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Learning Together- The Importance of Parental Involvement in their Children's Education

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Abstract

Studies have shown that parental involvement is key for children to succeed in education, confidence, and their overall development (Project Appleseed, n.d.). However, lack of parental involvement and scarcity of resources and tools for parents to be involved in their children's education are immense issues that the community of Greenfield, CA face. Children with parents who are actively involved in their education have been linked to higher achievements and graduation rates (Project Appleseed, n.d.). Yet, when parent participation is lacking for a child, they are faced with difficulties that affect their day-to-day life, potentially negatively impacting them in the long run as well (Tabaeian, 2016, para. 1). "Lack of parental involvement results in lower grades, problems with attendance, lower self esteem, increased rates of suspension, increased drugs and alcohol abuse, increased problems with violence" (Debategraph, n.d., para. 1). Language barriers, low literacy levels, and scarce resources/tools are among the contributing factors that potentially lead to a lack of parental involvement. Not being aware of the importance of parental involvement and of the services that are potentially available to them is a further dilemma that parents and families face.

Keywords: Literacy, parental involvement, parental resources, early childhood development

Agency & Communities Served

The Greenfield Branch Library is a branch within the Monterey County Free Libraries organization. The Mission of the Monterey County Free Libraries is “to bring ideas, inspiration, information, and enjoyment to our community” (MCFL., n.d.). Based in Greenfield, CA, whose community is primarily Hispanic or Latino (92.3% to be exact), has a population of 17,648 (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, n.d.). Serving people and families of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, they strive to create a welcoming environment for all. The Greenfield community struggles with poverty and lack of education, 18.2% of the population is in poverty, 47.9% are High School graduates, and only 4.1% have a Bachelor’s Degree or higher (Cal Matters, n.d.)(Census Reporter, n.d.). Programs they offer include homework help, computer literacy classes, summer lunch at the library, technology (printing, faxing, copying, free WiFi), services for youth, branchlets/book mobiles, crafts/activities, and so many more (MCFL., n.d.). They also partner with outside agencies to provide services for the community that include legal services for seniors, tax preparation, and Medicare assistance.

Problem Description

“Some parents are not aware of the important skills children acquire prior to kindergarten and that these skills provide the foundation for learning in elementary school” (Politis, n.d., para. 6). It has been proven that parental involvement in their child’s development is crucial to children’s overall success, however, lack of parental involvement and scarcity of resources and tools for parents to be involved are immense issues that the community of Greenfield, CA face. Parental involvement is key for children to succeed in education, confidence, their overall development, and has been linked to higher achievements and graduation rates (Project

Appleseed, n.d.). The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects. "Lack of parental involvement results in lower grades, problems with attendance, lower self esteem, increased rates of suspension, increased drugs and alcohol abuse, increased problems with violence" (Debategraph, n.d., para. 1). It does not only benefit the child, but it can benefit their educators, their parents, the schools or programs they attend, the community, and other children in the family. However, when this is lacking for the child, a shift happens and the child is faced with difficulties that affect their day-to-day life, and in the long run as well. "Lack of involvement may have a negative impact on student's performance in and out of the classroom and ultimately affects their educational development and success" (Tabaeian, 2016, para. 1). Not being aware of services that are potentially available to them is a further dilemma that parents and families face.

Contributing Factors

It is extremely hard for a parent working 10-12 hours a day six days a week in order to make ends meet, to take time off from work to attend programs or meetings for their child. There's a significant amount of factors that come into play for situations such as these. Some examples include; a single parent unable to afford to miss a day or a few hours of work, a parent working long shifts still needing to get home and cook a meal for their family to eat, a parent whose job does not easily allow time off, a parent with multiple children, or even all of the above. Parents do not have the luxury of time. A parent's financial concern limits their ability to be more present with their child early on, presenting a major obstacle in their involvement with their child and their activities. Time is something that they simply, and unfortunately, do not have (Buzan, 2016).

