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A Family Approach To Emergent Reading And Writing

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A FAMILY APPROACH TO EMERGENT READING AND WRITING

By

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To my parents, David and Cindy, for being my first teachers and helping me develop a passion for reading and writing. Thank you for all your love, support, and hours of babysitting. To my sister, Katie, for all your support through everything in life. To my educational mentors, Bryan, Mark, and Beth; your leadership and friendship have inspired me every day. Finally, to my daughter, Isabella, you are my everything and I love you so much! May you continue to have a passion for reading and writing.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"In those days Ceasar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world." (The Holy Bible, Luke 2:1) Every Christmas Eve before we opened gifts, our family would gather together and read these words. Reading the Christmas story was a family tradition. As I grew, I heard my grandfather, grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, and parents all read the Christmas story. Eventually, my reading skills blossomed enough to become part of this long-standing tradition. Literacy was always present in my upbringing.

My parents instilled an appreciation for literacy into my life as a child. For the majority of childhood, my mom was a stay-at-home mom. She allowed me to interact with text, experiment with writing, and engage in conversation with me throughout the day. My mom would take me to the grocery store and talk to me through the entire shopping trip. "Now we are going to get green beans. Here are some potatoes." Mom always provided opportunities to write, even though I might not really have been writing proper letters, sentences, or phrases. Both my parents read to me before I understood the mechanics of reading: top to bottom, left to right. My dad has always said, "We never taught you to read, you just did it when it was time." As I have grown, I realized how fortunate I was to have parents that read to me, took me to the library, and encouraged me to do well in school. My parents created an environment of literacy within our home. It was a print-rich environment: books, newspapers, magazines, writing materials of all kinds, and not to mention a lot of conversation. I appreciate what my parents did for me, and it is one of the reasons that I became a literacy instructor. The literacy skills that my parents helped me create, I find myself doing the same with my daughter.

In 2012, I was blessed with a beautiful baby girl, Isabella. Becoming a mom has been the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I cannot imagine life without her. I want to give her all that I had growing up, and more. I know the importance of creating a literacy-rich environment, similar to the one that I grew up in as a child. I read to her before she even understood the concepts of print. As she has grown, she has shown an interest in books and enjoys reading. She has enjoyed writing (drawing) since she was about a year old. We have an evening ritual of reading at bedtime. My daughter is four years old now. Her vocabulary is advanced for her age. Many people believe Isabella is older because she can carry on an advanced conversation for her age. I know my experience in teaching literacy has helped shape her literacy skills at a young age. However, I can't help but think, "What else can I do?"

This I began my eleventh year of teaching secondary Language Arts. Becoming a teacher was an eye-opening experience because I have realized that many of my students do not have the same support my daughter has at home. In most cases, because of that lack of support at home, my students have fallen behind in reading. There are numerous reasons my students may not be at grade-level by the time they get to middle school: lack of print-rich environment at home, parents may not speak English, loss of interest in reading, or maybe even a learning disability. Whatever the reason, it makes me curious about what certain students would be capable of in the classroom if they had the early literacy support from home.

As a secondary teacher, I begin to think about all the interventions and programs secondary schools have attempted to get students on grade level. However, as it is not just our job; how can we, as teachers, help parents provide more support earlier in a student's literary journey? These questions and experiences have led me to my research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?*

As I research and reflect on this question, it makes me ponder over my journey as a learner, and the people who have had a profound effect on me as a learner.

Literacy Journey as a Parent

Making the decision to become a parent is an enormous responsibility. You are making the commitment of putting another life in your hands and that little person becomes the most important thing in the world. As my daughter Isabella has grown, it has been exciting to watch her change and develop into this amazing little person. Children are little sponges in these first few years absorbing everything around them: words, pictures, and anything that makes them curious. At times I am surprised by all the things Isabella knows at the age of four. Being a teacher and having a background in literacy, I knew that starting literacy early was important to Isabella's development.

Not long after I brought Isabella home from the hospital, I began reading to her. Although I knew she didn't understand the importance or even the content of what I was reading, I knew it was beneficial to her. Reading was part of our daily routine, and I also talked to her all the time. I found myself doing a lot of the things my parents had done with me as a baby.

As Isabella approached the age of one, her favorite toys were books. She would sit on the floor with books spread all around her and look at them. To my surprise, I noticed that she was understanding the concepts of print. She held the book the correct way and turned the pages the correct way. Reading has continued to be part of our daily lives.

At the age of one and a half, Isabella found an interest in writing. I bought her an easel that she would draw and write on. She quickly learned how to draw circles and the letter "B" for

"Bella". Her interest of putting a pen to paper (and sometimes the walls in our house) still remains.

What has impressed me the most is Bella's ability to communicate. She knows some sign language, some of what was taught at home and the rest at school, and her vocabulary is beyond an average four-year-old. She is articulate and well spoken. It seems that she really likes to learn and adds words to her vocabulary daily. Everything from her speaking, to her writing and reading has been an eye-opening journey.

