

Key Factors Which Promote
Academic Achievement
and
Language Acquisition
Among
English Language Learners

by

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ABSTRACT

Key Factors Which Promote Academic Achievement and Language Acquisition
Among English Language Learners

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A thesis presented on the nature of progress English Language Learners have made in school and how that progress relates to certain key factors. This study identifies key factors which promote second language acquisition and academic achievement. Specifically, it analyzes the impact of educational practices, home environment, and learning environment on the academic performance of English Language Learners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The student population of California public schools is becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse every day. In fact, the English Language Learner (ELL) population has grown 105% over the past ten years (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2004). Presently, an achievement gap exists between the performance of English speaking students and the performance of English Language Learners on State testing measures. This achievement gap persists throughout grades K-12. Certain measures have been instituted in the public education system to eliminate this achievement gap. In 1996, the English Language Development (ELD) framework and standards were released. Their intended purpose was to make educational personnel responsible for providing the ELL population with access to all services (Short, 2000). Recently, the Federal government passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation with a specific purpose of closing the achievement gap that exists between minority and non-minority children (Orfield, 2004).

In spite of these efforts, many English Language Learners continue to score below the proficiency level on State tests. Clearly, educators and school administrators need to continue to inform their educational practices as they relate to English Language Learners.

Statement of the Problem

In general, English Language Learners do not make as much academic progress as English speaking students in school as measured by State tests. The ELL population in California is rapidly growing, and the achievement gap is widening. In order to help reduce and eliminate this achievement gap, it is important to identify factors which best promote language acquisition and academic achievement among English Language Learners. Once these factors are identified, they can be used to help inform educational practices at both the classroom and school wide level.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the nature of academic progress four English Language Learners (ELLs) have made over the course of two years. I will examine the relationship between the academic progress made by each of these students and the following four factors: the teacher training their teachers received, their home environment, the degree to which comprehensible input is incorporated into their curriculum program, and their learning environment. With this information, I hope to contribute useful data to the debate on how to best promote second language acquisition and increase academic achievement for ELL students.

Background

The names of the school and students have been changed in this study. Over 20 percent of students attending Lincoln School are English Language Learners. Lincoln has not yet adopted an English Language Development (ELD) curriculum or implemented an ELD program school wide. Teachers adapt the core Language Arts

Program, Houghton Mifflin, as needed to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Supplemental resources, such as Rosetta Stone, a computer based language program, are also available for teachers to implement.

Lincoln did not meet its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goal for the ELL subgroup on the 2004-2005 California Standards Test (CST). Consequently, teachers have begun to collaborate on instructional practices which will better meet the needs of ELL students. New materials were purchased during the 2005-2006 school year to support the learning of ELL students. Additionally, an intervention program was put in place in order to provide additional support as needed during the spring trimester of the 2006 school year.

Research Question

What is the relationship between the rate of second language acquisition and academic achievement among four ELL students and the following four factors: the teacher training their teachers received, their home environment, the degree to which comprehensible input is incorporated into their curriculum program, and their learning environment?

Setting and Sample

I will develop a case study for four ELL students who were in my classroom during the 2005-2006 school year. In order to create a representative group of ELL students, I will select students whose scores ranged from the Early Intermediate level to the Advanced level on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) given during the 2004-2005 school year.

The first student, Maria, is a fourth grade student. She scored at the Early Intermediate Level on the 2004-2005 CELDT. The second student, Angel, is a fourth grade student. He scored at the Intermediate Level on the 2004-2005 CELDT. The third student, Veronica, is a fifth grade student. She scored at the Early Advanced Level on the 2004-2005 CELDT. The fourth student, Barbara, is a fifth grade student. She scored at the Advanced Level on the 2004-2005 CELDT.

