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Family Engagement and English Language Students

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Abstract

Families are a child's first teacher. Preschool students are learning and developing rapidly, while becoming accustomed to new school rules and routines. Dual language learners are a growing population in the United States. As children are learning English as a second language, parents, alongside early childhood educators, play an impactful role in each child's development. When families and teachers work together, students will see more academic, social, emotional, and linguistic success during the early years. This paper explored a multitude of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies regarding dual language learners, family engagement, and the importance of fostering positive home school connections. The research that was studied showcased ideas of how family engagement can help support healthy language development for all students, especially those who may speak more than one language.

Keywords: family engagement, early childhood education, dual language learners, English Learner students

Chapter One: Introduction

Classrooms in the United States are made up of unique students. Students within these classrooms may speak multiple languages, come from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and have already had distinctly different life experiences than the peer sitting next to them. Educators value these differences while creating a culturally responsive, and respectful, learning environment and acknowledging English Language students each day (Taylor et al., 2011). In Early Childhood Education (ECE), part of creating this type of learning environment requires making sure positive relationships are built with these young students and families. Daniel (2009) described ECE programs being strengthened by home-school partnerships with families, which resulted in positive growth and development of students. This can become a difficult task for educators when so many different languages are represented within classrooms each year. According to Epstein (1995, 2001), parental involvement can look different in many ways and can be categorized into six sections: parenting and nurturing, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with school communities while utilizing resources (Zhang, 2015).

Scope of Research

Teachers strive to build relationships with students and families. Teachers are aware of the idea that when families are engaged in children's education, children's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development is supported in an indirect way (Smith & Sheridan, 2018). This paper aims to discuss the effect that family engagement has on English language learners in Early Childhood Education. Information was synthesized and analyzed relating to research done around Early Childhood Education, Dual Language Learners (DLL), family engagement,

language and literacy, whole child development, and utilization of home languages within the classroom.

Importance of Study in the field of Education

Early Childhood Educators have the critical job of helping all young learners build a solid school foundation prior to entering elementary school. Many teachers all across the United States have students in classrooms who speak more than one language. English language learners (ELL) refers to children who have a home language other than English, and are learning the English language in an English speaking context, like at school (Taylor et al., 2011). Teachers help dual language students learn new content, in a new language, all while making sure the lessons are culturally responsive to each student's home life and first language. Early Childhood students are so young, so when teachers can help establish and build a strong school-home relationship with families in these early preschool years, it helps set them up for success as students begin the educational journey. Continuing a strong family connection during these school years can help these young students grow in all areas of development, including cognitive, social and emotional, and language development. In order to continuously work to include families in learning, teachers must help create positive opportunities to help families stay involved.

Research Question and Connection to the Program's Essential Question

When considering how beneficial it is to have families involved in young children's education, the research question became, "How can family engagement support healthy language development for dual language learners in Early Childhood Education?" This question helped build and organize evidence proving how helpful it is to have strong family engagement opportunities in all Early Childhood Education programs, especially for children who speak

more than one language. The research question connects to Concordia-St. Paul's program essential question, "In light of what is known about how children learn, how shall professional educators best teach learners who speak a first language other than English?" in many ways. For example, Educators must know how children learn best, and building relationships with families can help teachers truly understand each student in individual ways. Educators take personal family experiences, backgrounds, and cultural ideas into consideration when planning lessons and activities, especially with students who speak a first language other than English. When educators do such things, Wilder (2014) stated the correlation between family engagement and academic success was positive for all students, in every ethnic group.

Definition of Terms

Family Engagement refers to home-school partnerships.

Early Childhood Education involves programs where young children are learning such as childcare, preschool, pre-K, family child care, and head start (Daniel, 2009).

