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Chapter 64

Fostering Successful Communities of Collaboration Through Educational Partnerships: Strengthening Bilingual Learners' Language and Literacy Achievement Along the Texas–Mexican Border

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ABSTRACT

There is an undisputable need to form collaborative partnerships between schools, families, homes, and communities across the nation. Collaborative educational partnerships are the cornerstone for student success. With increasingly diverse student populations, schools must communicate and collaborate with families and communities to bridge the wide gap that exists between home and school. With a dominant Spanish-speaking population of Mexican descent, as that of children living in the Southern tip of the Texas-Mexican border, known as The Rio Grande Valley, barriers such as low social economic status and limited English proficiency may impede much-needed communication between schools, homes, and communities. These barriers that negatively impede student success must be replaced with strong bridges that support student achievement. Recommendations are anchored in opportunities to increase academic and social partnerships among schools, families, homes, and communities. The premise for establishing educational partnerships is ultimately student achievement and success.

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INTRODUCTION

Intersectionality of Demographics and Bilingual Learners

“Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” -Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Dramatic increases in the number of English language learners in United States public schools have been well documented, with even greater growth projected in the coming decades. It is often stated that the United States is a land of immigrants, but too often many find themselves as a marginalized and underserved population. Albeit, our nation is rapidly becoming increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse as an estimated one in five children now live in homes in which a language other than English is spoken. Students who are language minorities have been identified as the fastest growing segment of the school population (Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005). It has been estimated that by 2030, up to 40% of the school population may speak English as a second language (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to data gathered by the Pew Research Center (2015), there has been a fourfold increase since 1960 when only 9.7 million immigrants lived in the United States, accounting for 5.4% of the total population to a record 43.2 million immigrants living in the United States in 2015, making up 13.4% of the nation’s population.

English language learners face unique challenges but also represent a tremendous asset for our country if their full potential can be unearthed and harnessed. The proportion of English language learners in the United States from homes where a non-English language is spoken is projected to nearly double from 21% in 2009 to 40% in 2030; the majority of them come from primarily Spanish-speaking homes 71% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Texas has a large number of English language learners whose enrollment in the public-school system ranks among the top 10 states in the nation. According to data by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (2018), English language learners speak over 400 different languages, but more than three-quarters of all English language learners speak Spanish. Spanish was reported as the language most commonly spoken by English language learners at home in 45 states and the District of Columbia, and in all but seven of those states, more than 50 percent of the English language learners in the state spoke Spanish at home.

As such an estimated one in five children now live in homes in which a language other than English is spoken; impressing upon us the importance of meeting the needs of a more culturally and linguistically diverse school-age student population. As our U.S. society and nation become progressively more diverse, we must look beyond the school walls toward families and communities as resources for fostering both academic and social success for all involved. Due to our changing demographics, teachers must have an inclusive and comprehensive understanding of how to best bridge the gap between home and school by developing and fostering strong home-school relationships. These educational partnerships harness a wealth of opportunity and possibility for our students.

Between 1980 and 2009, the number of school-age children ranging in ages from 5 to 17 years of age in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 4.7 (10%) to 11.2 (21%) million. Of these students, more than 85% identify as being of Latino origin (National Center for

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Education Statistics, 2013). Future projections suggest that in 20 years, about 1 in 6 U.S. residents will be of Hispanic origin and by the middle of the century—when today’s young children are middle-aged—this ratio will increase to about 1 in 4. The Latino population has grown dramatically in recent years, now comprising 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population, with Mexican Americans making up 58% of all Latinos. As a result of the extensive immigration from Mexico, 79 percent of school-age children are native Spanish speakers (Garcia, 2002). By the year 2030, the U.S. Census Bureau projections suggest that Latino students age 5-18 will number almost 16 million—25 percent of the total school population.