Researcher Perspective

During my teaching career, I have worked with ELL students extensively. I have taught students who recently immigrated to California and knew no English, and students who have been in America their entire life, but still have limited English language skills. Meeting the needs of ELL students is a top priority for California educators, yet it proves to be a challenging goal. As an educator and future administrator, I want to develop a deeper understanding of how to best promote second language acquisition and academic achievement among English Language Learners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Much research has been conducted concerning factors which impact second language acquisition and academic achievement. In this literature review, I will discuss four key factors that surfaced during my review of literature. These factors impact second language acquisition and academic achievement for ELL students. First, I will discuss the importance of quality teacher preparation programs. Second, I will examine the impact of home environment on literacy and student achievement. Next, I will discuss the importance of providing comprehensible input to ELL students. Finally, I will explain the impact a child's learning environment has on how well they learn.

Gary Orfield (2004) conducted a survey of teachers who teach ELL students. He noted in "Swimming Upstream: Cumulative Inequality and the Teaching of English Learners," that more than half of teachers who have a majority of ELL students in their classrooms have received either only one or no teacher training on English Language Development. Due to this lack of training, teachers are ill equipped to deal with the significant demands placed upon them when asked to provide instruction to students with diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Ultimately, the students suffer from the lack of knowledge possessed by their teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers receive adequate training on effective ELD strategies and methods.

Fortunately, many universities have realized that their teacher preparation programs are lacking in the degree to which they prepare teachers for providing effective instruction to ELL students. Many universities have more fully developed their ELD training in their credential programs. Roseberry- McKibbin, Laureen Hanlon, and

Alejandro Brice (2004) conducted a national survey studying the quality of language service provided to language learners in public schools. Their research article is titled, "Service Delivery to English Language Learners in the Public Schools". In their study, they noted the importance of having qualified teachers who know how to best address the needs of English Learners. Schools need to employ teachers who are able to implement the most effective ELD practices in their classroom. They found that more universities appear to devote coursework to service delivery to ELL students, thereby better preparing prospective teachers to serve English Learners. In this study on factors which promote language acquisition and academic achievement for ELL students, I will explore the degree to which teachers have been trained to meet the needs of ELL students at Lincoln School.

A second factor which impacts academic achievement is a student's home environment. Specifically, there is a correlation between the degree to which parents promote literacy in their young children and their child's success in school. Wells (1985) conducted a longitudinal study of language development where he examined the relationship between the rate of language development and the children's home environment. He found correlations between overall achievement, literacy, and the home environment. Factors which influence literacy include:

1. The number of books owned by a child,
2. The degree to which a child has been read to,
3. The opportunities a child had to participate in verbal interactions.

Students who had a positive home environment where literacy skills were developed, experienced greater academic achievement when they entered school (Wells, 1985).

The relationship between literacy and academic achievement is also true for English Language Learners. ELL students who have a high degree of literacy in their native tongue experience more success than students who do not have a high degree of literacy in their native tongue. Students who lack proficiency in their native language appear to have a more difficult time acquiring English. Deborah Short (2000) analyzed the ESL standards and their impact on English Language Learners. She published her findings in an article entitled, "The ESL Standards: Bridging the Academic Gap for English Language Learners". In her article, she noted that native language proficiency contributes to the development of English.

The findings of Wells and Short are further supported by a study conducted by Catherine E. Snow and David K. Dickinson (2005). Snow and Dickinson conducted a longitudinal research project with the purpose of investigating the prerequisites to literacy success. They published their findings in an article titled, "The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development". In their article they observed that the most dramatic predictor of a child's literacy development was the degree to which there was support for literacy in the home environment.

Literacy among preschool children is clearly a key factor in promoting academic achievement and language acquisition. Although educators do not have direct influence over the development of literacy in the home environment, they can help promote it by

educating parents. Eugene E. Garcia (1991) studied instructional practices which best promote language acquisition and academic achievement for English Learners. He identified key factors in schools with successful ELD programs. In his report entitled, "The Education of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students: Effective Instructional Practices", he stated that one characteristic of schools which have experienced success with their ELL population is they have a high degree of parent support activities.