Dual Language Learners (DLL) are students learning English as a second language. Teachers often utilize other terms, meaning the same thing. These terms include English Language Learner (ELL), English learner (EL), English as an additional language (EAL), and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research topic, explained why teachers must build solid relationships with EL preschool families, and gave definitions to key terms utilized throughout the paper. Chapter Two is a literature review, analyzing 15 studies about home languages, language and literacy development, family engagement from the family's perspective, parent engagement with English as a Second Language (ESL) services, literacy experiences at home,

and more. Chapter two describes how each study connects to the research question by highlighting important pieces of evidence showcasing how family engagement can positively affect the academic growth that dual language learners make.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review discussed the effect that family engagement has on English language learners in Early Childhood Education (ECE). It included a combination of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research studies that connect to Concordia's Essential Question for students in the English as a Second Language graduate program. Through the compilation of research, educators understand how critical it is to include families in preschool programs to maximize learning outcomes for bilingual students.

Building Partnerships with Families

School is a child's second home (Moralez-Alexander, 2021). The idea that school is a child's second home is evident in how important the idea of a solid connection between school and home is. When families and teachers partner to help influence a child's academic life together, a child's development is supported throughout the entire day, not just the hours spent in the classroom. Moralez-Alexander (2021) showed how families feel about the type of positive cultural connection hoped to be seen in every child's education. Moralez-Alexander's (2021) research has many connections to the question, "How can family engagement support healthy language development for dual language learners (DLL) in Early Childhood Education (ECE)?" It is evident through research, when teachers understand and respect the varying differences of cultural backgrounds of students in the classrooms, teachers are able to better the home-school-community relationships. Establishing relationships with families requires trust and communication, and should be prioritized while imbedding culturally responsive practices within the classroom (Moralez-Alexander, 2021). Moralez-Alexander (2021), stated that most Latino families believe respeto to be a core belief in education and teaching children how to make good choices and behave in socially acceptable ways helps them become well educated.

Moralez-Alexander (2021) conducted a qualitative study by interviewing Latino families in New York, and focused on the ideas of respeto (treating others with respect), convivencia (co-existing with others in a social context), and confianza (the ability to communicate mutual confidence and trust). Moralez-Alexander (2021) stated 59% of the families involved in the study, were Latino, and spoke little English. These participants averaged 29 years old, and had an average of two or three children (Moralez-Alexander, 2021). The analysis of the qualitative data findings indicated teacher preparation programs should give future teachers opportunities for understanding varying family-school-community partnerships and give teacher candidates authentic learning experiences interacting with all types of families (Moralez-Alexander, 2021). Limitations to this study include the size of the data. The author suggested having a larger sample of participants would have a clearer look into general data around this topic, not specifically only results from the Latino families that were interviewed.

Through qualitative interviews with parents and teachers, Zhang (2015) questioned the varying types of parental involvement found within classrooms and determined what makes or does not make engagement meaningful to learning. In the past, researchers found parental involvement to be meaningless or ineffective, because parents thought involvement was a way for teachers to get more preparation and planning done (Zhang, 2015). This led Zhang to question which types of family involvement were meaningful to students learning more than one language. There were 23 participants involved; including 11 teachers and 12 parents from three early childhood centers. The methodology used was the Grounded Theory Method (GTM), which meant data was collected through discovery, which in this study, meant interviews were conducted (Zhang, 2015). Teachers and parents were asked questions about meaningful moments while participating in school activities, and how families made the actual decision to participate.

When teachers, families, and students were all engaged, Zhang (2015), questioned if involvement was desirable, practical and effective to gauge if it was meaningful. The answers to these questions led to what type of impact each involvement had on children, families, and teachers. Limitations to this study included research that only showcased shared viewpoints between parents and teachers, and did not emphasize any situations where voices could have been in disagreement. Also, through these interviews, the student opinions were only heard through the voices of families, and teachers. Zhang (2015), mentioned that this study proves that a 'one show fits all' approach to parental engagement is not necessarily always the case, and educators must adapt to the families they serve. The result of this study showed an emphasis on making sure parental involvement is understood and practiced in ECE (Zhang, 2015).

