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Promoting Reading Literacy in the Home of Spanish Speaking Students

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PROMOTING READING LITERACY IN THE
HOME OF SPANISH SPEAKING STUDENTS

A Project Report
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by
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ABSTRACT

PROMOTING READING LITERACY IN THE HOME OF SPANISH SPEAKING STUDENTS

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Research related to the bilingual and bicultural issues of emergent literacy, family literacy, and intergenerational literacy, factors that promote literacy, parent involvement, and family literacy programs was read, evaluated, and summarized. From this literature review it became evident that when children develop literacy skills in their native language and/or English and learn to interact with literacy, learning to read and write becomes easier. A handbook, written in English and Spanish, was designed and printed providing reading strategies and activities for parents to promote reading literacy in the home.

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CHAPTER 1

Overview

Focus of the project

The evidence continues to grow. . . parental involvement improves student achievement (US Department of Education, 1998). The learning process begins before birth and continues in the home. Many times children begin school with little or no exposure to literacy. Not always is it because parents do not care, but rather because parents may be unaware of ways to develop their child's literacy. Parents may believe that the responsibility belongs to teachers to teach children all they need to know, forgetting that parents are a child's first and most important teacher (US Dept of Education, 1998).

Learning to read begins while the child is a toddler and is enhanced by the opportunity to interact with literature (Novick, 1999/2000). A home environment may promote literacy by communicating with children and expanding everyday situations into a teaching moments. Reading books and other printed material to children daily and asking questions builds comprehension skills. Encouraging children to focus on pictures and to talk about what is happening develops communication skills. Drawing pictures and writing about the story develops writing skills.

Research studies have shown a relationship between the home environment and literacy development. Parents who are interested in their child's efforts at reading, storytelling, and writing accept the child's attempts with enthusiasm. These are the children who read and write at an early age (Morrow, 1997; Novick, 1999/2000; Saracho, 1999). Children who come from homes with rich oral and written language environments

have provided researchers with insight on how children learn to read and write. The language environment of the home makes a significant contribution to children's development of literacy skills (McConnell & Rabe 1999). Homes in which there are high levels of adult/child interaction, where oral communication is encouraged, and where literacy activities are provided facilitate development of reading (Novick, 1999/2000).

Speigel, Fitzgerald, and Cunningham (1993) investigated parental perception about various literacy materials and events during the school years and in preschool. They found that the majority of parents encourage their children's literacy development, some more effectively than others. The literacy activities and environment that parents provide are influenced by their own literacy, social, and economic levels, as well as their cultural background (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

There is little debate about the benefits of parent involvement in school activities. However, many parents today are unsure of how they may help their children learn. Some parents may have had bad experiences with school themselves and are reluctant to return to school even as a parent, or they may feel intimidated and unsure about their contributions compared with those of a teacher. Families from the Hispanic population create an additional barrier of language and culture. Many families do not speak or understand English. Yet, many of these parents say they would be willing to spend more time on homework or other learning activities with their children if teachers gave them more guidance (Epstein, 1984). The problem facing Spanish speaking parents is that many lack understanding and knowledge of literacy practices. In addition, due to a lack of

resources and limited English skills; they often do not have access to literacy materials and resources (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to develop a handbook of strategies for Spanish as well as non-Spanish speaking parents to promote literacy in the home environment. The strategies and activities in this handbook were based on research found to promote literacy in the home utilizing readily available material.

Limitations

This project was limited to a parent handbook primarily for Spanish speaking homes. The activities were designed to be used with children from birth through first grade. Parents were encouraged to implement these strategies and activities in the home and reinforce them on a daily basis.

Definition of Terms

Emergent literacy: reading and writing concepts and behaviors of young children that develop into conventional reading and writing (Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

Literacy: relates to both reading and writing and suggests the simultaneous development and mutually reinforcing effects of these two aspects of communication (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Family literacy: encompasses the ways parents and children use literacy in the home and their community (Morrow, 1997).

Intergenerational literacy: other adults besides parents such as grandparents, neighbors, non-parental guardians, and volunteers who will form new relationships with young people may be involved in promoting literacy (Kerka, 1991).

Parent Involvement: the time spent by a parent participating in learning activities (Cooper, 1986).

Organization of the Project

Chapter one includes the focus of the project, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the project, and the definition of terms. Chapter two contains a review of literature on literacy, factors that promote literacy in the home, partnerships between home and school, and family literacy projects. Chapter three outlines the procedures used to develop a parent handbook. Chapter four includes the parent handbook in both Spanish and English. Chapter five summarizes the project, presents the conclusions, and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to provide evidence supporting the importance of parental involvement in children's literacy development. The research examined early educational experiences and their connections to later success, in addition to the different ways school provided opportunities and encouragement for families to become involved in the development of their children's literacy skills. This literature review was divided into four main sections: literacy development, factors that promote literacy in the home, partnerships between home and school, and family literacy projects.

Literacy Development

Literacy relates to both reading and writing and suggests the simultaneous development and mutually reinforcing effects of these two aspects of communication (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). According to Nathenson-Mejia (1994), children become involved in their native language at birth by responding to the people around them. They spend the majority of their lives absorbing what language is, what it means, how it works, and how to use it to communicate. They imitate the language of adults, but create their own when they do not have the words they need to communicate their thoughts. Children who have been constantly exposed to an environment that is rich in language and have interacted with adults using language in social context are more likely to develop more fluency with oral language than those lacking these opportunities (Morrow, 1997).

Reading and writing require children to use the knowledge and vocabulary they already possess (Davis & Lewis, 1997). According to Davis and Lewis (1997), children must be able to figure out what a word says, and then know how to put words together to make sense of what is being read. Children may use several strategies for reading within the same sentence. Many familiar words will be known by sight because they are part of their vocabulary; these are words children use and encounter in text several times. When children reach a word they do not know, they will probably try to sound it out, use context clues, and prior knowledge to make sense of the text.