Teachers living and working in the Southern tip of Texas along the Texas-Mexican border have felt the impact that these demographics affirm and know all too well the urgent need for establishing strong educational partnerships. The border regions are distinguished by their poverty level and the high number of Spanish speakers. Sixty-eight percent of border region public school students are economically disadvantaged, and seventy-seven percent are Hispanic limited English proficient students (Sharp, 1998). Many live in *colonias* which are described as areas where people settle and live that are characterized as “pockets of extreme poverty” and many are located in areas alongside the United States and Mexico border, such as the Rio Grande Valley (Sharp, 1998, p. 91). Further, these *colonia* areas are best described as “subdivisions established in unincorporated areas” that lack such basic services as paved roads, potable water, sewage connections, and electricity, and are “characterized by extreme poverty and population density” (Sharp, 1998, p. 92). The average annual income for these *colonia* families is \$7,000 to \$11,000 and typical households’ number five or more residents (Sharp, 1998). In a highly Hispanic populated geographic border region such as the Rio Grande Valley, with its close proximity to the Mexican border, a need exists to establish educational partnerships to magnify and support communication between schools, families, and communities. As such, parental engagement and active participation in schools runs in the same vein.

Teachers need to be equipped with the tools and knowledge to best meet the needs of diverse learners as well as knowledge of the importance of helping these children succeed in our schools; subsequently, easing the transition between home and school while establishing and nurturing those relationships. With a dominant Spanish speaking population of Mexican descent, as that of children living in the Southern tip of the Texas-Mexican border, known as The Rio Grande Valley, barriers such as low social economic status and limited English proficiency may impede the much-needed communication between schools, parents, and communities. These barriers must be broken if the goal is for students to succeed in schools. Ultimately, leveraging students’ cultural and social capital will benefit them when we counter deficit perspectives by breaking down barriers and establishing bridges. As such, developing resilient and strong home-school relationships is fundamental for students’ achievement and success. It is vital to create and sustain relationships that ultimately promote and advocate student accomplishment.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LATINO PARENTS

“If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed.” -Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Building strong collaborative relationships between schools, homes and communities is key to students’ social and academic achievement. Consequently, data compiled in 2005 show that 17 states, including Texas, have directed all districts or schools to implement parental involvement policies. Additionally,

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seven states - Texas, Alaska, California, Indiana, Minnesota, Nevada, and South Carolina, have obligated schools or districts to develop policies linking parent-community partnerships to school improvement plans. Many states promote parental involvement in early literacy education, school safety, dropout prevention programs, as well as initiatives addressing the needs of at-risk youth and English language learners (Zinth, 2005). Nonetheless, we continue facing challenges with lack of parental involvement in our educational system. Education is a core value of our democratic system and education benefits the individual in school; however, it also positively benefits the family and the community.

According to Swap (1993) families have always played an important role in promoting the academic success of their children, and the changing demographics have made it imperative for schools to rethink the ways in which they reach out to families. With this in mind, schools must make concerted efforts to foster the communication that will benefit children in our schools. Teachers must keep in mind that parents, regardless of income levels or ethnic background, value education for their children. Undoubtedly, economic well-being is closely related to parent involvement, yet it is unrelated to the value parents place on education (Lareau, 1990). Every parent wants their child to succeed and many times are uncertain of how to exercise agency to fully communicate their steadfast commitment to this ultimate feat.

Several researchers have reported the high value placed on literacy by many low-income families. For example, Delgado-Gaitan (1987) found that the possibility of a better education for their children was cited as a major reason for Hispanics to immigrate to the United States. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), studying low-income parents whose children succeed in school, noted extraordinary sacrifices and efforts being made by the parents in the interest of their children's education, despite the parents' limited educational levels. The sacrifices and efforts parents make are inclusive and permeate across race and ethnicity. Accordingly, Latinos and Latino families have strong connections to their families and feel a strong sense of obligation to each other (Fulgini & Yoshikawa, 2003; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Latino have strong tight knit families or *familias* who share common values, beliefs, and influences. These are grounded by belief in culture, heritage and values. With this comes, strong determination for future generations to succeed and reach goals that are far beyond what they have accomplished.