There are other people who help strengthen the connection between family and education such as school administrators, teachers, and policy makers, and help recognize the positive impacts of parental involvement on student academic outcomes (Wilder, 2014). Therefore, such people become an important part of education daily. School reform policies, and ideas such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Title 1, Part A), have been inspired by the idea that parents can change children's educational trajectories by engaging in parental involvement (Wilder, 2014). Based on these ideas, schools in the United States have implemented family engagement initiatives to help strengthen the home-school relationship. Wilder (2014), highlighted nine studies that were done and the results portrayed a positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. The research in these studies were all qualitative in nature, and Wilder (2014) suggests the relationships were impacted by various factors such as ethnicity, prior achievement, and socioeconomic status. However, Jeynes (2005), confirmed that parental involvement may contribute to shrinking the achievement gap across cultural groups,

Wilder (2014) believed this led to additional research that needs to be conducted around this idea. Like discussed in previous articles, Wilder (2014) also found that a one size fits all approach to the design of parental involvement is likely to fail, especially in diverse communities with varying cultural beliefs and languages.

Jeynes (2007) believed parental involvement meant families are engaged in the educational process and learning experiences of children (Wilder, 2014). After analyzing the qualitative research, Wilder (2014) found the most noteworthy involvement components to be attendance, communication between parents and children regarding school, educational expectations from families, along with family aspirations for children. These included reflections of beliefs and attitudes towards education as a whole. Wilder (2014) also found that students' academic level impacted the amount of engagement some families had.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) shed light on confusion with the differences between parental engagement and parental involvement, focused on the continuum of parental involvement with schools, and parental engagement with individual student learning. Through qualitative research done in the United Kingdom, phone interviews with staff showcased the realization schools may be on different points on the continuum due to varying activities that require engagement and different groups of parents coming from the community. Crozier et al., also warned that a one size fit all approach will not work for parental engagement because families have varying needs, face different barriers, and have different ideas about involvement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) believed that parents from ethnic minorities, and parents facing economic hardships, might find engagement with schools difficult but that does not mean these parents are not involved with learning at home. When Goodall and Montgomery (2014) surveyed parents, other concerns were found which led to ideas

that educators should consider when planning family engagement activities. Concerns included a lack of taking specific needs of families into account, such as times of meetings and facilities available, therefore becoming another barrier to engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Epstein and Sheldon (2000) believed the term "parent involvement" should be replaced with "school, family, and community partnership", because of the idea that it takes a village to raise a child (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Overall, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) gathered evidence believing engagement provides a rise in children's self esteem and can surge motivation and learning, which eventually produces higher educational outcomes. After the continuum was accessed, one point regarding the shift from the beginning of the continuum, that perceives schools to have sole responsibility for student learning, to it being clear in the third phase, that families and schools share this responsibility. A shift backwards relates specifically to Early Childhood Education, because parent engagement in learning begins far before a child enters the classroom. Parents are teaching young children to speak, walk, learn, and understand appropriate ways to interact with others from very young ages. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest this is a continuum, not a journey, and both schools, and families can start and move along the continuum at varying paces.

Educators Supporting Dual Language Learning. Early childhood educators need to understand how to best serve Dual Language Learners (DLL) and families, due to an increase in DLL populations within the United States (Baker, 2018). Baker (2018) facilitated a qualitative multiple case study regarding teaching practices which are beneficial to all students, including DLLs in preschool classrooms. Six classrooms, from Head Start programs, public preschools, and private preschool programs were studied and information was gathered through interviews, observations, video recordings, and student work samples. Participants were selected by

nominations from community members. Families of DLL students were even given an opportunity to share input about what type of practices educators should embed in DLL classrooms. Baker (2018) stated exemplary teachers hold specific asset based beliefs about students who speak more than one language, such as the importance of building relationships, utilizing home languages and cultures in the classroom, facilitating guided play within preschool, and observational assessments while scaffolding instruction in English. Baker (2018) reflected on teaching practices teachers utilize when teaching DLL students, including planning lessons, teaching skills, and assessment, and questioned whether teaching practices vary by the type of program students are enrolled in.