Prior knowledge, according to Davis and Lewis (1997), will be the understanding from personal experiences. When encountered with a new concept or idea, a child will try to comprehend and understand it by connecting what is read to past experiences. An example would be two children who have read a book about zoo animals; one child has visited the zoo and the other has not. The child who has visited the zoo will be able to relate what is being read in the book to his zoo visit, making it easier to understand.

Several studies conducted over the years have concluded that spending time reading with children every day is one of the best ways to bring them into the world of literacy (Nathenson-Mejia, 1994; Morrow, 1997 & Schickedanz, 1999). Frequent story readings help children become familiar with book language and realize the function of written language (Morrow, 1997). These continued or repeated story readings help develop children's vocabulary and a sense of story structure.

When parents promote language by reading aloud, speaking, and listening in the home, they prepare their children for reading and writing. Parents might also stimulate

their child's conversations and take them to a higher level of thinking by asking open-ended and predictable questions to develop their vocabulary (Saracho, 1999). Two way conversations are a great way to increase children's vocabulary while helping them understand language.

Emergent literacy. During the past ten years, the concept of emergent literacy has gradually replaced the notion of reading readiness and no longer describes adequately what is happening in the literacy development of young children (Teale, 1986). A vast amount of research from the field of child development, psychology, education, linguistics, anthropology, and sociology has contributed to the development of the theory of emergent literacy. Emergent literacy has virtually redefined the field of literacy. Reading readiness suggest that there is a point in time when a child is ready to begin to learn to read and write. Emergent literacy proponents suggest that the development of literacy taking place within the child is a gradual process and will take place over time (Hall, 1987).

Emergent literacy refers to reading and writing concepts and behaviors of young children that develop into conventional reading and writing (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Research states that literacy acquisition begins at an early age, and provides opportunities to children that will help them through the emergent literacy process and serve as a direct foundation for later reading proficiency (McConnell & Rabe, 1999).

Parents need to read to and with their children. Research has shown that parents play an important part in the process of learning to read. Children whose parents read to them become better readers and do better in school (Morrow, 1997; Nord, Lennon, &

Westat, 1999; Schickedanz, 1999; Trelease, 1995). Children who have listened to stories since early childhood have developed better language skills. Stories can have a potential to prompt considerable discussion. The more adults talk with children about the stories read, the more the story reading helps the child's language development (Schickedanz, 1999). Schickedanz (1999) continued to reaffirm the importance of promoting literacy development in the home by providing books. "Exposure to books familiarizes children with book language-language found in books differ significantly from the language found in conversations: it is more formal, and more information and images are packed into its sentences" (p. 56).

McConnell and Rabe (1999) stated that the home and family factors are associated with emergent literacy and found there were a variety of ways in which parents and other family members can support children's literacy development. According to McConnell and Rabe (1999) these home and family factors fall into three main categories: activities, materials, and language environment.

An influential activity that promotes literacy could be reading books together, and/or interactions between parents and children that involves books. Through shared book reading, parents foster their children's interest and positive attitude toward reading, while increasing their children's vocabulary development (Morrow, 1997). The materials provided by parents are also important for children's emergent literacy development. However, a wide array of other reading and writing materials and activities can provide opportunities to learn literacy skills.

The availability of books in the home are an obvious source for emergent literacy experience. Nathenson-Mejia (1994) reaffirmed with McConnell and Rabe (1999) that books in the home are a necessary factor. She stated, "No matter which language they are in, books involve children in the type of literacy experiences they will encounter in school" (p. 5).

The knowledge that children have received through their first language helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible. According to Krashen (1997) "Literacy developed in the primary language transfers to the second language" (p. 1). When children have literacy skills and learn to interact with literacy in their primary language, learning to read and write in another language becomes easier, because the hard work has been done in their primary language. Krashen stated, "Once we can read in one language, we can read in general" (p. 1). Hispanic parents must understand and become educated in how to promote literacy in the home in their native language so those skills can transfer to a second language.

Family and intergenerational literacy. The methods that parents and children use to incorporate literacy in the home and their community encompass family literacy (Morrow, 1997). Research suggests that the quality of parent-child interactions is important for children's development of literacy (Saracho, 1997). Family members who participate in literacy activities provide valuable developmental experiences for young children. In addition to developing an interest in reading, children who are read to, told stories, and visit the library may start school better prepared to learn. Liechter (1984) described the family's influence in literacy development in this way:

Interpersonal interactions consist of the literacy experiences shared with a child by parents, siblings, and other individuals in the home. The physical environment includes the literacy materials available in the home. The emotional and motivational climate comprises the relationships among the individuals in the home, especially as reflected in the parents' attitude toward literacy and their aspiration for their children's literacy achievement. (p. 43)

Nistler and Maiers (1999) describe family literacy as occurring naturally in the home during daily routines. These routines include sharing ideas, composing notes and letters, making lists for various purposes, reading or following directions, and sharing happenings of the day through conversation, reading, and writing. Children acquire literacy on a daily basis without realizing that it is happening. It is a natural process.

Children learn how to speak by hearing their family and other people around them talk and use language in various ways. They listen to conversations and songs. In other words, they learn oral language in meaningful context, not through direct instruction. So, just as children learn how to speak at home, they also learn much about the written language at home. By watching family members and their interaction with print and encountering text within the home, children can acquire a great deal of knowledge about the written language outside the classroom. If parents knew how to best direct and highlight these experiences, their child would have better success (Hannon, 1995).