The grit and resiliency of Latino families is part of their strength and perseverance through hardship and difficult times. Consequently, Fitzgerald (1991), in a study of low and high-income parents, reported that the low-income families rate the value of education even higher than the high-income families. This is a counter narrative to the idea that low-income or minority parents do not care for their children's educational attainment. Educational attainment and success are tightly woven in the fabric of the Latino culture and represents a strong component of Latino's identity. It is through this strong identity that Latinos exercise their agency.

Yet, steps must be taken to narrow the existing gap between our schools, homes, and communities by seeking to establish collaborative educational partnerships. It is essential that children's home language be validated and respected in school because it is an integral part of each student. Teachers should capitalize on the wealth of knowledge that students have attained from experiences with their home environments and surroundings. This is key to forming solid and authentic connections with students and used as a means for planning effective and ultimately, culturally relevant instruction for student success and achievement (Almaguer, 2008).

Language minority families are highly concerned about their children's education and are willing to help their children succeed in school; however, they are uncertain of how to do so (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Epstein, 1990; Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1991). Language minority parents are often reluctant to contact teachers about their children's education. Many Latino parents view teachers as pedagogical

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experts and are unlikely to interfere in what they view as the teacher's domain (Flores, Cousin, and Diaz, 1991). Unfortunately, it is often interpreted by teachers and school administrators as language minority parents' lack of concern for their children's education. However, research indicates exactly the opposite.

Research shows that school policies and teacher practices can determine whether parents participate in their children's education without regard to race, parent education, family size, marital status, or grade level (Epstein, 1990). The quality of curriculum, teacher preparedness and commitment, school and family relations and the community are an integral component for strong educational partnerships. Schools play a critical role in communicating with parents and families to inform them of school practices, to understand home cultures, and to draw on them as resources for teaching and learning. To initiate parental involvement, there needs to be cultural understanding and school personnel must genuinely value the partnership for its success. Family and community engagement set the groundwork on which a strong educational partnership can be institutionalized for a truly committed and successful school.

ENHANCING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

“Why not establish an intimate connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals.” -Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom

Students' literacy development is anchored to their culture. Understanding students' culture is vital to making connections with students and magnifying literacy development. Subsequently, the better teachers understand students' culture, the better they can support student learning. Cultural competence is recognized as a set of consistent behaviors, attitudes, and practices that individually form a system across professionals that enable them to work collectively across cultures (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Teachers, support staff and administrators comprise a significant component of the school setting. Within this group, there should exist understanding and respect for culturally and linguistically diverse families and school communities. This cultural understanding and respect are paramount to bridging gaps between home and school.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory proposes that learning is socially mediated and associated with social relationships and the interactions of the participants of these relationships. The New Literacies (NL) (Luke, 2005) and Funds of Knowledge (FOK) frameworks (Moll, 1992) within the sociocultural theory, emphasize that social interactions carry significant implications for academic engagement and achievement among bilingual children and immigrant children in teaching and learning in and out of formal school settings. The asset-based view of literacy calls for students to exercise agency by leveraging their linguistic and academic capital in ways that are enriching and beneficial. This is a counter narrative to the deficit view of learning. The engagement, interactions, experiences and relationships with school staff including teachers, administrators and mentors along with their families and the community shapes students' identity, the belief in the cultural assets that they possess, the belief in themselves and how they develop literacy and learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Hence, the support that students receive in and out of formal school settings along with the communication between home and school will gauge academic achievement and student's success. This is based on the sociocultural theory grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and on the roles that par-

ticipation in social interactions and culturally organized activities have that support both the academic and linguistic development of diverse English learners, many of whom are immigrants. Collaborative communities with active parental engagement are the cornerstone for students' academic and linguistic success. Integrating a framework to strengthen collaborative partnerships is paramount to students' success. Recognizing students' ways of practicing literacy outside of formal school setting is key in viewing literacy instruction as meaningful and relevant while decreasing achievement gaps by considering how families and communities practice literacy in ways that may differ from those in the mainstream culture or in positions of power.

