* assisted in my deeper understanding of how parent and teacher relationships

can look practically. Epstein's focus on parental involvement versus parental engagement presented me with a broader view of the communication exchange between teachers and parents. She demonstrated the need and effectiveness of two-way communication in a profound way.

Edwards added to this greater understanding by strongly suggesting differentiating the way we communicate with parents by articulating, "Participation will mean different things to different parents" (Edwards, 2009, p.17). The theory of differentiating communication for parents has been in my repertoire; however, through examining the research I have a greater understanding of *how* to differentiate to make communication more successful.

Implications of the findings

The finding from my research in Chapter Two, advised my idea to design a resource toolbox for educators and parents. The research proved that parents want to be involved, yet there was still a dilemma. Parents often do not know how to be involved and it can be overwhelming for them to explore how. Teachers also have a predicament with the amount of time they have to communicate with parents about helping their child at home. The implication of the research compelled the design of one central resource toolbox for teachers or parents to access to facilitate either of those issues. The benefits of this capstone are to provide communication tools for busy elementary teachers and provide literacy tools in a central location, for teachers and parents to access to assist in home literacy. My hope is to host this toolbox in central locations, such as, provide this toolbox to administrations to add to their resource rooms, for public libraries to have a copy for parents or teachers to check out, and have a blog site where the web-based tools

can be accessed. I hope this resource toolbox will benefit teachers, parents, and ultimately children, through connecting families with educators, and providing accessible literacy tools.

Limitations

Time is of course one of the most impacting limitations of research. Having homework from graduate school, working in a new career, being a full time wife and mom, and pregnant with another child, impacted the amount of time I would have liked to spend researching and designing my curriculum development capstone.

Another limitation was not receiving parent or teacher feedback on each of these tools. Ideally, in the future I would appreciate having a parent and a teacher committee approve and contribute to the resources for this toolbox.

An additional limitation is in regards to culture and family structure. I urge the importance of focusing on the culture and family structure of the children unique to each situation. The limitation lies in the false truth that resource toolbox can work for every child, parent, teacher or family. Please take into account the needs and culture of the demographic in each unique school.

Furthermore, there are limitations to the use of the technology resources in my toolbox due to continuous nature of change in the technology field. I chose resources that I believed would be relevant for a period of time, however, change is inevitable. Hopefully, there will be superior tools to choose from in the years ahead.

Future Study

Due to time constraints, I was unable to specifically include human subjects. However, as a future research topic I would survey teachers and parents and

ask them to approve the chosen resources and include additional resources they find valuable. I think it would be valuable to develop a centralized, accessible website for educators and parents to contribute to the toolbox.

In future study, I would also continue researching the implications of communication between educators and families in the following categories: single parents, poverty, ELL, struggling readers, and gifted learners. A specific resource toolbox could be created for each of the previous categories to better complement each specialized need.

Conclusion

As I conclude my capstone, again I revisit my research question to ponder all that I have learned from this topic. *How does fostering parent/teacher communication impact literacy development?* I have been enlightened by researchers in the field, and challenged myself to achieve something tangible to impact this topic. I hope that my resource toolbox will be utilized effectively with educators and families. I will do my part in connecting the public with my toolbox in order for it to be more widely accessible. I have enjoyed my research journey, and feel I have matured as an educator and parent.

As I sit next to my daughter and reflect on the privileged life I am giving her in regards to literacy, I hope to inspire and empower parents to do the same with their children. It truly takes a village to raise a child, and my hope is that we each engage in the lives of others around us to expand our village, to include more children, and make a difference in this world.

Appendix A

Parent Communication Survey

Parent Communication Survey

Please complete and return to school

<p>How important do you feel it is for teachers to communicate with parents?</p>	<p>Please circle: 1 -unimportant 10 -extremely important</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>
<p>What is the best form of communication for you and your family?</p>	<p>Please circle: Phone call Text message Email Note home Other _____</p>
<p>Would you like written communication translated to another language? If yes, please specify the language.</p>	<p>Yes Language _____ No</p>
<p>How often would you like communication home?</p>	<p>Monthly Weekly Daily</p>

Please add any additional information you feel might be helpful about communication style or needs of your family.

Thank you for your helpful feedback! I look forward to communicating with you this year in order to best support your child and family.