Findings from Baker (2018) were split into two tiers. The first tier included general early childhood practices that are beneficial to all students, including classrooms organized into play centers, predictable routines, following a whole child approach to learning, and scaffolding instruction during play time (Baker, 2018). Even though practices found within Tier One were not specifically created for DLL children, DLL children still benefit. Tier Two revealed practices specific to DLL students. Baker (2018) found that a set of four core beliefs were embedded into these practices. The four core beliefs included: bilingualism is an asset, bilingual families should be used as resources for learning, DLL students should be respected and seen as an equal part of the classroom, and DLL students deserve individualized instruction when learning English as a second language (Baker, 2018). Baker (2018) suggested additional research to be done around this topic, including bringing in other types of ECE programs, expanding the interview process away from just distinguished teachers, and gathering student opinions on what a successful classroom looks like.

Supporting EL students comes with challenges and Milton et al. (2020) focused on struggles Early Childhood teachers can have when supporting EL students in English due to the lack of formal training some teachers have. Milton et al. (2020) showcased 20 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, with 28 teachers involved. Milton et al. (2020) described most teachers were between the ages of 30-40, 96% of teachers were proficient in more than one language, yet had limited teaching experiences resulting in less than five years. Through research, Milton et al. (2020) gathered information that classroom sizes varied greatly between participants, ranging from 10 to 30 students. Milton et al. (2020)'s mixed methods study took place in South Africa, and consisted of both qualitative and quantitative methods by surveys and questionnaires. Teachers' responses were analyzed after questions were asked, such as what factors could impact abilities to help strengthen English as an Additional Language (EAL), teachers' own ideas about the level of training received, and what type of support ECD teachers need to help support EALs. The information was shown through frequencies and percentages in graphics such as tables. As a result, 89% of teachers felt well informed on what ideologies were successful for teaching EAL. Teachers described needing support in the areas of areas of advice on handling EAL learners, wanting workshops on English skills with preschoolers, appropriate materials to use in language lessons, and formal training on language acquisition and EAL (Milton et al., 2020). There were many challenges stated in this study, including language barriers of the teachers themselves. Milton et al. (2020) suggested the fact that student EAL acquisition might be affected when teachers do not provide a high quality model of the English language themselves.

Cultural Awareness and Recognizing Family Experiences

The population of DLL in America has grown, yet teachers often lack programming or curriculum to help navigate this increase, so Michael-Luna (2015) suggested educators can learn a lot from families who speak other languages, after learning appropriate ways to reach out to learn more about student home life. DLL use of language and understanding of vocabulary is influenced by language in the environment at home, experiences, and how family members utilize language (Michael-Luna, 2015). Michael-Luna (2015) gave suggestions on how to utilize information from families to enhance classroom language skills for DLL. This study involved 39 families speaking many different languages that sent preschool aged students to a dual language school (Michael-Luna, 2015). Michael-Luna (2015) brought up four main areas within the study including home language context, family language and behavior observations, language and literacy practices at home, and any family questions or concerns when it comes to EL services children receive. Home language context refers to the languages spoken within the home. Michael-Luna (2015) summarized the idea that a family's specific language environment in the home requires varying types of curriculums, assessments, and home-school connections that educators provide. For example, knowing such information can guide teachers' facilitation of interactions of children in class. Michael-Luna (2015) mentioned that home literacy practices could be supplemented by teachers allowing students to take home books in home languages, or giving additional online resources to help facilitate learning at home. When families were asked about specific concerns regarding students learning two languages, some suggested a fear of students being referred to special education, solely on the fact that teachers are not always trained in bilingualism with EL students. Michael-Luna (2015) provided ways for educators to learn more about learning taking place in the home, by developing parent focus groups, utilizing

home language surveys each year, home language tracking, offering informal interviews, family sessions on bilingual education, and offering more home-school projects utilizing both languages. Families play a role in learning as students go through four to six stages of language development in the preschool years (Taylor et al., 2011). Michael-Luna (2015) stated how important "creating a space for family knowledge, beliefs, and concerns about children's language use and development at home gives teachers crucial insights into meeting the needs of DLL in EC settings." When family insights are brought into consideration, teachers are able to better understand how to create a space that is welcoming, yet still supportive, to all students.

