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A Parent Focused Bilingual Literacy Program

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A Parent-Focused Bilingual Family Literacy Program

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION..... 3

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW..... 9

 Bilingual Literacy..... 10

 Parent Focused Literacy..... 14

 Family Literacy..... 18

 Literacy Needs of Bilingual Families.....20

 Existing Family Literacy Programs and Suggested Strategies..... 21

CHAPTER 3 PROJECT DESCRIPTION..... 29

 Project Overview..... 29

 Setting and Audience..... 29

 Project Description..... 31

 Framework..... 33

 Timeline..... 37

 Summary..... 39

CHAPTER 4 Conclusion..... 40

 Relevant Research and Important Learnings..... 41

 Limitations and Improvements..... 44

 Future Research or Projects..... 46

 Benefits and Next Steps..... 47

 Summary..... 49

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

As a young nineteen-year-old, I spent a year and a half in Mexico as a missionary for my church. During my time in Mexico, I grew to love the language, the culture, and especially the people. Since my time there, helping the Spanish-speaking community access the resources they need has been a passion of mine. In particular, I am very interested in supporting parents who are raising their children in a bilingual home. Over the years, I have worked as an ESL paraprofessional and volunteer translator in the local public school and as an instructor in English language acquisition for adults. This chapter serves as an introduction to my capstone project. In this chapter, I will discuss my experiences entering into the world of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and how those experiences led me to my guiding question: *how do I create a family literacy program that will help bilingual parents bridge communication between them and their children while providing parents with the resources they need to foster an environment of bilingual literacy in the home?*

While working as an ESL paraprofessional in an intermediate and junior high school, I faced the challenge of helping students in a very short window of twenty to thirty minutes. However, for the last hour of the day, I worked with a group of sixth-grade students, all from Spanish-speaking homes. I would help them with their homework, go over vocabulary, and listen to their 6th-grade woes. My students would often ask if I could teach an English class for parents. They would tell me how their parents would try to learn English through videos online and that the kids would laugh and tease their

parents about being so “bad” at speaking English. Although my students often joked about their parent’s ability to speak English, I could see that they struggled to find their identity. They were Spanish-speaking students in a monolingual English-speaking school who wanted to fit in with their peers while simultaneously wanting to keep their identities as children in an all-Spanish-speaking home. When I first met them, most students told me that they did not know how to speak Spanish until I started speaking it. However, once they realized that I enjoyed speaking Spanish, they started using it more freely.

This struggle to find their place was particularly apparent when our school announced the beginning of its annual family reading program. Each family who wanted to participate would be given the assigned book at a party to mark the beginning of the program. After that, the families would join in once-a-month meetings to do activities and discuss the assigned chapters. The entire program culminated in a final event with a party, a book signing, and a reading by the author. It sounded like a great program, and I could see its benefits; however, my students walked into the classroom deflated the first week of the program. They expressed their dismay that they could not participate in the family reading program because their parents couldn’t speak, read, or understand English. The students asked me to read the book to them during our class time, but we could not keep up with the program due to the time constraints of the class. As a result, the students were left unable to participate with the other students.

It was not the first time I had encountered stories like those of my students, and I knew it would not be the last. As a volunteer Spanish translator for a local school district, I was able to get a glimpse into the lives of parents raising bilingual children. While I was helping parents and their children participate in parent-teacher conferences, I started to

realize how truly disconnected non-English speaking parents can feel from their children's education. Because of the language barrier, parents were hesitant to talk to teachers and participate in activities. As a result, they were missing out on a large part of their children's lives. One mother, in particular, expressed her relief at having a translator for parent-teacher conferences. She said that she had refused to come to the conferences in the past because she knew that she wouldn't understand, and she didn't trust her kids to tell the truth about their grades when translating for her. She told me how sometimes her kids would be fighting in English and when she asked them what was going on, they would just reply, "nothing, mom." Although her children could understand and respond in Spanish, they would move on from the conversation, and she would be left wondering. It was evident that the struggle to find the balance of a bilingual family in an English-speaking world was not unique to the children.

While I was working, I was also finishing my undergraduate degree, including a minor in TESOL. While I was sitting in my introduction to TESOL class, I started to think of a solution for my students who wanted to participate in the school's reading program. It seemed only logical that ESL students should have the opportunity to participate in a reading program like monolingual English-speaking families. I quickly jotted down notes about what I thought a more inclusive program should look like, but I did not have much knowledge or research to support my ideas. Eventually, the class ended, and the idea lay dormant in my notebook until my last semester of school. Later, in an educational diversity class, we were asked to develop a program that would benefit students of minorities. Once again, the idea for a bilingual literacy program resurfaced; however, I never thought I would have the opportunity to create it. However, as I began

the MA TESOL program at Hamline and needed to pick a capstone project, the possibility of creating such a program became more of a reality.

Project Overview

Throughout my time at Hamline, I have realized that there is no silver bullet for language learning. Researchers will most likely be investigating and developing new theories surrounding language acquisition for years to come. While theories and methods surrounding English language teaching are continually evolving, the goal is almost always the same: help students acquire the English they need to be successful in their communication at work and the community. Adult ESL programs are often focused on work and community but leave family communication out of the curriculum. Inclusion of the first language (L1) in adult-focused curricula can help improve the language acquisition of the second language (L2) and improve the overall literacy of the learners. While many family literacy programs are being created or researched to improve child literacy in the home, and some bilingual family literacy programs have been created, few focus on the adults in the home.

This topic is addressed more in the literature review in Chapter Two, but it is important to note that participating in literacy programs can help increase the self-efficacy of adult student participants and foster community involvement (Stromquist 2008). This is one reason why I believe a bilingual family literacy program would help parents overcome those moments of isolation discussed by the mother at parent-teacher conferences. Ideally, the program created for this project will help parents gain more confidence in navigating community resources and improving communication with their children. I intentionally created this program to be parent-focused because I believe it is

essential that parents recognize and feel the importance of their role in their children's literacy. As a white person, I cannot fully understand all of the needs of the Latinx community or those of other non-English speaking communities. Through my research, I hope to identify those needs and create a program that the parents need to help their families.

I witnessed then, and continually witness now, the balancing act my students are constantly engrossed in with their identity as bilinguals. While this program is adult-focused, it will also be designed with the family in mind to help create an environment of bilingualism. The program will include time for bilingual families to meet together and share experiences. In addition, each unit will include a bilingual book that will help the families begin creating their personal bilingual library. Engaging with both languages through literacy could help families make space for conversations about being bilingual in a monolingual English world. I hope that this program will encourage parents to share their life experiences with their children. In addition, encouraging bilingual practices in the home is the first step in changing the societal ideals of eliminating traces of the L1. It will instead motivate the conservation of the L1 at home and eventually in society.

Although other researchers have created family literacy programs, more work needs to be done regarding parent-focused bilingual literacy programs. Doing so would benefit the parents and the stakeholders sponsoring the program and the community programs hosting it. Chapter Two of this project will discuss some research surrounding bilingualism in children, the experiences of bilingual children in public schools, the needs of Latino families participating in school programs and existing literacy programs, and

suggested strategies for creating a literacy program. Chapter three will describe this bilingual literacy program and the frameworks and theories supporting its creation. The fourth and final chapter will reflect on the process, success, and setbacks of creating a bilingual family literacy program and the new insights I gained from this research.