Parent's educational attainment also influences their involvement in their child's lives. Studies have shown that a parent's educational attainment can potentially determine the level of educational achievements their child has, the number of years they attend school, and their overall success throughout their lives. "A growing body of research indicates that a child whose parents model achievement-oriented behaviors and provide achievement-oriented opportunities tend to believe that achievement is to be valued and pursued. In turn, this belief should lead to the pursuit of higher learning and successful careers" (Lamar University, 2019, para. 4).

Achievement-oriented behaviors include obtaining advanced degrees, encouraging a strong solid work ethic, and reading often. Achievement-oriented behaviors are trips to the library or taking part in enrichment programs. When parents feel that education is not important, feel unwelcome at school, or lack knowledge and education, they further become disengaged in their child's development and education (Lamar University, 2019).

Language barriers and literacy levels is an additional contributing factor that prevents parents from being more involved and gaining additional knowledge about resources and tools available to them. It may also prevent them from being aware of the crucial skills children acquire prior to kindergarten and that these skills set the foundation for learning in elementary school. If parents are illiterate or unable to speak English, it would make communication difficult if not impossible. "Parents with limited English skills are sometimes reluctant to attend or participate in activities or meetings where they may not understand what is being said" (Ellis, n.d., para. 4). Additionally, immigrant parents may not know the true importance of these programs and meetings.

Consequences

Although parents have to work out of necessity for their family and household, their persistent absence makes their children more vulnerable to bad influences and can potentially lead to their child acting out in a negative way. "There's plenty of evidence showing that uninvolved parenting can have severe, long-term negative impacts on children. These impacts include things like delinquency, risky behavior, difficulty with social interactions, and depression" (Anderson, 2020, para. 12). Parental involvement begins at birth and continues throughout the child's life, until adulthood, and even beyond for most. However, lack of parental involvement also begins at a young age and the impact can potentially follow the child for the rest of their lives. Negative behavior may develop at a young age and in turn can follow them and affect them into their teens and early adulthood. "Some of the outcomes found in research include adolescents who engage in more externalizing behavior and a connection with delinquent acts like vandalism, petty theft, assault, and rape" (Anderson, 2020, para. 9). Teens with uninvolved parents are also more likely to drink and smoke more, do more drugs, and are more likely to have low self esteem and higher levels of depressive symptoms in adolescence (Anderson, 2020). That is why it is important to develop healthy relationships and involvement early on in a child's life.

Parents who feel that education is not important or are not present for their child's activities or accomplishments potentially pass on the impression and belief that education is not important to their children. It also affects their academic performance, "Since there are no expectations from the child at home, they may show little or no interest in academics and have low achievement motivation" (Dhaliwal, n.d., para. 4). Studies have shown that children with

uninvolved parents are the least adjusted and achieve lowest in exams (Dhaliwal, n.d.). They have also known that placing importance and value on education within the family instills on children at a young age the significance of education. When that is lacking in the home, children are negatively affected by the normalized behavior within the family. They are less likely to pursue higher degrees and are more likely to drop out and be less successful in life, leading to cycles being passed onto future generations. Evidence has shown that people with a higher education have children who also obtain higher levels of schooling across numerous countries (Dickson, Gregg, & Robinson, 2016). "Our results suggest that increasing parental education has a positive causal effect on children's outcomes that is evident at age 4 and continues to be visible up to and including the high stakes examinations taken at age 16" (Dickson, Gregg, & Robinson, 2016, para. 4).