Much learning occurs in the home. Those people around children must be the ones to provide opportunities and incentives to promote literacy. In addition to parents, other adults such as grandparents, brothers, sisters, neighbors, nonparental guardians, and

volunteers who will form new relationships with young people may be involved in the development of literacy. Intergenerational literacy may be viewed in a broader sense for those who may also provide interaction with literacy development (Kerka, 1991; Weinstein-Shr, 1999).

Family literacy and intergenerational literacy are terms that have been recently introduced. Weinstein-Shr (1990) indicated that both terms share a common recognition that relationships between children and adults affect literacy use and development.

Factors that Promote Literacy in the Home

Home environment can be crucial to literacy which begins and continues in the home. According to Brown (1998), throughout history the family has been the primary source for learning. She stated the family as being the preferred place for literacy development. Hannon (1995) stated:

It may be argued that after a child starts school teachers become more influential.

This is obviously true to some extent, but even for school children, time spent in school represents little more than a quarter of their waking lives and a great deal of learning must take place outside school hours. (p. 38)

Various researchers have studied homes in which children read and write early without direct instruction (Durkin, 1966; Morrow, 1997; Teale, 1986). The results have consistently established that certain characteristics are common to these children and their homes. These characteristics tend to be:

- ✓ Children, who are interested in paper and pencil activities, letters, and words, tend to spend their playtime at home writing, drawing, working with letter

puzzles, and playing with magnetic letters to make words (Department of Western Australia, 1995).

- ✓ Parents reading to and helping children with reading assist children in developing language skills which helps them automatically pick up the written language. What the children see and hear from reading out loud makes written language easier for them to understand as they read alone (Cullinan, 1992; Macfarlane, 1994; Morrow, 1997).
- ✓ When parents model reading using a large variety of reading materials, children attempt to read and write earlier, imitating the literacy behavior of their parents and older siblings (Macfarlane, 1994; Rodriguez-Brown, Fen Li, & Albom, 1999).
- ✓ Reading materials are readily accessible to children in every room. In addition, parents provide a special library corner in their child's room to store the child's favorite books. Kitchens and restrooms are also important, because children spend considerable time in both places. In the kitchen children can read cooking magazines and recipes, while restrooms can have children's magazines and plastic books to read in the tub (Morrow, 1997).
- ✓ Parents, who take children to bookstores and libraries, expose their children to a variety of reading materials. Children are encouraged to select books that interested them. While at the library children can listen to stories on tapes, play on the computer, and with puzzles. They might also have the opportunity

to listen to a story being read (Colomb, Reyes, Rodriguez-Brown & Schikore, 1995; Macfarlane, 1994; Nathenson-Mejia, 1994).

- ✓ Children who are offered many experiences to broaden their schemata base their understanding on what they already know (Davis & Lewis, 1997).

Building background knowledge by visiting the zoo, museums, lake, parks, etc. helps to broaden their experiences.

- ✓ Children who watch television less often spend more time playing, reading, or writing. Parents work with their children to budget viewing time by selecting shows from weekly TV listings instead of watching whatever comes on TV. In addition they include movies and video games in this allotment of time (Davis, 1998).

- ✓ Parents frequently request teacher(s)' input on how they can help at home. Morrow (1997) explained that teachers should guide parents to provide a rich literacy environment with plenty of opportunities for children to interact with reading and writing materials.

Morrow (1997) described how young children learn by exploring, acting on their environment, and imitating what they see and hear. This reinforces the importance of providing an environment rich in literacy where children can interact in daily literacy activities. When children are provided with materials, like alphabet blocks, magnetic letters on the refrigerator and puzzles they are able to play and learn. Writing and drawing utensils plus plenty of opportunities to use them are also important.

Finally, the language environment in the home is a crucial component. The amount of speech heard by children and opportunity to interact with it helps to build literacy skills. The language environment of the home makes a significant contribution to children's development of emergent literacy skills. The amount of speech that children hear and use with their parents and adult is important. Parents help build literacy skills by asking questions of their children, providing positive feedback in response to children's comments and behaviors, and engaging children in language play, such as word games, rhymes, and songs (McConnell & Rabe, 1999). Parents must understand that by using what is normally found in any home, a child may be pulled into active involvement in the world of literacy without the necessity of commercially produced educational materials (Nathenson-Mejia, 1994).

According to Cullinan (1995), parents "Have taught their children one of the most complex and difficult skills imaginable-language . . . children learn to talk naturally" (p. 7). Starting at birth children are introduced to language. They are surrounded by others talking to them and they learn language from modeling by being praised and encouraged for their attempts at speaking. If children are exposed to and involved with literacy at all times, learning to read and write may occur naturally with practice. Cullinan (1995) reaffirmed that if parents will encourage their children to read and write as they were encouraged to talk, "children will learn to read and write just as naturally as they learned to talk" (p. 9). In order for reading to be a natural process children must be surrounded by books, have reading modeled, and encourage their attempts to read even when children make mistakes.

Partnerships Between Home and School

Children who possess literacy knowledge and skills before entering first grade are more likely to be those who have had a rich history of meaningful literacy experiences (Schickedanz, 1999). Family literacy programs can help educate parents, and parents therefore can help develop their children's literacy. In order for parents to become involved in their children's education, schools must build a bridge of communication from school to the home and from home to school.

Parents are a child's first and most influential teachers! (Macfarlane, 1994; Morrow, 1997). Simich-Dudgeon (1986) found that over the last two decades, there has been a growing body of research evidence suggesting that there are important benefits to be gained by elementary-age school children when their parents provide support, encouragement and direct instruction in the home, as well as maintain good communication with the school.