Conclusion

My idea for a bilingual literacy program began several years ago when I worked in a public school with ESL students. I soon realized that my students' parents were left out of the equation when it came to their children's education. The children and their families were navigating a monolingual English world as bilingual people without support. A bilingual family literacy program would provide parents with the resources to encourage bilingualism in their homes and start a conversation about bilingual inclusion in the schools and community. As will be discussed in chapter two of this project, monolingual English education is highly perpetuated throughout the educational system. Public schools are participating in subtractive bilingualism instead of supporting the conservation of the L1. I will create this project with adult bilinguals and their families in mind. Chapter Two will outline the research that will support me in the creation of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will discuss some of the literature surrounding bilingual literacy, family literacy programs, and the importance of parent-focused bilingual family literacy programs. This literature review addresses the guiding question of *how do I create a family literacy program that will help bilingual parents bridge communication between them and their children while providing parents with the resources they need to foster an environment of bilingual literacy in the home?* The research in this chapter will guide the creation of a parent-focused bilingual family literacy program.

Bilingual Literacy

While encouraging English-only literacy can help increase overall family literacy, bilingual literacy education should also be a priority. Atkins (2014) stipulates that ESL programs should foster language acquisition and create an environment that allows students to explore and understand their identity as English language learners. Programs cannot champion efforts for more inclusive education with one hand while limiting a parent's ability to use their L1 with the other effectively. Educators must incorporate bilingual literacy into their curriculum to support students in knowing that their L1 is just as important as their L2. Allowing children to speak their first language in the classroom is not enough; educators need to provide the adults in the home with the resources necessary for fostering an environment of bilingual literacy in the home. This section will discuss the basics of bilingual literacy, the problems arising from

English-only instruction, and why bilingual literacy should be encouraged by educators and families.

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages. In today's world, the amount of bilingual families is ever-increasing, leaving teachers and schools struggling to adapt and provide the resources students need. Students struggle to align the language they learn at school with the language(s) they hear and use at home (Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003). While over fifty percent of the world is made up of bilingual speakers, it is less likely that the same fifty percent are biliterate, able to read and write in both languages (Ho, 2019). There is a common misconception that allowing bilingualism in the home or school will cause confusion and slow linguistic development, leading educators and parents to avoid bilingual literacy practices (Nicoladis & Montanari, 2016; Ho, 2019). Consequently, parents do not teach their children to read and write in the L1 at home, and educators inadvertently create a space that squelches bilingual literacy development. However, research is continually proving that bilingualism does not cause linguistic or developmental delays and that children can effectively switch between languages per the language of the person speaking to them. Bilingual children are able to recognize when the language they are speaking is not being understood without explicit instruction from the listener. This indicates that children can easily handle the mental load of being bilingual (Nicoladis & Montanari, 2016). Allowing students to use their L1 in the classroom, even in the language classroom, can be beneficial for second language acquisition (*Hornberger & McKay 2010*). The L1 can and should be seen as a valuable asset when creating educational programs.

Shamash (1990, as cited in Hornberger & McKay, 2010) studied how students, with support, were allowed to translate works done in the L1 into English. The study found that allowing students to use their L1 not only provides a way for students to explore and affirm their identities as second language learners it “ validates the learner’s lived experience, provides the learners with opportunities to experiment and take risks with English, and constitutes a natural language confidence” (p.131). This is especially important because participation in literacy programs can be significantly affected by the program’s and teachers’ attitudes towards students and their culture. Allowing students to use and embrace their first language in the classroom creates an open space where students can explore their identity and second language without judgment.

Ho (2019) argues that most research done on bilingualism is performed by English dominant cultures in which the education system often focuses on English-only instruction. Educational systems see the bilingual status of a student and assume that the student will have low socioeconomic status (SES), qualifying that student as “at-risk,” meaning that they will fall into what the school calls a “school readiness gap” (Ho,2019, p.4). The school readiness gap signifies to the teacher that these students will most likely not have the skills to succeed independently. Ho believes that because these two factors are not being separated, it is difficult for educators to see that bilingualism is not an instant ticket to falling into the gap (2019). This misconception compacted by an English-dominant society leads to English-only instruction and reading and language strategies that are ineffective for bilingual speakers (Murillo,2012). Teachers and perhaps family members might encourage students to only speak English in an attempt to help them assimilate better into society; however, by doing this, they are participating in what

Goldstein (2003) refers to as subtractive schooling. In subtractive schooling, the English dominant culture “subtracts” the culture of the student’s L1 leading the students to resist fully investing themselves into their education and the resources available to them both socially and culturally.

Hopewell and Butvilofsky (2016) claim that current education systems subscribe to the idea of “language as a resource,” meaning that the first language is only a tool to further English language acquisition. Educators should be aiming to conserve home languages instead of pushing students towards the sole use of English. The study also claims that bilingual programs are not appropriately recognized for fostering bi-literacy because the students participating in bilingual education programs are tested the same as and compared to monolingual English education programs. Hopewell and Butvilofsky (2016) believe that bilingual education is still seen as a tool to increase English proficiency instead of conserving and promoting biliteracy. The study showed that students participating in bilingual education programs had equal writing abilities in their home language (Spanish) and English. The study suggests that students should be tested for their literacy in both languages instead of just English. Doing so would further foster first language conservation and bring awareness to the benefits of bilingual education and increased focus on preserving the home language.

Preserving the home language would not only benefit the students academically but emotionally as well. According to Atkins, “meaningful participation evolves from people’s aspirations to be part of, develop and negotiate their sense of identity within learning communities” (p 7). In essence, participation is more than the mere act of raising one’s hand in class or coming to a community event. When students participate, they

search to be a part of something bigger than themselves while simultaneously exploring their identities within that community. Unfortunately, not every student or family feels comfortable enough to engage with the educational system. When discussing the “borderlands” of Texas and Mexico, Murillo (2012) argues that parents of immigrant children are not often made to feel welcome within the educational system even though there is a high Spanish-speaking population in the community. Students often feel ashamed or embarrassed about their ability to speak Spanish, and teachers ignore parents. Murillo claims that funding meant to help students who speak another language is not invested in bilingual education but monolingual English education. For this reason, Murillo believes that bilingualism is frowned upon until higher education when it is demanded for college entrance. It seems paradoxical for educators to expect bilingual families to support and embrace the educational system when they are alienated from participating in it.

Parent Focused Literacy

Many programs throughout the United States currently teach Adult Basic Education (ABE) or English as a Second Language (ESL). These programs have a wide range of settings, including workplace education programs, community college programs, and adult schools. The funding for these programs comes from various sources, such as federal, state, and local or private grants (Guth, 1993). These programs try to reach the diversified needs of their students and allow the students a place to grow confidence in their academic abilities. However, there is an ongoing struggle for these programs to maintain and boost their enrollment numbers (Brod, 1995). Therefore, the enrollment in these programs fluctuates greatly depending on the personal circumstance of the students,

the funding for the programs, and the relationships between students and teachers. The existing programs may focus primarily on English language acquisition for ESL students or GED (General Educational Development) certification. While these programs provide a great starting point for ABE and ESL students, there is still much to do regarding adult bilingual literacy education.