Sawyer et al. (2017) believed language development for young students can be complex. There has been research conducted regarding parent and teacher beliefs around school-aged DLLs, but Sawyer et al. (2017) wanted to draw in more research on preschool aged students specifically. 32% of preschool students in the United States are DLLs (Sawyer et al., 2016). Sawyer et al. (2016)'s qualitative study included 14 Latino speaking families, with 13 preschool aged children and 17 teachers. These students ranged in ages three to six, and two students had additional needs that required Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Focus groups were created and interviews were given to those participating families who could not attend the group sessions. Through research, Sawyer et al. (2017) understood that parental involvement can be beneficial for teachers because sometimes there is a lack of culturally and linguistically responsive practices represented in early childhood classrooms. Sawyer et al. (2017) believed having a positive partnership between teachers and families can create a collaboration that allows parental cultural knowledge to add to the instructional support for DLLs. Sawyer et al. (2017) wanted to focus on the values of bilingualism for students, utilization of home language, English proficiency, the process of how a second language is acquired, and barriers for DLL language

activities. Parents reported wanting students to be bilingual because it prepares them for increased job opportunities as they get older due to being seen as an asset for speaking more than one language (Sawyer et al., 2017). Parents also want students to keep home languages, so communication with older generations in the family can still happen, while keeping cultural factors in families alive. Keeping those parent beliefs in mind, parents also view children's level of English proficiency as a gauge of academic success for years to come. Sawyer et al. (2017) found that sometimes parents might feel a sense of regret as children only learn the mainstream language and can become resistant to utilizing home languages simultaneously. Themes were found throughout the study regarding language beliefs, collaboration between parents and teachers, the value of home language and learning english simultaneously, understanding that learning a second language is a process, understanding a connection between culture and impacts on learning, and that parental experiences can influence academic practices (Sawyer et al., 2017).

Through this study, both parents and teachers recognized misconceptions that often follow suit with ESL practices. Two misconceptions noted by Sawyer et al. (2017) include learning multiple languages can cause language delays, and to maximize English learning, students should be fully immersed in the language. This puts pressure on families to only speak English in the home, and goes against the belief of wanting to keep home culture alive. Parents understand the added pressure on students when learning in a second language, which can lead to challenges and can create negative behaviors for students in the classroom. Sawyer et al. (2017) stated Latino parents felt a barrier to children receiving proper DLL instruction, which resulted from teachers having limited training with bilingualism and DLL in the classrooms. Limitations to the study were found through the type of demographic that participated. Sawyer et al. (2017)

believed that findings could have varied with surveying a different population and demographic of families, because most parents who participated had higher levels of education.

Family Engagement with Language and Literacy

Family literacy programs are designed to enhance the skills of DLL, as well as DLL's family's skills (Jung et al., 2015). Jung et al. (2015) further researched quantitative studies to determine which features of ECE family literacy programs are important for Latino children's early language and literacy development, therefore connecting it to the research question. A study was facilitated and included 22 family literacy programs in the Southwest area of the United States (Jung et. al., 2015). These ECE programs had high percentages of immigrant Latino families who were enrolled in family literacy programs including parent-child activities, parent education, and adult education. Jung et al. (2015) showcased 181 three to five year old Latino students selected for the study, from 39 different classrooms, within the 22 early childhood programs. Through the research, Jung et al. (2015) found when Latino children engaged in ECE programs, children showed greater knowledge in language and literacy skills. Limitations in this study included not looking at more aspects of family literacy programs besides those involved with ECE, as well as negative ideas around the connections of ECE and socioemotional support, quality of instruction, and language and literacy experiences some children face. Jung et al. (2015) suggested future research to involve looking to see if the relationships between the quality of the ECE programs and the learning outcomes of the Latino children vary based on the depth the ECE program goes with parent engagement.