Schmidt (1995) conducted a study of linguistic minority students in an attempt to understand their social interactions within the classroom and how those interactions impacted their literacy development. As a result of interviews and observations of teachers, students, and parents, as well as the student's work, testing information, and classroom materials, Schmidt discovered that cultural conflict and lack of understanding negatively affected the literacy development of the linguistic minority students in the classroom.

Stewart (1995) argued that teachers should seek what children know about the literacy process, as well as be sensitive to cultural differences in the construction of

literacy. Schmidt (1995) indicated that teachers might actually interfere with their students' learning if they do not understand the diverse backgrounds of the students in their classroom.

According to research in parent education (Cairney & Munsie, 1995), a school partnership between parents and teachers led to gains in children's literacy achievement. Teachers often assumed that low income, low literacy and/or minority parents did not care about their children's education. The reality was that many Spanish speaking parents did not know how to help their children and/or lacked access to resources and materials (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) further researched Spanish speaking parents of elementary students. The finding showed many Spanish speaking parents lacked basic English skills and thereby felt intimidated by schools. As a result, many were unaware of the resources available to them. In addition, since many Spanish speaking parents received their formal education outside of the United States, they were unfamiliar with the American school system. Their expectations for formal education might not have coincided with the education their children were receiving in the United States schools.

An overwhelming number of limited-English proficient (LEP) or non-English proficient (NEP) parents believe that the school system has the responsibility to educate their children, and that any amount of parent interference/intervention is certain to be counter-productive (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986). However, while LEP/NEP parents do not have the English language proficiency to engage in parent involvement activities they can be taught how to reinforce educational concepts in the native language and/or English.

For many Mexican American parents, lack of involvement in their children's education is erroneously perceived as lack of interest (Chavkin, & Gonzalez, 1995). The reasons for their limited involvement include their belief that the roles of home and school are sharply delineated. Mexican American parents saw their role of home and school were sharply delineated. Mexican American parents saw their role as being responsible for providing basic needs in addition to instilling respect and proper behavior. They saw the school's role as instilling knowledge. They believed that one should not interfere with the job of the other.

Communication should be a major focus of involvement. Chavkin & Gonzalez (1995), advised that reception areas in school should include bilingual staff, while telephone and written communications should be available in both Spanish and English. Even the parents did not become involved. For some parents, home visits or visits in a neutral site offered a less threatening environment. Phone calls and one-on-one meetings were other methods of communicating with parents. Teachers need to demonstrate to parents that their involvement and interest in their children's education was important (Ballen & Moles, 1994; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995).

Strategies for Involvement. Nicolau and Ramos (1990) recommend the following strategies to increase and retain involvement of Hispanic parents:

1. **Personal Touch.** Make the first contact in the parents' primary language and use face-to-face communication. Home visits are a particularly a good way to begin.
2. **Non-Judgmental Communication.** Parents need to be supported for strengths, not judged for perceived failings.

3. Perseverance in Maintaining Involvement. Activities must respond to real need or concern of parents.
4. Bilingual Support. All communication, written and oral must be in Spanish and English.
5. Strong Leadership and Administrative Support. Flexible policies, a welcoming environment, and a collegial atmosphere are important. Principals must be committed to project goals.
6. Staff Development Focused on Hispanic Culture. The staff must understand the features of the Hispanic culture and its impact on student's behavior and learning styles.
7. Community Outreach. Many families could benefit from family literacy programs, vocational training, ESL programs, improved medical and dental services, and other community-based social services. (p. 9)

Espinosa (1995) stated, "Most, if not all, Hispanic parents want their children to succeed in school" (p. 3).

A growing number of parents do not speak or read English well enough to communicate with teachers and administrators. Because of cultural differences, many parents are not familiar with the expectations of their children's schools and don't understand how to go about getting involved, even if they want to. Some parents lack the educational background or skills they feel they need to interact with teachers and staff. For others, their own

negative experiences as students make them uncomfortable going to the school. (Aronson, 1996, p. 58)

Not only may the language barrier be a problem for those who do not speak English but there might be other circumstances which create barriers for parent involvement. According to Ballen and Moles (1994), the possibility that some parents might lack the ability to read or write in any language can not be overlooked.

Ballen and Moles (1994) explained that in order to have partnerships between schools and families there needs to be mutual trust, respect, and open communication. Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) explain that schools can build partnerships and open their doors to more parental involvement by making parental involvement easy and interesting.

For those who do not speak English or can not read newsletters, field trip forms, or homework assignments, an extra effort must be made to contact them. Information can be translated and a resource person can communicate with them in their first language and audiotapes and videotapes might be used as alternatives to written communication. These tapes should be available to parents in their native or primary language. Inger (1992) recommends "the only successful approach is personal: face-to-face conversations with parents in their primary language in their home" (p. 3).

Teachers and schools should also take into consideration families' work schedules. Parent activities should be scheduled before or after work where possible to give those parents who work the opportunity to become involved. Inger (1992) reminded schools that providing bilingual materials, baby-sitting at no cost, and times and locations which are convenient to parents make it easier for parents to participate.

“The importance of family structure and support for extended families remains strong among Hispanics in the U.S. despite news reports about the decline of the traditional family in general” (Inger, 1992, p. 1). A resource that schools should utilize is the strength of the Hispanic extended family. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, godparents, and even friends play an important role in reinforcing family values and raising children. If the parent(s) feel welcomed and comfortable, but can not make it to a meeting they can ask someone from the extended family to attend. Ballen and Moles (1994) affirm that schools need to be a place where all family members are recognized and feel welcomed for their strengths and potential.

One way to close the gap is building and maintaining the bridges between home and school. This could be a difficult process especially when teachers and parents do not speak the same language. Creating strong bridges would allow not only the students, but also the parents and teachers to communicate effectively between the two most important worlds of children (Nathenson-Mejia, 1994).