Programs focused on adult education and literacy benefit the adults in the home and those around them. Children are more likely to prioritize education when they see that their parents have opportunities and desire to further their own education. Hammer, Miccio, and Wagstaff (2003) claim that adults given access to reading and literacy programs are more likely to encourage education in the home. Additionally, Swain, Jon, Brooks, & Bosley (2014) found that one of the main reasons parents enroll in family literacy programs is to learn how to support their children in their education better. By actively reading and participating in literacy programs, the adults signal to others in the home that academic achievement is valued (Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003). While there is a proven correlation between parent and child literacy practices, there are many misconceptions about parents of ESL students and their ability to be involved in their child's education.

Some educators may assume that because the parents or adults in the home do not speak English, they cannot actively contribute to their child's education. On the contrary, Murillo (2012) argues that parents can still add value to their child's education through their knowledge of other skills they have acquired through their employment in factories, restaurants, and fields of trade. Brod (1995) states that most adults enroll in ESL programs not only because they want to improve their skills but also to have the ability to

help their children with their homework. Parents and adults in the home want to feel like they can contribute to their home life and the education of the younger generation. However, this cannot happen if programs are not created to help adults fill that role. Chudgar (2009) studied adult literacy practices in India and how they impacted home and village literacy. The study found that the rate of child enrollment in school increases with adult or parent literacy. Some might assume that these results simply indicate that homes with literate adults, in turn, have adults with higher education which results in an emphasis on education in the home. However, Chudgar found that adults did not need to acquire higher education in order for literacy practices to have an impact. Even homes where the adults had not obtained higher education but were literate had increased numbers of children enrolled in school. The study found that, in Western India, homes such as these were fifteen percent more likely to have children who enrolled in school (Chudgar, 2009 p. 421). Adult literacy practices benefit not only the children in the home but the community as well.

While the benefits to the children of the home are innumerable, adult literacy is also essential for the adult's personal development. Swain, Jon, Brooks, & Bosley (2014) assert that family literacy programs' benefits on parents are not nuanced but are usually overlooked by policymakers, thus leaving the topic neglected by researchers. Wall (2017) claims that literacy in the L1 helps to foster autonomy and independence. Research shows that adults who participate in literacy or Adult Basic Ed (ABE) programs have increased community involvement and political awareness (Stromquist, 2008)). Helping adults develop their literacy skills allows them to be aware of political rulings, election information, and in some cases, changes the student's attitude surrounding politics

(Stromquist,2008). By fostering adult literacy, educators are helping to create a generation of people that can be a voice for themselves and others. A study done in Nepal found significant benefits of literacy in adults, especially for women. According to Stormquist (2008), “women literates... participated more in community groups and were more aware of domestic violence and girls' experiences with trafficking”(p. 92). The study also indicates that as literacy increased, the women’s community and political awareness rose with it. Helping adults foster their literacy skills has long-term benefits that continue permeating throughout the family even after the literacy programs have ended.

Swain, Jon, Brooks, & Bosley (2014) found that out of ninety-four participants in their study, eighty-nine reported benefits from the literacy program they participated in and that the benefits continued even after the program was over. They also found that the benefits fit into four areas that were also in line with the students’ motivations: “...improvements in parents’ own literacy, personal changes in confidence and self-esteem (including changes in their sense of identity), and a better awareness of how to support their children”(p. 85). After participating in this program, parents also reported being more confident in their reading abilities and their ability to communicate with others, even teachers. Fifty percent of the participants who answered the survey reported continuing their education after participating in the program. This study concludes that more emphasis should be on the benefits family literacy programs have on the parents. However, it stipulates that the focus should be on giving adults the tools to implement literacy practices in the home, not just at school. This should indicate to the

educational community that our time and resources should be spent on increasing parental involvement.

Likewise, Chao and Mantero (2014) found that parents participating in adult literacy programs could develop a stronger sense of self and confidence in their English speaking abilities. By participating in this program, adults did not rely as much on their children to do adult-type tasks such as paying bills, asking questions at the doctor's office, or ordering food at restaurants. Instead, parents found freedom in not being dependent on their children for communication with the outside world. The study also found that parents showed improved participation in their child's schooling because they felt more comfortable speaking with the teachers. In addition, parents engaged more in-home literacy practices with their children and found support in sharing their culture with other participants in the programs. The results also showed that parents placed more value on their L1 in the home when previously they had tried to avoid teaching it to their children because the parents wanted the children to be more "American." By emphasizing parent literacy, educators will see that family literacy will increase along with a better sense of confidence and community amongst the families. The following section will discuss the importance of family literacy and how family literacy programs can impact the educational goals of adults and children.

Family Literacy

Public education systems do what they can to foster the literacy of the children they teach, but what happens when those children go home? Although they might be receiving literacy instruction at school, it is unlikely to continue at home, especially when

their parents have little to no formal education. Family literacy programs help to bridge the gap between school instruction and home life.

According to Ho (2019), home literacy *practices* are the actions that parents put into place in the home to foster literacy, while home literacy *expectations* are what the parents think should happen in terms of their child's literacy. Home literacy practices and home literacy expectations do not always go hand in hand. Ho also argues that much of the research on home literacy practices is done on middle-class, English-speaking, monolingual homes. Therefore, there is not sufficient attention given to bilingual or multilingual home literacy practices. Ho stipulates that while every home might not have English literacy practices, that does not mean that literacy practices are not happening in other languages. Therefore, assumptions should not be made that lack of traditional "school type" literacy practices equates to lack of home literacy altogether.

Other research has shown that participation is mainly dependent on the influence of family members when it comes to literacy programs. Terry (2007) found that family members largely influence student participation in adult literacy programs. The study showed that not only is parental involvement essential, but grandparents, children, and siblings also play an essential role in a student's success. Adults who have dropped out of school often attempt furthering or completing their education to encourage their children to do the same resulting in lasting effects on the perception of schooling in the home. The study results indicated that the financial responsibility adults in the home feel is a motivating factor in furthering their education. The study also found that parents and grandparents were usually the instigators in other family members enrolling in literacy

programs by seeking information about literacy programs. Consequently, family is a major driving force for students to enroll in and continue with their education.

Wilkins and Terlitsky (2015) assert that implementing a family literacy program will help develop teacher-parent relationships and ultimately improve the child's performance in school. By giving the parents the tools they need to help children develop their literacy skills, teachers are fostering a cycle that continues to reap benefits for the children (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2015). Wilkins and Terlitsky continue on to say that family literacy programs that involve the caregivers of the home have lasting effects on a child's success. They also claim that programs such as these can improve student behavior, especially with students who have special needs. Another study found that the academic and behavioral improvement of the child, which resulted from parental participation in the family literacy activities, lead to greater feelings of self-efficacy in the parents (Wilkins & Terlitsky 2014 as cited in Wilkins & Terlitsky 2015). The article identifies a cyclical pattern that yields four specific benefits: capabilities, confidence, connections, and cognition. This framework outlined by Wilkins and Terlitsky improves parental involvement with their child's literacy activity at home which in turn allows teachers to more fully engage with the family. When parents frequently engage with the teacher and understand their child's academic and behavior goals, they are able to implement the strategies being taught in the family literacy program and see the benefits. Once the parents see the improvements in their child's behavioral and academic goals, they feel more confident and capable, thus creating a cycle. Active parental participation not only helps the child improve but is a benefit for programs as a whole. Zhang, Pelletier, & Doyle (2010) also found that teacher-student relationships were important for the

retention of participants. Positive results were found in both parental knowledge and child literacy skills. Studies like these suggest that families overall benefit from participation in literacy programs.