Lewis et al. (2016) discussed the relationship between DLL's home language and literacy experiences, with expressive vocabulary and oral comprehension abilities in Spanish and in English. According to Arrigada (2005), "Children's language experiences at home play a pivotal

role in their early language abilities regardless of the language spoken" (Lewis et al., 2015, p. 479). Research conducted by Lewis et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of support in the home, including participating in literacy in home languages. The quantitative research study consisted of 93 three to five year old, dual language students, and mothers from Pennsylvania. These students were enrolled in an urban Head Start Classroom. All of these students were exposed to Spanish in the home prior to entering school. The result of this study suggests the Spanish language experiences these dual language learners have in the home environment support the development of English learning language abilities, as well as general academic experiences in school. For instance, the study showed families how participating in literacy activities in the home, such as reading books, was one way they could support children's language development. Lewis et al. (2015), described three limitations found within the course of the study including "not collecting data on the language(s) spoken during specific home literacy activities or the number of literacy materials in Spanish and English, the impact that communicative partners other than children's mothers had on children's language abilities was not explored, and that the preschoolers in this study were DLLs exhibiting more developed language abilities in English than in Spanish" (2015, p. 490).

Sommer et al. (2020) research showed how children can be enrolled in Head Start services, while parents are involved in taking ESL classes simultaneously. Sommer et al.'s (2020) study connects to the research question, because it offers ideas on how English as a Second Language(ESL) classes parents take can help them understand the Head Start curriculum and learning outcomes that students are focusing on. The set up of this two generational program allows parents many opportunities to be involved in student learning and development. Such opportunities help families feel more connected and comfortable with what is happening in

student life at school. Sommer et al. (2020) provided a mixed methods study and information was both qualitative and quantitative in nature due to different parts of the research being done. The quantitative aspect looked at the results on the CAP Tulsa Family Advancement Study from the 35 participants in the 2014-2015 timeframe (Sommer et al., 2020). The qualitative aspect of this study reflected the focus groups the participants were placed in during the semesters when enrolled in the Head Start/ESL programs. The study looked at parents' progress, class attendance, alignment of the parent curriculum with child development, and parent agency in school and other child-related domains. Parents enrolled in this type of two generational programming benefitted children's education. Through research, evidence was shown how parents furthered specific skills in ESL classes that prepared them for future engagement opportunities in educational settings, such as school activities, or parent teacher conferences (Sommer et al., 2020). Limitations included future studies having a controlled set of participants who are not enrolled in this type of program, to compare data to. Sommer et al. (2020), describe another limitation as the study only focuses on parent's English language skills during the two-generational ESL programs, while understanding that parents are also learning much more through ESL classes. For example, parents are getting help with employment, getting information on attaining certifications and degrees, learning how to promote culture and home language, and focusing on parenting skills (Sommer et al., 2020).

The Getting Ready Intervention focuses on parent-child and parent-teacher relationships. Sheridan et al. (2011) wanted to test the effectiveness of the Getting Ready Intervention on early language and literacy skills in conjunction with young children's school readiness. Through research, questions were asked such as "Do certain family variables or child variables moderate the effects of the Getting Ready Intervention on children's language and literacy outcomes?"

(Sheridan et al., 2011, p. 365). 217 student participants in this study were from 29 Head Start classrooms in the public school system. The study spread through the course of four school years. All classrooms were National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited inclusive settings, with 10% of students receiving special education services or learning English as a second language (Sheridan et al, 2020). The study also focused on 211 parents and 29 Head Start teachers. Data was collected and child assessments were conducted through questionnaires. Sheridan et al. (2011) found students who entered preschool without speaking English yet, made bigger gains than other participants. This led Sheridan et al. (2011) to believe that the classroom curriculum was set up in a way that benefit students learning English immensely. Limitations to the study included a lack of data regarding instructional quality to determine whether or not students saw growth because of the intervention itself or because of classroom characteristics.

Hammer et al., (2011) compared and contrasted language and literacy differences between Spanish speaking Latino preschoolers and preschoolers who speak Mandarin, Cantonese, or Korean. When Hammer et al., (2011) looked closely at EL students' language and literacy abilities, the age of exposure to each language led to differences in results. Environmental factors such as socioeconomic status also influenced such skills. While growth is still visible throughout ECE, Hammer et al., (2011), described DLLs as behind monolingual peers. Hammer et al., (2011), suggested limitations related to this study include not documenting student’s families characteristics such as educational, generational, and occupational status of parents, as well as languages spoken in the home, because such factors can influence factors impeding language and literacy skill level, and having this information would help policymakers identify the most effective type of educational setting to help young learners thrive.

