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Parents and teachers working together to enhance student success in the classroom

Marisela Santana
California State University, Monterey Bay

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PARENTS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER
TO ENHANCE STUDENT SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

By
Marisela Santana

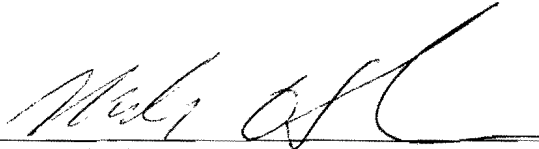
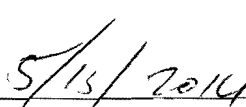
California State University Monterey Bay
Master of Arts in Education

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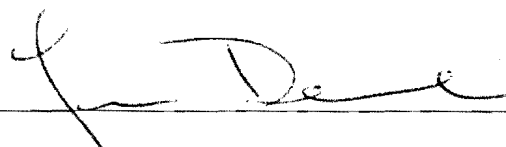

Marisela Santana

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

DR. MARK O'SHEA
GRADUATE ADVISOR

DATE

DR. LOU DENTI
CULMINATING MAE PROJECT INSTRUCTOR

DATE

Abstract

This study focused on the benefits parent and teacher collaboration had for students who attended topic specific workshops that were delivered by the teacher to parents, with the intent of enhancing student learning. By establishing a positive learning environment and mutual respect, both parents and teachers collaborated to create common areas of interest to explore. The continued collaboration between parent and teacher evolved into a community of learning, which aimed to build a partnership between school and community. This study provided evidence of its attainment through academic growth and interest of parents in the learning experiences of their children.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to Lazar and Slostad's article (1999). "Parent-teacher partnerships bring a community of adults together to work toward a common goal-helping students succeed."

Collaboration between parents and teachers is a powerful tool in the classroom. Oftentimes I have either read or experienced firsthand how many teachers believe that parents are not an asset but are instead quite the opposite. My experience and belief are contrary to this. If I can extend my teaching to parents at home, I have just provided my student with more tools for success as well as valued the role of the parent in their child's education.

Research indicates that when parents and teachers work together students benefit both socially and academically. (Lazar &Slostad, 1999). So important are parents in the fabric of educational support that both state and federal agencies are now calling for greater collaboration between parents and teachers. The Goals 2000: "Educate America Act" specifically states, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Initially, the issue of lack of support at home was rooted in the belief that it was due to the population of students I first served, which consisted predominantly of Mexican-American students who came from a low socio -economic background. Many of these students shared migrant farm -working backgrounds, and schooling for parents was limited. However, these same concerns have come about with students from more affluent backgrounds, yet the need is the same. I see that the social justice to be served is to the child regardless of origin or socio-

economic status. Our students deserve the support and, therefore, that collaboration between parents and teachers, which is instrumental to enhance students' success in the classroom. By having this collaboration between teachers and parents, students can have a positive impact in the social context as well as academic. This collaboration can set a clear path of continued success at all grade levels, which will in turn positively affect the student's career.

Findings of the strategies that can be applied to create a positive collaboration between parents and teachers can help address the problem of lack of parent participation in schools. These can be seen as an approach, strategies and methods applied in classrooms of various socioeconomic backgrounds that when practiced, have brought about positive results and overall enhanced the learning of the student.

The objective of this research is to develop a collaborative approach between teachers and parents, to establish positive ways of working together to promote academic and social growth. The main purpose of this study is to explore topic specific practicum for parents with the intent of enhancing the children's success in their schooling.

Problem Statement

Creating a partnership between parents and teachers requires time to build relationships, establish trust in order for parents to be well-informed, and to enable appropriate decisions to be made that affect their child's learning experience at school and at home. A strong school home partnership builds a positive attitude towards school and learning in children. "Partnership" suggests a locus, which permits negotiation and interchangeability of roles. (Laluvain, 2010, p. 1) As Laluvain, (2010) states, relationships which are built upon, or build towards mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire generate a strong cohesion of commitment and shared interests which transforms them into partnerships over a period of time."

When such partnerships are created that incorporate these components, the child will have the greatest academic benefit. However, despite the evident need and advantages of parent and teacher collaboration, little has been done in this field at school sites that go beyond a mandated parent teacher conference. Therefore, a step beyond is needed, one in which we not only inform a parent of the child's strengths and weaknesses but also develop collaborative approach to identify positive ways of working together to promote academic and social growth. Offering professional growth opportunities for parents to gain the necessary skills to work in concert with the child's teacher increases the likelihood that the child will profit from positive adult interaction, thus helping to develop a joy of learning so necessary for success throughout the schooling process. Since this type of collaboration, wherein the parent and teacher develop a somewhat mutual responsibility and ownership for the child's education is lacking, it behooves educators to begin to create a systematic approach at the school level to engender a meaningful partnership with clearly stated goals and objectives to ensure that students/children not only learn grade level standards, but learn the soft skills such as respect, responsibility, and empathy so necessary for success in life.

To address the problem identified, I will apply certain strategies to establish a positive partnership between parents and teachers. I will make sure that parents are given a voice when wanting to speak to me about their child, honor the time by offering direct and productive information at these workshops and be understanding and accommodating of needs they may have such as language barriers. Furthermore, I will design "topic specific" workshops, based on the needs of students and request from parents, to provide parents with the academic background to assist their children with some of their schoolwork.

Purpose of Study

My goal as an educator, as I believe it to be, is to share what knowledge I possess with others, as well as to guide my students to become great thinkers and assist them in acquiring needed skills. Teaching in general is my passion, but teaching beyond my classroom became instrumental to the success of my students' overall well being in school. After meeting with great success when extending the first invitation to parents to come and listen to me share my strategies on how to best help their child at home, I was immediately intrigued and wanted to continue with these meetings.

My students are having difficulty in various academic areas in the classroom. In some instances, I have noticed that students are not receiving the support needed at home with tasks such as making sure students have read that previous night. Other times, I realize that the support at home is not happening because parents simply did not know how to go about supporting the student at home. Moreover, I recognize that many of these parents want to show and give support at home but have said they need the guidance as to how to go about it. To that end, the main purpose of this study is to explore parent teacher collaboration through topic specific workshops given to parents by teachers.

Due to limited educational funding, the assistance of teacher helpers or aids has diminished. Exploring the concept of inviting parents to be a vital partner in the success of their child's education can be a way to address the lack of help in the classroom. Through this study I plan to explore the benefits of this type of collaboration for all involved, the student, teacher and parent. Surveys and interviews will be used to collect data after each workshop is held.

The intervention developed consists of a series of topic specific workshops that address current classroom academic concerns as well as parent requests. Parents will be participants in

discussions, at times creating material useful to the student and them, such as flash cards that can help students with “sight words”, to help student read more fluently or other tools. Another important aspect of these workshops is creating community within the classroom; so finding time to get to know each other better is important and can be done through “ice-breakers”.

I have chosen this intervention because according to research, collaboration between parents and teachers enhances the success of children in the classroom. It has also demonstrated to have an impact on the child’s emotional and social well being as they feel they are important at home and in school. Creating a workshop for parents allows for the parent to hear and/or see the information the teacher is delivering to their children first hand, the concepts and/or concerns, allowing for discussion and “hands-on” experience, just as the child does in the classroom.

Research Questions

The research questions investigated in this paper are as follows:

What is the impact of academically focused parent workshops on the parents’ confidence level for:

- Increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics and
- Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics?

Theoretical Model

One of the earlier theoretical models that form the foundation of this research is social development theory, as proposed by Russian Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's theories emphasize the fundamental role of social interaction as well as believing that “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function” (1978, p. 90). Vygotsky analyzed the way in which children

attain knowledge and learn and how adults provide opportunities for growth to occur. His famous construct, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), underscores the transformative experience when students construct meaning through interaction with peers or adults who provide just the right amount of “anxiety” to push them to success. This learning can be both spontaneous and reflective. ZPD readily applies to adults who attempt to solve problems within an organization. In order to find a solution to a problem or develop new options, adults must adjust the complexity and difficulty of task in order to make sense of it and process the information at hand. To do so, puts them in the zone of proximal development, which allows them to understand the issue at hand increasing the likelihood they can make competent decisions and they can do something about it.

Vygotsky’s theory contextualizes aspects of Bruner’s social learning theory. Both believed that learning was socially constructed. In fact Bruner’s cornerstone concept, scaffolding, is closely aligned with the zone of proximal development, wherein one learns information through building from the simple to the more complex with the help from another agent or teacher for children.

In regards to adult learning scaffolding is equally as important. Adults need their involvement in an endeavor to be inherently beneficial and meaningful. Adults want to take responsibility for what they want to learn or what interests them. However, like children their learning must be scaffold so they can gain a firm grasp on what is being said or entertained. If elevated to an organizational level, group or community level, adults require a basic understanding of what is required of them and then must understand the steps to solve a problem or engage in a event.

Social development and social learning theory provide a lens into the way adults as well as children construct meaning individually, with peers and in groups. These theories form a bridge to practice providing a backdrop for active adult engagement at the workplace or community level. Traveling across the bridge can lead to many different roads and more theories without a clear path to a practice that adults can use in the very real world. What road combines these theoretical underpinnings with practical implications whereby, adults can make decision together and develop solutions to pressing issues within an organization, to that end we turn to community of practice.

According to Wenger, (1998), this process can best be explained as social learning that occurs when people who have common interest in a subject or an area collaborate over a period of time, sharing ideas and strategies to accomplish a common goal. He, along with his colleagues developed a theoretical construct known as community of practice. A Community of Practice has specific characteristics to ensure that individuals not only understand the practice, but also incorporate the identified characteristics into the culture of the organization. For example, a shared domain of interest defines the first characteristic, entitled identity. This characteristic particularly speaks to how this partnership between teacher and parent, in essence a community of “educators” would work together towards for a shared interest, in this case the child.