LATINO PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCEED

Successful parental involvement programs offer several strategies for involving Latino parents (Medina, 2002). For example, begin by adding a personal touch. Face-to-face communication in the parents' primary language when first making contact is encouraged. Additionally, making home visits when possible and having parents invite other parents to school is also encouraged, as always greeting parents when they come to school and being a nonjudgmental and active listener of parent ideas and concerns.

Providing bilingual support by communicating in both Spanish and English is essential. Educational partnerships should leverage parents' strengths and commitment for their education. It is essential to communicate in both languages by sending all notes home in both languages and helping establish a linguistically and culturally diverse collection of classroom and library books. Professional development opportunities can include learning about students' culture as this will help teachers and staff members of other ethnic backgrounds better understand the key features of the culture, i.e., Latino history, traditions, values, and customs as well as their impact on students' learning and behavior styles. Helping provide community outreach for Latino families such as family literacy programs, vocational training, community-based social services, and ESL programs are other ways to involve families.

CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are a valuable asset to our schools and act as liaisons for their children as they cross home-school boundaries. Additionally, they are also involved in their child's literacy development in various ways. Parent involvement can be classified in at least three categories: school-based involvement, home-school conferencing, and home-based involvement (Fantuzzo, et al., 2000; Hill & Craft, 2003). The first category of parental involvement is school-based involvement that includes parental activities and behaviors occurring in their children's school environment. Examples include volunteering in the school and classroom, participating in fundraising activities in school, acting as a chaperone for class field trips, participating in school governance activities, such as the school-based Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and planning classroom activities with teachers.

The second category of parental involvement is home-school conferencing, involves communication between parents and teachers or other school staff regarding children's academic success, rate of progress, enjoyment and engagement in school. Examples include parents talking to the teacher about their child's areas of strength and weaknesses in school, participating in parent-teacher conferences to discuss their children's progress and performance in class, conferencing with school administrators to

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learn more about what is happening in the school, becoming aware of rules and routines, and problem-solving issues related to their children.

The third category of parental involvement is home-based involvement as they provide for their children's physical and emotional needs and assure their attendance at school, as well as, provide learning opportunities for their children. Literacy learning can be a symbiotic event with families. Examples include reviewing a child's homework, providing a print rich environment and exposing children to books, magazines, educational games, and videos.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS THROUGH THEIR FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

“People educate each other through the mediation of the world.” -Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The concept of *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 2005, p. ix-x) is grounded on the understanding that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge.” Cummins (2000, p. 75) purported “Our prior experiences provides the foundation for interpreting new information. No learner is a blank slate.” As such, teachers can discover funds of knowledge of their students' families include conducting home visits to learn more about them and their families. Students can also share what talents and skills their parents possess that can be shared in class through a class presentation. Engage with parents when they visit your campus or on the playground to show your genuine interest in getting to know them. Share with them that they are an integral component of the class and you value their contributions. For the success of students in our classrooms, it is essential that parents and teachers keep open lines of communication.

There may be factors impeding this communication; however, there are ways in which we can include parents as valuable resources in our schools. According to current research regarding parental involvement, there are several factors affecting the level of parental involvement. Parents' beliefs about what is important to do with or on behalf of their children affect their level of involvement. Parents' level of involvement is also influenced by the extent to which parents believe they have a positive influence on their children's education as well as parents' perception that their children and school want them to be involved.

Tapping into student's funds of knowledge and asking them questions about them, their families and their cultural practices is important in forming a strong home school collaboration. This partnership will boost students' academic success in our classrooms and schools. As a former elementary school teacher of emergent bilinguals, I recall sending parents notes home and making phone calls to invite parents to visit our classroom and speak to students about their skill, hobbies, interests, cultural practices and heritage. Often parents who were bakers and explained the process of adding just enough sugar to a mix or decorating a cake, parents who were seamstresses and shared how to sew an angle to a dress correctly; and parents who were farmers and harvested corn or watermelon who discussed the best season to plant and the best time to water the crops to spur their growth. This close and personal type of literacy was fundamental to my students as they connected to the learning through practical and functional ways that they could relate to.