Garcia's findings are further supported by an article published by Catherine Ayoub, Barbara A Pan, Kathleen Guinee, and Claire L Russel (2001) titled, "Relationships Between Family Characteristics and Young Children's Language and Socio-emotional Development for Families Eligible for Early Head Start". In this study, the researchers explored the relationship between family, parent, and child characteristics and their children's language and socio-emotional development. One of their conclusions was that programs which support maternal parents' practices, especially those that focus on improving maternal literacy, can influence the children's own language development. Clearly, an effective ELD program will include a plan for educating parents on how to develop their own literacy and how to promote literacy in the home environment. In this study on factors which promote language acquisition and academic achievement for ELL students, I will explore the way in which the home and school connection is supported at Lincoln School. I will also explore additional activities which might strengthen the home and school connection at Lincoln School.

A third factor which impacts ELL students' academic achievement and second language acquisition is the extent of comprehensible input they receive in their

instruction. For ELL students, their lack of English is often a barrier to understanding the instruction given to them by their teacher. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers ensure that their instruction is comprehensible to their students. If teachers do not ensure that comprehensible input is provided, the students will not progress as steadily. In fact, Ester J. de Jong (2004) conducted a study on Academic Achievement Patterns of Former English Language Learners. She evaluated the effectiveness of ELD programs by examining the success rate of ELL students once they were mainstreamed out of their ELD program. In her conclusions, she found that a lack of comprehensible input in mainstream classes makes them ineffective learning environments. If teachers in mainstream classes do not ensure that the input they provide to ELL students is comprehensible, the students will not experience academic success.

Debbie Coonrod and Selma Hughes (1994) studied educational practices which best promote language development for language minority students. Their article is titled, "Using Children's Literature to Promote the Language Development of Minority Children". In their article, they discuss the importance of providing comprehensible input to language minority students. Comprehensible input is instruction tailored to make new concepts more understandable to ELL students. They found that one of the best ways to provide comprehensible input is through the use of children's literature. In this study on factors which promote language acquisition and academic achievement for ELL students, I will examine the curriculum and teaching strategies used at Lincoln School to determine how well comprehensible input is provided to ELL students.

Finally, a students' learning environment can either inhibit or promote language acquisition and academic achievement. Much of the literature which I reviewed noted that a gap between student's home culture and their classroom culture contributed to poor language acquisition and academic achievement. If students' background and experiences are not incorporated into their learning, they often feel alienated, have low self-confidence, and lack motivation. However, when students' background and experiences are incorporated into their schooling, they become more engaged and involved in their own learning.

Jim Cummins (1996) has conducted research on the education of bilingual children for many years. In his studies, he has found one of the best ways to promote bilingual students' academic achievement is to design instruction that builds upon a student's personal and cultural experiences. It is important that teachers access students' current knowledge and experiences, and then use this information to help students generate new knowledge. Tapping into prior knowledge enables teachers to create more meaningful lessons that are better tailored to help students construct new knowledge. In this study on factors which promote language acquisition and academic achievement for ELL students, I will analyze the extent to which teachers create positive learning environments for ELL students at Lincoln School. I will explore the degree to which teachers validate and build upon the cultural background of ELL students.

The literature which I reviewed provides a theoretical framework for my study. As I conduct my research, and begin to analyze how various factors impact second language acquisition and academic achievement, it will be helpful to refer back to the

theories and findings of others who have studied and researched the same phenomena. Each article and study which I reviewed provides valuable insight into the nature of second language acquisition and the ways in which different factors can impact it. In my study, I intend to examine the quality of training provided to teachers at Lincoln School, the extent of parent education occurring at Lincoln school, the degree to which comprehensible input is included in the curriculum used at Lincoln School, and the climate of the learning environments for students at Lincoln School.

Chapter 3: Method

Measures

To measure the academic progress of the students which I am studying, I will review their Language Arts CST scores from the 2002-2003 through the 2004-2005 school year. To measure their rate of second language acquisition, I will review their CELDT scores from the 2003-2004 through the 2005-2006 school year. I will rate progress into the following three categories: significant, adequate, and poor. Students who have demonstrated growth on both tests will be ranked as making significant progress. Students who have demonstrated growth on one of the tests will be ranked as making adequate progress. Students who have demonstrated no growth on either of the tests will be ranked as making poor progress. I will chart the academic progress in the following table:

	Overall Progress	CST 2004-2005	CST 2003-2004	CST 2002-2003	CELDT 2005-2006	CELDT 2004-2005	CELDT 2003-2004
Martha							
Angel							
Veronica							
Barbara							