For both parents and teachers to learn within a “community of practice” is a vigorous process of being engaged in an ongoing practice by learning and sharing of ideas that will unite them. As Wegner, (1998) specifies, a shared interest that distinguishes members from other people. The next characteristic is, community, where members participate n activities as a group and participate in discussions, as well as support each other. The last characteristic, community

of practice, enables community members to bond, share stories and sustain their interest and participation in the project. This can be a formal or informal process but critical to shared and reflective practice.

Based on these characteristics, this collaborative approach of learning between parents and teachers that happens through monthly workshops qualifies it as community of practice. Through these workshops, the participants will be a select or defined group of people that have come together to share and exchange knowledge. By sharing or talking about ideas will involve the exchange of information in order to create or work on a specific activity, an example would be discussing strategies used at home to help students with reading. For Wenger, having knowledge in a practice includes learning to talk within and about that practice. Within this community of practice, the dialogue will come from all parties involved, as well as interaction. According to Wenger, practice, enhanced by analysis and reflection, allows for the sharing of tacit understandings and the creation of shared knowledge from the experiences among participants in a learning opportunity (Wenger, 1998).

Vygotsky's theories which emphasize the fundamental role of social interaction, and Bandura's social learning theory build on the concept of leaning information through building from the simple to the more complex. Adding to these is Wanger's theoretical construct known as the Community of Practice, where social learning occurs as people with common interests or goals come together to work and share ideas and strategies to accomplish a common goal. Together, these theories and constructs give a foundation to my research project of having parents and teachers work together to achieve the common goal enhancing student's success in the classroom.

Researcher Background

I have taught for ten years in elementary schools in my community in various grade levels and language programs. It has been a privilege to work with English Language Learners that share a similar background to mine. Being the first in my family to have been born in the United States to farm working parents and having to overcome the barriers associated with such a reality is a story that strengthens my bond with my students. As an educator, it is my responsibility to share my experiences with students and parents; it is through these stories that we can inspire and give them hope that one day they can also break the cycle of disillusionment. Through my educational journey, I have been able to explore and experience the many components to schooling that are exceptional assets to my student's today: supportive language programs and alliances or partnerships within the school community. Through this research, the significance of collaboration between teachers and parents will be highlighted; a component which can enhance the experience not only of a student that shares my background, but also for any student.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration:	An interactive process that enables individuals with diverse expertise to work together as equals and engage in shared decision making toward mutually defined goals.
Parental involvement:	Parental involvement is the level of participation that a parent has in their child's education and school.

Partnership: Collaborative arrangements and endeavors between and among entities (corporate enterprises, community agencies, student/parent/citizen groups, colleges, other schools, individuals, etc.) designed to share resources, achieve common goals, and foster educational achievement, improvement, and reform.

Workshops: Supervised academic exercises consisting of study and practical work.

Professional growth: Educational opportunities for adults, school teachers and administrative personnel with goals of personal and professional growth and school improvement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review will cover literature demonstrating the benefits of the parent's role in education. I will then elaborate on the benefits of parent and teacher collaboration by focusing on three main points. First, I will discuss research that demonstrates the reasoning behind school and family partnerships, and the positive outcomes that arise. Second, I will review issues that seem to prevent collaboration between parents and teachers, highlighting the barriers that may exist. Last, I will introduce research, discussing strategies that can be implemented as a school to help create these collaborations.

Parent's Role in Education

According to Bang (2009), "family involvement is an essential factor in the U.S. schools, in particular for young children" (p.1). Many parents may believe that their involvement is limited to the prior years of schooling, however many studies suggest how important it is to continue with this support especially as children begin their schooling experience. Bang (2009), also states that "The parents' role is critical in early childhood education, because moving from home to school is a major transition for children and families" (p.1). According to Litwack, Moorman and Pomerantz (2007), "The aim of increasing parent involvement in children's schooling is based on a wealth of research suggesting that such involvement is beneficial for children" (P.373). Despite the findings, at times parents feel that they limit their participation due to lack of either knowledge or support in doing so. At times, parents can find themselves overwhelmed or confused that they need sources of support. (Vandrick, 1999, p. 249). As educators we need to value the wealth of knowledge parents have about their children already, which can benefit everyone, the student, the parent and the teacher. Often, primary teachers

begin to contact parents when they notice the child struggling in the classroom. However, if parents had previous knowledge of how important their role is with academic concepts at home as well, this would serve as a form of support system to parents. According to Lazar and Weisberg (1996), "Because parents connect with their children in personal ways across time, they can play a special role in helping teachers understand how their children relate to print outside of the classroom" (p. 229). The role of a parent in their child's education can only benefit their academic experience. However, creating that involvement of the parent in the child's schooling has its own implications the contribution of more than just the parent. As Barton, Carreón and Drake (2005) state, "As with any human action, parental involvement is not a fixed event but a dynamic and ever-changing practice that varies depending on the context in which it occurs, the resources parents and schools bring to their action, and the students' particular needs" (p.467). Moving forward with this concept of involving parents in education would be how to begin to create a partnership and create collaboration between parent and teacher.

Benefits of Collaboration

According to Cartledge and Musti-Rao (2004), demographic factors such as poverty, racial and ethnic identity, family composition and educational levels of parents are contributing factors that can affect a student's academic performance. These factors also have an impact on the amount of individual time students receive throughout the day from teachers due to attendance in high enrollment classes. It is important that schools recognize these factors so they can then see the benefits of having schools and families work together. Based on reports presented by Epstein (1992), parents and educators create a partnership with schools that are highly beneficial for the school, children and the families. Collaboration between homes and schools can only increase the overall academic and social experience for the student. Some

positive outcomes include: better test scores for students, a better attitude towards school, and a student support system.

Another positive outcome that comes about through collaboration is the enhanced communication between parents and teachers. Once a partnership begins to take place in which both parent and teacher can identify learning goals for the student, the collaboration becomes stronger and more efficient between teacher, parent and student. Seeley (1985), stated, “critical contribution to successful learning does not derive from the home or the school alone, but from the dynamic relationship between them” (p. 4). The ultimate goal is for the student to be aware of any areas that he or she may need to focus on, and with the support of school and home, the student will be more successful.

In a time where class size seems to increase each year, the individual time students get from a teacher is limited, making collaboration with parents imperative. Cartledge and Musti-Rao (2004) discuss how teachers can learn to identify the strengths that parents put forth with the knowledge base they already possess, and supplement it with topic specific workshops for them. For example, a workshop with a focus on literacy, math or any topic can be developed and presented to parents. By doing so, teachers have shared the information that is vital to them through a face-to-face communication method, versus a note or a homework worksheet. Practicing the material presented in this workshop at home will allow the student to have reinforcement through a one to one approach with the parent.

According to Cartledge and Musti-Rao (2004), the collaboration that has been developed through the communication and partnerships teachers have created with the parents will then transcend to the overall positive experience the parent and family will have with the school itself. Ideally, parents will feel they are part of a learning community that cares about their children and

values what they as parents bring to the academic life of the child. As Ordoñez-Jasis and Ortiz (2006) proclaimed, when teachers begin to embrace both the way parents express themselves and their world, they allow for families to broaden their roles. Parents will be able to have a better understanding of how the school system functions and see that they play a vital role in that system.

To further elaborate on the positive outcomes of collaboration, Bustos and Riojas (1994) conducted a qualitative study in a low performing elementary school located in south central Texas. The school formed part of a study, that was based on two premises: that all children and their families have funds of knowledge that lay the foundation for school success, and that using the funds of knowledge, state standards could be met. The school principal came to the realization that the school's low academic performance created chaos in the school, in particular between parents and teachers. One of the components to reforming the school was the collaboration between parents and teachers with the students. The results of the study indicated that teachers at this site did not feel they were being supported by parents at home, while parents expressed they did not feel welcomed nor understood. The findings of the study presented various important factors that corrected a common misconception by teachers; that parents simply don't care.

One important factor was, understanding the child's background and giving value to the funds of knowledge the child came with. When approached by the study, parents shared how they enjoyed telling stories to their children as well as playing with them through song and dance. When teachers heard of this, they realized that through the activities parents shared with their children, they proved they truly cared. Once parents realized that through these activities

they were meeting standards teachers expressed as important, they felt they added value to the academic life of their child.

A second factor was the need for educators to interact with families in order to enhance appreciation and communication. This was the first step this particular school took to establish a partnership between parents and teachers.

Having parents involved in school, also foster both skill and motivational development for children in many ways. According to Litwack, Moorman and Pomerantz (2007), the following two models enhance children's academic achievement in various ways. The motivational development model focuses on enhancing achievement through various motivational resources. Some of these motivational resources are the concepts parents share with children as important such as finding value in school, learning of strategies on how to deal with any challenges they might encounter at school and sharing with children school tasks they are aware of such as strategies or concepts learned in the classroom. Through the skill development model, the concept of sharing strategies goes further. Here, parents gain useful information about how and what children are learning at school due to their close and constant involvement in school. Therefore such information when reciprocated and practiced at home reinforces the child's learning.

Having parents involved in the schooling process of a child has resulted in higher academic achievement in school. In an exploratory study of parents who were receiving parent support while attending GED courses, proved to have a positive impact on the children's life. Parents were offered a support system where part of their GED coursework, was attending monthly meetings where parents learned about the topics and strategies teachers used in their children's classrooms. This study resulted in parents responding well to sharing the importance

of school with their children. They began to practice strategies learned at home. According to Shiffman (2011), the parallel of having both parent and child at school proved to strengthen the parent role in a child's learning, parents interacted with the child's school and parents also communicated values and expectations of schooling with their children.