Recently, I have noticed that she is starting to go through books that she is familiar with and "reading" them. I sat and listened and she was able to articulate most of what was in the books, in the correct order, using the pictures as her guide. Watching this brought tears to my eyes and helped me realize that I must be doing something right as a parent. Then, I started thinking about how we have reached this point in her literary journey. As a parent, I want to understand how we got to this point. I wonder which things that I have done as a parent that has helped Bella's development in literacy and I am curious about what else I can do to prepare her for kindergarten. Bella is an emergent reader and writer, and I want to understand how to help her continue to growing in the area of literacy. I hope to learn why this stage in a child's life is so important in their literacy journey. Finally, I want to gain some skills and ideas that I can use as a parent to help Bella gain the knowledge necessary at this age. It is a goal that I can use this knowledge to help not only myself, but other parents in their children's literacy journeys and answer: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?*

Rationale

For most of my career, I have worked in an urban environment. I have worked in three schools, and all of which were low-performing schools in reading, writing and/or math. Many of the students are below grade level, but have the ability to do better in all three areas. Literacy, in general, has been a growing interest of mine. I have found it is where my heart is and I have a developing passion for it. I have been using many reading and writing strategies to help my students in their literacy development in middle school. I have seen the results when students use these strategies, but I wanted more tools, and a better understand of literacy development.

In 2008, with much encouragement from my principal, I enrolled in the K-12 Reading License program at Hamline University. Many of the strategies I learned in the program, in both reading and writing, I shared with my colleagues and used in my classes. I began to see more of an improvement in my students and realized I was hungry for more. This excitement for student success led me to the Master of Arts in Literacy Education program at Hamline. This program came at a perfect time because the school I was teaching in at the time, was labeled as a "low-performing" school.

Due to our "low performing" status, one concern kept resurfacing in our discussions about other strategies we could use to improve the literacy performance of students: parent involvement. This is where my inspiration for this research came about, and I figured in order to research this I needed to start small. What things could I try at home with my daughter and pass on to parents within my school? However, my knowledge on early literacy is limited and I needed to better understand emergent readers and writers. In order to do that, I needed to create something to help parents in their child's literacy development. Therefore, these ideas made me

wonder: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?*

Significance

The understanding of emergent readers and writers is important to the teaching profession. Many districts in this country are working to help struggling readers and writers. Our country's reading scores seem to be declining and many lawmakers are working to encourage early childhood education. My hope is that through this research I will be able to shed some light on the importance of emergent literacy, and find ways to help parents and teachers support the emergent readers and writers. The more education parents can receive on emergent literacy, the more likely they are to support their child in the early stages of learning these skills. In turn, teachers, parents and students can work together to create success for the student in school.

Conclusion

As noted, my interest in literacy and the role parents play in a child's literacy development is something I am passionate about. It is my hope that this curriculum guide can help me understand my own daughter's journey as an emergent reader and writer, and in turn help other parents. In Chapter Two, I will define an emergent reader and writer. Also, I will examine how emergent readers and writers develop the skills in the early years of their literacy journey. Finally, in Chapter Two, I will examine the positive affects parents can have on an emergent reader and writer. Hopefully, with this research in Chapter Two, I will find the answer to my research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?* Chapter Three will highlight the methods I will use to develop

an adult education presentation for parents to assist their child in the area of literacy. Finally,

Chapter Four will provide reflection of the project's entirety.

CHAPTER TWO

<u>Introduction</u>

In order to understand the research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers;* it is important to determine specific information within the question itself. This chapter will explain: the importance of parental support, adult education, brain development, the emergent literacy, literacy rich versus literacy poor environments, literacy programs and their effectiveness, and digital literacy.

First, the foundation of the research question will be defined. Parental support in schools will be explored, and a short background on adult education. Next, emergent literacy will be defined. In this section, the different components of literacy will be detailed, such as the importance of reading aloud, linguistic awareness, invented spelling, and many others. The next part of research will focus on literacy-rich vs. literacy-poor environments. Each of these environments will be explored, and hopefully will explain why providing a literacy-rich environment to an emergent reader and writer is key to the academic success of the student. In addition, there will be a focus on programs that already exist to bridge the gap between home and school literacy, such as Head Start. It will be determined whether programs like these are effective to the families and students involved. Finally, digital literacy will be a topic explored. With the increase in technology usage, such as iPads and other tablets, how can these devices help or hinder emergent readers and writers? In the end, the plethora of this information should help to better understand the research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?*

Parental Support

   The United States Department of Education defines parent support, also known as parental involvement, as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (US Department of Education, 2004). This includes, but is not limited to, assistance in the child's learning, being actively involved in the child's education experience, and serving as "full partners" in decision-making and/or serving on leadership or advisory groups. (US Department of Education, 2004). According to Jimerson, Egeland, and Teo (as cited in Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008), "parent involvement in the first 3 years of children's formal schooling predicted upward changes in achievement trajectories through sixth grade, based on information provided by teachers about the amount of teacher-parent contact" (p.75). Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, and Ortiz, point out that while it is assumed that parental involvement is important, few studies have addressed parental involvement in preschool years (2004). They argue that the importance of parental involvement early in a student's academic career needs to be addressed more in depth (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). A student's early academic career will include emergent literacy.

Adult Education

   Many parents will be learning about emergent literacy as their child explores reading, writing and speaking from a very young age. Malcolm Knowles is a well-known expert in the area of adult education. As stated in the last section, parent involvement is key to the success in a child's journey as a learner. Knowles discusses six-assumptions that adult educators need to consider when training or teaching an adult. These assumptions include: self-concept, role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, motivation, and the need to know

(Knowles, 2005). In order to make the learning experience better for a child, supporting the parents' journey as a "teacher" of emergent literacy is essential. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated within every stage of a child's development, it is important to talk to your kids, read with them, and provide them opportunities to write (2017). Conversation, reading, and writing are three essential skills that children need to develop prior to the age of five. It is important to provide these experiences in the early years as their brains are growing quickly during the stage of emergent literacy.