Utilization of Home Languages

Home languages being valued, represented, and used in the classroom is beneficial towards EL students because when lessons and classroom environment are culturally appropriate, students feel more comfortable learning in English (Taylor et al., 2011). Xu (1999) researched varying literacy experiences that Chinese Kindergarten students had at home. Xu (1999)'s research showed different ways that experiences in the home benefits students. Home literacy experiences can range from having environmental print in both languages, reading to children, and family members modeling language and literacy. These home literacy practices can have positive effects on students' academic performance at school. This research is qualitative in nature, because Xu (1999) facilitated many interviews, observations, and took field notes leading to open ended questions being asked to the participants. Xu (1999) focused on six participating Chinese speaking families who were enrolled in kindergarten classes in a large school district, in the western part of the United States. The families varied in the level of engagement that took place within the home. At the end of the study, Xu (1999) described how teachers could support and strengthen literacy knowledge by providing home literacy experiences for families. Xu (1999) discussed incorporating home languages into the classroom to help build confidence and self esteem of young learners. One limitation to this study was it was done many years ago, but the information is still relevant today.

Whole Child Development

Hammer et al. (2011), described a high level of importance on teachers understanding child development, which leads to academic success in later educational years. Although, due to the rising number of DLL students, the nation is focused on academic outcomes at the preschool

level instead (Hammer et al., 2011). This has led to a need for universal preschool programs in the United States, which can be found in the form of Head Start programs. Hammer et al., (2011) described children's early development studies already conducted have faults of excluding DLL students from samples until they are English proficient, which allow research to show how child development goes hand in hand with learning a second language. Including parents in these types of curriculum, can help dual language families transition to kindergarten, too. Overall, the developmental stages children go through help teachers understand more about how to teach or assess student progress. This is especially helpful when determining what a DL student should be capable of doing at any given age or stage.

Conclusion

Currently, teachers in areas all across the United States have students who speak more than one language, or are learning English as a second language. The EL program at Concordia St. Paul has an essential question that all courses are tied to. The Program Essential Question states, "In light of what is known about how children learn, how shall professional educators best teach learners who speak a first language other than English?" Teachers must understand and respect that each young EL student will come to the classroom with a unique set of strengths, needs, and varying background experiences that have shaped each child. Especially at such a young age, parents and families play a huge role in that. Taylor et al. (2011) states young children first learn to speak their home language, and then learn to communicate the languages surrounding them in social or academic settings. When such literature regarding family engagement is reviewed, Early Childhood Education classroom teachers gain more knowledge and a better understanding of how to help ELL students learn, while families are included in the

process. Chapter Three explains ways teachers can learn to do this and improve their instructional practice for EL students.

Chapter Three: Discussion/Application/Future Studies

Research shows many advantages to having families engaged with student learning, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) finds this to be especially true when a partnership is made; families are engaged in student learning and teachers are striving to build rapport with families (Nemeth, Koralek, & Ramsey, 2020). This is evident for students learning more than one language. Chapter three will examine ways teachers can improve their instructional practice with EL students, ideas for teacher training to guide such improvements, and possibilities for beneficial future research regarding parent involvement with EL students.

Summary of Insights Gained

There are many ways educators can support dual language learners and their families in the classroom. Teachers must strive to build rapport with families while making sure the classroom environment values and supports all students, from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers can build this cultural awareness by involving families and recognizing family experiences that help shape individual students within the class. Families are a resource teachers should be using to help strengthen the connection between home and school, which will also help families feel more comfortable as their child may be learning in a different language than what they are fully familiar with. Nemeth et al. (2020), suggests teachers can do this by facilitating a two way communication uniting educators and families with the ways they can help students grow together. When teachers utilize home languages, it helps students build a sense of belonging and confidence as they learn. As Taylor et al. (2011) research shows, students learn through interactions with their peers, and students enjoy hearing other languages represented in the classroom.