The role of parents in the education of their children can not be overestimated. Saracho (1999) and Rodriguez-Brown et al. (1999) suggested parent intervention programs should be developed to educate parents how to promote literacy in their home. These interventions could teach parents ways to use their home environment and resources. Parents could learn how to use objects and materials in the home environment which are reflective of the children’s interests, emerging skills and strategies that foster communication and helped children to process new information.

Family Literacy Projects

In our country today, many families do not speak English and therefore are not able to support their child's English reading and writing development in the ways that schools have suggested. In addition, many parents who have limited literacy ability cannot do so in the mainstream approach. Breaking the cycle of illiteracy by creating environments which enable adult learners to enhance their own literacies and at the same time promote the literacy of their own children is the intention of family literacy programs.

A variety of family literacy programs exist. Literacy projects are often headed by public schools, adult literacy programs, community based groups, government agencies, or often combinations of groups. Morrow (1997) reported on three types of family literacy programs that emerge from the research: programs that bring adult and child together, programs that focus on the adult, and programs that focus on the child.

Programs that bring the adult and child together. There are separate activities and instruction for both parents and their children as well as group activities. Programs are structured and occur over a long period of time. Examples are Parents and Literacy (PALS), Even Start programs, and Family Literacy model. Programs such as these involve adults with limited education and their preschool children, both attending a public school for literacy instruction.

According to Powell (1995), children's success in school has been found to be associated with the quality of the home environment in the early years of life. He reported that there are five major ways that early family environments contribute to children's school performance. The program Even Start focuses on a range of parenting dimensions:

child development, understanding of each child's abilities, parents' teaching strategies, early literacy environments, and control and discipline. Powell stated that no one area was more significant than others in predicting children's success in school.

Improving the school readiness and literacy skills of children is the goal of the federally funded Even Start family literacy program. Preliminary findings of the 4-year national evaluation of the program revealed that participating children who have had no prior pre-school experience doubled the expected developmental growth rate. This finding suggested that as these children entered the public school system they were more likely to know basic concepts and precursors of kindergarten skills than they would have in the absence of the program (St. Pierre, Swartz, Murray, & Deck, 1993).

In the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model, parents work on the basic academic skills and parenting skills while their children attend a preschool class. Follow-up studies of preschool participants who were at risk of failure when they enrolled in the program showed that primary grade students performed above average on variables such as academic performance, motivation to learn, attendance, self confidence, and probable success in school. Ninety percent of the children were rated as not considered at risk for school failure by their current teachers (Powell, 1995).

There were also significant findings for the parents who participated in the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model. Over 80 percent of the parents who enrolled in the program were unemployed, had not completed high school, and had an income of less than \$7,000 per year, primarily from public assistance (Seaman, Popp, & Darling, 1991). After

participation in the program; 41 percent either were in some form of higher or continuing education program or had definite plans for enrolling; 35 percent were employed; 41 percent were not receiving any form of public assistance; and well over half of the parents were still serving as volunteers in their children's elementary schools 1 to 3 years after leaving the program.

Programs that focus on the adult. In these programs adults receive literacy instruction, English as a Second Language instruction, and instruction in how to read to children including appropriate modeling techniques and strategies.

Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando [Learning, Improving, Educating]) was based on four assumptions: (a) providing a supportive home environment, (b) parents can have a positive effect on their children's learning, (c) parents who are confident and successful will be effective teachers for their children, and (d) that literacy can be influenced in the context of the family. Parents were also encouraged to visit their child's classroom in order to gain better understanding of their child's literacy development in the classroom setting (Rodriguez-Brown et al., 1999; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995).

The Project FLAME was targeted to helping Spanish speaking families. This program provided literacy training for parents who were not yet proficient in English. Their lack of English often made them feel unable to help their children learn or communicate with their children's teachers. The English as a second language (ESL) classes helped the parents learn how to communicate with their child's school. In

addition, the “parents as teachers” classes, that were conducted in Spanish taught, parents how to read with their children and “emphasized that parents can foster children’s learning by talking, reading, and writing with them in Spanish” (Shanahan et al., p. 590).

Parents in the FLAME program attended ESL classes twice a week. Twice a month they received “parents as teachers” literacy training. The ESL and literacy training were reflective of parents’ concerns and needs. Finally, the ESL and literacy training were complimentary to and built off each other.

As a result of the FLAME project, parents learned to speak and read English, took an active approach to their children’s learning, had more literacy materials in the home, and gained confidence in reading with their children (Shanahan, et al., 1995). The findings from the study conducted by Rodriguez-Brown, et al. (1999) suggested that a family literacy program such as Project FLAME:

can increase Hispanic parents’ ability to provide literacy opportunities for their children, increase their ability to act as positive role models, improve Hispanic parents’ skills, and increase and improve relationships between Hispanic families and schools in spite of the number of years of schooling and years in the United States (p. 52-55).

Project Primer (Producing Infant/Mother Ethnic Readers) was designed to encourage low-income parents to read to their child (Cronan, 1995). The effects of the program on parents and children were evaluated. Results indicated that parents engaged in the targeted behaviors and the children in the high intervention program showed improvements in their cognitive abilities.

Programs that focus on the child. Children receive direct instruction and parents are asked to assist at home, but do not receive any actual training.

Preschool programs such as ECEAP, Headstart, and community sites are examples. The Read-a-thon program is an example of this kind of literacy program as well. Saracho (1999) and Rodriguez-Brown et al. (1999) suggested parent intervention programs should be developed to educate parents how to promote literacy in their home. These interventions could teach parents ways to use their home environment and resources. Parents could learn how to use objects and materials in the home environment which are reflective of the children's interests, emerging skills and strategies that foster communication and help children to process new information.