Literacy Needs of Bilingual Families

It is important to note that while researchers may speculate about the needs of bilingual families, there is no better information source concerning the families' true needs than the parents themselves. When implementing a literacy program retention should be one of the main concerns of the program lead. Janes and Kermani (2001) found that parents were resistant to participate in literacy programs because of their personal relationship with reading. Parents were forced to read books in school and, as such, associated the act of reading with a punishment. The study also found that literacy programs often made parents feel inferior because they didn't have the schooling necessary to implement the activities that school programs were asking for. In addition, Janes and Kermani (2001) emphasize that many cultures do not have commercial storybooks in their homes and do not see reading bedtime stories as a traditional practice. The well-intentioned literacy programs provided by the local schools leave parents feeling burned by an alienating culture imposed on them, resulting in apathetic participation from parents who feel that the assigned activities are just another chore. However, when parents were given the opportunity to write their own stories, the overall engagement of the parents changed drastically. Parents were enthusiastic while reading the books, interacting with the children, and showed enjoyment while participating in the activity (Janes & Kermani, 2001). Through writing and presenting their own books to the

children, parents became active participants in their children's literacy development while utilizing language and subject matter with which they were comfortable.

Coady et al.(2015) conducted interviews with Latino parents in rural communities and with the educators responsible for teaching their children. The study revealed that parents felt disconnected from their children's school because they had no way to communicate with them. Parents didn't know that they had access to translators and bilingual materials (pamphlets, handouts, flyers, etc.) weren't provided. Of the eighty-five teachers who were interviewed, roughly half had undergone professional development explicitly targeted for the needs of ESL students (Coady et al., 2015, p.16). However, when asked questions about professional development opportunities that interested them, only 2.8% of the teachers wanted more instruction on creating an inclusive classroom environment, while 3.3% wanted to know how to provide assessment accommodations (Coady et al., 2015, p.17). In order to improve parental involvement in our educational programs, it would be prudent to foster relationships with the families of bilingual students and offer help in areas that concern them instead of placing our priorities on assessment. When these relationships are established, it might be possible to address concerns such as assessment and instruction.

Existing Family Literacy Programs and Suggested Strategies

_____ This section will discuss types of family literacy programs and their importance in helping build family relationships, and their impact on the family's perception of education. There is no silver bullet for family literacy programs. The world is full of diverse communities with a variety of literacy needs. Although no one program is perfect, other programs' information and success can be a springboard for future literacy

programs. Currently, there are programs such as *El Dia de los Libros* published by the American Library Association (Larson 2011). This program is meant to encourage reading, cultural awareness, and bilingualism throughout the community. The program is designed to be flexible in its application to meet the needs of various types of community settings. According to Larson, “Dia’s mission is to link all children to books, languages, and cultures through a vision of family literacy” (2011,p. 4). Larson achieves this mission by setting forth a curriculum that celebrates home languages through festivals, tailgate parties, and outdoor celebrations. Each community tailors the Dia program to their specific setting with the same goals of encouraging family literacy and bilingual literacy practices.

Another unique program is *The Family Literacy Project* which strives to bridge the gap between parents, children, and the school. In this project teachers from various schools who were working with English language learners (ELLs) implemented this program. The parents were asked to tell their children stories about their heritage or culture, and the children would illustrate the story. The ending result was a bilingual picture book created together by the parents and their children. The hope of this program was to help students connect with the cultural and familial roots that they have been disconnected from due to immigration, wars, and other factors (Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016). To create the book, teachers spent time with students going over examples of family heritage stories with clear explanations so that families could better understand what was expected. In addition, parents were able to send written stories or oral recordings of the stories if they couldn’t write them down. In the end, the teachers were

able to build relationships with the parents of the ELLs and were actively engaged in bilingual literacy development.

Similarly, Chao and Mantero (2014) conducted a study that evaluated the benefits of a church-based family literacy program. The literacy program in the study was targeted at immigrant families and implemented through local church ministries. The programs were “non-profit adult ESL programs... built on an informal curriculum with a focus on English skills and American culture” (p.96). One of the programs was conducted through a Baptist church with participants who had lived in the United States for an average of 7.6 years and had a large Asian student population. The other program was through another Christian church and consisted of a largely Hispanic student population living in the U.S. for an average of five years. Classes were offered once a week for two hours in the evening, and the ministry provided child care. The programs were immersive English classes with only English spoken in the classroom, and a traditional ESL textbook of the church’s choosing was used for instruction. Thus, it is clear that literacy programs can exist in many different contexts, each with benefits to the students and their families.

In addition to already existing programs, there are some suggested strategies that may be helpful for bridging the gap between home and school. Wilkins and Terlitsky (2015) suggest that teachers keep an open flow of communication with the parents. Examples include teachers sending home frequent and clearly written notes attached to student homework where parents can mark whether or not the child needs more help. Wilkins and Terlitsky also suggest that teachers send home more positive communication and avoid only speaking with parents when their child misbehaves or falls behind. Examples include thank you notes, certificates of achievement, and positive notes about

student progress. By doing this, teachers can create a long-lasting relationship with parents.

Lynch (2009) recommends using print in literacy programs. Lynch asserts that students benefit from authentic literacy materials that are in print form instead of digital. Examples of materials would include books, newspapers, and magazines. In a study done in Pakistan, it was found that men were more likely to encounter written materials in the form of bills, instructions, or political news and women were more likely to use print materials in the form of novels, word searches, and calendars (Zubair, 2001, as cited in Lynch, 2009). Lynch's (2009) study concludes that parents were often unaware that they were engaging in literacy practices when interacting with these print materials. By drawing attention to the fact that parents are performing literacy activities, daily students can recognize their role in fostering literacy in the home. Parents become teachers as they teach their children to read authentic everyday print materials. It also supports the parent's academic progress as they recognize their own literacy practices and how to improve on them. This study was done on non-school literacy practices; however, Lynch believes that these practices would be beneficial if applied in the formal classroom as well.

Another great resource is Colorín Colorado, a bilingual multimedia project to improve bilingual education at home, in schools, and in the community (Colorín Colorado, 2019). Their resources are available on a user-friendly website that provides instruction for teachers, parents, and community leaders. In order to create a successful bilingual literacy program, Colorín Colorado suggests creating a program that identifies the parents' literacy goals for their families as well as encourages and values the use of

the home language. The website also suggests avoiding creating a rigid school-like structure in the program and instead focusing on creating home literacy practices by using authentic materials that students might encounter every day (Colorín Colorado, 2019). In addition to creating a home-centered relationship with literacy, Colorín Colorado also emphasizes the importance of creating a sense of community amongst the participating families and helping to dispel some of the isolation bilingual families often feel from the educational system. This along with a measurable way to assess the program and its success, is a great way to maintain retention and build a successful program according to the website.

Quintero and Huerta-Macias (1990) implemented a family literacy program for Latino families called Project FIEL. The curriculum for this project was built with the family in mind, but instead of being a take-home literacy program, it was implemented in a classroom with parents and children together. Shanahan and Mulhern claim that literacy is best learned when parents and children are working together and helping one another learn (1995). The families meet together once a week for twelve weeks to participate in a variety of projects. Project FIEL embraces bilingualism and encourages translanguaging in the classroom. The program also emphasizes the family's culture by giving the parents space to share their children orally and in writing their family's traditions. Project FIEL is similar to another literacy program called FLAME which emphasizes the parent's role in helping their children increase their literacy (Shanahan & Mulhern, 1995). While both of these projects had the goal of increasing bilingual literacy and the parent's capacity to help their children in school, each took a different approach, thus reinforcing that there are multiple ways to help bilingual families.