Obstacles That Prevent Collaboration

The benefits in collaboration between schools, parents and students seem apparent, yet barriers that prevent collaboration still exist and present problems for teachers, parents and students. Fine and Robinson (1994) described obstacles that prevent effective collaborations to take place through various situations. One common barrier they found was the lack of direct communication with parents when their only form of contact was through notes going home with the child. The disadvantages to this form of communication were illiteracy on behalf of the parent, lack of organization that would result in notes not reaching parents, and/or confusing wording that can all be resolved through a phone call. Another obstacle that the article presented was the lack of sensitivity the teacher sometimes had during a conference or conversation with the parent. When using school academia language, teachers might intimidate or completely lose the attention of the parent, creating an instant barrier. This study was conducted in one particular school that was trying to find where the gap between parents and teachers existed. School officials set as a goal to bridge communication and partnerships with the families and then reflected on issues that teachers or parents commented on.

Other obstacles that prevent collaboration is not having the necessary support for teachers on how to create a positive relationship with parents that we know is effective for student success. A study conducted by Drummond and Stipek (2004), included the findings of parent involvement when teachers initiated contact and collaborated with parents and compared them with teachers who did not. This study did focus on aiding one group of teachers with training on

how to approach parents to create that partnership and collaboration. For teachers who did not have this support, differences in involvement and their overall teaching experience was apparent. Teachers with the support realized that they were able to create a positive relationship with parents, the academic outcome of students was high and teachers were regarded as more qualified teachers than those who did not offer that collaboration. Comparing both groups, teachers who kept in contact with parents had a more effective relationship with parents and students had showed a better outcome in school.

Strategies To Implement Collaboration

According to Fine (1991), three objectives must be met when implementing parent involvement in schools: One, having schools include parents in the child's academic decision making, two, educate parents in order to make the necessary decisions for the child, and three, enable and empower parents to work actively on behalf of the child. By understanding that a goal in schools should be to create positive partnerships and collaboration, one can begin with setting a tone of friendliness and openness the moment they welcome the student and family into your classroom. Similarly, Cartledge and Musti-Rao (2004), suggested organizing a getting-to-know families week during the first few weeks of school. During this time, parents can see teachers as individuals and not just the teacher. It would also be an opportunity to provide training sessions with specific strategies to parents that can then be used at home with their children. Other ideas included scheduling in person meetings and being flexible with hours to get increased participation and attendance from parents. Simmons (2002) stresses the importance of creating true partnership between parents and teachers, specifically in the times that both parties have opportunities to work together for the well being of the child, parent conferences. As this author states, common practice of parent conferences tend to be a time of highlighting skills children have not attained, support parents have not given and often these conferences tend to

end on a rough note to making it difficult for parents and teachers to create a partnership. Simmons offers some approaches to help facilitate and conduct a more successful parent conference. Amid the suggestions are assuming good will, assuming competence and assuming shared responsibility from both parties. Once this is in place a true collaborative work can take place between parents and teachers. Using opportunities such as parent conferences to come together to mutually share concerns and ideas to better support a child can create the needed trust for a true partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers. Simmons does stress the importance of teachers initiating that inviting and respectful approach. Only then can the collaboration to take place. Lazar and Slostad (1999), suggest a simple strategy to keep open communication with parents through weekly newsletters describing classroom and homework activities, which can serve as a means to begin a partnership between teacher and parent. Added to this communication is the benefit of keeping the parents informed of what goes on in the classroom and for the teacher the satisfaction of knowing that they are reaching out and keeping parents informed. Looking further into the benefits of collaboration is the idea of negotiation as proposed by Luluvein (2010). The author suggest the idea that both parent and teacher can offer great insight into what can have the better outcome for a student. The negotiation would arise from the initial consensus of concern over a student's well being. The joint expertise of both parent and teacher can be a successful tool used for any child, weather it be one who is experiencing difficulties or one who can continue to nurtured by both parent and teacher through an agreement or negotiation of what can and should be done for the child's benefit.

Conclusion

To describe collaboration is to understand that certain characteristics of it make this very different from other types of interactions or partnerships that occur among professionals. As Cook and Friend (1992) stated, there are certain characteristics that set collaboration apart from

other types of professional interactions. It is a method of partnership that depends on more than one party to make it a successful act. You entrust, rely on and work with each other to gain an outcome. Collaboration is effort and hard work, yet it is that same effort and hard work that is asked of students by schools, teachers and parents. According to the vast body of research that has previously been conducted and the findings presented in this literature review, it is understood that only positive outcomes can come about from collaboration. The process of creating collaboration among schools, teachers, parents and students is also part of the overall positive outcome.

Due to the process, many levels of partnership and community building take place. Schools and teachers have a clearer understanding of how to go about creating a partnership with parents, which is a desirable outcome, given today's highly populated classrooms. Parents are made aware of the importance of their participation in their children's education and can be viewed as an asset, when the different demographic situations present are taken into consideration by the educational institutions. Students will encounter a more positive outlook on their educational goals and path, with the support from the school, teacher and parents.

Although obstacles may be present that may impede collaboration from taking place, there are various strategies that can be implemented to overcome these. This process may begin with the suggestion given by an aforementioned author, by first listening and learning about the student's life and culture, before making assumptions about the parents. Collaborating is a positive action to take, positive while you create it, positive when you embrace it, as a school, a teacher and a student.

Based on the numerous findings that support collaboration among schools, I too am in agreement of the importance and necessity of collaboration. These articles presented reasons for

the need, and ideas on how to go about creating collaboration. For future research, I would like to explore the strategy of delivering topic specific workshops to parents. Perhaps through implementation of workshops I too can propose this strategy as a powerful collaborative tool that can enhance collaboration between schools, teachers, parents and students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this section I will describe the methods I am using to gather and analyze data to answer and analyze the research questions I proposed, including the following:

- What is the impact of academically-focused parent workshops on the parents' confidence level for:
 - Increasing their academic background in the workshop topics and
 - Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics?

Overall research design

I am using action research because, per Hendricks (2006), it is the ideal research method to help teachers assess and improve their own teaching practice.

Specific research plan

The type of action research I am using is practical classroom action research, because it is designed specifically for teachers who wish to improve their teaching by studying and applying research-based practices to the curriculum, instruction, and/or assessment issues they have targeted for improvement. Practical classroom action research provides teachers with rich sources of data to develop more effective ways to modify and enrich their own practice thereby enhancing their students' chances for success, and it can be conducted by individual teachers or collaboratively by groups of teachers (Hendricks, 2006). Action research makes use of every kind of data source that can contribute relevant information to the problem being addressed, including both quantitative and qualitative data, and both are being used in this study. In this

study, the basic quantitative design is a Likert-style questionnaire, and a qualitative design because I will be using interviews and journal writing.

Procedures

The setting of my study is Maple Elementary School, in central California. The following information is taken from the city and school websites.

Community: “Central City” is a large town. According to the U.S. Census (2010), it has a population of about 154,484 consisting of roughly 75% Hispanic/Latino, 46% White alone, 15.5% White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, 6.3% Asian alone, 2% Black alone and .3% Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone, 1.3% American Indian and Alaska Native alone, and 5.1% of two or more races. The overall population is young: population of age 18 and younger is 31.4%. The median household income is \$44,387. The town is surrounded by mountains and is located in one of the most productive agricultural areas in the world, commonly referred to as the “Salad Bowl of the World” as the great majority of U.S.-grown lettuce is grown in the surrounding valley (www.city-data.com).

School: The school in which the study is being conducted is one of thirteen elementary schools in the district, and it serves 308 students in grades kinder through fourth grade. As with the town as a whole, 63.3% of the students are Hispanic/Latino and about 27.6% are English Language Learners (ELLs).

Class: The class in which the research project is to be conducted is a 2/3 grade class that includes 24 students, 13 of who are girls and 11 of whom are boys. 19 of the students are English Only and 5 are English Language Learners.

Participants

Parents: Participants included the parents of the students in my classroom, and myself as the presenter. As with classroom action research in general, my overall project will be based on a convenience sample consisting of all the parent participants in my second/third grade class.

Parent Breakdown

- 18 women: 5 Hispanic/Latino, 13 White or of mixed race
- 2 men: 2 Hispanic/Latino

A total of 20 parents participated in every workshop. The majority of the parents were women with the exception of two men. Parents in my classroom have a mixture of schooling background ranging from limited elementary school education to parents who have received master's degrees. The range of parents in my room also have diverse professions, ranging from mothers who stay home and volunteer in the classroom, to professionals in our school district and community. Every parent received each of the data collection tools in every workshop, Likert-Scale Survey, Parent Reflection Journal and Parent Interview Questionnaire The following table demonstrates the parents who participated in the workshop series.

Table 1. Parent Participants with Pseudonyms Names and Background

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Race
"Joy"	40	Female	White
"Kristy"	38	Female	White
"Elenor"	45	Female	White
"Mandy"	45	Female	White
"Nancy"	45	Female	Indian
"Isabel"	38	Female	Hispanic
"Norma"	40	Female	Hispanic
"Melisa"	28	Female	Hispanic
"Jean"	38	Female	White
"Alejandro"	40	Male	Hispanic
"Antonio"	42	Female	Hispanic
"Ginger"	45	Male	White
"Lourdes"	45	Male	Hispanic
"Lucy"	40	Female	Asian
"Melody"	50	Female	White
"Claudia"	50	Female	Hispanic
"Kathy"	38	Female	White
"Mallory"	39	Female	White
"Sophia"	38	Female	White
"Carmen"	42	Female	Hispanic

Teachers: In action research teachers are participants. This study will involve me in the dual role of teacher and data collector as follows.