Summary

The literature reviewed in preparing this project supports the need to promote literacy in the home through parent literacy programs and develop a partnership between the home and the school. The influence of the home environment has long been recognized as vital to a child's literacy growth. A child learns by experiencing and absorbing information from many sources even before they enter a classroom.

Many Spanish speaking parents lack the understanding of how to help their child learn. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) told us Hispanic families do care but must be educated on how to help their child. Hispanic parents believe if they help their child use their native language it is to a disadvantage to their children, because in school they learn English. It is important for them to understand that literacy in their primary language will help children learn a new language (Krashen, 1997).

The school and the home do not exist as independent influences on students' literacy development. Each support and reinforce the other. After a child starts school, parents and teachers must join together to support the union between the home environment and a child's literacy success in school.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Purpose

The influence of the home environment on literacy learning has long been recognized as significant. The strongest element in shaping lives and the most powerful support network is the family. It is where the cycle of learning begins, where the attitudes of parents about learning became the educational values of the children (National Center for Family Literacy [NCFL], 1999). Consequently, the purpose for this project was to develop a handbook to serve as a resource for Spanish and non-Spanish speaking parents to use in the home environment to promote literacy. The strategies and activities in this handbook were based on material research that has been found to help promote literacy in the home.

The product of this project was a parent handbook containing suggestions and activities on reading literacy to use in the home with materials readily available to them. The handbook's suggestions and activities were intended to reinforce the literacy environment in classroom settings.

Procedure

Research literature related to literacy, factors that promote literacy in the home, partnerships between home and school, and family literacy projects were read, evaluated, and summarized. From this literature review a correlation between parental involvement and the success of literacy development was found. It became apparent that the need for

parent involvement for student success could not be overstated. Parents were interested in becoming involved in their child's educational development, but often did not specifically know how to help their children or have an understanding of exactly what materials and activities to use. Therefore, a parent handbook was developed for parents with specific activities to provide a rich reading literacy environment in the home.

The suggestions and activities in the handbook were designed to engage parents in their child's literacy development. The activities were selected after reviewing a wide variety of commercially prepared handbooks containing ways families can help children learn. The primary goal of the activities were to provide parents with an easy access to specific activities to promote reading literacy in the home. "Home activities allow parents flexibility in scheduling, provide opportunities for parents and children to spend time together, and offer a relaxed setting" (Brown, 1989 p. 1).

The handbook was organized according to the literacy components: language, reading, writing, and communication. The detailed suggestions and activities were organized by the characteristics found in the home which promote literacy. The criteria used to select the various components contained in the handbook were based on the research. The selection criteria used in this project for the suggestions and activities included:

- (a) interaction between children and parents or other family members,
- (b) parent/child interest,
- (c) reading activities and/or strategies,
- (d) writing activities and/or strategies,

- (e) communication activities and/or strategies,
- (f) required minimal materials,
- (g) games reinforcing strategies

The communication aspect of this project was vital. In order to find success, teacher-parent communication had to be meaningful and frequent. An effective way for parents to become informed and involved was to attend a monthly meeting headed by the classroom teacher. The meeting was conducted in both English and Spanish, baby-sitting was provided, there was no cost to attend, and was scheduled at a time which would benefit parents. The meeting included an incentive to encourage parents to attend, such as providing snacks, dinner, pot-lucks, children's books, or writing material. Depending on the needs of the families in the classroom the incentives differed. For example, if a group constantly told the teacher they did not have anything to write with at home, at the next parent meeting the teacher might give them writing utensils and make notebooks. Questions were addressed and parents shared experiences after trying some activities. Each month the handbook was reviewed and discussed. Activities were modeled first by teacher and student, then parents had an opportunity to practice with their child. Families were given copies of poems, songs, chants, and books to make in their native language.

Chapter 4

The Project

Introduction

Chapter four of this project contains a parent handbook, “Look Inside for Ways to Help Your Child Learn in the Home . . . “ “Habra y descubra maneras como ayudar a su hijo ha aprender dentro del hogar . . .”, in Spanish and English to serve as a resource in the home environment to promote reading literacy. This handbook is divided into five sections.

The first section advises parents on the use of television and video games in the home, providing ideas on how to limit the amount of television watched and making a schedule of the programs by reading the television guide. It also contains information about visiting the library as a source of placing books in the hands of their children, interacting with games, taped books, and using the computer.

The second section includes a variety of fun games that reinforce reading and language development. No materials needed and there are no time requirements. The games may be implemented in the home, on the road while traveling long distance or just a few minutes, in the restaurant, or anyplace where you have a few minutes.

The third section pertains to language development and includes suggestions on how to encourage children to talk. It is important to interact with children. Language is the basis of reading and is used daily to communicate. Places and times are suggested.

Section four pertains to writing. This section encourages parents to provide opportunities for children to write using various mediums. The activities include writing stories, making books, cards, and writing letters. It also explains experimenting with writing is the best way to learn how.

The last section consists of suggestions and activities to encourage reading at all times. The activities include where to read, what to read, who to read to, and list of suggested materials to be placed in the home. There are also activities that can be done after reading a book with parents, where writing, language, and reading are connected.