Brain Development

The Urban Child Institute released information regarding the development of a child's brain and the experiences that children have from birth to age three. The brain is made up of neurons and synapses. Neurons are the nerve cells that communicate with one another. Synapses are the messages passed between neurons. Children have twice as many synapses in their brain, during the first three years, then adults do in their brains.

Children's brains grow rapidly at the beginning of life. During the first year, a baby's brain will grow twice its original size. By age three, 80 percent of their adult brain will be developed. Therefore, the synapses pass information at a quicker rate in these early years. Then, furthermore, information that the child takes in during these formative years can have a profound effect on the overall development of their brain. The Urban Child Institute explains that distinguishing different languages happens early in life, "For the first few months, a baby in an English-speaking home can distinguish between the sounds of a foreign language. She loses this ability by the end of her first year: the language she hears at home has wired her brain for English" (2017). Between the age of one and two, a child's vocabulary quadruples. Overall, the Urban Child Institute concludes, "these early years are a window of opportunity for parents,

caregivers, and communities: positive early experiences have a huge effect on children's chances for achievement, success, and happiness" (2017). Having an understanding of the brain development of a child, helps one understand why emergent literacy is so crucial.

Emergent Literacy

"Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA) released a position statement in 1998, regarding the appropriate practices for developmental reading and writing. In this statement it explains that the early years between birth and the age of eight are the most crucial years for literacy development. They go on to discuss that literacy skills continue to become an increasingly essential skill (NAEYC, 1998). The NAEYC and IRA (1998) explain that children "begin to acquire some basic understandings of the concepts of literacy and its functions."

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) explain "emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environments that support these developments" (p. 849). Emergent reading can involve anything from pretending to read to actually reading. The earliest form of emergent reading usually comes from being able to recognize symbols or signs. It also includes children being able to articulate meaning within a context. Children may use pictures to derive meaning from a book, for instance. Although they cannot read the words in the story, they are able to understand the context of the book through pictures. The concepts of emergent reading are similar with emergent writing. Emergent writing is pretending to write, as well as being able to write alphabetic letters. As the stages of writing progress, children begin

to understand that letters create sound and eventually use that knowledge to use 'invented spelling'. Invented spelling includes phonological knowledge, but lacks orthographic cognizance. (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

Within emergent literacy, there are different components and skills that children acquire. The components are language, conventions of print, knowledge of letters, linguistic awareness, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, emergent reading and writing, print motivation, and other cognitive factors (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). The skills children learn include using symbols, pictures, print, play and oral language in order to communicate effectively at a young age. In order to understand emergent literacy, the NAEYC and IRA (1998), as well as Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) explain each of these components and skills in detail.

Birth to Preschool. Babies are able to understand concepts of language within the first few months. They have the ability to duplicate sounds and understand facial expressions and gestures. As they grow, they enjoy rhymes, songs, playing games such as peek-a-boo and explore board books and alphabet blocks. Eventually, as children grow, they "begin to process letters, translate them into sounds and connect this information with a known meaning" (NAEYC, 1998). The NAEYC and IRA (1998) reference Durkin (1966) and Anbar (1986) to explain that these skills may seem to come naturally. However, "studies suggest that they (the children) are beneficiaries of considerable, though playful and informal, adult guidance and instruction". In order to build these skills within an emergent reader and writer, the NAEYC and IRA (1998) recommend certain activities and skills this age range should acquire.

Reading Aloud. Wells et al states, "the single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children" (as cited NAEYC, 1998). In order for the read aloud to be effective, it is important to talk to

children about the pictures, retell the story, discuss their favorite parts of the story, or they may request to read the same story many times (NAEYC, 1998). While reading, parents and teachers can point out different words, explain concepts of print, help children identify letter shapes and sounds, visit the public library, provide opportunities to read labels and signs (NAEYC, 1998). However, what happens when the parents, and maybe even the child, does not speak English?

English as a Second Language. Cummins (1979) explained that if a child has a strong foundation in their first language, it will increase the achievement in the second language (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). Providing reading and writing support in both languages will enhance the child's ability to improve their oral and written communication. Wong Fillmore (1991) explains it is important to allow the student to "maintain their home language while also learning to speak and read English" (as cited by NAEYC, 1998).

Alphabetic Principle, Linguistic Awareness, & Phonemic Awareness. Adams (1990) states that the alphabetic principle is the "understanding that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds" (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). A basic understanding of the alphabet, both in identification of the shape and the sound of the letter are essential in emergent reading. In addition to the alphabetic principle, a child's linguistic awareness should be a focus in emergent literacy. Within emergent literacy, this is the component in which a child is able to distinguish, using their auditory skills, between different words and apply the language. One example would be, understanding two words can rhyme, and have different meanings. However, in early stages the child is not able to understand the differences and similarities of the phonemes within the words (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Bryan et al. (1990) suggest that the roots of phonemic awareness can be the best predictor of reading success later in life through activities

focused on rhyming, skipping and word games (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). The NAEYC

(1998) defines phonemic awareness as "a child's understanding and conscious awareness that

speech is composed of identifiable units, such as spoken words, syllables and sounds." There are

differing opinions on how phonemic awareness develops. Elkonin (1973) believes that it

develops around the age of five through linguistic games and tiles to create phonemic speech

segments (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). Where Cunningham (1990) and Foorman et al. (1991)

believe children need to learn letters, shapes and sounds in order to apply it to meaningful

reading (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). Wagner & Torgesen (1987) and Ehri (1994) believe that

phonemic awareness is developed without any training (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). While much

of this conversation surrounds reading, writing is important as well.