Terry (2007) suggests that educators consider the role that family plays in a student's progress. Students cannot focus on homework or classwork when there are home-related problems to deal with, which should be considered for late-work and attendance policies. Terry also suggests that educators curate activities that include family involvement and allow the teacher to become familiar with each student's home situation. It is also crucial for instructors to become familiar with the resources available to students who may be struggling at home and connect their students with the correct professionals.

Conclusion

Strategies for teaching English in the language classroom have evolved over the years to become more student-focused. While many programs are making efforts to meet the needs of their students, there is still a lot to be done in the area of family literacy programs. There is a significant gap in parent-focused bilingual family literacy programs in particular. This paper reviewed some of the literature surrounding bilingualism, parent or adult literacy, and existing family literacy programs and suggested strategies. The research suggests that bilingualism, although becoming more accepted, does not receive the attention it should in today's educational system. However, research shows no danger in allowing children to speak more than one language (Nicoladis & Montanari, 2016). Bilingualism and the conservation of the home language should be a priority for educators and should be woven into literacy practices.

The ability to access education and to succeed in academic settings have been a critical factor in the growth and prosperity of the United States and has given "...our country undisputed international power and ubiquitous preeminence, based largely on the

successful attainment of educational goals and overall scholastic achievements” (Mar 2008, p. 6). However, Hammer, Miccio, and Wagstaff assert that children who are bilingual, especially those who speak Spanish, are at higher risk for lower literacy levels in the U.S school system (2003). Students in bilingual homes are being set up for socioeconomic failure because they are not provided with the resources necessary to improve their literacy. Mar (2008) claims that English-only instruction and the use of English only language is used as a tactic by the government of the United States to keep minorities from finding solidarity in their mutually spoken languages and to separate them from fully embracing their identities as non-white Americans. Mar stipulates that political parties keep the country’s language focused on Anglo-European English to foster further the feeling that not speaking English means you are not American (2008). In 2007 Former House speaker Newt Gingrich only solidified these sentiments when he said “. . . We should replace bilingual education with immersion in English so people learn the common language of the country and they learn the language of prosperity, not the language of living in a ghetto" (Hunt, 2007, para.3). Whether or not any or all political parties subscribe to the ideals that Gingrich so vehemently preached, the fact remains that English-only instruction has been a long-standing tradition in American school systems and is one that does not fully meet the needs of bilingual students.

The previously outline research explaining the benefits of family literacy programs and highlighting the discrepancies in the educational system will be the foundation upon which I will create my capstone project. The following chapter, Chapter Three, will describe my capstone project in detail and provide a timeline for when the

project was completed. It will also give more insight into my rationale for creating a parent-focused bilingual family literacy program and the frameworks I used.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This chapter will describe my capstone project. This project addresses the question, *how to create a family literacy program that will help bilingual parents bridge communication between them and their children while providing parents with the resources they need to foster an environment of bilingual literacy in the home*. In response to this question, I created a take-home parent-focused bilingual family literacy program. This chapter will provide an overview of the program and its implementation, the audience the program is meant for, and the timeline in which I will accomplish this project.

Project Overview

This project was executed in the form of a take-home curriculum that can be implemented by community programs and libraries. The program was designed with a focus on the parents. The goal was to increase their confidence in their abilities to encourage bilingual literacy within their homes. As described in Chapters One and Two, I chose this project because of the many adult ESL students I have had who struggle to promote bilingualism in their homes with their children. I wanted to help dispel the misconception that speaking the L1 with the children at home will inhibit or delay their English language acquisition (Nicoladis & Montanari, 2016). This program was engineered in such a way that parents will develop their role as leaders in their homes and will, hopefully, be empowered to facilitate bilingual literacy in their homes.

Setting/Audience

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages. Ho (2019) suggests that while over fifty percent of the world is made up of bilingual speakers, it is less likely that the same fifty percent are biliterate, meaning they can read and write in both languages. This project was meant to help parents encourage bilingual reading and writing- in other words- reading and writing in both English and Spanish. Although the parameters for participation in this project can be adjusted in the future to meet a larger variety of families, ethnicities, and ages, this project was geared specifically towards Spanish-speaking families with children from grades k-6. Parents will need to have at least an intermediate level of literacy in their L1 to participate in this program successfully. In the future, it may be possible to expand this program to meet all literacy levels; however, that was not possible in the time frame given to complete this project.

The program was designed to be a community resource that will be implemented through community programs and libraries and was created with my current student population in mind. I teach at a local community college through the College and Career Readiness Center. Our students can range from ages 16 to 70+ and can be native English speakers or ESL students. My students usually are Spanish speakers with beginning to intermediate English skills. The majority of my students want to improve their English for work or to be able to communicate better with their children and grandchildren. I have several students who have high levels of education in their home countries but lack the English skill and system for transferring those degrees to the U.S. I also have students who never finished junior high school and are working on their literacy skills in their L1 as much as they are trying to learn English. I hoped that this literacy program would be implemented in my current workplace and other departments utilize it.

I chose to create this program because I believe that when parents are given the proper resources to foster literacy in the home, the whole family, including the children, benefits (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2015 fig. 1). Giving parents the tools to convey their literacy at home as well as encouraging them to increase their literacy skills has a positive impact on the entire family and the choice of their posterity to enroll in higher education (Chudgar, 2009). In addition, Atkinson (2014) asserts that teachers should give more attention to the new identity that students are navigating as they become bilingual speakers because students are often conflicted about gaining a new language and new culture while maintaining that of their L1. Through this program, I hope that parents will find a space to explore their identity as bilingual speakers and what that means for their family as a whole.

Project Description

This project has been influenced and inspired by the already established program known as *El dia de los Libros*, which is a program that focuses on encouraging a love of literature and an awareness of different cultures and languages (Larson, 2011). *El dia de los libros* was created by the American Library Association to help increase family literacy and help children become familiar with books that reflect the different cultures and languages. *The Family Literacy Project*, which is a school-based program engineered to help bridge the gap between parents, children, and school has also contributed to the creation of this project by demonstrating what a take-home family project can look like (Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016). An online resource called Colorin Colorado also provides resources and instruction on creating a literacy program. All of these resources provide suggestions on activities that can be done for at-home literacy programs. The books for

this project were purchased from Lectura Books which is a website that sells bilingual books in Spanish and English (<https://www.lecturabooks.com/>). I chose these books because of their mission to encourage bilingualism in the home.

The project I created consists of a take-home curriculum to help parents/adults create more bilingual literacy in their homes. The program was designed with families in mind and instruction targeted towards the parents. When participating in the program, parents and children will meet for one and a half hours every two weeks with other participants in the program and an instructor who facilitates the program. The first half-hour of the group meeting will be a joint meeting with the kids and the parents to discuss what has been taught throughout the previous two weeks. Children and parents will be able to share their experiences with the group and review what they have learned. During the subsequent hour, children will split off into their own area to participate in content-related activities. Parents will remain to discuss their experiences and techniques for implementing the take-home packets for the next two weeks. This hour will allow parents to build a community amongst each other while fostering their self-efficacy as leaders in their homes. This program aims to help parents create an environment in their home that values and encourages literacy in both the native (in this case Spanish) and the English language.