After evaluating the nature of academic progress the students have made, I will then interview them. I will also conduct an interview of their parents, and of their

teachers. The purpose of the interviews is to establish the relationship between their academic progress and the following four factors: the teacher training their teachers received, their home environment, their learning environment, and the degree to which comprehensible input is incorporated into their curriculum program. For each interview, I have created descriptors. I will analyze these descriptors and the results will be ranked on a three point scale. For each factor, a rank of 1 (poor), 2(moderate), or 3(significant) will be assigned. This information, coupled with the information regarding student academic progress, will be charted on the following table:

Student Name	Academic Progress	Home Environment	Teacher Training	Learning Environment	Comprehensible Input
Martha					
Angel					
Veronica					
Barbara					

After charting the information, I will analyze it in order to determine possible relationships between student achievement and the four factors.

Procedures

Lincoln uses a computer based data system called Edusoft to store all testing data for students. Using the Edusoft system, I will download the CST and CELDT test results for the students I am studying.

I will interview one teacher each student has previously had to determine their

level of teacher training and the manner in which they provided comprehensible input to the students. I will interview each student to gather data on their learning environment and their home environment. I will interview each student's parents to gather further data on home environment. (See attached interview questions.)

Implications

The results of my research will provide information about the nature of academic progress ELL students have made and the relationship between this progress and four key factors: the teacher training their teachers received, their home environment, the degree to which comprehensible input is incorporated into their curriculum program, and their learning environment. Equipped with this information, I can contribute valuable insight into the most influential factors which promote academic achievement and language acquisition among ELL students. This information can help direct classroom and school wide decisions regarding ELD programs and practices. Ultimately, I hope the information attained through this study will help close the achievement gap that currently exists between English Language Learners and other students.

Chapter 4: Findings

Results:

The students' academic progress as demonstrated through the CST and the CELDT test scores is charted on the table below:

Academic Progress

	Overall Progress	CST 2004-2005	CST 2003-2004	CST 2002-2003	CELDT 2005-2006	CELDT 2004-2005	CELDT 2003-2004
Martha	Significant Progress	Below Basic	Far Below Basic	Non Applicable	Early Advanced	Early Intermediate	Early Intermediate
Angel	Adequate Progress	Below Basic	Below Basic	Non Applicable	Advanced	Intermediate	Early Advanced
Veronica	Significant Progress	Basic	Basic	Below Basic	Early Advanced	Early Advanced	Intermediate
Barbara	Significant Progress	Proficient	Proficient	Basic	Advanced	Advanced	Early Advanced

Martha demonstrated significant growth on both the CST and the CELDT. During the 2003-2004 school year, she scored Far Below Basic on the CST. During the 2004-2005 school year, she scored Below Basic. She moved from one band into another band during a two year time period. During the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005

school years, she scored at the Early Intermediate level on the CELDT. During the 2005-2006 school year, she scored at the Early Advanced level. She improved by two band levels during a three year time period.

Angel made adequate academic growth. Although he remained at the Below Basic Band on the CST during both the 2003-2004 school year and the 2004-2005 school year, his raw score improved from a score of 288 to 294. On the CELDT his score improved from the Early Advanced Level to the Advanced Level over a three year period. However, his score dipped to the Intermediate Level in the middle of the time period. Although Angel's academic growth was not steady or profound, overall he has made adequate growth during his academic history.

Veronica made significant academic progress. She scored at the Below Basic Level on the 2002-2003 CST, but at the Basic Level on the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 CST. On the CELDT, she scored at the Intermediate Level during the 2003-2004 school year, but at the Early Advanced Level during the 2004-2005 and the 2005-2006 school years. Veronica has made growth and sustained that growth over a three year time period.

Barbara has also made significant academic progress. She scored at the Early Advanced Level on the 2003-2004 CELDT, but at the Advanced Level on the 2004-2005 and the 2005-2006 CELDT. She scored at the Basic Level on the 2002-2005 CST, but at the Proficient Level on the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 CST. She has also made growth and sustained that growth over a three year time period.