As bilingual students, they related to many of the parents who participated in these class activities. I acknowledged and validated the funds of knowledge that parents shared with my students in the classroom and literacy development was enhanced by engaging in these discussions. I always followed it up

with reflective journaling about what they learned and had them share their own experiences, if any, related to the parent's jobs. I had parents who would not respond to my invitation to come speak to our students; however, other parents would call them as well and encourage them to take part in the funds of knowledge activity. They were memorable because parents would also demonstrate their skill through a hands-on activity such as cooking, gardening or quilting.

My students were always excited when parents came into class to present and would eagerly await their arrival. As I reflect today, I realize that I was legitimizing these funds of knowledge while leveraging their cultural capital. I know that I empowered my students to form their identity and use their agency to be successful (Almaguer, 2019).

Parents form an indisputably valuable part of the equation when student motivation and success form the basis for such relationships. Collaborative efforts ultimately benefit the student. Families plant the seeds of literacy well before children begin formal schooling. In many ways the home school partnerships are the basis for student's learning to read. This consequently supports students' reading growth in school. It is important that teachers reach out and communicate with parents so that they feel welcomed, respected, and a part of their children's literacy achievement and success. They begin to recognize and value the importance of their presence and participation in the classroom. Additionally, it is important that we not only contact parents to share difficulties we are experiencing with the child; but, also to share the extraordinary achievements of their child. This is so valuable in the educational experiences of our bilingual students.

HOME SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Aside from regularly scheduled teacher conferences and workshops teachers can keep parents abreast of their children's achievement in a variety of ways such as:

- *Progress notes* are a personal way to keep parents informed about their child. Positive and congratulatory notes can be written when the child has completed a book, participated in a special way in class or finished an important assignment.
- *Monthly newsletters* made in a colorful and attractive flyer, can help parents understand what children are learning and help them support classroom endeavors while aiding in avoiding possible misunderstandings and confusions.
- *Reading Festival* can be organized where students, parents, and community come together to share books, articles, and stories.
- *Book fairs* can be coordinated where community role models, such as firemen, veterinarians, and police officers, can come in and read to the children, make crafts or artwork.
- *Muffins with mom* is an opportunity for moms to visit, eat a muffin, and spend time with their child during the school day. This may also include reading a book, completing an art activity or making a craft.
- *Donuts with dad* is an opportunity for dads to visit, eat a donut, and spend time with their child during the school day. This may also include reading a book, completing an art activity or making a craft.

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- *Granola with grandparents* is an opportunity for grandparents to come in, eat granola or ‘pan dulce,’ and spend time with their grandchild during the school day. This may also include sharing a book, working on a craft or doing artwork.
- *Literacy Nights* offer an opportunity for parents to visit the school on designated days during the school year. During this time, the school may bring in speakers and parents may visit the library and read a book with their child.
- *After School Clubs* offer an opportunity for parental involvement in social or sport related clubs led by and an advisor such as a teacher or coach along with a parent as a representative.
- *Talent Shows* are an opportunity for parents to participate in their students’ talent and celebrate their talent through musical performances, skits, or creative drama.
- *Award Ceremonies* offer the opportunity for parents to celebrate their students’ academic accomplishments and successes.
- *Movie Nights* are a social opportunity for parents to engage with teachers and chaperone students while viewing a movie.
- *School picnics* are opportunities to invite parents to come to school and have a picnic-style lunch with their students. This can take place in the school field or in the gym on days when the weather may not be good.