The program will run for six months with group meetings twice a month, equalling twelve meetings in total. The curriculum is broken into six themes, one theme for each month. Each theme focuses on authentic experiences the students may have in their homes and communities. The six themes are Home and Family, Time, Library, Health, School, and Shopping. Parents will receive a packet in their meetings which they

will take home and implement with their families over the span of two weeks. The take-home packets have simple and short lessons that parents can do with their children. These activities include a goal for the family to focus on during the two weeks between class meetings. A take-home bilingual book that matches the unit's theme will also be sent home with each family. The books will be for the families to keep as a start to their personal bilingual library. Lynch (2009) suggests that using authentic print materials is more beneficial to learners than using digital literacy materials. The study concludes that using print materials with parents helps bring awareness to their own literacy practices and the progress they are making. With time and experience, the use of digital materials may be beneficial and perhaps necessary to include in the program. However, the take-home content of this program will be delivered in paper format only for the time being.

Framework

I followed the backward design model as described by Wiggins and McTighe (2011) to create the objectives and curriculum for each of the units. In addition, I will be relying on Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) for developing future assessments. Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) refer to objectives or learning outcomes as “learning targets.” Therefore, to maintain continuity, I will be using the term “learning target” to refer to the lesson and unit objective for the remainder of this project.

The backward design model instructs educators to create units and lesson plans focusing on learning targets instead of activities or coverage of a topic (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). As such, the curriculum for this project began with learning targets first,

followed by the development of activities and take-home packets per the learning targets.

There are three stages of development in the backward design model:

“Stage 1 What should students learn as a result of this unit (short term and long term)?

Stage 2 What assessment evidence will show the Stage 1 goals?

Stage 3 What key learning events will help students reach the goals and be successful on assessments?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p.43).

These stages were used as guiding posts for creating the overarching learning targets of the programs and the learning targets, activities, and assessments for each individual theme.

As previously stated, this is a community program aimed to help bilingual parents increase bilingual literacy in the home. Because this curriculum will not be executed in a formal school setting, no state standards govern it. However, in the future, I will use the framework outlined by Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) to create the assessments. The learning targets engineered in stage one will be categorized into the five learning target categories as proposed by Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) to create assessments that accurately reflect student learning. The purpose of these categories is to help instructors align their assessments with the different types of learning happening in the classroom. By doing this, learning targets will be developed with more clarity and assessments will more accurately reflect student learning. The learning target categories are “knowledge targets, reasoning targets, performance skill targets, product targets, and disposition targets” (Chappuis & Stiggins 2020, p. 52). The learning targets were created in Stage One, categorized in Stage Two, and will then be used for designing the program in Stage

Three of the backward design model. The assessments for each unit will be created according to the five keys of classroom assessment discussed in the following section.

Assessment

Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) claim that there are five keys to classroom assessment quality that help teachers create effective assessments (p.11). I will be using these five keys to create the assessments for this program. Although this method is meant for classroom teachers, I believe that the principles are applicable to the design of this program because of the clarity and efficiency it provides in creating assessments. By using the strategies outlined in Chappuis and Stiggins (2020), the assessments will more accurately reflect the effectiveness of the activities and the teaching. The five keys to classroom assessment quality are “*Key 1: Clear Purpose, Key 2: Clear Targets, Key 3: Sound Design, Key 4: Formative Usefulness, Key 5: Effective Communication*” (Chappuis & Stiggins 2020, p.23, fig 2.1). Keys one and two will be addressed in the following section.

Key 1

“Clear Purpose. Who will use the information? How will they use it ? Therefore what type of information is required?” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020, p.11).

The information of the assessments in this program will be used by the instructor and may be used by the community program or library sponsoring the implementation of the program. The instructor will use the information from formative assessments to gauge student progress and to identify any misunderstandings or areas that need more attention. Summative assessment will be used by the instructor to evaluate the overall effectiveness of instruction and to identify any gaps that may have been overlooked in the development

of the project. The entities sponsoring the implementation of the program may use summative assessments to gauge the overall effectiveness of the program and to determine whether or not the program should be repeated.

Key 2

“Clear Targets. Are learning targets clear to teachers? What kinds of achievements are to be assessed? Are these learning targets the focus of instruction?”

Key Two was used mostly in the development of Stage 1 (what should students learn as a result of this unit?) However, the work done using Key Two will also influence the subsequent stages because of the direct correlation between learning targets and assessment.

Summative Assessment

At the beginning of the program, parents will be given a survey that will ask questions about their literacy practices at home. Questions such as “how do you share stories in your home?” “Do you share stories by reading? If so, what kinds of books do you read?” “When you share stories are they in Spanish, English, or another language?” will be included in the survey. At the end of the course, students will be given the same survey with additional questions about participation in the program in order to determine if there is a correlation between participation in the program and increased home literacy practices. More options for summative assessment may be found necessary during the creation and implementation of this program.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment will be conducted in the bi-monthly meetings that families will participate in. The assessment type should be in accordance with the category of the

learning target as previously discussed. The curriculum will include learning targets and corresponding assessments which will correspond with the categories provided by Chappuis and Stiggins in order to ensure that the assessments truly align with the learning targets. Doing so follows the principles of Key 3 of creating quality assessments.

Key 3

“Sound Design. Do assessment methods match learning targets? Are items, exercises tasks, and scoring rubrics of high quality? Does the sample represent learning appropriately? Does the assessment control for bias? Do teachers know how to create assessments for formative use?” (Chappuis&Stiggins 2020, p. 23)

During the parent-only portion of the bi-monthly meeting, the instructor will be able to conduct verbal formative assessments as the parents share their successes as well as their struggles. The instructor will also conduct a mid-semester survey to give students an opportunity to voice any of their concerns or suggestions about how the program is going. This survey will also assess how much the parents are actually implementing the program at home. During the course of the program, parents will be given a scale of one to five to rate their participation in the program at home in order to evaluate the level of ongoing participation. Further formative assessment may be created by the instructor as the need arises.

Key 4

“Formative Usefulness. Do formative assessment results guide the next instructional steps? Do students receive and act on feedback? Do students offer accurate feedback to peers? Are students engaged in accurate self-assessment and productive goal setting?” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020, p.23).

Key 5

“Effective communication. Is formative assessment information tracked as needed? Are students engaged in tracking, reflecting upon, and sharing learning progress? Is summative assessment information recorded according to the learning represented? Is summative information combined and summarized appropriately to reflect the current level of achievement?” (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2020,p.23).

Keys four and five will be addressed after the development and implementation of the program because they ask questions about the overall effectiveness of the assessments which will be unknown until after the program has been implemented.

Timeline

The completed program would have a total of six full units that will span six months. However, due to the magnitude of this project, the development process will be broken into six phases. The first phase was completed as the artifact for my capstone project. The other five phases will be completed depending on my future resources and as time allows.

Phase 1

Phase one was completed in the summer semester of 2021. I used the three stages of the backward design model as previously discussed. Theme 1, Home and Family, was completed in phase 1. The implementation of this phase occurred in July 2021.

“**Stage 1** What should students learn as a result of this unit (short term and long term)?”(Wiggins & McTighe,201, p. 43).

In this stage, I will develop the learning targets for the entire unit and created learning targets for each two-week learning packet. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) advocate

creating not only short-term but long-term learning targets which demonstrate the true intention of the unit. The learning targets should answer questions like “why am I teaching this?” and “what is the real-world application?” This stage was completed within three days.