A language barrier and/or low literacy levels may lead to a parent being intimidated in settings that are out of their comfort zone, for example, a school setting with teachers, or in a setting or environment that will require them to be around people that do not speak their primary language. This may include any programs designed for children 0-5 years of age, before Kindergarten. Parents may sometimes have had negative school experiences of their own, "In some cases, they may not feel that they speak English well enough to communicate with you. These parents may want to be involved, but are uncertain how" (Politis, n.d., para. 2). The intimidation can also take place in the form of embarrassment. This leads to extreme hesitation to get involved with their child's education or other programs and resources available to them.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Parents working: unable to be more present and involved	Lack of parental involvement and scarce resources/tools for parents to be involved in their child’s education	Children become vulnerable to bad influences and may start acting out
Parents’ educational attainment		Affects child dropout rates/success rates
Language barrier/low literacy levels		Results in hesitancy from parents to get involved with their child’s education, unused opportunity for services

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project

The capstone project will be a Bilingual Literacy Packet Program for preschool and first-grade children, in both English and Spanish. The packets will consist of five different versions for each grade and will include literacy activities such as word searches, crossword puzzles, stories, math and alphabet exercises, and a craft activity. The packets will be manually translated in English and Spanish to better serve the community and population in Greenfield, CA. Copies of the ten different packets will be made and distributed weekly from library staff to the families of the children via curbside pickup during their Fall Lunch at the Library Program for a period of ten weeks. The packets will include all necessary material needed to complete all the activities, crafts, and exercises within them. In addition, each packet will also include an age-appropriate engaging toy for the child to enjoy and learn through play. The purpose of the literacy packets is to encourage parental involvement, while also providing the tools and resources necessary to assist their children in learning.

Project Purpose

Language barriers, low literacy levels, and scarce resources/tools are among the contributing factors that potentially lead to a lack of parental involvement. Our goal is to provide families with literacy packets to encourage parental involvement while also helping children learn from home. We hope that by providing all of the materials, resources, and tools, along with translating them to Spanish for the community, families are able to participate fully.

Project Justification

“When parents, informal community programs, and professionally staffed early childhood services pay attention to young children’s emotional and social needs, as well as to their mastery of literacy and cognitive skills, they have maximum impact on the development of sturdy brain architecture and preparation for success in school” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007, p. 10). Assuring growth-promoting experiences at home and in community-based settings, through a range of parent education, family support, early care and education, preschool, and intervention services, can potentially prevent children from becoming vulnerable to issues later in life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). Offering literacy packets will allow parents/guardians and their children to learn and interact together, will encourage ways to bond and spend time together at home, and will also equip them with the necessary resources and tools for parents to be involved in their child’s education and learning.

Project Implementation

The first step to implement the program was to become acquainted with the library mission and purpose, and to define the target population we would like to reach. I did this in the Fall of 2019 with help from my mentor, Dawn Vest, and library staff. The next steps were to learn the library roles, duties, and services also with the help of Dawn and library staff, throughout Fall 2020 and early Spring 2020. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, I proceeded with the rest of the project implementation remotely. In Summer 2020, I created bilingual literacy packets to be distributed to children and families in order to help encourage parental involvement and fill an educational need for the community. From September to late October 2020, Dawn and

library staff will print and distribute the packets during the Fall Lunch at the Library program.

Finally, in November 2020 I will gather all data and verbal feedback notes obtained from families with the support of Dawn and library staff. This will help obtain necessary information to help determine program impact and to measure effectiveness of the program.

A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

Assessment Plan

To measure effectiveness, my assessment plan is for the Greenfield Library staff to distribute 100 bilingual literacy packets to families and children weekly, while they are taking part in the Lunch at the Library Program. 50 packets will be for Pre-K children and 50 packets will be for first grade children. We will track how many people receive it and obtain as much verbal feedback from families as possible. The goal is to be able to determine if families enjoyed the packets and/or if they benefited from them, and determine if it helped encourage parental involvement. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, age range distributions will have to be approximated and assessment plans were limited.

Expected Outcomes

The bilingual literacy packets for preschool and first-grade age children will encourage more participation and involvement among parents in their child's development and education. It will also encourage learning and playing together among parents and their children. In addition, this project will also aid in providing knowledge to parents and family members about ways for them to get more involved with their children at home in their everyday life.

Project Results

The resources were provided for 100 children once a week for five weeks, consisting of 50 Pre-K literacy packets and 50 first grade literacy packets. Although physical surveys were not administered, verbal surveys were conducted when possible.