Appendix B

Demographic School Profile

Demographic School Profile

Categories	Subcategories	Number of students	Percentage of students	Important to Communicate to teachers
Sex	Male			Y N
	Female			
Ethnicity	Caucasian			Y N
	African American			
	Asian			
	Hispanic/Latino			
	Native American			
	Other			
Language	English			Y N
	Spanish			
Lives with	Mother			Y N
	Father			
	Both parents			
	Other			
Transportation	Bus			Y N
	Walk			
	Drop-off			
	Other			
Free or Reduced				Y N
Moved	Into the school			Y N
	Away from the school			
Technology: Access to computer or internet	Computer			Y N
	Internet			
	Both			

Adapted by Melissa Hibbard (2016) from Edwards (2009)

Appendix C

Class Messenger Application

Class Messenger: Examples of communication texts to the whole group of parents to send reminders or reinforce curriculum at home.

*Please help your child fill in four letters from their Alphabet chart before Friday. Thank you for your participation!

*Don't forget to send a lunch with your child tomorrow. We will be on a field trip from 10-2. Thank you!

*The final report for our frog unit is due tomorrow. Please help your child to remember their project.

*We are focusing on honesty for character development this week at school. Please reinforce this at home in any way you can.

Appendix D

Focus Group Agenda

Focus Group Agenda:

Introductions: (10-15min)

- Introduce who is present at the meeting so everyone is familiar with each other: name, children's grade level, etc.
- Icebreaker question: What is something your child loves doing? Or what does your child like best about school?

Focus- Group Questions: (30min)

- How often and in what way does your child's teacher/school communicate with your family?
- Would you like more or less communication from your child's school/teacher?
- What do you believe is the parent's role in a child's education?
- Is there anything the school/teacher could do to make your child more successful in school or with learning at home?

Wrap-Up (5-10 min)

- Thank everyone for his or her time – (possibly have a small gift of some sort as a thank you for their dedication.)
- Be available for private questions or comments following the group session.

Appendix E

Vision Statements

**Student's Hopes and Dreams Vision
Statement**

My hope for myself this year is_____.

I will work on it by_____.

(Draw a picture below of what that looks like to you.)

Parent Vision Statement

Child's name _____ Your name _____

What are your child's strengths?

What are your child's needs?

What is your vision for your role in your child's education?

What is your vision for your child as a student?

What is your vision for your child's future?

Appendix F

Good News From School

Good News From School



SENT FROM MRS. HIBBARD

Melissa Hibbard

67322 Sally Street
Burnsville, MN 55432

[A...](#)

I wanted to send a quick note to inform you that Johnny was an excellent friend today and asked a new student to be his partner. He truly made another student's day and showed great character. Take some time at home tonight to congratulate him for his selfless act.

**To the parents of:
Johnny Smith**

1436 Tree Lane
Burnsville, MN 55432

Appendix G

Two Way Communication Conference Questions

Two Way Parent Communication Conference Questions

1. What would you like to spend the most time discussing today?
2. What are your child's strengths?
3. What do you believe is a growth area for your child?
4. How can I better help your child at school?
5. What can I do to help support you working with your child at home?

Appendix H

Communication Timeline

Communication Timeline Template Blank

Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written
Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal	Verbal
Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain	Explain
Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed	Date Completed

Communication Timeline Template Example

Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal	Written Verbal
Explain Welcome letter to parents and parent survey	Explain Phone call home for parents initial thoughts on year so far	Explain Class messenger app started for homework and reminders	Explain Student and teacher together positive call home	Explain Back from break – back to routines good habits letter home	Explain Good news from school postcards	Explain Youtube video created on healthy ways to prepare your child for testing	Explain Meet and greet at the classroom – open house style to connect with parents	Explain Polls.com survey for parents on how to help with summer transition	Explain Parent literacy bags-written tips to help parents during summer months
Date Completed 9/2	Date Completed 10/6	Date Completed 11/1	Date Completed 12/21	Date Completed 1/6	Date Completed 2/26	Date Completed 3/7	Date Completed 4/16	Date Completed 5/10	Date Completed 6/7

Melissa Hibbard (2016)

Appendix I

Strategies for Engaging Parents in Home Support of Reading Acquisition.