- I am a female Latina with 12 years of teaching experience, primarily in grades 1-3. I have a bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies with an emphasis in Spanish.

Data Collection Procedures

Intervention: The process of this intervention consisted of a series of three topic-specific workshops titled 1) Math Strategies and Common Core, 2) Language Arts Strategies and Common Core, and 3) Math Game Night. At each of the workshops, parents received information about Math and Language Arts Common Core standards, as well as strategies they could implement at home. At each of the workshops, information was given through a presentation for parents on the differences between the California State Standards and newly adopted Common Core Standards. Along with the presentation, handouts with the standards as well as strategies that served as support for the standards were distributed. These handouts consisted of a math games that are aligned with Common Core and as well as a Bloom's Taxonomy list of questions parents could use at home, see appendix I.

Implementation

This action research was developed to measure parent's increased level of knowledge on the content presented, as well as increased confidence in applying the strategies at home with their child. A limitation through the implementation of this study was that parents were not randomly selected to participate in this project, rather they were self-selected, and whoever wanted to participate was welcomed. The process to achieve such a measureable data included the three steps listed below.

- a) Prior to starting the intervention, parents from my classroom were invited to be a participant by me at parent conferences. I explained the process of the workshop including the frequency of the workshops, and the possible days and times. A letter in form of an invitation confirmed the set dates and times. Along with the invitation, a letter of acceptance or decline to the invitation of the workshop was asked to be returned, see appendix II.
- b) I contacted parents, who returned the acceptance of the invitation, through an email to thank them for their participation.
- c) Preparation for of the material consisted of researching for the pertinent information that would be discussed, Math and Language Arts Common Core Standards and strategies that could be applied for both.
- d) Workshops took place in my classroom and lasted one hour. At the first workshop, I went over the objectives of the workshops as well as the desired outcome of each. Information and strategies would be presented, with the idea that after some practice they could take the strategies home to implement. I explained that the following workshops would be similar in process but would differ in content.
- e) Parent Reflection Journal: After each workshop, parents were asked to write a reflection by jotting down their thoughts on the approach that was presented. The format was a series of questions that were used to guide them in their reflection, see appendix III.
- f) Parent Likert Scale Survey: Parents were then asked to complete a workshop survey in which they rated the effectiveness of the approach presented, see appendix IV.

- g) Parent Interview Questionnaire: The questioner further asked on the ideas they had on what specific information they learned as well as if they felt they could apply the learned concepts at home, see appendix V.

Data Collection and Sources

Data used to measure research results consisted of both quantitative data and qualitative data as follows.

Instrument Used	Likert Scale	Parent Reflection Journal	Parent Interview Questionnaire
Research Question #1 Increased Academic Understanding	X	X	X
Research Question #2 Increased Confidence	X	X	X

Quantitative Data

- Survey: I developed a 5-item Likert-style survey, which included questions asking parents to rate the effectiveness of the suggested strategies and my approach in presenting the material. Furthermore, the questions asked for increased confidence in applying the strategies learned at the workshop in their own home. An example of one these questions was, “The workshop stressed ideas and or concepts that I was not aware of”, and “After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic”. The question was followed by a scale of one as a rate of least effective, to a five for most effective.”

Qualitative Data

- Parent Reflection Journals: Data was also being collected from parents’ reflection journals after each workshop. As mentioned, the format was a series of six questions that

was used to guide them in their reflection. Some of these questions were, “What are the most important ideas I learned?”, and “Do I have a better understanding about this concept now that I have attended this workshop?”

- **Parent Questionnaire:** The third data collection instrument used was an open-ended questionnaire eliciting their thoughts on their understanding of the strategies/information presented, confidence on how to go about implementing the strategies/information at home, if and how they implemented the strategies learned at home, enjoyment, and their overall experience in the workshop. Some of these questions were, “After attending the workshop, do you feel you learned something you did not know or clearly understand before?”, and “Were you able to put the information or concept into practice at home with your child or family?”

Data Collectors: I collected all data myself to ensure all artifacts were received. I was then able to sort and correlate data to be analyzed.

Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Data

- **Survey:** Survey responses were summarized individually and then compared using descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode). As recommended for action research, survey data will be analyzed using bar graphs (Hendricks, 2006; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Specifically, responses for each item on the survey were bar-graphed to facilitate

interpretation of which topics were thought of to be least and most effective. Data was collected using a Likert-style test, and the responses were analyzed.

Qualitative Data

- I first transcribed the open-ended questionnaire and the reflection journal questions by creating codes and prepared them for analysis. I then read all the documents and coded them using the codes derived from my research questions. As the documents were coded I began to identify patterns. The patterns I found throughout the questionnaire were then identified as themes.
- I triangulated the varied qualitative data sources to identify any overall patterns that may have been suggested. These patterns were compared and analyzed to determine any themes that may answer the research questions.

Limitations/Threats to Internal Validity

Although efforts were made to minimize threats to internal validity, there are still some potential threats that can limit the overall validity and usefulness of the findings.

- Implementation fidelity: I had only a very short time to implement and put into practice the workshops so there is a possibility that they will not be implemented as fully or as adequately as designed.

- Experimenter bias: The fact that I am both researcher and data collector/analyst may conceivably cause a biased approach to both roles. I tried to minimize bias by obscuring the names of parents on their surveys prior to reading them.
- Finally, the workshop series duration was insufficient time to yield data that could definitively answer the research questions. My sample size was limited to the twenty participating parents in my own classroom. Nonetheless, short project duration reduces the probability of other internal validity threats such as attrition.

Summary

This action research endeavored to answer what would be the impact of academically focused parent workshops and their confidence level in increasing academic background for the different workshop topics offered, as well as if they were able to assist their children with schoolwork in reference to those topics. During the course of this research I held workshops on different topics, which focused on areas of interest to parents and myself. All the data, including surveys, reflections and questionnaires' were triangulated and analyzed to generate answers and understanding in regard to the research questions.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This chapter outlines the results of my study on the effectiveness of delivering information and strategies through parent workshops. The following research questions guided my study. *What is the impact of academically focused parent workshops on the parents' confidence level for:* 1) *Increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics and* 2) *Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics?*

As I engaged in learning the answers to these questions through action research, I collected data through a combination of quantitative and qualitative means. In this chapter I examine the results of my data analysis, which were merged into three overall themes. However, prior to this I will discuss the results of my efforts toward the implementation of the Parent Workshops, as it was those practices that allowed me to obtain the core results.

Implementation of Parent Workshops

In January 2014, our school district notified us about the upcoming changes with educational standards and student assessments. We were moving away from California State Standards and into full implementation of the National Common Core Standards. This shift began a series of discussions among schools, teachers and eventually parents, who began to hear about these changes via media sources or the schools themselves. Foreseeing the possible questions and different levels of uneasiness that may arise among my students' parents, I embarked on the idea of creating an informational meeting that would allow parents to not only listen to me further explain Common Core, but also allow them to see and practice strategies aligned with Common Core. I began to develop what would be a three-series workshop for

parents, Common Core and Math Strategies, Common Core and Language Arts strategies, and Math Games, which was a parent and child night where parents would have an opportunity to practice skills and strategies with their children through interactive games. I sent out an invitation to all twenty-four families in my classroom, detailing the focus or title of each workshop, and also explained that workshops were independent so that one workshop did not build on the previous one, to encourage all to participate in at least one. As part of the invitation I explained that these workshops had evolved into my action thesis project, and that their participation through the answers they would provide in their surveys would form part of the findings for my project.

Every workshop had an attendance of twenty parents; some came as families of two, with both parents attending, while only one parent represented other families. The parents who were unable to attend would let me know and ask that I give them whatever information I could afterwards.

Structure and Format of Workshops

Previous to the parents' arrival, I had prepared folders with informational handouts that were relevant to our workshop topics including a handout on the Common Core Standards and some strategies that could be applied at home with their children. Every workshop would begin with me welcoming parents and thanking them for taking time to come and learn how to better support their child at home. I reminded them that I had taken this topic of interest to them and created this action research project, and that they would be part of it through answering some survey questions at the end of each workshop.

The first workshop was the Common Core and Math Strategies. Referencing the material in their folders, I read a few of the standards and compared them to the current state standards to

highlight the differences between them. After a short discussion on the obvious length or complexity of the Common Core standards, I showed them what a question on the actual test would look like for the students. Afterwards, using the classroom screen, I projected the Smarter Balanced website, the testing site that our school would be using to test our students. I navigated to the section that was designed for parents so that they would see how to access it at home. We began to look into a few practice problems, and much discussion came about just from seeing the lengthy questions and the needed steps or scaffolds we must provide to our students so that they could be successful when answering such questions. I provided that scaffold to the parents as if they were my students, then allowed them to practice on the devices that students will be using. Together we explored logging in to the computer, reading the questions, scaffolding, and finally reaching the answers to questions. The remaining time we had from our scheduled hour-long workshop left us with opportunities for me to introduce what could be done at home to practice. Most parents made reference to the need for everyday counting skills turned into games as a form of practice. One of the games focused on coins where the parent would conceal three coins in their hands, totaling (as an example) thirty cents; the task was to then have the child identify what those coins were. As a group we discussed the benefits of spending time on these types of games. Not only would the child be practicing a valuable skill, they would also be spending some valuable and fun time together as a family.