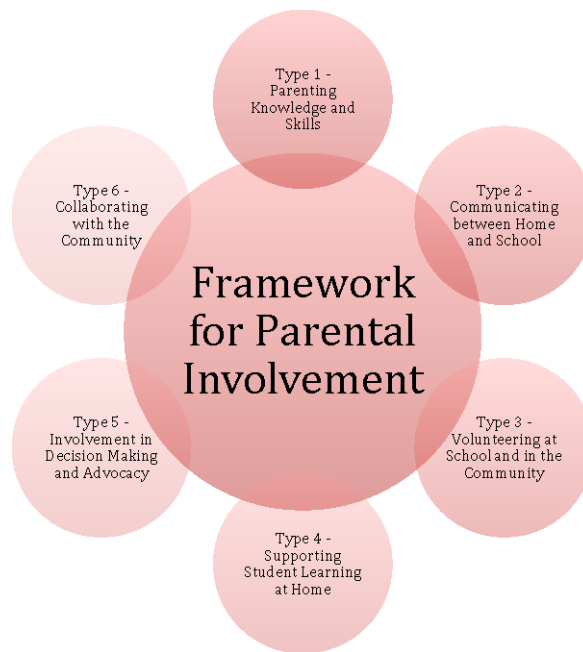
Epstein’s Parental Partnership and Framework for Parental Involvement

Epstein’s (2010) definition of *parental involvement* has morphed and expanded into *school family and community partnerships*. Through this lens, parental engagement is viewed in more meaningful and significant ways. This triggered the paradigm shift and widened the view of educational partnerships along with *overlapping spheres of influence* (2010). This view takes into account the shared responsibility for student learning and success including parents, teachers and community members (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006).

Epstein (2002) proposed a framework that involves six types of parental involvement. A comprehensive understanding of the importance of parent, family and community involvement can be established to better develop school and family partnerships. Epstein states “The main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life” (p.703). As teachers develop an awareness and understanding of the following six types of parent, family, and community involvement, they can critically navigate the framework to build strong partnerships to effectively work with parents. Figure 1 represents the *Framework for Parental Involvement* with six types of parental involvement opportunities.

Involvement Type 1: Parenting Knowledge and Skills which entail assisting parents with parenting skills, provide a clearer understanding about child and adolescent development and the conditions that support children as students in different age levels and grade levels. Examples of activities for significant family involvement include: (1) participation in workshops provided by the school related to health and nutrition literacy activities that can be done at home; (2) attending training programs that help develop skills as classroom aides or activity sponsors; (3) participating in classroom and center activities; and (4) providing families with books and articles related to parenting, issues related to literacy development and supporting academic success at home.

Figure 1. Parental Involvement Framework, (Epstein, 2002)



Involvement Type 2: Communicating between Home and School which entails communicating with parents about school programs and student progress through effective and reliable two-way communication channels. Examples of activities for communicating between home and school includes: (1) providing support services such as child care in order to increase attendance and involvement; (2) arranging student performances and plays; (3) providing newsletters to keep families abreast of what is occurring in the classroom; and (4) providing a monthly calendar of activities will keep parents involved and abreast of classroom and school events.

Involvement Type 3: Volunteering at School and in the Community which entails improving recruitment and training to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at school or in other locations. Examples of activities for encouraging volunteering at school and in the community include: (1) providing childcare so that parents are able to volunteer and attend school functions; and (2) forming welcoming committees that will help families feel encouraged to volunteer.

Involvement Type 4: Supporting Student Learning at Home which entails involving families in literacy and academic learning at home including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum related activities. Examples of activities that support student learning at home include: (1) offering books, resources and materials for parents to use at home; and (2) providing suggestions, tips, and ideas on how to assist their children at home and through the use of a website for parents that will help them extend and enrich classroom projects and activities at home.

Involvement Type 5: Involvement in Decision Making and Advocacy which entails involving families as participants in school decisions through committees, governance organizations, advocacy activities, and parent organizations. Examples of activities for involving parents in decision-making and advocacy include: (1) involving families in fundraising, fairs, and bazaars; (2) participation in PTO (Parent Teacher Organization); and (3) participation in curriculum development and review.

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Involvement Type 6: Collaborating with the Community which entails coordinating services and resources for families, students, and the school with agencies, businesses, community groups, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities to provide services to the community. Examples of activities for collaborating with the community include: (1) providing family nights, cultural dinners, carnivals, and potluck events; and (2) providing parent support groups that include parenting information, community agency information, and speakers.

FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Family literacy programs are unique in that they offer educational opportunities for both adults and children in a family. It is important to leverage the strengths and richness of students' backgrounds and diversity to knit into the fabric of family literacy programs. Auerbach (1989) offers a definition of family literacy programs that includes direct parent-child interactions based around literacy tasks as well as opportunities for parents to develop their literacy abilities by focusing on pertinent issues such as family and community problems, child-rearing concerns, home language and culture, and interactions with the school system. Additionally, for language minority families, learning English is often a key component of these programs. Language minority parents are often interested in learning English as a second language (ESL) opportunities which can be offered by teachers and school personnel. The goal of learning English shines the light on how families are interested in being able to support the learning and communication that takes place within educational partnerships.

These family literacy programs provide better access to and comfort in dealing with schools, they acknowledge a broad range of culturally influenced ways, and they situate literacy learning within the context of the daily lives of families and schools. Family literacy programs have many configurations and successful programs share several characteristics. These include: addressing parents' personal goals, valuing families' home language, viewing families from a resource model for what they have to contribute and share than from a deficit model, and providing families access to information and resources that will encourage success for children (Ada, 1988; Auerbach, 2007; Quintero and Huerta-Macias, 1990; Shanahan and Rodriguez-Brown, 1993). These counter narratives challenge the deficit view of learning and instead focus on the asset-based view of learning and incorporate funds of knowledge to strengthen bonds between homes and schools.

Culturally Relevant Parent Partnership Practices and Activities

- ***Read Aloud*** encourage parents to take an active role in the reading and literacy development of their children. Invite parents to come to class to conduct read aloud of culturally relevant stories. Parents can also take part in class routines and activities. They will feel honored to participate in their child's education and as an important part of the learning process
- ***Cultural Heritage Project*** is an opportunity for students to interview family members such as elders and ask about their literacies of life - funds of knowledge reflected in their everyday cultural practices. This project can be extended to include family stories, pictures, memoirs and artwork of family members reflecting their ancestry, traditional cultural activities and may include recipes (Almaguer, 2019).

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- ***Engage*** parents in bringing in snacks and participating in recess activities where they can participate in class activities such as read alouds.
- ***Funds of Knowledge*** are a great means by which parents can share their personal funds of knowledge and experiences with the class. This may be funds of knowledge related to baking, sewing, or cooking, gardening, clothes-making or quilt-making among others.
- ***Home Visits*** are an authentic way to learn more about families, their customs, traditions and ways of life. These are also a great opportunity to get to know students' families and show interest and discuss commonalities that exist between the teachers, parents, and students.
- ***Personalized Message*** can be sent home to parents. A personalized message or invitation to visit your classroom can be included.
- ***Reading partnerships*** encourage parents to take an active role in the reading and literacy development of students. Teachers can encourage parents to read with their students for 20 minutes a day. If students are not able to read on their own, they can be read to. Invite parents to read with their child in class to further support their reading efforts.
- ***Culturally Relevant Texts*** will motivate students and parents to read because students culture, race and ethnic background are reflected in the story line. Students are able to relate to the plotline and increase their comprehension of the reading. This would encourage parents to read with their children and both the parent and the child can relate to storyline.
- ***Dialogue Journaling*** is a conversation between parent and child that takes place in writing. One person writes in it one day, asking questions or making observations, and then passes the journal to his partner. The partner writes in the same journal the following day, replying to the questions and comments, and then adding questions, comments or observations for the first writer. The parents writing becomes a model for the child. The child can emulate the parents writing.
- ***Reflective Journaling*** is an opportunity for students to reflect on their thoughts, experiences or ideas in learning. They can use their own words to interpret and make connections with the learning taking place in the classroom. Journals can be used to write their thoughts daily. For many, this serves as an opportunity to write about their feelings or experiences regularly. Expressing their thoughts on paper can be a way for shy or introverted students to express their thoughts throughout the learning.
- ***Dyad Reading*** is an instructional strategy where two students are paired or placed in 'dyads' to share the reading of culturally relevant texts. A more able reader is paired with a less able reader to provide a model of correct reading fluency, expression, pronunciation, intonation, prosody, and comprehension of the text (Almaguer, 2005). Dyad reading is unison reading of a "lead reader" who reads well and an "assisted reader," who does not read well simultaneously reading aloud at a normal rate. Thus, both members of the dyad have the opportunity to read aloud to one another. Utilizing this cooperative paired reading strategy allows the sharing of reading experiences among students who are struggling readers and adds additional support and opportunities for English learners to engage in reading. The more able reader would be the parent who would serve as an immediate model of correct pronunciation, prosody, intonation and expression for the child (Almaguer, 2005).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is evident that parental involvement and support is necessary for the success of students in school. The gap between students' homes and school must be narrowed so that our children, regardless of income level or ethnic background, are the beneficiaries of the alliances that can be created. Teachers and school personnel must collaborate to be the leading force who envision innovative and creative ways to get parent involved and engaged in schools. Additionally, teachers must be aware of the latest research that supports the notion that parents, regardless of income level, educational background and level of English proficiency, care about their child's success in school. Supportive and caring school staff, teachers and administrators can positively impact achievement through culturally competent cooperative relationships that foster these outcomes.