Invented Spelling. Chomsky (1979) and Clarke (1988) found that invented spelling,

which is also known as phonic spelling, can contribute to beginning reading (as cited by

NAEYC, 1998). Clarke (1988) went on to explain that the process of invented spelling

encourages the child to actively think about how letters and their sounds go together.

Language. Language includes the understanding of vocabulary, as well as the

understanding of the alphabetic model. This includes the knowledge that particular sounds

correspond with letters. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) discuss the differences between the

awareness of decontextualized language and contextualized language. Decontextualized

language involves story narratives and other written communication, whereas contextualized

language deals with physical context, knowledge, and immediate feedback. (Whitehurst &

Lonigan, 1998)

Conventions of print. This component has to do with the understanding that in English

we read left to right, top to bottom, and the layout of the book (cover, pages, binding, etc.) This

may also include the understanding of spacing between words and the use of punctuation. (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

Knowledge of letters. Understanding that each letter has a name is what this component entails. The knowledge of letters, usually will lead to the understanding of sounds. (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence. Another component of emergent literacy is phoneme-grapheme correspondence. This is a more advanced skill in emergent literacy. It is not only understanding that each letter has corresponding sounds, but that combinations of letters can make sounds, as well. The better a child can combine or blend phonemes, the more success the child will see in their reading achievement later on (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Print Motivation. This component of emergent literacy simply involves the child's interest in reading and writing. According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), "a child who is interested in literacy is more likely to facilitate shared reading interactions, notice print in the environment, ask questions about the meaning of print, and spend more time reading once he or she is able" (p. 854).

Other cognitive factors. The final component of emergent literacy includes phonological memory and rapid naming. Phonological memory is being able to immediately recall non-words, or digits, when presented orally. Rapid naming is the ability to name digits, letters, colors, and objects as quickly as possible. Both tap into the cognitive aspect of emergent literacy, and some studies show that the lack of these abilities may lead to difficulty in the understanding of literacy later on in life. (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)

Overall, emergent literacy is complex and develops over time. Emergent literacy skills are the building blocks to creating a fluent reader and writer. From birth through preschool,

children are absorbing language and experimenting with it as they grow and learn. The environments in which children are developing these literacy skills may vary.

<u>Literacy Rich Vs. Literacy Poor Environments</u>

Literacy-rich environments provide a variety of literacy activities, that are easy and accessible, with a responsive adult. Whereas, literacy poor environments are lacking literacy resources and/or the adult to guide them (Center for Early Literacy Learning). Research shows that with more access to literacy, a child would find more success in the development of literacy.

Griffin and Morrison's study (as cited in Bingham, 2002) "conceptualized the home literacy environment to include magazine and newspaper subscriptions, library use, television viewing, and parents' book reading behaviors. Their measure of the home literacy environment significantly related to kindergarten children's receptive vocabulary skills and children's reading recognition skills" (p.12). The Center for Early Literacy Learning describes a literacy-rich environment including print-related materials (calendars, alphabet toys, signs, etc.), reading materials (books, magazines, mail, etc.), and writing materials (pens, markers, pencils, etc.). It also mentioned the importance of an adult modeling reading and writing in the home. Froyen et al (2013), explains in their study that "the learning environment in the family directly affects learning outcomes for children." In this study they also address the emotional environment, in addition to the academic environment. They found "it may be that children experiencing warm, emotional family environments are better able to internalize knowledge gained through home learning activities and demonstrate that knowledge in other contexts" (Froyen et al, 2013). On the other hand, another study shows how the environment around an emergent reader and writer can negatively affect a child's progression in literacy.

Froiland, et al (2013) conducted a study to determine "whether neighborhood socioeconomic well-being is associated with early literacy skills through home literacy in an at-risk sample of preschool students" (p.758). In this study, they found that the socioeconomic level of a neighborhood can help or hinder a child's literacy development through the home literacy. In order to come to this conclusion, they used three important predictors of early literacy to assess the children's progress: letter-word identification, concepts of print, and receptive vocabulary. (Froiland et al, 2013) Letter-word identification was based on the "Woodcock Johnson III Test of Achievement", which determines whether or not a child can identify letters and words (as cited by Froiland et al, 2013). Concepts of print is synonymous with "conventions of print" as discussed earlier in this chapter; being able to identify a book's cover, being able to understand that the English language reads left to right, and so on (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998 and Froiland et al, 2013). Finally, receptive vocabulary was determined by the "Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Third Edition". In this assessment, words were read to a child, and the child pointed to a picture that correlated with what was spoken to them. Using these three common assessments, it was apparent to the researchers that neighborhoods and the parents can drastically affect a child's literary future. (Froiland, et al)

In conclusion, a child's socioeconomic upbringing, parents, and access to printed material can help or hinder a child's emergent literacy skills. (Froiland et al, 2013 and Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) While a child cannot control their socioeconomic upbringing and parental involvement, there are ways to help a child prepare and be ready for Kindergarten. If a parent has difficulty providing the support that an emergent literacy learner needs, they may look to programs that will help support the child, as well as a family. Programs, such as Head Start, give families the tools they need to jumpstart a student's literacy journey.