The language arts workshop focused on understanding what level of questioning skills were needed to be practiced at home as an everyday routine. I provided parents with a sheet on Bloom's Taxonomy questions to use and explained the hierarchy of difficulty. We once again looked at a passage from the Smarter Balanced practice test and I asked parents to identify what type of questions were being asked. They realized quickly how most of the questions we

practice at home were at the opposite end of where they needed to be. We ended our workshop with practice on how to use these questioning skills with reading books found at home so that everyone could leave the workshop knowing how to implement Bloom's Taxonomy with questions at home.

Workshop three of the series was "Game Night", so my students were looking forward to this day. Once again, I provided the computers so that now both parent and child could access the actual devices that would be used, as well as some card and coin games. With me guiding each of the games, we played a total of three card games, two coin games and one online game. The objective was to have a fun learning experience, and based on the smiles, the comments made by my students the following day, and the survey responses from the parents, the objective was met. Learning can be made fun and it is up to us adults to make sure that the learning is also meaningful.

Data Analysis

In this section I apply the findings to my research questions, to discuss what my findings suggest about the effectiveness of implementing Parent Workshops as a means to enhance understanding of concepts and increase the ability to provide home support.

As discussed in Chapter 3, my data sources included both quantitative and qualitative data, as is traditional for action research. As these kinds of data are analyzed and achieved differently, for each research question the quantitative data findings will be presented first, followed by the qualitative data findings.

Parent Workshops to Increase Parent Knowledge and Confidence

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data was analyzed by computing and comparing tallies from a Likert Scale survey that was used to answer my research question “*What is the impact of academically focused parent workshops on the parents’ confidence level for: 1) Increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics and 2) Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics?*” The survey was composed of a series of five questions that were developed to target the research questions: Questions one through three focused on the parents’ level of gained knowledge through the workshop presentation and questions four and five focus on the parents’ comfort level for helping their children at home.

The survey was administered following each of the three workshops. Survey questions asked parents to rate how effective each element of the workshop was for them, using 1 for “Least effective” and 5 for “Most effective”, and the survey data was then used to create tables and figures to illustrate survey responses. The findings are illustrated below. The total number of responses indicated that twenty parents out of a total of twenty-four parents in the classroom completed the surveys.

Parent Responses to Math and Common Core Workshops

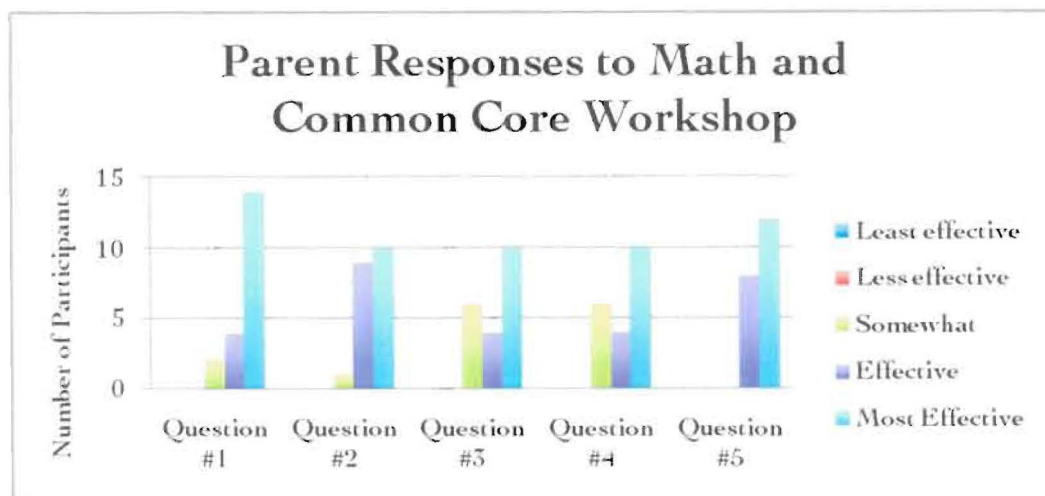
Survey data relating to the Math Strategies and Common Core Workshop are presented below.

Table 1. Parent Responses to Math and Common Core Workshop

Rating	1 Least Effective	2 Effective	3 Somewhat Effective	4 More Effective	5 Most Effective
Question #1 The workshop information was informative and valuable to me			3	3	14
Question #2 The workshop stressed ideas and or concepts that I was not aware of			1	9	10
Question #3 After attending this workshop I have a better understanding of what and how my child is working in the classroom			6	4	10
Question #4 After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic			6	4	10
Question #5 After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom				8	12

The data in Table 1 are illustrated in Figure 1, below. The height of the bars represents the frequency of responses and the color indicates the degree of effectiveness of that workshop element as perceived by parents.

Figure 1. Parent Responses to Math and Common Core Workshop



The results of this survey showed that parents found all of the elements of the workshop to be effective for them; ratings of “Effective” and “Most effective” exceeded all other responses. Parents particularly found the workshop’s emphasis on content to be very effective: “The workshop information was informative and valuable to me”. They also rated as very effective the workshop’s focus on the importance of working with their children at home: “After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom”. These results demonstrate that parents did believe they had an increased understanding of the Common Core math standards, and an increased ability as well as confidence to provide their children with support related to those standards at home.

Parent Responses to Language Arts and Common Core Workshop

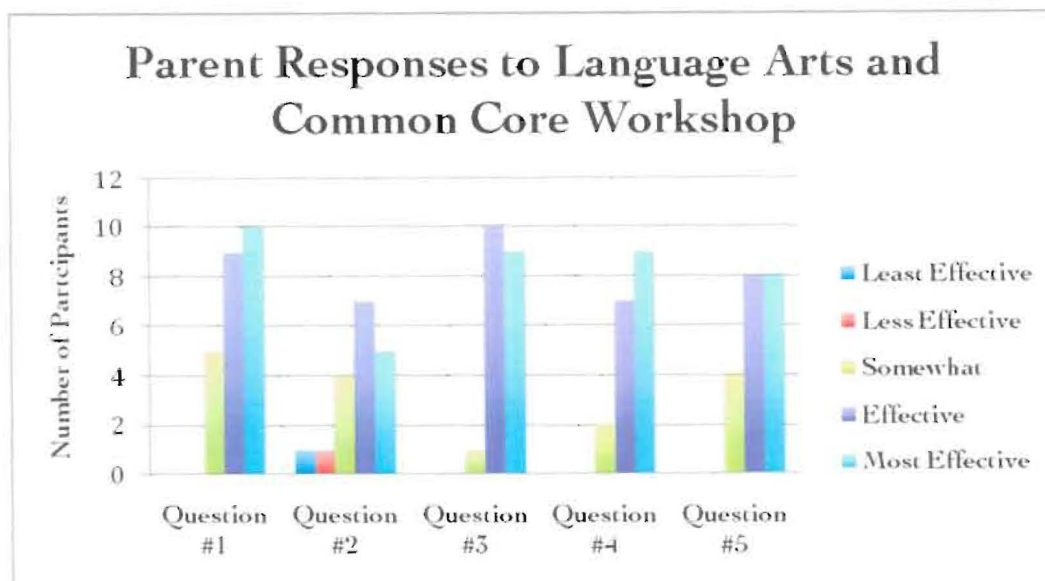
Survey data relating to the Language Arts and Common Core Workshop are presented below.

Table 2. Parent Responses to Language Arts and Common Core Workshop

Rating	1	2	3	4	5
Question #1 The workshop information was informative and valuable to me			1	9	10
Question #2 The workshop stressed ideas and or concepts that I was not aware of	1	1	4	7	5
Question #3 After attending this workshop I have a better understanding of what and how my child is working in the classroom			1	10	9
Question #4 After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic			2	7	9
Question #5 After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom			4	8	8

Figure 2, below, illustrates the frequency data in Table 2. Again, the height of the bars represents the frequency of responses and the color indicates the degree of effectiveness of that workshop element as perceived by parents.

Figure 2. Parent Responses to Language Arts and Common Core Workshop



The results of this survey reflect those from the first workshop. That is, parents found all of the elements of the workshop to be effective for them, as illustrated by the high number of ratings for “Effective” and “Most effective” compared to the other ratings. Parents again found the workshop’s emphasis on content to be very effective, as expressed by their very high ratings of two elements: “The workshop information was informative and valuable to me”, and “After attending this workshop I have a better understanding of what and how my child is working on in the classroom”. The high ratings for both questions emphasize that parents had increased understanding of the material that was presented. Parents also rated as highly effective the workshop’s focus on increasing their confidence for helping their children at home, although ratings were a little more widespread for this element: “After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic”.

Overall, results demonstrate that parents did believe they had an increased understanding of the Common Core language arts standards, and an increased ability as well as confidence to provide their children with support related to those standards at home.