Effective educational partnerships evolve when a partnership between home, school and communities exist and are grounded on collaboration for student academic achievement and success. Educational partnerships are anchored to their importance in a child's academic success. Parent engagement can be established and fostered for home-school partnerships that form strong communities of collaboration that are beneficial to all. Fostering and strengthening these bonds will lead to fortified educational partnerships that propel students' achievement and success. Working together, parents, schools, and communities, shines a light and gives added meaning to the statement: "It takes a village to educate a child."

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Practices: Instructional practices that students from diverse backgrounds can connect and engage in.

Culturally Relevant Texts: Books in which students' culture, race and ethnic background are reflected in the story line. Students are able to relate to the plotline and increase their comprehension of the reading.

Culture: The way groups of people identify through language and customary practices.

Dialogue Journaling: A conversation between parent and child that takes place in writing. One person writes in it one day, asking questions or making observations, and then passes the journal to his partner. The partner writes in the same journal the following day, replying to the questions and comments, and then adding questions, comments, or observations for the first writer. The parents' writing becomes a model for the child. The child can emulate the parents' writing.

Digital Media: A variety of digital apparatuses such as electronic tablets, cell phones, electronic books, and web spaces including searching the Internet.

Dyad Reading: A fluency and comprehension strategy used with readers and writers who lack fluency. More able readers are paired with less able readers to provide a model of correct reading intonation, pronunciation, prosody, tone, and expression of the reading selection.

Educational Partnerships: A collaboration between parents, schools and communities to benefit the social, linguistic and academic achievement of students.

English Language Learners: Most often referred to as ELL's are students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds and who typically require modified instruction for English acquisition.

ESL: A common abbreviation used in schools for "English as a Second Language." Schools will use the term ESL when describing the programs that educate students and who are not native English speakers. ESL courses are also offered to parents who are not native English speakers to help them develop English.

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Funds of Knowledge: The skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture. It is the knowledge and expertise that students and their family members have because of their roles in their families, communities, and culture.

Immigrants or Newcomers: People who are recent arrivals to the country and are from a different country of origin.

Latino: A person of Latin American origin or descent.

Parental Involvement: A combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and to the student.

Reflective Journaling: An opportunity for students to reflect on their thoughts, experiences or ideas in learning. They can use their own words to interpret and make connections with the learning taking place in the classroom. Journals can be used to write their thoughts daily. For many, this serves as an opportunity to write about their feelings or experiences regularly. Expressing their thoughts on paper can be a way for shy or introverted students to express their thoughts throughout the learning.

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