In summary, all the students demonstrated adequate to significant academic

growth on both of the testing measures I used to determine their academic progress.

I charted the information obtained through the parent, student, and teacher interviews on the following table:

Academic Progress and the Four Key Factors

Student Name	Academic Progress	Home Environment	Teacher Training	Learning Environment	Comprehensible Input
Martha	Significant	1 (poor)	3 (significant)	3 (significant)	3 (significant)
Angel	Adequate	2 (moderate)	2 (moderate)	3 (significant)	3 (significant)
Veronica	Significant	3 (significant)	2 (moderate)	3 (significant)	3 (significant)
Barbara	Significant	3 (significant)	2 (moderate)	3 (significant)	3 (significant)

After interviewing the parents and the students, I observed that Martha had poor home support. She did not attend preschool. She does not own any books at home. Her family does not share family stories. Her family rarely reads with her and her parents do not read for recreation. Martha does enjoy writing stories at home, but she seldom reads for recreation and never reads with her parents.

Angel has adequate home support. He did not attend preschool, but he does own some books at home and he reads sometimes with his parents. His family often tells stories and his parents read at home. Angel enjoys writing at home and will read for recreation on occasion.

Veronica has strong home support. She attended preschool. She owns many

books, and she reads stories with her parents. Her family shares stories and her parents read for recreation. Veronica enjoys writing letters at home and reads occasionally for recreation.

Barbara also has strong home support. She attended preschool. She owns many books and reads with her family occasionally. She frequently reads for more than thirty minutes each day for recreation at home. Her parents tell family stories, and they also enjoy reading for recreation.

All the students reported that they enjoyed school and felt accepted in their learning environments. They reported that they enjoy their friendships at school and felt that the teachers were there to help them. In fact, they indicated that whenever they needed assistance or extra help, teachers were there to support them and explain things to them.

Martha, Angel, and Veronica all reported that Math was their favorite subject because they got to learn new things. They said they did also enjoy Reading, but they preferred Math. Martha said she preferred Math because it is easier for her and she performs better in that subject. Angel reported that he feels Math helps him do things in life. Veronica stated that she prefers Math because her parents did well in Math and she would like to follow in her parents footsteps.

Barbara stated that her favorite subject was Reading. She enjoys reading because she can learn new words.

The students' responses about their learning environment are consistent with the responses given by the teacher interviews. The teachers interviewed all stated that

they modify instruction and make accommodations for their ELL students.

Comprehensible input is provided in a variety of ways. Some of the accommodations made include: one on one instruction, small group instruction, explicit direct instruction, vocabulary development, and frontloading.

The students' culture is validated by all the teachers. Every teacher I interviewed teaches Spanish as one of the subjects in their class. As part of the Spanish instruction, aspects of the Spanish culture are also taught and affirmed. In addition, literature is chosen that is culturally sensitive and diverse.

There were some differences in opinion about how well the teacher preparation programs prepared teachers for teaching ELL students. In some cases, it was difficult for teachers to answer that question because they earned their credential years ago. In those cases, the teacher preparation did not even address ELL learning. However, the teachers who did not receive ELL training as part of their credentialing program did receive professional development on how to meet the needs of ELL learners.

For teachers who did receive some ELL training as part of their credential program, they felt the training was adequate, but not exemplary. In general, these teachers would have liked more training on the specific needs of ELL students and specific strategies to meet those needs.

Overall, teachers believed that the professional development they have received on meeting the needs of ELL learners has been valuable. Some of the professional development which was mentioned included: the Writing and Math Project, Reading/Writing Workshop, Frontloading Training, and Transition Training.

Data Analysis:

All the students demonstrated academic growth as measured by the CST, and they all demonstrated progress in their language acquisition as measured by the CELDT. This finding indicates that the schooling the children have received has been effective in promoting both academic achievement and language acquisition. This finding is further supported by the interview results which indicate that the learning environment, teacher training, and comprehensible input are strong factors at Lincoln School.