Phonics	<p style="text-align: right;">83</p> <p>To support phonics instruction, parents can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to point to words and say them out loud when writing • Listen to their child read • Help children sort words by long- and short vowel sounds • Help children define larger words by breaking them into smaller chunks • Play spelling and word games like Scrabble and Guess the letter
Fluency	<p>To support the development of fluency parents can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud often, encouraging their child to read aloud • Let their child choose books to read and reread favorite books • Model reading for fun and pleasure • Act out a book or story • Read aloud a sentence and then invite their child to read the same sentence (i.e., echo reading) • Help their child read new words and talk about the meaning • Talk with their child when they go to the library about how to pick out books of interest at an appropriate reading level
Vocabulary	<p>To support the development of vocabulary parents can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud a variety of genres • Talk with their child about daily events and about books they read together • Talk about how the illustrations and text in a book support each other • Use word lists provided by their child's teacher in natural conversation • Search for new words in texts with their child and look them up in the dictionary • Help their child learn new vocabulary based on hobbies or interests
Text Comprehension	<p>To support comprehension parents can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask their child to predict what might happen next in a story • Ask who, what, where, when, and why questions about a book • Ask their child questions about the topic of a book before reading it • Ask their child about books being read at school and be familiar with them in order to extend conversations • Ask their child what the main idea or message of a book might be
Print Concepts	<p>To support print concepts parents can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point out the title and author's name to their child when reading together • Talk about where reading begins on the page and show how the words flow left to right • Play games to match lowercase and uppercase letters • Talk about how types of texts have similarities and differences • Expose their child to many types of print • Make a book with their child, using large print and illustrations.

Appendix J

National Geographic Kids Word Work and Comprehension Skills

Example of a type of word work found on the National Geographic Kids website

Parts of Speech- fill in each of the boxes with a word from that type of speech category.

Noun	dad
Adjective	slippery
Number	32
Family Member's Name	Sammy
Noun	underwear
Animal	tiger
Food	pop tarts
Adjective	purple
Noun plural	eggs

The words are used to create a funny story:

Dad ran all the way down the slippery stairs to find 32 cats in the living room. Sammy ran down too in only underwear and tripped on the tiger. They had a picnic on the food eating pop tarts and purple eggs.

Appendix K

Connection Stem Log

Connection Stem Log

Use words or picture to describe connections you have while reading the story.

That reminds me of ...	I remember when...	I felt like the character when...
If I were that character I would...	An experience I have had like that was...	Another book like this is _____ because....

Melissa Hibbard (2016) adapted from DeVoogd & McLaughlin (2004)

Appendix L

Word Work Alphabet Chart

Letter	New Vocab Word	Picture
A		
B		
C		
D		
E		
F		
G		
H		
I		
J		
K		
L		
M		
N		
O		
P		
Q		
R		
S		
T		
U		
V		
W		
X		
Y		
Z		

Melissa Hibbard (2016) Adapted from Readwritethink (2016)

Appendix M
Reading Tips for Parents

Literacy Tips for Parents

Verbal Story telling- Start the first portion of a make believe story and have your child finish the story.

Favorite object write- Collect some of your child's favorite objects in the house or outside and have them write about the objects to form a story.

Special writing tasks- Find every opportunity to have your child practice writing; birthday cards, shopping lists, thank you notes, etc.

After school sharing- Ask your child what she/he read or wrote in school. Be specific when asking the question and be an enthusiastic listener.

Read it again - When your child has sounded out an unfamiliar word, have him or her re-read that sentence. Often kids are so busy figuring out a word they lose the meaning of what they've just read.

Create your own book- Fold pieces of paper in half and staple them to make a book. Ask your child to write sentences on each page and add his/her own illustrations.

Word work chart- Hang an A-Z word chart on the wall or somewhere visible and add new vocabulary words to the wall. Practice using them in sentences while you eat dinner or have a snack.

Appendix N

Somebody Wanted But So – Plot Chart

Somebody Wanted But So- Plot Chart

During or after reading fill in the plot chart with an image in the first row and sentences/words in the second row.

Somebody Character	Wanted Goal	But Problem	So Solution

Adapted by Melissa Hibbard (2016) from Ellery (2005)

Appendix O

Literacy Backpack Letter

Literacy Backpack Letter



The purpose of this literacy backpack is to provide you with age appropriate, quality reading materials for you to utilize with your child.