The verbal feedback is as follows:

- 180 felt the literacy packets helped them learn and play together with their children more
- 400 felt the worksheets, crafts, and activities were age appropriate and useful
- 223 felt the literacy packets allowed them to spend more time with their child because everything was organized and ready for parents and child to learn and play together
- 251 found it helpful to have the literacy packets in both English and Spanish
- 400 would like to see this program repeated

Additional feedback/comments received:

- It was nice to work on the activities at own leisure, convenient also
- Some said they made the activities stretch out for the week and looked forward to new packets weekly
- Thought the activities and worksheets were very well thought out,
- Liked that the answers were provided for some of the worksheets
- Helpful at home
- Some loved the stories in particular

“My daughter was the teacher and I was the student, it was fun.”

This was a statement we received from a parent. It was perfect to me because that is exactly what we were hoping to achieve with this program, to encourage parental involvement in their child's

development and education while also motivating parents and their children to learn and play together.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on feedback received from parents, the literacy packets positively impacted families, households, and children. It achieved the expected outcome of encouraging more parental participation and involvement in their child's development and education, encouraging parents and their children to learn and play together, and providing knowledge for ways parents and family members can get more involved with their children.

Because of the positive impact the literacy packets had upon the children, families and the community of Greenfield, the Greenfield Branch Librarian, and my mentor, Dawn Vest, has decided to continue the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program for years to come. She also stated that other branches may follow suit. My recommendation for the future is to attach physical paper surveys to the packets and offer an incentive prize (ie. raffle) for those who turned them in. This will allow the opportunity to obtain as much information and data as possible regarding the benefits of this program. I also recommend adding the bilingual literacy packets to the playgroups that take place within the community of Greenfield as well.

Personal Reflection

Personal/Professional Growth

Throughout my time at the Greenfield Branch Library I learned so much both professionally and personally. As an intern at the Greenfield Branch Library, I created a Bilingual Literacy Packet Program that allowed me to gain experience, knowledge, and skills necessary to take part in inter-agency collaboration and to develop a program. I also gained

experience in other areas such as ethical leadership, integrated and disciplinary knowledge of health and human services, professional development and application, research methods and information literacy, professional communication, and many more. This experience also really taught me a lot about building a foundation of values, ethics, and the cultural competence needed for serving communities and populations from diverse backgrounds. In addition, my time at the Greenfield Branch Library, initially working with the community, creating the bilingual literacy packets really allowed me to focus on equity, social justice, policy, politics, and public action. All of these areas have been critical in preparing me for a career in health and human services.

My capstone project impacted the agency and the community the agency serves in a meaningful way. Aimed at impacting families, parents, and school-age children, the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program addressed literacy and education gaps among the community and provided tools and resources to encourage parent involvement in their child's education. The Greenfield Branch Library hopes to continue the program in the future and enhance it along the way. Other programs in the community, such as the Play Groups for parents and their children, are hoping to possibly incorporate the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program into their play groups.

Strengths, Challenges, and the Broader Social Significance

The strengths and successes of the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program were the staff, the collaboration and communication we had, and the support we received from the community and family members. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, we were faced with more limitations and challenges than we were expecting. Unfortunately I was not able to intern in-person for the Fall 2020 semester, which prevented me from being more hands-on on the project as I would have liked. Also, the pandemic resulted in a lot of restrictions put in place that

prevented us from conducting our original project design, a Parent-Child Play Group. To comply with the restrictions and for safety purposes, we shifted to another plan. We then were able to come up with the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program. This allowed families and children to still receive tools and resources to encourage parental involvement, while also helping to close the education gap among young children in the community.