Head Start and At-Home Literacy Programs

Following President Lyndon B. Johnson's speech "The War on Poverty", the concept of

Head Start was created in 1965. Head Start is a comprehensive program for low-income

families, which include emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs (Office of

Head Start, 2017). This program has served over 32 million children since 1965. The program

expanded to Early Head Start in 1995, which is a program for infants and toddlers, while Head

Start meets the needs of pre-K students. The goal of these programs is to provide early

childhood education services to prepare the children for Kindergarten through play, instruction,

as well as literacy and language learning. It also focuses on the nutrition of the children:

attending regular screenings, encouraging and/or providing nutritious meals, and anything else

that may help a child's physical development. The final goal is to work with families both in and

outside of the home. Providing information, education, and training Head Start gives the parents

tools to help foster their child's growth and development to better prepare them for Kindergarten.

(Office of Head Start, 2017). While Head Start is probably the most well-known program that

focuses on parental involvement and child development, there are other programs available.

The Reading Together Program is another program that prepares families specifically in

the area of literacy. Sukhram and Hsu (2012) explain that it combines the Family Strengths

Model and Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. Sukhram and Hsu (2012)

explain that the Family Strengths Model provides support for families to meet their child's

literacy needs. Hannon's description of this model (as cited by Sukhram and Hsu, 2012)

emphasizes the environment and culture of the family to help foster purposeful literacy and

language experiences (p.116). Hannon (as cited in Sukhram and Hsu, 2012) "stresses the

importance of the active role and engagement of families in their children's literacy journey

through multiple opportunities for engaging in language and literacy, modeling of strategies, interaction between parents and children and recognition of literacy development." Along with the Family Strengths Model, Sukhram and Hsu (2012) explain Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development "refers to how children's learning occurs" (p.117). They elaborate by saying that Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal development "focuses on the area between what children can do on their own and what they can do with guidance" (p.117).

Sukhram and Hsu (2012) use this study to determine if, The Reading Together Program is effective. They describe the purpose of the program:

> In the Reading Together Program the children were exposed to early literacy skills instruction through daily experiences that embedded their prior knowledge of the text and through exposure to decontextualized language. These skills, developed through the guidance and encouragement of their parents and caregivers, helped to build better understandings of and meaningful interactions with the text. (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012, p. 117)

The study was determined by a survey from parents who were participated in the program as well as information observed in the Reading Together Program by the researchers. The program offered a variety of topics along with corresponding readings and activities. See Table 1 below of the activities observed in the study (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012, p.118)

Table 1 Reading together program overview

Session topics	Questions explored	Picture books used	Songs, rhymes and finger plays
Selecting books	How do you choose a text that is appropriate for a particular child?	Campbell (1982) Martin (1995)	Itsy Bitsy Spider Hickory Dickory Dock
Reading strategies for parents	What are some ways parents can read a text to their child?	Wise Brown (2005) Numeroff (1985)	Grandmother's Glasses If You're Happy and You Know It
Motivating children and developing an interest in reading	How can parents stimulate their child's interest during reading?	Gerth (2007) Mayer (2000)	Where Is Thumbkin? Ten in the Bed
Promoting phonological awareness	What kinds of text can be used and what specific strategies can parents use?	Bland (2009) Dr. Seuss. (1960)	Monkeys Jumping on the Bed Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star This Old Man
Fostering life skills through reading	How can parents use books to prepare a child for life experiences (i.e. new sibling, first experience in school, visiting the doctor, etc.)?	Cousins (2010) Berenstain and Berenstain (1981)	The Wheels on the Bus The Mulberry Bush
Developing comprehension of text for children	What kinds of questions should parents ask during reading? How does a parent know if his or her child understands?	Shannon (1998) Dewdney (2005)	I'm a Little Teapot Jack and Jill

Overall, the study concluded that there was an impact made with the Reading Together Program. Families reported in the survey that they saw higher levels of engagement in literacy because the parents became more engaged in their own child's learning. Also, they concluded that parents understood the value and importance of reading with their children at a young age. Sukhram and Hsu (2012) explain, "These early positive experiences with reading serve as a stepping stone for further literacy development", and continue by explaining "Reading is essential to one's academic and life success. Likewise, parent involvement makes a positive contribution to this success" (p. 119-120).

Effectiveness of Reach Out and Read. Reach Out and Read (2014) is a program that partners with pediatric physicians to promote literacy and reading aloud in the home. Medical professionals are trained to make this discussion part of child well-checkups. Children from the ages of infancy to five can have more than 10 checkups with a pediatrician. In each checkup, the doctor discusses the importance of reading aloud with a child, as well as engaging the child with books. Also, the pediatrician demonstrates how to look through a book and talk about the stories with a child. Families are encouraged to build routines around reading, such as at bedtime. At the end of each visit, the family gets to take a new book home. In addition, Reach Out and Read (2014) offers books in twelve different languages for parents that do not speak English. It also provides support to families in which the parents are not avid readers, or may not be very skilled readers by explaining how to use pictures to discuss the book's content (Reach Out and Read, 2014)

Reach Out and Read has reached approximately 4.7 million children. One in four families of the families participating are low-income families (Reach Out and Read, 2014). They have found that the impact of their program has been beneficial to families that commit to

reading with their child. Parents in the program are two and a half times more likely to read and enjoy books within the home with their child. In some areas that Reach Out and Read (2014) is offered, they are seeing preschool aged children having three to six-month improvement in their language development. It has also been found that both receptive and expressive language scores have increased, as well as vocabulary scores. In Latino families that have participated since the child has been six months old, researchers discovered those children be average or above average in their literacy skills by the end of Kindergarten (Reach Out and Read, 2014).

Both Head Start, the Reading Together Program, and Reach Out and Read are supporting the literary community, and creating opportunities for families that may otherwise lack resources to support an emergent reader and writer. These programs are giving families a foundation to build from as their child grows, and help families build a love for reading. Literacy programs such as these have positive impacts on the development of the emergent reader and writer, as well as providing opportunities for parents to be involved more in the process. However, what does mean for families in the 21st Century?