Lincoln School is a Professional Development School associated with a University. All the teachers hired at Lincoln School are considered to be Master Teachers with extensive training and experience. In order to be hired at Lincoln School, teachers are required to have a minimum of three years of experience, although many teachers far exceed that requirement. Furthermore, teachers at Lincoln School participate in ongoing professional development. They also meet daily to discuss students' work and progress, analyze data, plan instruction, and develop programs. Given the unique culture of Lincoln School, it is reasonable to expect that the degree of teacher training at that school would be high.

As a Professional Development School, many of the teachers have received extensive training in pedagogy and practices. In many cases, the training has included strategies and practices which best meet the needs of English Language Learners. Because of the training and experience that the teachers at Lincoln School possess, they are able to make the necessary accommodations and modifications in order to

make the instruction comprehensible. In fact, all the students surveyed indicated that their teachers help them understand things and are always there to support their learning.

Lincoln School also supports both a Dual Program and a Language Enrichment Program. As part of its charter, students who participate in the Language Enrichment strand get a minimum of 90 minutes weekly of Spanish instruction. In the Dual Program, students receive instruction in Spanish for fifty percent of the day and instruction in English for fifty percent of the day. In addition to language instruction, students also receive instruction in cultural awareness. It is not surprising that all the students felt affirmed and supported in their learning environment given the significant emphasis placed on multiculturalism. All the students indicated that they felt their culture was affirmed and that they were valued by their school community.

The greatest variation in the research was found in the home environment. In some cases, students received a great deal of literacy support in their home environment. In other cases, there was little support for literacy in the home environment. In fact, it was the difference in the support for literacy in the home environment which I found to be the most pronounced between the students in this study who are currently performing at grade level and students who are not. The students who received more support for literacy in the home are closer to meeting grade level expectations than the students who did not receive as much home support.

Although all students demonstrated academic growth and progress in their language acquisition, not all students are performing at grade level. Martha is

significantly below grade level, Angel is slightly below grade level, Veronica is approaching grade level, and Barbara has met grade level expectations as measured by the CST. Martha had the least support for literacy in the home environment, Angel had adequate support for literacy in the home environment, and both Veronica and Barbara had strong support for literacy in the home environment. There is a direct correlation between this data and their current performance in school. Based on this finding, I concluded that as a teacher and educational leader, one of our greatest responsibilities is to support literacy in the home environment.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion

The first conclusion which can be drawn from this study is that the students at Lincoln School who were studied receive strong comprehensible input, experience a positive learning environment, and are taught by well trained teachers. This conclusion can be drawn by reviewing the data gathered through the teacher and student interviews.

All the students reported that they felt accepted by their teachers and classmates, and that they felt secure in their learning environment. As a teacher at Lincoln School, it is my opinion that Lincoln School's strong emphasis on multiculturalism and multilingualism contributes to the positive learning environment. Students are taught both Spanish and English at Lincoln School. Furthermore, students participate in multicultural activities and read multicultural literature.

The students also unanimously agreed that their teachers explained concepts well to them and always clarified anything that was confusing. These responses indicate that the teachers at Lincoln School are well trained and are able to provide comprehensible input to their students. Students reported that their teachers were able to tap into their prior knowledge, and their prior knowledge was used to help them construct new knowledge.

As a Professional Development School, the teachers at Lincoln received extensive professional development and participate in ongoing research. They participate in Active Collaboration Time (ACT) daily. At ACT meetings, teachers review

student work, discuss best educational practices, develop assessments, and plan instruction. The structures at Lincoln School support well trained teachers who are able to provide comprehensible input to their students.

A second conclusion which can be drawn from this study is that the aforementioned three factors: comprehensible input, teacher training and learning environment, contributed to the academic progress of the students who were studied. All of the students have made adequate to significant academic progress during their education at Lincoln School. Clearly, they have benefited from the structures of the school which support strong teacher training, a positive learning environment, and the delivery of comprehensible input.

As a future administrator, it would be my goal to create similar structures in the schools where I work. I would help cultivate a learning environment which supports multiculturalism and multilingualism. I would also work towards helping our school become a professional learning community. It would be my goal to create collaborative time for my staff so that the teachers have opportunities to review students work, study best educational practices, plan effective instruction, and develop meaningful assessments. I would also provide staff members with strong professional development in the area of ELL instruction.