Monthly meeting conducted by the classroom teacher must be held. The meeting should be conducted in both English and Spanish and both the parent and child are encouraged to attend. Babysitting should be provided, there should be no cost required to attend, and must be scheduled at a time which would accommodate parents. Incentives to encourage parents to attend the meetings should be included, such as providing snacks, dinner, pot-lucks, children's books, or writing material. These incentives would be provided by the school or both the school and parents. Depending on the needs of the families in the classroom the incentives differed. For example, if a group constantly tells the teacher they do not have anything to read at home, the next parent meeting activity may be to write a story about their family with their child and illustrate it. At the first meeting of the year the handbook will be distributed and explained, the activity of that night should be making refrigerator magnets using a clothespin to clip the handbook on it and place it on the refrigerator for easy access. At the monthly meetings the handbook will be reviewed, discussed and questions will be addressed. Parents will have the opportunity to share experiences about the activities they have tried at home. Some of the activities in the handbook will be modeled first by teacher and student, then parents will have an opportunity to practice with their child. Families will be given copies of poems, songs, chants, and books in their native language to read at home. In order to make this project effective meaningful and frequent communication with parents is vital.

TELEVISION PRACTICES

- ⊖ Limit TV and VIDEO GAME viewing to no more than 14 hours a week.
- ⊖ Develop a schedule with your child, include the name of the show and the time it comes on. Remember to include the video games.
- ⊖ Read the weekly TV guide to find out what is showing.
- ⊖ Monitor the shows your children watch and the type of video games they play.

Read to and with your Child EVERYDAY

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

Bookshelves or place to store books. Easy access to books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, any other material that can be read

Here are some suggestions for helping children learn to be readers:

- ✎ **Provide opportunities** for your child to read everyday: Make it a routine for your child to read before bedtime everyday.
- ✎ **LABEL** furniture in child's room, kitchen, restroom, living room, etc.
- ✎ Have your child **READ** to others in the home: siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends etc.
- ✎ **READ ALOUD**: with enthusiasm and change your voice according to the characters in the story, make it FUN! Encourage your children to take turns reading aloud.
- ✎ **READ** alphabet and picture books: invite your child to use their imagination and make up their own stories afterwards:
 - * have your child summarize the story and write about their favorite part
 - * create their own alphabet and picture books using blank pages stapled together in half to form a book.
- ✎ **GROCERY LIST**: make a list with your child. At the grocery store, have your child read the list and find items by reading aisle headings. Once an item is found cross it out.
- ✎ **NEWSPAPER**: find letters and words, read the weather, sports, or any section and have your child share what was read as a reporter to others.
- ✎ **LISTEN** to taped stories with read along books.
- ✎ **IN THE KITCHEN**: provide a bookshelf to keep cookbooks, recipes, and cooking magazines for children to read.

ACTIVITIES TO PLAY ON THE ROAD:

- * Take along books to read.
- * Take along writing materials and use them to write about highlights on your trip.
- * Listen to taped books and songs.
- * Play license plate games:
 - * say words that begin with the letters on the license plate
 - * put the letters found in alphabetical order
 - * count how many of one letter you can find on license plates
- * Find the letters of the alphabet in order on road signs.
- * Count how many of one letter you can find on road signs.

Always encourage and model WRITING

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

*pencils, pens, erasers, markers,
crayons, colored pencils, chalk
scissors, glue, ruler, stencils
paper: blank, notebook, construction
paper, old magazines and catalogs*

Here are some suggestions for helping children learn to be writers:

- ✎ Provide your children time to write daily, make it a routine.
- ✎ Make blank books to draw and write (to make use blank paper inside and make a cover using construction paper, fold the papers in half and staple it together or string yarn on the bookend).
You can make:
 - * Alphabet and picture books by drawing pictures, cutting pictures from newspapers, catalogs, and/or magazines glue them onto the pages then label or write stories about the pictures.
 - * Have your child dictate you a story and you write it down; then create the illustrations for your story.
 - * Create your own culture and family stories, illustrate them using photographs..
- ✎ Hang a family message board in a room to write reminder notes, appointments and notes to each other. For example: doctor's appointment on Tuesday March 12 at 9:00 am; Dan please take out the garbage.
- ✎ Encourage children to write letters, make cards for different occasions such as birthdays, thank you cards, invitations and then mail them out. Use stamps, stickers, magazine pictures, or draw pictures to decorate. Write a message inside the card.
- ✎ Label furniture in their room. Print name on door.

Look at the cereal boxes, cartons, food containers: name letters, read what they say and discuss pictures on the box.

Involve your child in everyday activities. A perfect time to expand your child's language is outside when you're working in the yard or garden. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary, explain the process of what you are doing and why.

Encourage your child to TALK

Talking is one of the most important things we do in life. We use language to communicate with others. Parents need to provide many opportunities to talk.

Here are some suggestions for helping children with language:

- 📌 Provide your children time to discuss their day with you.
- 📌 Surround children with language by talking to them.
- 📌 Provide different toys that encourage your child to explore and experiment with them. Promote language by talking to and encouraging your child to form ideas and understanding of what they are doing. An example may be building blocks: encourage your children to explain what and how they are building. Model by showing your child how.
- 📌 Constantly ask your child questions: how, why, when, where? Encourage your child to explain their thinking. Whatever you do together talk about it.
- 📌 Sing and recite nursery rhymes, finger plays and poems. Some examples of nursery rhymes are: Humpty Dumpty, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, Jack and Jill

Habra y descubra maneras como ayudar a su hijo ha aprender dentro del hogar. . . .

Aparte un lugar para escribir en el cuarto donde su familia pasa la mayor parte del tiempo. Ponga una mesa chica y sillas con muchos libros para leer y utensilios, como lapices, papel, colores, etc para escribir.

Deje que su niño experimente con la escritura proveendole oportunidades para hacerlo. Los niños aprenden sobre la lectura y escritura observando a otros, explorando, y desenvolviendose con ello. Recuerden que la escritura empieza con garabatos, anime y dele elogios por sus intentos.