Teacher Training and Improved Instructional Practice

There are many things teachers can do to improve practice with educating dual language learners. Milton et al. (2020), describes an urgency to help teachers understand how to better facilitate instruction geared towards English as an additional language (EAL) students, and describes a need for professional development for educators. Baker (2019) suggests four core beliefs teachers should instill in classroom life each day, including seeing bilingualism as a strength, utilizing dual language families as instructional resources, viewing DLL students as equal participants with ideas being valued and respected, and providing scaffolding and individualized support for DLLs. When teachers view speaking more than one language as an asset, teachers can use a child's L1 (first language) while learning classroom routines, during play, instruction and assessments when able to (Baker, 2019). This can also be seen when L1's are brought into the classroom, when giving students opportunities to share personal cultures, beliefs, and languages with peers. Baker (2019) believes that viewing bilingual families as positive resources and seeing DLL children as valuable classroom members is evident when teachers are able to have ongoing communication with families, make the classroom an inviting place for all families, and by building relationships throughout the school year. Ideas for strengthening communication with DLL families include being approachable and allowing families to ask questions or vocalize concerns, writing newsletters to inform families about classroom curriculum, home visits, and sending literature home (Baker, 2019). In preschool, social stories are often implemented with all students, as this type of story is an effective way to teach new skills or concepts. Social stories can easily be printed and sent home, or sent as a PDF through electronic messages. Social stories can be translated and utilized in the home for DLLs. Scaffolding lessons for DLLs can easily be done when teachers model lessons appropriately,

teaching vocabulary, offering one on one support, and utilize tangible, realistic items for DLL to learn from (Baker, 2019). In preschool, teachers can create natural learning experiences for DLLs with realistic, engaging materials in the dramatic play center which naturally creates opportunities for students to verbalize thoughts and practice using new vocabulary. Jung et al., (2015) believes students benefit from learning with a scaffolded curriculum because this type of instruction helps them better understand skills, and enjoy learning a variety of ways to use language.

Milton et al., (2020), helped facilitate some research in South Africa about how most educators there have little training on theories of how children learn languages. This can lead to teachers not feeling confident, when teaching English as a second language. When language ideas are new, or unknown, this can be a struggle for teachers all over the world. Milton et al., (2020), described specific training teachers could benefit from such as workshops on how to best teach English skills to preschoolers, language acquisition and English as a second language training, which materials to use to support lessons, and how to utilize other resources when struggling with how to best serve EL students.

Future Studies

More studies can be done to further understand the impact family engagement has on learners. When thinking about how to deepen this research, it is beneficial to narrow down the demographics of the participants of studies involved. For example, most teachers may think finding the specific age of participants of the students they currently teach would help see statistics and results in a clearer view from being familiar with the characteristics of a specific age group. Studies throughout the literature review were done internationally, and across the United States, but pulling in research from specific areas of the Midwest, could help Minnesota

teachers better understand the students they are currently teaching. Many of the studies previously found had Spanish speaking Latino participants, or families who spoke Chinese or Italian in the home. Early childhood teachers in Minnesota may be interested in additional research around Somali speaking family engagement and the impact on student achievement due to the rising number of students who speak Somali in the home. By having more languages represented in studies, language patterns can be found by comparing and contrasting, depending on languages spoken. Educators could further research into determining what resources, such as interpreters, are available to EL families, which might motivate engagement due to increased accessibility. Nemeth et al. (2020) described finding out how families want to be communicated with, and utilizing those formats could help ensure families being comfortable communicating with educators.

It would benefit teachers to gather research around the type of education or training that individual teachers, or districts as a whole, have had with teaching students who speak more than one language, to compare to studies that have been done with teachers lacking the expertise. It could be assumed that districts with such training would see higher levels of academic success for students, and more positive parent involvement due to knowing how to best teach EL students, and how to most appropriately interact with families while building those solid school home relationships.

Conclusion

Classroom experiences and Early Childhood Education programs shape students' language and literacy skills and overall development for young learners (Jung et al., 2016). Research shows having families involved in ECE, allows for growth in English language skills for preschool EL students (Jung et al., 2016). Morales-Alexander (2021) reminds us how EL

families want their cultural backgrounds and experiences to be valued in the classroom, while students are engaged in authentic learning experiences to help them develop their second language. When teachers are culturally responsive and work hard to engage families in a positive way, these language learning experiences are realistic and beneficial for all EL students.

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