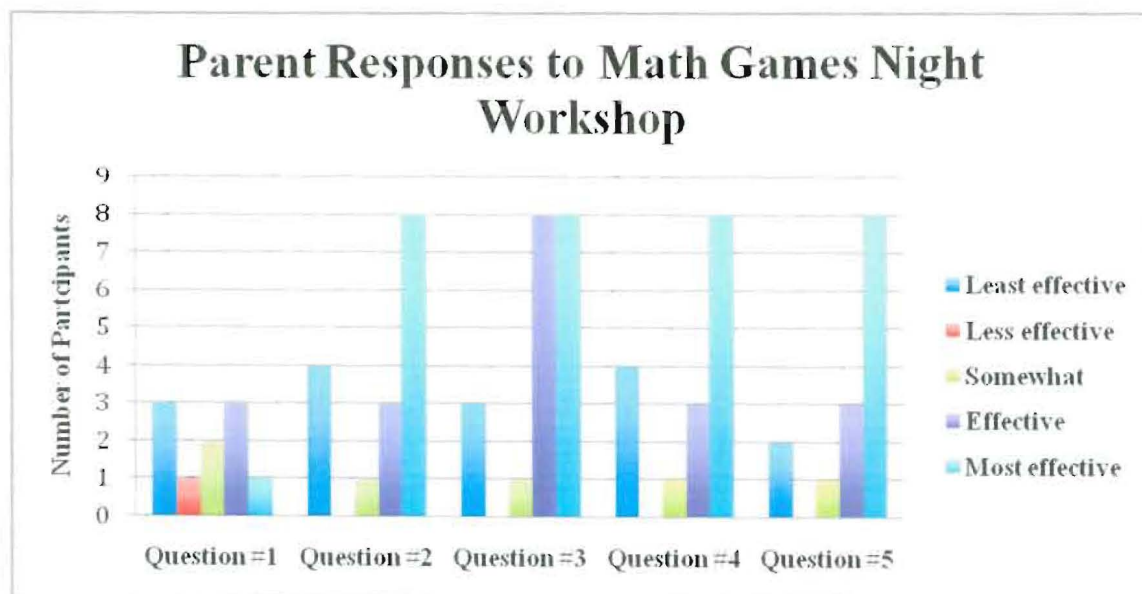
Parent Responses to Math Games Night Workshop

Survey data relating to the Math Games Workshop are presented below.

Table 3. Parent Responses to Math Games Night Workshop

Rating	1	2	3	4	5
Question #1 The workshop information was informative and valuable to me				1	19
Question #2 The workshop stressed ideas and or concepts that I was not aware of				5	15
Question #3 After attending this workshop I have a better understanding of what and how my child is working in the classroom			1	5	14
Question #4 After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic		1	1	4	14
Question #5 After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom			2	2	16

Figure 3, below, illustrates the frequency data in Table 3. As before, the height of the bars represents the frequency of responses and the color indicates the rate of effectiveness of that workshop element as perceived by parents.



The results of this survey reflect those from the first two workshops in that parents found all of the elements of the workshop to be effective for them. Again, the greatest number of “Most effective” ratings were given to the workshop’s emphasis on content: “The workshop information was informative and valuable to me”. Parents also gave a high number of “Most effective” ratings to the emphasis on how important it is for them to work with their children at home: “After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom”. These responses, combined with the high ratings on the other three questions, indicate again that parents felt the workshop had increased both their academic knowledge and their confidence for helping their children at home.

Summary

From my collective quantitative data, it appears that parents believed they had an increased understanding of the Common Core standards, and an increased ability as well as confidence to provide their children with support related to those standards at home. It also appears, then, that academically focused parent workshops are an effective means to deliver information and strategies that can increase parents’ level of confidence. Presenting parents with material through a workshop setting allowed for conversation to take place as well as questions and practice. Overall, all responses from parents demonstrated an increased confidence level for: *Increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics and being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics.*

Qualitative Findings

Each of the workshops consisted of parents receiving information and strategies relating to the workshop topic. To conclude each of the workshops, parents were asked to complete various data collecting forms including the Likert survey described above. In addition, data collection included a reflection journal where I asked parents to respond to certain prompts, and some open-ended survey questions.

Detailed analysis of these qualitative data sources yielded three themes. Two themes were developed related to the research questions: 1) Increased academic understanding; and 2) Increased confidence for providing support. The third theme emerged from the data: 3) Helping children practice. Each of these themes is detailed below with respect to how they addressed the research questions.

Increased academic understanding

The data indicated that indeed, parents felt they had increased their understanding of the academic content presented at each of the workshops. For example, when asked if after attending the workshop parents felt they learned something they did not know or clearly understand before, a typical response was something like: “Yes I now have a better understanding about what Common Core is”. Another parent stated, “Yes I learned my child can learn more with technology”, and another said, “Yes, I now know that there are different ways to get an answer for the same math problem”. One wrote, “Everything covered was new to me, the new type of test, standards and strategies needed to be practiced.” Overall, these parents expressed an increased level of understanding of concepts that were presented.

When asked what some of the most important ideas learned were, one answered the following way: “After this workshop with math strategies, I now realize I need to open my mind to new ideas and methods of learning.” Some mentioned the strategies presented: “An important idea I learned is how to use Bloom’s Taxonomy to facilitate higher order thinking and how practicing these questions can benefit my child’s test taking skills.” Other responses focused on the understanding of spending time with their children in general: “After attending these two workshops, I understand the importance of learning together with my child.” Other responses in reference to their children were: “I learned that learning and fun can go hand in hand”, and “I learned how to keep my child engaged with learning.”

Increased confidence for providing support

Other reflections and answers revealed that parents now felt more confident to better support their child at home. For example: “I can now use this information to better guide and aid my daughter so she can have more success”. Other parents were more specific as they mentioned the certain skills they acquired and how they would implement them by saying, “Now that I understand some questioning skills through Bloom’s Taxonomy and using higher order thinking skills, I will apply them to the reading we do together at night.” Other comments about how parents can use this information at home corroborated with these responses: “After the information I received at the workshop I can help my child at home in 1) navigating online site you showed us how to use 2) have gained knowledge on test-taking strategies, 3) and I learned how to use Bloom’s taxonomy when discussing reading books to facilitate higher order thinking.” One parent expressed how confident she felt by sharing what she had planned on doing: “I am grateful that I have this information available to me now. I will be constructing a chart to put up on the fridge. I believe my daughter seeing the questions will have her stop and

think about different situations at school and home. I believe the helpful information is beneficial to her education.” Most responses in reference to increased confidence were similar, expressing increased self-assurance.

Helping children practice

Both the Likert questions and the open-ended survey questions were structured to answer the original research questions, that is, whether parents felt they gained knowledge through the presented topics and if parents felt their confidence increased in supporting their children at home. Therefore, the findings from most of the questions throughout every survey provided data directly related to the research questions. In addition, however, parents’ comments on the open-ended questions kept mentioning the idea that they were going to practice certain skills with their children at home. These recurring thoughts developed into another theme: “Helping children practice”.

One parent expressed this theme as follows: “After that first workshop where we learned many math strategies and games, I went home and began practicing them with my son.” Another parent shared, “I can take the strategies learned and take time each day to practice some test questions.” Some parents expressed the idea that putting some of these strategies into practice would benefit more than just their child: “I think that when we do begin playing these games, it will be a great experience for my entire family.”

Overall, then, parents’ qualitative responses reiterated their quantitative responses in expressing thoughts of increased academic knowledge, and increased confidence for supporting their children at home in their academic work.

Summary

As presented and discussed in the literature review, there is much research that supports the concept that having a parent participate in the educational path of a child enhances their academic success. According to Litwack, Moorman and Pomerantz (2007), “The aim of increasing parent involvement in children’s schooling is based on a wealth of research suggesting that such involvement is beneficial for children” (P.373). Oftentimes, however, parents need guidance themselves to know how to best support their child’s academic needs. It does begin with an open door invitation to the classroom, a welcoming and reciprocal act of respect between parent and teacher and the delivery of information to the parent on how to support their child at home.

With this background in mind, I utilized the concept of Parent Workshops as a means to deliver the information and strategies, so that in turn parents could implement them with their child at home. By introducing Parent Workshops in my classroom, I strove to investigate their effectiveness for parents. My findings show that the impact of the workshops made an impact on academic parents’ confidence level for: *1) Increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics; and 2) Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics.*

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my research. The following chapter summarizes my findings and discusses implications derived from them. It also outlines an Action Plan for future uses of Parent Workshops, along with my thoughts as to what I learned from this action research project.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Action Plan

Recognizing the importance of parent involvement in a child's schooling experience, served as a catalyst to explore the diverse ways in which to involve parents in my classroom. In my first years of teaching, I realized that it was typical to send a welcome letter home the first week of school and to the most an invitation for back to school night, giving me a very limited opportunity to express the value of parent involvement with their child. Communication and involvement from parents generally did not go beyond these customary activities, something I felt I needed to modify if I wanted to create a more positive experience in my student's academic year. The first opportunity I would have to implement these practices was through an invitation to my classroom where parents could hear what activities I had planned for their children and for them, as well as welcome suggestions. If I was to create a paradigm for parents on the importance of working together, their voice needed to be heard. From this desired outcome of creating a partnership between the parents and myself to enhance the child's academic experience is how parent workshops commenced.

The purpose of my research was to investigate what the *impact of academically focused parent workshops on the parents' confidence level for increasing their own academic background in the workshop topics and being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics.* Parents were invited to participate in a series of three workshops, Math Strategies and Common Core Standards, Language Arts Standards and Common Core Standards and the final workshop, Math Game Night. These resulted after parents

began to express both curiosity and concern around the new adopted common core standards. As an educator, I realized that it was important that involving parents was, especially as we learn more about the Common Core standards. Each workshop included time where information and strategies were presented, as well as time to explore the strategies first hand. The findings revealed that after attending each workshop, parents left with new knowledge, feeling confident that they could apply what they had learned at home and concluded they would begin to apply the strategies learned through various practices.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the findings of this study with respect to answering the research questions and contextualizing them within the literature review. Finally, using these findings and thoughts on the research to formulate my action plan, I will present my ideas for integrating this study into the educational environment in which I work.

Involving parents in the educational experience of a child has always demonstrated to have a positive impact on their academic success. When a child realizes that parents place importance on their child's schooling, the child will do the same. Emphasizing that importance by collaborating with teachers will enhance the awareness the child will place in school and academics. Based on reports presented by Epstein (1992), parents and educators create a partnership with schools that are highly beneficial for the school, children and the families. Collaboration between student, parents and teachers, increases the overall academic and social experience for the student. For the child, this collaboration results in better grades, a gratifying daily school experience, and assurance that a strong sense of support has been established for their overall success. For these reasons, I aimed my study on the importance of parent

collaboration and focused on the benefits of Parent Workshops as a means to deliver topic specific information to parents.