You may read any amount of time that fits your family's needs. If looking for an estimate, 15 min/night is a great goal. Attached is a reading log to fill out with your child.

Literacy backpacks are expected to be returned to school each Friday morning. Your child will receive a new literacy backpack to bring home each Friday afternoon.

Thank you for taking the time to read with your child!
Happy Reading!

Appendix P

Read Aloud Tips

Read Aloud Tips



- *Choose relevant, engaging books appropriate for the child's age level.
- *Give an overview of the book before you begin, discuss what happened in the book after you finish reading.
- *Connect the book you are reading with a book you have read in the past. Talk about how they are alike and how they are different.
- *Ask the child what he/she might do in the character's situation.
- *If a child is restless while reading have them draw a picture of something happening in the story while they listen.
- *Talk about your feelings that are evoked while reading the story. Then ask the child to share their feelings.
- *If you are reading a book over multiple days stop reading at a suspenseful part so the child will be anxious to read with you again the following day.

Appendix Q

Read Aloud Books by Grade

Read Aloud Book Suggestions by Grade Level

Grade Level	Read Aloud Books
Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The Going to Bed Book- Boynton *The Artist Who Painted a Blue Horse- Carle *Dear Zoo: A lift the flap book-Campbell *The Day the Crayons Quit-Daywait *Llama, Llama Red Pajama- Dewdney *The Wonderful Things You Will Be-Martin *If You Ever Want to Bring an Alligator to School, Don't- Parsley *Click, Clack Moo, Cows That Type- Cronin
First-Second	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *The Snowy Day- Keats *Peanut Butter and Cupcake-Border *Fancy Nancy Series- O'Connor *Binky the Space Cat- Spires *Claude at the Beach- Smith The 39-Story Treehouse-Griffiths *Swimmy-Lionni *What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?- Jenkins
Third-Fourth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <u>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</u> - Viorst *The View from Saturday- Konigsburg *Mr. Popper's Penguins- Atwater *Space Case-Gibbs *The Borrowers- Norton *Treasure Hunters, Danger Down the Nile-Patterson *The Tale of Despereaux-DiCamillo
Fifth to Sixth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Holes-Sachar *Bud, Not Buddy- Curtis *The Crossover-Alexander *Fish in a Tree-Hunt *When You Reach Me- Stead *Dead End in Norvelt-Gantos *A Snicker of Magic-Lloyd

Melissa Hibbard (2016) Adapted from Read Aloud America (2016) & Scholastic (2016)

Appendix R

Ten Helpful Website for Parents

Ten Helpful websites for Parents:



<p><i>Reading is Fundamental:</i> www.rif.org</p>	<p><i>Big Learners:</i> www.biglearners.com</p>
<p><i>Reading Rockets</i> www.readingrockets.org</p>	<p><i>National Children's Literacy Website:</i> http://www.child2000.org/lit-tips.htm</p>
<p><i>Readwrite</i> www.readwritethink.org</p>	<p><i>Story Place</i> www.storyplace.org</p>
<p><i>PBS:</i> http://www.pbs.org/parents/</p>	<p><i>Starfall</i> www.starfall.com</p>
<p><i>Scholastic:</i> http://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/reading-resources-and-help/ages-8-10</p>	<p><i>Story Online</i> http://www.storylineonline.net/</p>

Appendix S

Teacher Self-Assessment

Teacher Self-Assessment

Please circle the answer that you feel best describes where you currently feel you are in terms of communication from school to home.

- 1- Needs Improvement
- 2- Average
- 3- Completely Competent

I feel I communicate with my student's families at a high frequency.

1 2 3

I use relevant technology tools to communicate with families.

1 2 3

My families would say that I communicate timely and effectively about their child and school issues.

1 2 3

I communicate all of my student's families the same amount for positive and negative issues.

1 2 3

I ask the families I serve how they would like me to best communicate with them.

1 2 3

I am accessible to my student's families in ways other than calling the school.

1 2 3

What do you feel is your biggest strength in regards to communicating with families?

What is your goal to work on in regards to communicating with families this year?

Melissa Hibbard (2016)

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