Digital Literacy

Our culture has become digitally dependent. Boudo et al (2014) discuss the emergence and prevalence of technology in the 21st century and point out that our Common Core Standards now include a digital literacy component. The way in which we read has changed in the last five to ten years with the growing number of e-readers, iPads, Kindles, and other electronic devices. Boudo et al (2014) question in their study if these devices can help an emergent reader and writer to grow in their literacy skills by using the various apps, eBooks, etc. Throughout this study they mention the importance and impact parents can have on the development of literacy skills based on engagement and the parents own disposition on literacy (Boudo et al,

2014). They came to the conclusion in their study that technological devices can help emergent readers and writers when used appropriately, and with parental support. Just as with hardcover and paperback books, parents need to engage with their child while using the technology to learn literacy concepts such as concepts of print, vocabulary, and using non-conventional texts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, parental support was defined and the importance of the role of the education of the adult. Emergent literacy was defined as well as its different components. Throughout this literature review, it became apparent that in order for an emergent reader or writer to find the most success, parental involvement is key to the child's successes.   Parents need to provide literacy-rich environments in order to foster success and growth in their child's reading and writing development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). It is apparent that the socioeconomic status of a family may affect the literacy environment of the child. Luckily, our government over fifty years ago recognized that there was a need for families struggling, and programs such as Head Start were created. These programs provide support for not just the child, but the entire family in health and education. (Office of Head Start, 2017). Another recent addition to the literary world to support emergent literacy is technology. The explosion of e-readers, iPads and other electronic devices, have become another tool for emergent readers and writers (Boudo et al, 2014). Regardless of how an emergent reader or writer is learning, one constant has remained throughout: parent involvement is key. Washington (as cited by Boudo et al, 2014) states "parent involvement in early literacy is directly connected to academic achievement".

CHAPTER THREE

<u>Introduction</u>

In order to answer the research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers,* a program needed to be developed to teach and assist parents how to work with their child in the area of literacy. While there are resources available to parents of the emergent reader and writer, the purpose of this capstone was to create a parent-friendly presentation to provide a rationale for the importance of emergent literacy, as well as a platform to model and practice these strategies. This chapter will give an overview of the project and its content, an explanation of how Malcolm Knowles work in adult education will influence the presentation, the choice of method in which the project will be made available to the parents/families, give an explanation of the setting and audience, as well as a timeline for the project itself.

<u>Overview of the project</u>

The goal of this project was to create a literacy-rich environment, with parental support for emergent readers and writers within their homes. It was also important to create the presentations in a parent-friendly manner, in order for the parents to understand the importance of emergent literacy; as well as creating fun, engaging activities they can work on with their children at home. Some parents can become intimidated by the education jargon or education, in general. These parent sessions should alleviate any intimidation or anxiety the may have had about helping their kids be prepared for school.

The programming created includes three sessions. The first session focused on the rationale and research behind emergent literacy. This gave parents an understanding of "why" emergent literacy is essential to their children's development and preparedness for school. The

first session also included the strategies parents can use at home to support their emergent reader and writer, as well as modeling and practicing of these strategies. At the end of the first session it was important to give parents resources, therefore technology was made available for parents to apply for a library card to be sent to their houses. The local library continues to provide materials for families looking to support emergent literacy. The first session will be approximately one and a half to two hours in length.

The second session was focused on reflection of the strategies and tools presented in the first session. This session also focused primarily on digital literacy and exploring tools that are beneficial to supporting emergent literacy. This session will be one hour in length.

The final session included a short survey using Google Forms to analyze the effectiveness of the program presented to the parents. Questions included the effectiveness of the strategies presented, the tools/resources they used with their child, as well as the changes they noticed in their child and/or family. In addition to the survey, the parents were given resources to continue this process with their child, and instruction on the importance of continuing to be involved in their child's education journey. This final session will be held for an hour.

These three sessions will be offered twice a year, once during fall semester and once during spring semester. Families were able to communicate via email with the presenter. It was important to consider the manner in which this material was presented since adult learners were the audience for the presentations.   With that in mind, Malcolm Knowles work in this area was explored, and supported this work.

Malcolm Knowles and Principles of Adult Learning

When creating this project, Malcolm Knowles work in "The Adult Learning Theory-Andragogy" was the framework used to develop the presentations. The six assumptions: self-concept, role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, motivation, and need to know were all at the forefront of planning for adult learning around the area of literacy. While planning the presentation, it was important to take into account how each assumption would be addressed.

Self-concept. This assumption involves the ability for adults to be self-directed. Also, it is important when working with adult learners that you are not impressing your own beliefs upon them. Knowles also suggests that you avoid using words such as "education" and "training" related to the presentation or teaching. It can give the learners a negative assumption about the presentation if their past experiences with the education world were not positive. In order to address this within the presentation, it was important to stick to the research and the facts about the importance of emergent literacy. Then, the families are given the opportunity to choose how to use the information given.

Role of Experience. Taking this assumption into account when planning was probably the most important one. Role of experiences includes keeping in mind the diversity, quantity and quality of the learners' education and experiences. It was important to not make the learners feel invaluable based upon their experiences, and that their individual needs were being met. This assumption was incorporated into the presentation by providing many different activities and skills, in order to allow families to choose what works for them in their homes.