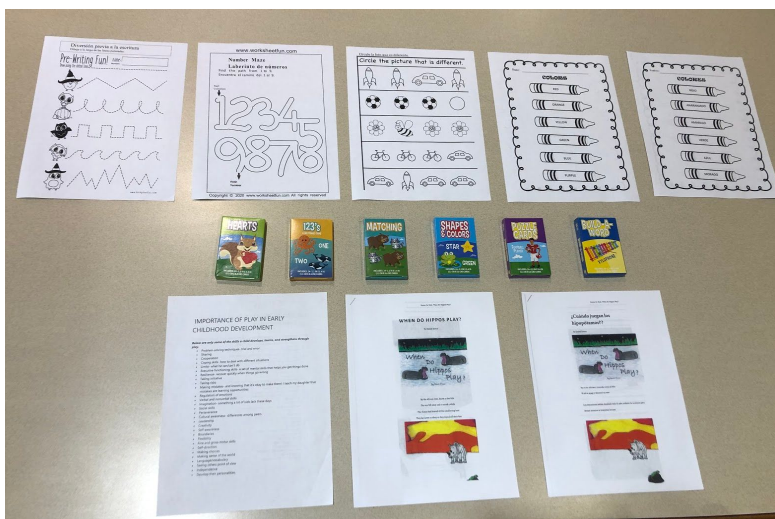
The broader health or social problem the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program relates to is the lack of parental involvement and scarcity of resources and tools for parents to be involved in their children's education. The program addresses this problem by providing physical tools, resources, and materials needed at home to encourage parental involvement in their children's education. Beyond what my project was able to accomplish, there's still so much more that can be done to further address this problem. For example, conducting more Parent-Child Workshops, enhancing and continuing the Bilingual Literacy Packet Program frequently, developing more programs to address this issue, and encouraging the participation of all parents of different cultures and backgrounds and making them feel more comfortable to take part in their child's education and development.

For future capstone students working at my agency and/or on this type of project my advice would be to possibly merge the two project designs. Merging a Parent-Child Play Group would ensure hands on play and learning, while also encouraging it at home. It would also allow the families and children to take the tools and resources "to-go" to have for future and continued use at home.

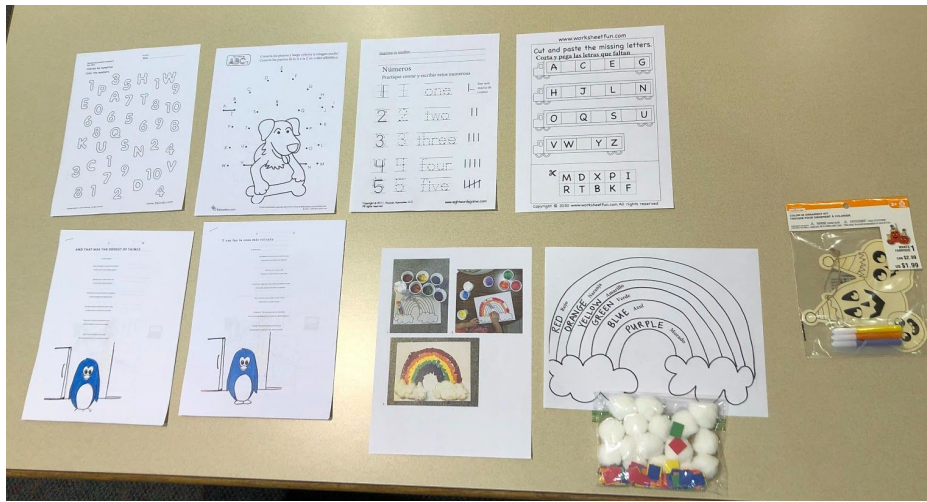


A father and daughter, members of the Greenfield, CA community, picking up their weekly bilingual literacy packets.

My mentor Dawn Vest and staff handing out the bilingual literacy packets.