“**Stage 2** What assessment evidence will show the Stage 1 goals?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 48)

In Stage Two I categorized the previously created learning targets into the five categories of learning targets described by Chappuis and Stiggins (2020) as previously discussed in this paper under the section titled *Framework*. Assessments will then be made according to the categories they are placed in at a later date.

“**Stage 3** What key learning events will help students reach the goals and be successful

on assessments?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 52)

According to Wiggins and McTighe (2011), after determining the learning targets and the desired outcomes of the learning activities, the learning activities themselves should develop easily. This framework emphasizes that students should be able to show that they can perform the learning tasks independently and transfer their knowledge to new information. Keeping this in developed learning activities that will meet the desired outcomes as well as help the students obtain transferable skills for the future. The take-home packets took a month to create.

Summary

This chapter describes the bilingual family literacy program that I created as my capstone project. This project was created in response to the guiding question of *how to*

create a family literacy program that will help bilingual parents bridge the communication barriers between them and their children while providing parents the resources they need to foster an environment of bilingual literacy in the home. This chapter discussed the overview of the program and its implementation and the timeline in which it would be accomplished.

This family literacy program was created with the intent to help parents increase their confidence in being able to encourage bilingual literacy at home. Parents should be given the tools they need by the educational system to help their families navigate and support their identity as bilingual speakers. This program is also meant to help create a space that parents can use to bridge the communication gap they may feel as their children are learning English at school while parents themselves are primarily, and perhaps exclusively, using their L1 at home. Because of the short timeline in which this program was created, it will not be able to accommodate all literacy levels, languages, and ages of children. This program is engineered with parents or adults who speak Spanish and have at least an intermediate level of literacy, with children in the home who are in grades k-6. The following chapter, Chapter Four, will discuss the outcomes and reflect on the creation of Phase One of this project and address future changes that may need to be made.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The previous three chapters were written over the course of a year of searching for the answer to this question: *How do I create a family literacy program that will help bilingual parents bridge communication between them and their children while providing parents with the resources they need to foster an environment of bilingual literacy in the home?* This question was born out of my past experiences as a paraprofessional and my more recent experiences as a teacher. I realized that needs were not being met by interacting with my students and listening to their conversations about their families navigating bilingualism in a new country. I had wanted to develop a program that would help families promote bilingual literacy in the home for quite some time, but I did not have the resources or knowledge to create such a program. Over the past two years, I have been fortunate enough to study at Hamline University to receive my MA TESOL degree, which has allowed me to delve deeper into the research about bilingual literacy programs and how to create one. As a result, I chose to develop the first phase of a parent-focused bilingual literacy program for my capstone project.

The previous three chapters of this capstone consist of an introduction explaining my background and the driving force behind my project, a literature review outlining the pertinent literature I was able to find to fuel my project, and a description of the project and its creation. This, the fourth and final chapter, will conclude my capstone project with a reflection of what I have learned throughout this process, the research that proved to be most influential in the creation of my project, the limitations I encountered, and future

research or projects. This chapter will also address the benefits of this parent-focused bilingual family literacy program and its relation to the educational community.

Relevant research and Important Learnings

While in the drafting process of this capstone, I had the opportunity to meet with an advising professor who gave suggestions and improvements on my work. One of these suggestions was to acknowledge that I was not part of the community that the project was created for. That is, I am not Latina and the program I designed for my capstone was explicitly geared towards Latino bilingual families. This professor reminded me that, as an educational community, we often prescribe solutions for issues that we see in communities that we do not belong to. As a result, we bulldoze over their culture with our well-intentioned attempts to “fix” the problem causing more harm than good.

Alternatively, we should ask the people who are part of the community what *they* need and not what we suppose is best for them. This suggestion prompted me to delve deeper into a different branch of research that I hadn't considered before: What are Latino parents asking for in a family literacy program? My previous research focused primarily on bilingual education, the importance of parental involvement, and existing bilingual literacy programs. While all of these elements were crucial to my project, it was clear that the voices of the families I was aiming to help were absent from my work. Unfortunately, I did not recognize the need for more research into what Latino parents want from a literacy program until it was very late in the construction of my program. However, I was able to read through a large chunk of relevant literature with the research of Janes and Kermani (2001), Quintero and Huerta Macias (1990), and Shanahan and Mulhern (1995) standing out to me the most.

As noted in Chapter Two, Janes and Kermani (2001), pointed out that many Latino families don't like participating in school-sanctioned take-home programs because of their own relationship with reading. Additionally, they often feel disconnected from the texts they are asked to read with their children since it's not what they grew up with. While reading and synthesizing this research, I was pushed to reflect on the types of materials I was selecting for my artifact. I had started with the purpose of helping parents build their confidence in participating in their communities and helping their children embrace bilingualism. It was important to me that the program be created in such a way that the parents would have some control instead of simply listening to the teachers or the school. While the parents were at the forefront of my mind, I hadn't considered that although the program would be engineered for them, they might not even want to participate in it. Janes and Kermani helped me reframe the way I was thinking about the content that would be included in my artifact so that, hopefully, it will be a program in which parents want to participate. I looked for other programs that were successful in obtaining parental participation to model my artifact after.

In my search for successful programs similar to the one I would be creating, I found a Family Initiative for English Literacy (FIEL) implemented by El Paso Community College in Texas (Quintero & Huerta Macias, 1990). Project FIEL had objectives similar to those in my project and gave a detailed description of the *how* and *why* of the program. One of the most notable characteristics of project FIEL was its emphasis on whole language learning and using social interactions to build literacy. In addition, the project was bilingual and encouraged biliteracy among the family participants (Quintero & Huerta Macias, 1990). This research should be noteworthy to

the educational community because of its holistic approach to literacy development. FIEL was designed to help families learn literacy in interactive and engaging ways that come naturally to them. In doing so, parents can have an active role in their child's literacy while also learning how to build a bridge of communication. It is imperative that we learn from programs like FIEL when developing new programs for bilingual families. No program is perfect, but by striving to create programs parents can actively participate in, we will lay the foundation for continued success and progress.

Another noteworthy program was created by Shanahan and Mulhern (1995). Project FLAME helped me understand more about the voice of the parents and the fact that they do want to have a say in their child's education. Shanahan and Mulhern (1995) mention that parents participating in FLAME presented ideas to the instructors about activities they would like to do with the kids, such as crafts. These ideas were redirected because the activities did not align with the academic standards the teachers had set. I believe that parents would make a great resource to develop a literacy program given support and a proper forum for doing so. Parents know what their children need and enjoy, and while they may not be experts in the field of literacy or bilingual education, they are experts on their children. The fact that mediation was needed between the parents and the people implementing the program shows that parents want to have a voice in their children's learning experiences.

One of the key learnings that continually stood out to me during this process was the powerful influence of the choices of the family member's in the home. There was no single study I read that conveyed this message to me, but an overarching theme that underpinned the research I found all of which can be found in Chapter Two of this

capstone. Almost every study discussed the importance of the adults in the home choosing education, literacy, or program involvement and how it impacted results. Additionally, it was made clear to me that creating programs that support the parents will have long-lasting effects which cannot be replaced by any other intervention.