Readiness to Learn. The learners need to have a willingness to learn the material that is being taught or learned. In addition, the learning experiences need to match their lifestyle. With

emergent literacy, it was important to target families with emergent readers and writers. It was assumed that families that had young children would attend. Offering a variety of activities, allows families to choose the literacy experience that fits their family's routine.

Orientation of learning. Knowles explains this assumption to be that adults are life-centered and not subject-centered. The experiences and information that adults choose usually help them in their everyday lives. This overall information within the presentation affects their children, and maybe even their entire family. The act of reading and writing with parent and child, or the entire family, could lead to a new routine for some families.

Motivation. It seems in today's world almost everyone, including both children and adults, are extrinsically motivated. They want to know how an experience will move them ahead in life. With the presentation, the adults gained a sense of understanding of emergent reading and writing strategies and skills to give to their children, which in turn, benefit their child. The child should then be able to go forth with these literacy skills to be successful in school, college, and the real world.

Need to Know. Adults need a rationale for new learning experiences. They want to know why the information is important and how it will benefit them in the future. Within the presentation, it was important to state the rationale at the beginning. The adult learners were given an explanation as to why this information is essential for their child's well-being, as well as a rationale for why their parental role in the literacy journey is important.

In addition to the six assumptions, Knowles' "Principles of Adult Learning" with a focus on presentations was also key to the development of the project. Relying on inquiry from the families and taking notice of the diversity of the audience were both important to the project. Knowles uses the term "Transfer the Training" when presenting to adults (Knowles,

2005). Using this skill, the audience or participants choose the idea or concept that they would like to experiment with after the presentation is complete. Next, participants create steps in applying the idea or concept, and then predict obstacles they would anticipate putting the idea or concept into action. This process was embedded into all the sessions of the presentation. The transfer of training was a great way to close out each session and have a plan for the participants going forward.

Choice of Method

The method used in this project is an adult education presentation. The presentation was broken into three sessions. These sessions were designed to assist parents of emergent readers and writers in the literacy of their child. It provided research, strategies, modeling and practicing of those strategies, as well as some time for reflection. All three presentations are in Google Slides format.

Session One. The first session in the trilogy focused on rationale and explaining why early literacy is important. Topic for rationale included: the importance of early literacy, literacy-rich environments, parental involvement, and the effectiveness of literacy programs that work with families. This session will include diagrams about the effectiveness of reading twenty minutes per day. Strategies to promote early reading and writing are included, and modeled and practiced by participants. Most importantly, the session included a time for reflection using "transfer of training". At the end of this session, laptops were ready for parents to apply for a library card online to be mailed to their house, in order to provide a resource for families that may not have many books in the home.

Session Two. This session allowed time at the beginning to review the research and rationale using Quizizz. After the review, the participants engaged in the "Give One, Get One"

activity. During this activity, participants wrote down questions they have about their experiences working with their child at home on a Post-It note. It was also possible to write down successes they are finding during this process at home. After they wrote down their questions/successes, they got up, found a partner and introduced themselves, and shared with their partner what they wrote. Once they shared, they swapped post-it notes and found a new partner. They shared their previous partner's answer with their new partner. The process continued three to five times. It gave the participants opportunities to hear other families' experiences. Next, information on digital literacy was presented. Finally, the session ended with "transfer of training" reflection.

Session Three. The final session began with a group discussion around burning questions from families. Families were given information on next steps after the final session was over. This information included a list of resources covered in the three sessions. Finally, participants were given a survey on Google Forms to analyze the effectiveness of the program.

Conclusion

This project was created to support adult education in the area of emergent literacy. The three-day presentation was split up into three parts, and will be offered twice a year. The first session built background and provided strategies for parents to try at home with their child/children. Session two was a follow-up to session one. Digital literacy was introduced in this session, as well. Finally, the third session is to wrap up the learning, provide resources, and evaluate the program. Throughout the creation of this project and each session, it was important to keep in mind the research question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers?*

CHAPTER FOUR

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter reflects on the project as a whole. In this chapter, I will discuss the process as a learner, researcher, and writer. Then, I will address my literature review. With this section, I have selected a few items that stood out to me during my research, and will impact my work in the future. Next, I will discuss the implications and limitations of my project. Finally, I will discuss the plans for the future as a researcher, writer, learner, and educator.

<u>A Learning Process</u>

During this journey of researching the question: *How can adult education programming be developed to support parents of emergent readers and writers;* this capstone has taken on many forms. Research questions change, project ideas evolve, and throughout the entire process you take in a vast amount of knowledge.

Having an English/Language Arts background, most of my writing experience both as an educator and learner has been narrative and reflective writing. Through this writing, I have been allowed to use a strong voice, and include my thoughts and feelings on a topic. Converting to strong, academic writing has been an adjustment for me as a writer, researcher, and learner. I found it quite difficult to practically eliminate my own voice in areas of this process where research and academic writing was required. It is very foreign to me to only state the information, and not react or respond to the researched information. The APA format is something that one really has to wrap their head around, and even as I write this chapter, I question myself on whether or not I was successful in mastering the APA format.

Throughout this entire process, the thing that I have learned most about myself as an educator and student is that I still have a lot to learn. In order to be an effective educator, it is important to continue my own education. Education ebbs and flows. Frameworks, philosophies, and standards change. As long as I continue to base my education around research-based information, it will improve my craft and, in turn, help the students and families that I serve. There are many areas of education and literacy that I am still curious about, and I look forward to continue my learning beyond this project and this Master of Literacy Education degree.