A third conclusion which can be drawn from this study is that the students who received greater support for literacy in the home environment have experienced greater academic achievement. Based on this data, it can be argued that it is imperative that literacy is promoted in the home environment, and that schools should build effective

links between the home and school in order to accomplish this goal. As a future administrator, I would work to create an effective home and school relationship in order to create greater support for education within the home.

The importance of parental involvement is often acknowledged by administrators and teachers. However, building effective communication lines between the home and school environment often proves to be a challenging goal. Currently, Lincoln School sponsors many activities to create a positive home and school relationship. Family math and literacy nights and parenting classes are held throughout the year. There is a Back to School BBQ and a Back to School Night. Open House is held once a year. Parent- teacher conferences are held twice a year. All home-school communications are translated, and translators are available for parent-teacher conferences.

Lincoln School also funds a Family Resource Center. The purpose of the Family Resource Center is to provide families with resources to support their children's learning. The Family Resource Center is located in the library and is staffed with support personnel. There are educational games, activities, books and computers available for students and families to use throughout the day and well as after school and on Wednesday evenings. Special events, such as Dr. Seuss Reading Night, are held at the Family Resource Center.

Finally, Lincoln School supports a dual language preschool. The preschool is housed at Lincoln School. Students who attend the preschool are transitioned into the dual language program at the school. A topic for future study would be to examine the impact these activities have had on students' learning.

As a future administrator, I would support similar activities at the school where I worked. These activities have provided valuable opportunities for the family and schools to build a relationship. However, in addition to sponsoring these activities, I would also create opportunities for teachers to gather insight into early home literacy activities from the parent's perspective. Insight into early home literacy activities can be instrumental in helping to inform instructional practices. Yet, educators do not often investigate early home literacy environments.

In A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents (1999), Patricia A. Edwards, she argues that teachers can use parent stories to build networks between the home and school environment. She defines parent stories as, "...narratives gained from open-ended conversations and/or interviews" (Edwards, xvii). She further states that parent stories can be, "...the vehicle that will allow teachers to recognize, understand, and respect parents' and children's cultural/social background "(Edwards, 13).

In my research, I used parent stories (interviews) to gather useful data into the early literacy experiences of my students. Equipped with this information, I can tailor learning activities to meet the individual needs of the students, and I can inform the parents of activities which support literacy at home. The technique of using parent stories to inform instructional practice should be expanded to a school wide level. Methods of interviewing parents and using the information obtained through parent interviews could be a topic for future research.

As a future administrator, I would support using parent stories to inform instructional practice, and to help build the link between the home and school

environment. Based on the suggestions given by Patricia A. Edwards (1999), I would use the following steps to guide the incorporation of parent stories into the instructional repertoire.

1. A block of time would be created, such as ACT time, as a forum for teachers to discuss parent stories and brainstorm instructional strategies based on the results of the parent stories.
2. An organizational system would be designed to manage all the paper work related to students' educational history. This paperwork would include: parents stories, assessments, test scores, etc.
3. A protocol for collecting parent stories would be developed. Materials, such as tape recorders and notebooks, would be gathered.
4. Interviews of parents would be conducted. (See attached document for sample interview questions.)
5. Data gathered from the interview would be collated.
6. The data obtained through the parent stories would be discussed, and instructional strategies, activities, and/or programs would be developed.

Edwards (1999) also recommends that a resource file be generated prior to gathering parent stories. She defined a resource file as a, "...self-generated computer and /or hard-copy binder of community resource agencies that teachers utilize to delegate responsibilities that fall outside of their own duties" (Edwards, 62). She explains that often parent stories will yield information, such as child abuse, which is

outside the scope of education. Proper referrals must be made.

My research has shown that all four factors: comprehensible input, teacher training, learning environment, and home environment, play an important role in helping to ensure the academic achievement and language acquisition of English Language Learners. At Lincoln School, the students whom I studied have made academic growth and have made solid progress towards acquiring the English Language. It is evident that the strong teacher training, the positive learning environment, and the degree to which comprehensible input is provided to the students have all contributed to this success. Our next step at Lincoln School is to continue to use parent stories to inform our instructional practice and help promote literacy at home.