In my time at Hamline University, I learned about the concept of gatekeeper teaching. That is the teaching method when teachers perceive themselves as the keepers of the knowledge who will then “impart” it to their students. I was taught to adjust my way of thinking instead of being a gatekeeper to guide my students in their learning. Through this project, I have come to understand that not only are we gatekeepers in the classroom but we often take on this role with the families of our students. Parents should play an active role in implementing literacy programs instead of simply following the instructions we assign them. I am continually learning that there is more than one way to be a teacher, and there are endless opportunities to learn and improve. I hope that in the future, my work will be improved upon to create an even better program for families.

Limitations and Improvements

This section will discuss the limitations I perceive were present during the creation of my project and the improvements that could be made. In reflection of my work over the past year, I recognized these areas as limitations or for improvement:

Time

It is necessary to have deadlines for projects under development, which was the case in this situation. I completed this capstone in the Summer semester of 2021, with the month of July allotted for the construction of the artifact. While I am content with the content that I have created, more time for development would have allowed me to delve

deeper and produce more robust activities for the families. In my original timeline, I had planned to make assessments to go along with each unit. However, I was not able to accomplish this due to the short window of time. Additionally, I believe that more time would have allowed more research and design experience, which I will address in the following sections.

Research

As previously mentioned, one of the pivotal understandings for me was acknowledging that I do not belong to the community I intended to help and therefore cannot make an accurate diagnosis of the literacy issues they face. As such, I needed to research more deeply in order to have a better grasp of this concept. I know that the research I was able to do on this topic barely scratched the surface of what is available. Given more time I would have researched more on the topic of commercialized literacy replacing oral traditions, oral literacy practices in the home, and parent responses to literacy programs.

Expertise

While my time studying at Hamline University has made me a better and more competent teacher, I am not an expert at everything. Consequently, while I was creating my artifact, I continually wished that I had a curriculum design expert who could provide feedback and suggestions on designing the content. I believe it would have been beneficial to take a course on using tools such as Canva or Adobe Illustrator to make better quality worksheets and templates. I also think it would have been beneficial to find a literacy expert to provide support and guidance while in the development process

Literacy Levels of Parents

Early on in the development of this project, it became very clear to me that the topics of literacy and take-home programs were vast and wide in terms of available research and avenues for development. Ultimately, I had to make decisions about who this program would be made for and what type of content would be included. I am not a literacy expert and my field of study, although relevant, did not supply enough background knowledge on literacy development in order to create a literacy program that teaches literacy. Consequently, it was decided that in order to participate in the program parents would have to have at least intermediate levels of literacy in their L1. This decision was a difficult one to make because many of my adult students didn't have the opportunity to finish school beyond elementary school and I knew that making this requirement would exclude many families from participating in the program. However, I believe it was the correct decision because it allowed me to create something that fits within my scope of practice and can promote bilingual literacy in the home. Perhaps in the future, this limitation can be addressed and changes can be made to the program that will allow for parents with all levels of literacy to participate. Other ideas for future projects and research will be discussed in the following section.

Future Research or Projects

As I was preparing to create this artifact, I realized that my work would have benefited from primary research. Ideally, I would have gathered surveys from the demographic for which I was creating this project and used them to guide the creation. The surveys would have been distributed to local bilingual families asking about the elements they would like to see in a literacy program. Unfortunately, due to the limitation of time mentioned above, I was not able to accomplish this. In the future, it would be

beneficial to conduct primary research on parents' interest in and their previous experiences with literacy programs and their confidence in encouraging bilingualism at home. It would also be beneficial to research how parents share literacy in their home, whether in the L1, L2, or both. While researching for my project, I had a challenging time finding work on bilingual literacy programs. This would also be an excellent area for further research so that literacy programs such as mine can be improved and continue to develop. These options could be done independently or in conjunction with creating the literacy program I had envisioned.

Chapter Three of this paper explained that the artifact created for the capstone project was only phased one of six. The original curriculum was designed with six themes, each having two units within them. I would love to see at least the first theme implemented and to gather information on how the families received it. A future and much longer project would be to develop and implement all six themes fully. I really enjoyed creating this artifact for my capstone project, and I think it would prove equally satisfying, if not more so, to repeat or expand on it in a thesis project.

Benefits and Next Steps

A bilingual family literacy program like the one I have created could be controversial due to the fact that the objectives of the program are not purely academic in nature. In fact, in terms of academic benefits, the objectives may seem lacking given that there are no official standards for a take-home literacy program implemented by the community. This section will discuss the benefits of my project and how it will impact the academic community. It will also touch on what I hope to achieve going forward.

As outlined in Chapter Two of this project, the benefits of literacy practices for the parents are far-reaching, impacting not only the children but possibly having political and community ramifications as well (Stormquist, 2008). By participating in programs such as mine parents will help their families find a love for both languages and their identities as bilingual people. They will also learn more about themselves and their own identity as bilingual adults in a predominantly English-speaking country. One of the goals of this project was to build self-efficacy in adults so that they can feel more confident interacting with community entities such as doctor's offices, post offices, grocery stores, and their children's schools without relying on their children for communication. Through recognizing and building upon their existing knowledge parents will realize their capability to not just exist in an English-speaking community as bilingual people but to thrive in it. Literacy programs such as the ones I have discussed and am proposing can foster change that reaches through generations as parents become more confident in their ability to encourage bilingualism in the home. Children raised in homes where bilingual education is not exceptional but the standard for communities across the world will grow up more articulate, more family-oriented, and more accepting of their bilingual identity.

Arguably, this project does not have many "traditional " measurable outcomes but perhaps not every good outcome can be measured through standardized testing or data collection. What I hope policymakers and my colleagues can recognize through my work is that the needs of our English as a Second Language (ESL) students go beyond that of the classroom. While school interventions are well-intentioned and a good place to start, they cannot make up for the foundation that should be built at home. It is my belief that if we want to improve bilingual education for children we need to start with their

caretakers. There are many programs focused on literacy for children and many programs created for adults, however, there are very few that incorporate both and encourage the adults to lead the way. As a profession, I believe that we can do better. I hope that work like mine will encourage leaders in policy and in education to dedicate resources to bilingual literacy and programs that benefit bilingual families.

In the future, I hope to acquire the resources and support in order to implement the program I have designed. I would like to revisit it and make some of the changes which I have suggested and polish it before implementation. I will share the things I have learned with my colleagues and supervisors in the hope that they will reframe their teaching when working with bilingual families to help guide their students instead of simply instructing them. Perhaps most importantly I hope to use the knowledge that I have gained to become a better teacher and advocate for my students.

Summary

Throughout this process, I have learned that there is no “right” answer and no one person can tackle the issues our bilingual families face. The realm of bilingual education is vast and it takes many voices and willing minds to create curriculums that will support our students. I have also learned that even with the best intentions, we may not be helping our students as much as we think we are and the best way to meet their needs is to simply ask and listen with the intent to act upon their answers. Through my research, I better understand the benefits of bilingualism and the hindrance that monolingual English education can be for our bilingual students. While I always understood that literacy was important, I don’t think I was able to fully grasp the effect it can have on generations

when made a priority in the home. Even more so, bilingual literacy, although maybe not as lauded, can make a difference in preserving a family's L1.

Over the course of a year, I have grown as an individual, a researcher, and a teacher. I now know that support from peers and experts in their field is key when trying to develop a new program. I benefited from the knowledge and experience of others which helped guide me along the way and pushed me to think more critically. I more clearly understand the time, effort, and research required to produce a quality program. At the completion of this capstone, I will have earned the degree Master's of Arts in TESOL, however, I know that none of us are truly masters if we fail to acknowledge that there is always room to learn and progress in our practice

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