Juegos para jugar dondequiera:

- ✓ **YO ESPIO:** describa algo que se pueda ver y su niño trata de encontrarlo. Por ejemplo: el padre dice: yo miro algo que se come es rojo y redondo el niño responde: es una cereza? el padre le dice: no es mas grande y es crujiente. el niño responde: una manzana el padre SI. Tome turnos en ser el adivinador.
- ✓ **TRUENA:** El primer jugador dice dos palabras. Si las palabras comparten un sonido, en el principio, el medio, o al final el otro jugador dice " TRUENA!" y truena sus dedos. Si las palabras no comparten ningun sonido el otro jugador se mantiene callado. Se turnan y siguen jugando.
- ✓ **SONIDOS IGUALES:** El padre escoje el sonido de una letra y hace el sonido, despues da un ejemplo de una letra que contiene el mismo sonido y el niño piensa en otras palabras que empiecen con el mismo sonido. Por ejemplo el Padre dice: Mi letra es 'p' es el sonido con que empieza 'perro ' 'platano'. El niño diria: pinguino, pantalon.
- ✓ **OPUESTOS:** ayude a su niño desarrollar su vocabulario y conceptos. El padre empieza con dos palabras opuestas como dia/noche o dentro/afuera y despues nadamas dice una palabra y su niño dice la otra palabra. Ejemplos de palabras opuestas: arriba/abajo correcto/incorrecto si/no abierto/cerrado, alumbrado/oscuro
- ✓ **PALABRAS QUE RIMAN:** El padre y su niño toman turnos en decir dos palabras que riman. Por ejemplo: El padre dice: mesa/pesa El niño dice: casa/masa Tambien pueden adaptar el juego un poco y el padre dice una palabra y el niño la que rima con ella.

Mantenga letras magneticas en el refrigerador para pronunciar el nombre y sonido de las letras, escribir su nombre, deletrear palabras, y jugar juegos identificando las letras.

Exponga el trabajo de su niño sobre el refrigerador demostrandole que esta orgulloso de su trabajo

Facilítele a sus niños muchas oportunidades para leer. Pueden leer en la sala, en la cocina, en el comedor, en su recamara, y cuando viajen en camino o en autobus a todo tiempo. Leer empieza a una temprana edad, desde que un niño empieza a leer un libro mirando las ilustraciones. Recuerde que los errores son normal en el desarrollo de la lectura. La mejor manera para aprender a leer es:

LEER! LEER! LEER! LEER!

Visite la biblioteca de su comunidad:

- ⊗ Lleve a sus niños a la biblioteca a menudo.
- ⊗ Registre a sus niños para que obtengan su propia tarjeta de circulación.
- ⊗ Haga que sus niños participen en la seleccion de sus propios libros, los que les interesen a ellos.
- ⊗ Permita a sus niños entretenerse con historias en cassettes, rompecabezas, y la computadora.
- ⊗ Pregunte al bibliotecario por eventos especiales que ofrece la biblioteca , las horas de música, de lectura de cuentos y club de lecturas.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

Summary

Because parents are their child's first teacher and learning begins at home through a child's observations, this project was designed for parents' use in the home. The purpose was to develop a handbook with activities to enhance reading literacy in the home. This handbook was designed using the common characteristics found in the literature review on literacy, factors that promote literacy in the home, partnerships between home and school and literacy programs which described how homes can provide a rich literacy environment. The handbook gives parents the opportunity to focus on one area at a time, with activities designed to be used anywhere anytime.

A secondary goal was to build stronger partnerships between families, particularly Spanish speaking families and schools. A key factor in the development of this project was the fact that many parents, in particular Mexican American, are perceived as lacking interest in their child's education. Due to a lack the understanding on how they can help their children. This self-explanatory handbook was designed to provide these parents with material they can use to help improve their child's literacy, thereby giving parents a feeling of involvement.

Conclusions

As a result of the information gathered in the review of literature contained in chapter two, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. Parents and family have the greatest influence on their children's literacy development. Morrow (1997) states "family is the key to successful literacy development for both children and their parents" (p. 79).
2. Literacy development in their native language enables children to transfer those skills when learning a new language.
3. Mexican American families are perceived as not caring for their children's education when in fact they strongly believe if they become involved in school they are interfering with the school's job of instilling knowledge. They need to become educated that becoming involved does not mean interfering but helping their children become successful learners.
4. Parent involvement leads to student achievement (Flaxman & Inger, 1991). Teachers and parent must work together in educating their children. School activities must accommodate parents' cultural beliefs.
5. Parents are interested in helping their children, but often do not know how and what activities or materials to use. Teachers and schools must give parents the tools to help their children learn in the home.
6. Strong parent/teacher relationships allow teachers to gain a better understanding of their students' background and enables them to develop a more meaningful literacy environment in the classroom and to develop a more meaningful literacy program.
7. Parent literacy programs and access to literacy materials can increase parent involvement in the literacy development of their children

Recommendations

The handbook developed through this research is intended to help parents promote reading literacy in the home with suggested activities and materials. Along with the lack of parent involvement because parents feel they do not know what or how to help their children, schools also face problems with language barriers and parents who can not read.

The following recommendations are suggested:

1. Record the directions in both English and Spanish on how to use the handbook. Explain each section, according to the color it is located, the activities and materials required for that particular section.
2. Videotape the monthly parent meetings to use the following year. These videos would then be available for families to check out and watch at home.
3. Provide parent evaluations for feedback. Make changes to handbook and parent meeting accordingly.
4. Develop literacy workshops using the sections and parents' comments and questions in the handbook during the school year.
5. Schools need to educate parents on how to promote reading literacy in the home and help their child become successful by offering literacy programs to parents.

According to Daley & Staff (1999) "If you integrate literacy into a family's ongoing and everyday life, it becomes more than an extra. It becomes a habit" (p. 1). Integrating literacy into families homes and lives should be every school district's mission.

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