Interview Questions for Collecting Parents Stories

Ideas for the following sample questions are taken from Patricia A. Edwards' book: A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents, (1999, 36 – 40).

1. What does your family enjoy doing together?
2. Tell me about your child at age 1, 2, 3, 4. Include descriptions of his/her early learning efforts (i.e., sitting-up, talking, walking, etc.)
3. Are there circumstances at home we should now about in school that may interfere with your child's learning at school?
4. What are some ways that your child may have learned simply by watching you do something?
5. How do you discipline your child?
6. Does your child visit the public library?
7. What type of summer activities does your child participate in?
8. Does your child participate in activities outside of school on a weekly or monthly basis? If so, what?
9. How does your child feel about school?
10. What kind of things do you do to help your child be successful in school?
11. What activities/hobbies do you participate in as an individual?
12. What kinds of books/magazines do you read?
13. What do you remember about your own efforts to read and write?
14. What are your ideas about how parents and teachers could work together for the benefit of your child?

Teacher Interview

I am conducting research about English Language Development and Academic Achievement. I would also like to gather information about (student's name) through you. Your participation is voluntary and your willingness to participate in this interview indicates consent to participate in this research. Your name will not be used in my report. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout my research. If you have any questions about your participation in this study please contact Amanda Quintero, Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at CSU Channel Island, 805-37-3285. Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Interview Questions

1. How often do you modify the content of instruction to accommodate the needs of ELLs?
Often Seldom Rarely
2. How frequently do you incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into your instruction?
Often Seldom Rarely
3. How well did your teacher preparation program prepare you for meeting the needs of ELLs?
Well Adequately Poorly

Student Interview

1. Do you keep diaries, journals, or write letters? Yes No

2. How often did you read with your parents when you were little?
Often Seldom Never

3. How frequently do you participate in activities that make you feel that your
cultural background is validated? Frequently Seldom Never

4. How often do you choose to read for recreation at home?
Frequently Seldom Never

5. What is your favorite/least favorite subject in school? Why?

Entrevista de los Padres

Estoy haciendo una investigación acerca del Desarrollo del Idioma Inglés y Aprovechamiento Académico. También quisiera obtener, por medio de Uds., información adicional acerca de su hijo(a). Su participación es voluntaria y su participación en esta entrevista indica su consentimiento para participar en esta investigación. Su nombre no será usado en mi reporte. Mantendré la confidencialidad durante mi investigación. Si Uds. tienen alguna pregunta acerca de su participación en este estudio por favor llamen a Amanda Quintero, Directora de Programas de Investigación en CSU Channel Islands, 805-37-3285

Gracias por su cooperación y apoyo.

Preguntas para la entrevista:

Preguntas para la entrevista:

1. ¿Asistió su hijo(a) a un programa pre-escolar? Sí No
2. ¿Cuántos libros tiene su hijo(a)? Muchos Pocos Ni uno
3. ¿Comparte su familia historias? Con frecuencia Rara vez Nunca
4. ¿Con qué frecuencia leen juntos Uds. y su hijo(a)?
Con frecuencia Rara vez Nunca
5. ¿Cuántos minutos lee su hijo(a) diariamente en la casa?
Más de 30 30 Nunca
6. ¿Leen Uds. con frecuencia por recreación? ¿Si es así, qué tipo de materials leen Uds.? Periódicos Novelas Revistas Otros-

Parent Interview

I am conducting research about English Language Development and Academic Achievement. I would also like to gather additional information about your child through you. Your participation is voluntary and your willingness to participate in this interview indicates consent to participate in this research. Your name will not be used in my report. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout my research. If you have any questions about your participation in this study please contact Amanda Quintero, Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at CSU Channel Island, 805-37-3285. Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Interview Questions:

1. Did your child attend preschool? Yes No
2. How many books does your child own? Many Few None
3. How often does your family share stories? Frequently Rarely Never
4. How often do you and your child read together? Frequently Rarely Never
5. How many minutes does your child read daily at home? More than 30 30
Never
6. Do you read for recreation? If so, what type of materials do you read?
Magazines Newspapers Novels Other

References