Collaboration and Academically Focused Workshops

The initial mention of the workshop series was delivered via a personal verbal invitation to parents during conferences. Here, I had the opportunity to briefly explain the purpose and the agenda for each of the workshops, since much of our conversation during the conference revolved around the new common core standards. Parents received a second written invitation that requested parents to respond to for their attendance. The following day, the collaboration that I had been hopeful would surface between parents and myself continued. I began to receive responses of attendance for the workshops, questions revolving around the material that would be presented and a few parents expressed that although they would not be able to attend, would appreciate any material and information from the workshops at my earliest convenience. Every workshop was well attended, with the majority of the twenty-four parents participating. The aforementioned, concept of the importance of collaboration began to unfold.

Every workshop had a focus and objective that I strived to meet. The focus of each would be divided into the Common Core Standards, specifically the Language Arts and Math components. It seemed most relevant to explore these standards, as students would encounter these standards through the new tests. Parents received noticed of how the workshops were going to be organized and the concepts that would be discussed. However, it was not until parents experienced coming to the first of the workshops that they began to see some value and benefits on the academically focused workshop. Through surveys and interview responses, some

parents expressed, “every time I attend a workshop or have hands on experience it re-enforces and broadens my knowledge.” Another parent said, “I’m glad I attended the workshop. The instructions were clear and helpful.”

Although the experience of the workshop was regarded to as a positive experience, there were some limitations that could be noted. Above all, time constraints, due to respect for other activities that I thought would be taking place for my families, I condensed the workshops into forty-five minutes. The limited time did not allow for too much discussion to take place nor practice.

Increased Academic Background

The objective of these set of workshops, was to increase any previous knowledge parents might have had on the presented topic or deliver new information to parents for the each focused workshop. The beginning of every workshop had a verbal explanation from me on the information I would cover as well as an explanation of the materials I had left prepared for each of them. I found it relevant that as I elaborated on the presented topic, I made reference to the handouts that I had provided for them. I encouraged they take time to stop and jot down information and to feel at ease to stop the delivery of information at any time if my pace was to rapid for them to keep up. Aside from the verbal delivery of information was an opportunity to put the learned information into practice. As an example, the second of the workshops focused on Language Arts Strategies and Common Core. My suggested strategy for this was the use of Bloom’s Taxonomy during reading. Rather than just handing the sheet, I had parents explore how these questions were arranged as well as reading some sample test questions. The over all experience was gratifying for me as the presenter as well as for parents.

An implication that arose from the focused workshops was that the objective had been met; parents felt they had gained knowledge. One parent shared, learned new strategies I did not know about before.” Another mentioned, “Yes I understand what things I can do at home to help my son.” Parents expressed they would leave with new information from each of the three workshops. “Yes, this was the first time I learned about common core testing.” Other parents expressed how they came to realize that taking time to work with their child would have a great impact. “I learned that parents can help students more by actually participating.” Overall, the notable factor across the workshop surveys were the responses to increased learning.

A limitation that was apparent when referring to the topic of increased learning was the restricted amount of time we had to truly explore strategies. As the presenter of the strategies I felt I delivered the material very rapidly and made could expand on one to two topics at most. A longer amount of time would have been great to have.

Assisting Children with Schoolwork

Another objective I wanted to meet through the workshop process was having parents feel that the information they had just received, the “gained knowledge”, could be applied at home. During the two first workshops, parents were the ones invited to come and receive the information, strategies and take some notes on how to apply these skills with the students. Once parents completed the surveys, parents expressed they felt somewhat comfortable, “Now that I have this information I can be sure I am asking the appropriate questions.”

Throughout the data collected, parents expressed they felt either comfortable or felt that they needed to actually practice at home for some time to really be able to answer the questions. One parent said, “Yes I did feel comfortable going home to share some of these strategies but I will be able to do more so in the future.” Other comments in reference to their confidence level

in applying strategies were, “I am looking forward to trying some of these strategies,” and comments like, “if these were just hand outs this would have been confusing so I am glad I came to learn first hand, I can now apply these skills.” Once again, every survey demonstrated gained confidence to apply the skills learned at home either fully and ready to implement or they shared they would apply the skills in the near future.

Limitations were in reference to the wait time some parents expressed they would need before applying skills and strategies. I believe that once again our time was limited therefore parents could not fully feel they would be applying these skills at home. Another limitation was that parents were the only ones attending the first two workshops, which was different from the third. Parents expressed much more confidence both in their surveys and in comments in general about sharing the games they learned at Game Night. The games had the materials needed, the instructions and what was really effective is that since the child attended the workshop, they put everything into practice right then.

Overall

Parents expressed a great deal of satisfaction through the many forms of data that was collected. Ratings on the surveys had the desirable outcomes I had hoped and that I had aimed for. However, these workshops were prepared knowing the understanding my classroom population. These specific workshops were designed to answer the specific concepts that this group of parents expressed interest about. I cannot speak to the effectiveness of these workshops if they were replicated in a different classroom with a different set of parents and delivered by a different person beside myself. There are certain concepts that I felt needed to be in place in order to have a successful workshop experience. If your desired outcome is to have a positive experience and to embrace collaboration, your results can be more effective.

Action Plan

Due to the positive experience I felt I had through these workshops, I plan to continue to implement them in my classroom on a monthly basis. I strongly believe that collaboration between parents and teachers is essential and beneficial for the overall success of a child. Utilizing the workshop experience, as a means to create collaboration is one I will continue to implement and share with other teachers in my school.

In the future I plan to initiate these workshops since the beginning of school, make sure I continue to use parent interest as a guide to design the workshop topics but also take into account the limitations of this study. Having longer periods of time to apply strategies learned and continue to invite students to participate in the workshop was a success.

Due to this study, I also feel I can feel more confident about the positive outcomes you can have through the workshop process. The data collected and project that was created can be utilized to demonstrate its effectiveness. I am excited to share my project and the concept of workshops with colleagues. Often we find ourselves wondering how or what we can do to integrate parents into our classroom or the lives of their children at school, I believe that spending a night of learning once a month could be a very positive experience for everyone.

Mostly, I will take this experience and use it to reflect and continue to learn from. I truly value the participation of parents and the positive impact they can have at school. I plan to continue exploring how to involve parents on a daily basis and will strive to now incorporate students into the making of future workshops. Allowing all people involved to have a voice, teacher, parent and student, might yield greater results than those that I found through this project. Working together can only make our learning experience in the classroom more effective, a desirable outcome that as a teacher I strive for.

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Appendix I

Math Strategies

Card Smarts Variations for All Grades

Games with number cards can help children develop strategies for using numbers in different combinations by adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing.

What You Need

1. Sets of number cards, 1-10 (you can make your own using heavy paper or index cards)
2. Pencil and paper
3. Coin

What to Do

Here are some games that you and your child can play with number cards:

Number Sandwich With your younger child, review the numbers 1 through 10. Make sure that he knows the correct order of the numbers. Sit with him and shuffle and place two sets of number cards in a pile between you. Have him draw two cards from the pile and arrange them in order in front of him, for example 3 and 6, leaving a space between. Then have him draw a third card. Ask him where the card should be placed to be in the right order—in the middle? before the 3? after the 6?

Make a number This game is for your older child, and can be played with family and friends. Give each player a piece of paper and a pencil. Deal each player four number cards with the numbers showing. Explain that, using all four cards and a choice of any combination of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, the player must make as many different numbers as possible in two minutes. The player gets one point for each answer.

More or less? Sit with your younger child and place a shuffled set of number cards between you. Flip the coin and have your child call "heads" or "tails" to see if the winner of each round will be the person with a greater value card (heads) or a smaller value card (tails). Then each of you will draw a card. Compare the cards to see who wins that round. Continue through all the cards. When your child is comfortable with this game, change it just a bit. Divide the cards evenly between the two of you. Each of you places the cards face down and turns over one card at the same time. Have your child compare the cards to see if his card is more or less than yours. If his card is more than yours, ask him how much more. If it is less, ask how much less. The player with the greater or smaller value card (depending on whether heads or tails was tossed) takes both cards. The winner of the game is the player with more cards when the cards have all been used.

Appendix II

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy provides an important framework for teachers to use to focus on higher order thinking. By providing a hierarchy of levels, this taxonomy can assist teachers in designing performance tasks, crafting questions for conferring with students, and providing feedback on student work

This resource is divided into different levels each with Keywords that exemplify the level and questions that focus on that same critical thinking level. Questions for Critical Thinking can be used in the classroom to develop all levels of thinking within the cognitive domain. The results will be improved attention to detail, increased comprehension and expanded problem solving skills. Use the keywords as guides to structuring questions and tasks. Finish the Questions with content appropriate to the learner. Assessment can be used to help guide culminating projects. The six levels are:

Level I Knowledge

Level II Comprehension

Level III Application

Level IV Analysis

Level V Synthesis

Level VI Evaluation

Blooms Level I: Knowledge

Exhibits memory of previously learned material by recalling fundamental facts, terms, basic concepts and answers about the selection.

Keywords:

who, what, why, when, omit, where, which, choose, find, how, define, label, show, spell, list, match, name, relate, tell, recall, select

Questions:

- What is...? • Can you select? • Where is...? • When did ____ happen?
- Who were the main...? • Which one...? • Why did...? • How would you describe...?

- When did...? • Can you recall...? • Who was...? • How would you explain...?
- How did ___ happen...? • Can you list the three..? • How is...?
- How would you show...?

Assessment:

Match character names with pictures of the characters.

Match statements with the character who said them.

List the main characteristics of one of the main characters in a WANTED poster.