I have also found that I enjoy the process of creating presentations and gathering information for adult learners. My experience in helping lead professional development in my own school district influenced my process in creating this project. Teaching adults is different from teaching children. Not only are you giving them the information, but you are providing more of rationale for the information you are presenting; and teaching them the process in order for them to go forth and teach others the information they have learned.

Reflections on Literature Review

Malcolm Knowles's work with andragogy was one of the main foundations for this research. Having been a part of leading professional development in my district, and focusing on family involvement in literacy, it was important for me to understand the adult learner. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) discuss the six assumptions of adult learning: self-concept, role of experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, motivation, and need to know. Within andragogy, these assumptions differ from pedagogy. Adults tend to seek out information or education that will improve their way of living and benefit their interests or goals for their own lives or the lives of their family members. (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) I kept this in mind while trying to plan what I would like to do with families, and specifically parents. It was

important to recognize the diversity of the parents; parents will vary in race, socio-economic status, as well as education experience. Parents do not want to feel like they are being judged, but being supported (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005). Through this research on adult education, a three-session parent program was created to support emergent readers and writers, and their families. Throughout this planning for parents, I used the six assumptions to design it, and created a supportive, informative, and research-based program (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005). The adult education, as well as, the information on emergent literacy was essential.

Emergent literacy's impact on future literacy, and a child's overall well-being is astounding. However, through the research on emergent literacy, it was apparent that three key strategies continued to reappear. First, speaking to your child from birth helps understand and shape their language, as well as their oral fluency as they grow. The NAEYC (1998) discuss how babies in the first few months of life are able to distinguish language. In addition to oral language, reading is vital in early literacy. Wells et al explained that reading aloud is the most important thing that a parent can do in order for the child to build the skills and understanding for the act of reading (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). The act of reading aloud will build success for that child in the future (as cited by NAEYC, 1998). Finally, it is important for parents to provide opportunities for the child to write. Invented spelling is one way for an emergent writer to practice this skill. Clarke (1988) went on to explain that the process of invented spelling encourages the child to actively think about how letters and their sounds go together (as cited NAEYC, 1998). The triad of speaking, reading, and writing practices during the early years of a child, with parental support, will likely create a solid base and endless opportunities for that child in their later years of life.

Finally, from this literature review I found that there is the lack of resources around digital literacy. With so many of the schools having one-to-one devices, and very little material on how to utilize the devices effectively, causes some concern. The technology is all around us, and many bloggers and different groups give their opinions on a variety of educational apps, but we are missing the most important voice in all of this: education. Hopefully, in the next five to ten years, we will see more research on the effectiveness of digital literacy, and the ways in which it can affect emergent literacy.

Implications and Limitations

This project, if taught effectively, should increase the amount of literacy experiences in the homes of the participant. It is clear that the information is geared toward the literacy experiences for the child, but it truly was created to have an effect on the entire family. Literacy within the home can not only build knowledge for the child, but it could also make a family's relationship stronger. With the parents being the "teachers" in this situation, it could have a profound effect on the parent as well. It is possible that a parent may rediscover their love for reading and/or writing because of the experiences with their child. It is possible that it might turn parents that were not engaged in their own reading and writing experiences before into lovers of literacy.

Another implication could be an improvement with retention within the district. For districts with high mobility, if a family feels supported before their child even becomes a student in the district, one would believe the family would stay in the district. Also, when the children enter kindergarten, more of the children will be "kindergarten-ready". While much of this presentation could provide positive growth for families and school districts, this presentation has limitations as well.

Until the presentation has been offered numerous times, it is not possible to know how effective it is for the child and their families. The real results of a presentation like this will be presented when a student finishes kindergarten. More parent feedback is also needed to analyze the effectiveness of the presentation.

Future Projects

Going forward it is my hope to continue to working with my school and district in the area of literacy. Being the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Coordinator has, and will, continue to give me opportunities to help lead and organize professional development in my building. The AVID curriculum focuses on writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR). Much of the professional development in our district is coming from AVID's WICOR strategies, especially in the area of literacy.

Using my project, I am hoping to present this work to our Teaching and Learning staff in the district to see if it is something we could offer to parents in our district either in person, as the project was intended, or ask if it could be uploaded to our district website. With many of our families speaking another language besides English at home, I would like to have the presentation translated into Spanish and Arabic. I would like to see the English Language Learner families have support when their child is young. Hopefully a resource, such as my presentation, to get families involved would be a springboard to retain students in the district and increase parent involvement throughout their child's schooling. I see this emergent literacy presentation and the professional development as another stepping stone in my education career.

My next goal upon completion of this program is to complete an Education Administration program. It is my hope as a future administrator to have literacy be at the

forefront of everything we do. I would like to see departments within the school work collaboratively to improve the reading and writing of students in the building. In addition, I would like to see collaboration between primary and secondary schools around the area of literacy. My past experiences, in a variety of districts, have lacked collaboration between primary and secondary teachers. This disconnect creates repetition in curriculum, missing pieces in the scope and sequence of a child's learning, and at times, animosity between buildings. When a district works together to create a cohesive plan, around the area of literacy, as well as other subjects; it is my belief that it is then that we provide the best education possible for a student. If students read and write better, in all content areas, the more opportunities you create for the student in the future.

Conclusion

Overall, this research and project has shed some light on how important the early years in a child's life can affect their future learning opportunities. If a child does not have a strong foundation to build from, it could possibly hurt them over time. I am excited I have been able to provide a strong start for my own daughter in the area of literacy. Watching her love for reading and writing grow, gives me promise for what the future holds for her during her educational journey. This entire process has made me a better educator, and most importantly, has made me a better parent.

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