Arrange scrambled story pictures and/or scrambled story sentences in sequential order.

Recall details about the setting by creating a picture of where a part of the story took place.

Blooms Level II: Comprehension

Demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptors and stating main ideas.

Keywords: compare, contrast, demonstrate, interpret, explain, extend, illustrate, infer, outline, relate, rephrase, translate, summarize, show, classify

Questions:

- How would you classify the type of...? • How would you compare...? contrast...?
- Will you state or interpret in your own words...?
- How would you rephrase the meaning?
- What facts or ideas show...? • What is the main idea of?
- Which statements support...? • Which is the best answer...?
- What can you say about ...? • How would you summarize... ?
- Can you explain what is happening...? • What is meant by...?

Assessment:

Interpret pictures of scenes from the story or art print.

Explain selected ideas or parts from the story in his or her own words.

Draw a picture and/or write a sentence showing what happened before and after a passage or illustration found in the book. (visualizing)

Predict what could happen next in the story before the reading of the entire book is completed.

Construct a pictorial time-line that summarizes what happens in the story.

Explain how the main character felt at the beginning, middle, and /or end of the story.

Blooms Level III: Application

Solve problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different, or new way.

Keywords:

apply, build, choose, construct, develop, interview, make use of, organize, experiment with, plan, select, solve, utilize, model, identify

Questions:

- How would you use...? • How would you solve ____ using what you've learned...?
- What examples can you find to...? • How would you show your understanding of...?
- How would you organize _____ to show...?
- How would you apply what you learned to develop...?
- What approach would you use to...? • What other way would you plan to...?
- What would result if...? • Can you make use of the facts to...?
- What elements would you use to change...? • What facts would you select to show...?
- What questions would you ask during an interview?

Assessment:

Classify the characters as human, animal, or thing.

Transfer a main character to a new setting.

Make finger puppets and act out a part of the story.

Select a meal that one of the main characters would enjoy eating: plan a menu, and a method of serving it.

Think of a situation that occurred to a character in the story and write about how he or she would have handled the situation differently.

Give examples of people the student knows who have the same problems as the characters in the story.

Blooms Level IV: Analysis

Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.

Keywords:

analyze, categorize, classify, compare, contrast, discover, dissect, divide, examine, inspect, simplify, survey, test for, distinguish, list, distinction, theme, relationships, function, motive, inference, assumption, conclusion, take part in

Questions:

- What are the parts or features of . . . ? • How is _____ related to . . . ?
- Why do you think . . . ? • What is the theme . . . ? • What motive is there . . . ?
- Can you list the parts . . . ? • What inference can you make . . . ?
- What conclusions can you draw . . . ? • How would you classify . . . ?
- How would you categorize . . . ? • Can you identify the different parts . . . ?
- What evidence can you find . . . ? • What is the relationship between . . . ?
- Can you make a distinction between . . . ? • What is the function of . . . ?
- What ideas justify . . . ?

Assessment:

Identify general characteristics (stated and/or implied) of the main characters.

Distinguish what could happen from what couldn't happen in the story in real life.

Select parts of the story that were the funniest, saddest, happiest, and most unbelievable.

Differentiate fact from opinion.

Compare and/or contrast two of the main characters.

Select an action of a main character that was exactly the same as something the student would have done.

Blooms Level V: Synthesis

Compile information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.

Keywords:

build, choose, combine, compile, compose, construct, create, design, develop, estimate, formulate, imagine, invent, make up, originate, plan, predict, propose, solve, solution, suppose, discuss, modify, change, original, improve, adapt, minimize, maximize, theorize, elaborate, test, happen, delete

Questions:

- What changes would you make to solve...? • How would you improve...?

- What would happen if...? • Can you elaborate on the reason...?
- Can you propose an alternative...? • Can you invent...?
- How would you adapt _____ to create a different...?
- How could you change (modify) the plot (plan)...? • What facts can you compile...?
- What way would you design...? • What could be combined to improve (change)...?
- Suppose you could _____ what would you do...? • How would you test...?
- Can you formulate a theory for...? • Can you predict the outcome if...?
- How would you estimate the results for...? • What could be done to minimize (maximize)...?
- Can you construct a model that would change...? • How is _____ related to...?
- Can you think for an original way for the...? • What are the parts or features of...?
- Why do you think...? • What is the theme...? • What motive is there...?
- Can you list the parts...? • What inference can you make...? ...? • What ideas justify...?
- What conclusions can you draw...? • How would you classify...?
- How would you categorize...? • Can you identify the different parts...?
- What evidence can you find...? • What is the relationship between...?
- Can you make the distinction between...? • What is the function of

Assessment:

Create a story from just the title before the story is read (pre-story exercise).

Write three new titles for the story that would give a good idea what it was about.

Create a poster to advertise the story so people will want to read it.

Use your imagination to draw a picture about the story.

Create a new product related to the story.

Restructure the roles of the main characters to create new outcomes in the story.

Compose and perform a dialogue or monologue that will communicate the thoughts of the main character(s) at a given point in the story.

Imagine that you are the main character. Write a diary account of daily thoughts and activities.

Create an original character and tell how the character would fit into the story.

Write the lyrics and music to a song that one of the main characters would sing if he/she/it became a rock star and perform it.

Blooms Level VI: Evaluation

Present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria.

Keywords:

award, choose, conclude, criticize, decide, defend, determine, dispute, evaluate, judge, justify, measure, compare, mark, rate, recommend, rule on, select, agree, appraise, prioritize, opinion, interpret, explain, support importance, criteria, prove, disprove, assess, influence, perceive, value, estimate, deduct

Questions:

- Do you agree with the actions/outcome...? • What is your opinion of...?
- How would you prove/ disprove...? • Can you assess the value or importance of...?
- Would it be better if...? • Why did they (the character) choose...?
- What would you recommend...? • How would you rate the...?
- How would you evaluate...? • How would you compare the ideas...? the people...?
- How could you determine...? • What choice would you have made...?
- What would you select...? • How would you prioritize...? • How would you justify...?
- What judgment would you make about...? • Why was it better that...?
- How would you prioritize the facts...? • What would you cite to defend the actions...?
- What data was used to make the conclusion...?
- What information would you use to support the view...?
- Based on what you know, how would you explain...?

Assessment:

Decide which character in the selection he or she would most like to spend a day with and why.

Judge whether or not a character should have acted in a particular way and why.

Decide if the story really could have happened and justify reasons for the decision.

Appendix III

Invitation



March 20th, 2014

Dear Families,

As part of my culminating Master's Thesis project for the university, I have decided to focus on my students and families. Part of my research lies in the benefits of parent involvement and how having support at home enhances student success.

I am currently organizing a 3 session, workshop series for the upcoming week(s). The focus of the workshop will revolve around Common Core Strategies you can apply at home and understanding how to better support your child with the upcoming state tests. I am working diligently on making these three sessions informative and engaging for you all, and I hope I can count on your support.

Workshop Topics

The workshops will be based on math and literature. They will be hands-on strategies that I will share with you and your child that you can continue to use at home.

Dates and Times

At this time, the workshops would be scheduled for the following days, from 6-7 pm

Tuesday, April 1st

Monday, April 7th

Thursday, April 10th

Participants

If you decide you can and are willing to be a participant, I would need to collect some information before and after the workshop, but during the time scheduled. This data will help support my thesis questions, which are driving my workshops.

What is the impact of academically focused parent workshops on the parents' confidence level for:

-Increasing their own academic background in the workshop and topics and

-Being able to assist their children with schoolwork in those topics?

I sincerely hope you can consider attending the workshop series as I am working diligently on making this a very informational and beneficial time for you and your child.

Please respond with an accept or regret as I will need to open the workshop series to room 16 if not enough of my students and parents participate.

Respectfully,

Maestra Santana



3 Series Workshop RSVP

Please Return This Portion ASAP 😊

Student Name_____ Parent Name_____

I respectfully accept the invitation to the 3 series workshop _____

I respectfully decline from participating in the 3 series workshop _____

Appendix III



Parent Reflection Journal

After each workshop, please take a few minutes and reflect and write about the following prompts.

Workshop Title_____

- How can I use the information that was provided in this workshop at home?

- Was I doing anything different in the past in reference to this topic?

- Did I learn something new or learn it in a different way?

- Do I have a better understanding about this concept now that I have attended this workshop?

- How do I feel about what I have learned during this workshop?

➤ What are the most important ideas I learned?

Appendix IV



Parent Workshop Survey

Workshop Title: _____

Directions: Please answer the questions with 1 if you rate the question as least effective and 5 for very effective.

1. The workshop information was informative and valuable to me.

1 2 3 4 5

2. The workshop did stress ideas and or concepts that I was not aware of.

1 2 3 4 5

3. After participating in the workshop, I feel I can apply what was presented with my child at home on this topic.

1 2 3 4 5

4. This workshop did not help me have a better understanding of what or how my child is learning in the classroom.

1 2 3 4 5

5. After attending the workshop, I can understand how applying these concepts with my child at home will increase his/her understanding of what is being learned in the classroom.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix V



Parent Interview Questions

Parent Name: _____

Workshop Title: _____

1. After attending the workshop, do you feel you learned something you did not know or clearly understand before?
2. Was the concept or information you received different from what you believed it was?
3. Were you able to put the information or concept into practice at home with your child or family?
4. Were you able to help your child better at home now due to the information that was provided at the workshop?
5. Have you noticed any differences with your child's schoolwork now that you have applied the information and or strategies you received?
6. Have you noticed a difference in your child's overall attitude in reference to the workshop topic?

7. Are you feeling more at ease and or confident with assisting your child at home, now that you have attended the workshop?