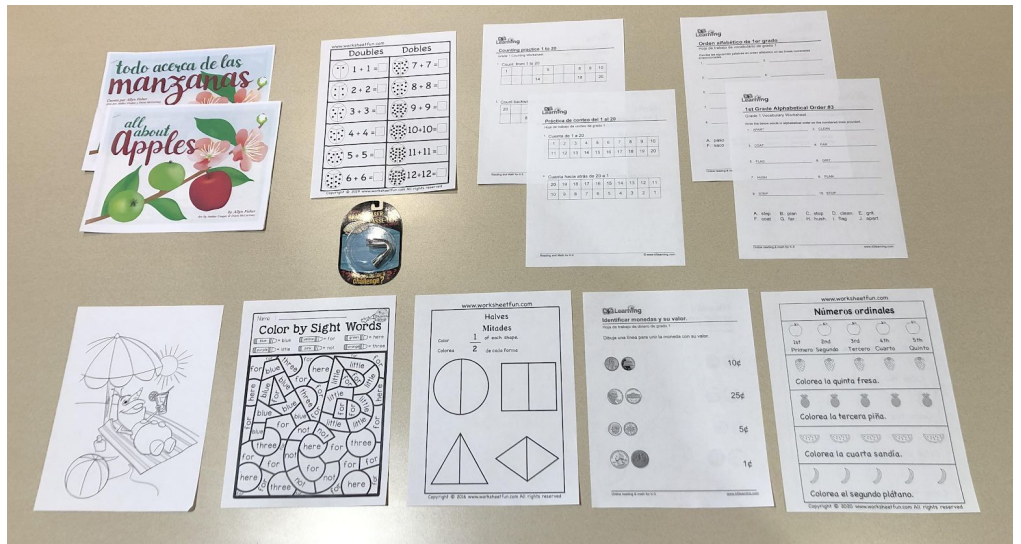


Bilingual literacy packets for Pre-K students: Week 1



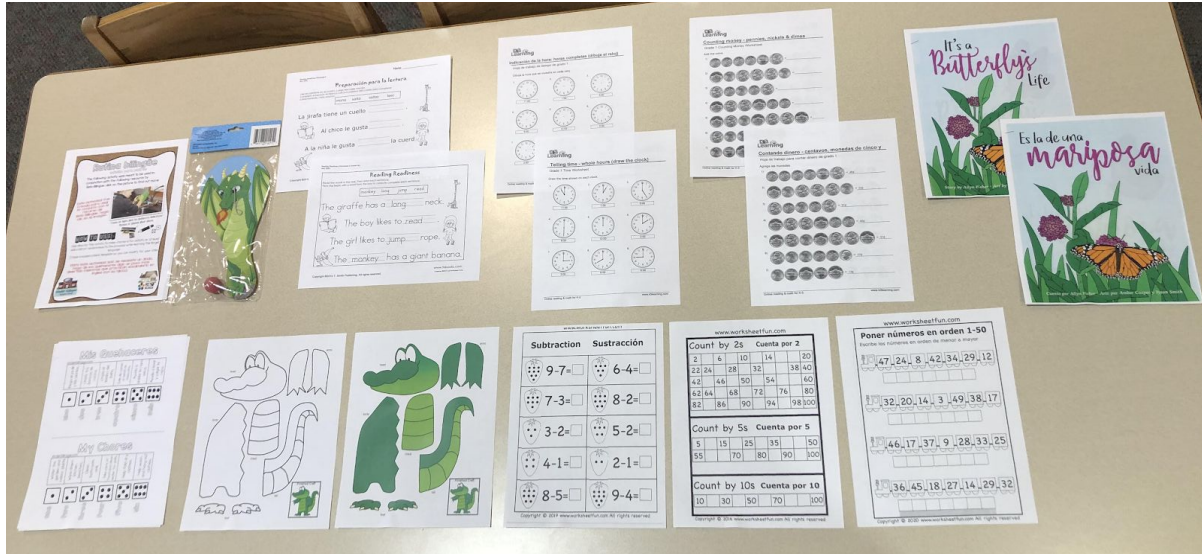
Bilingual literacy packets for Pre-K students: Week 2

Bilingual literacy packets for 1st grade students: Week 3

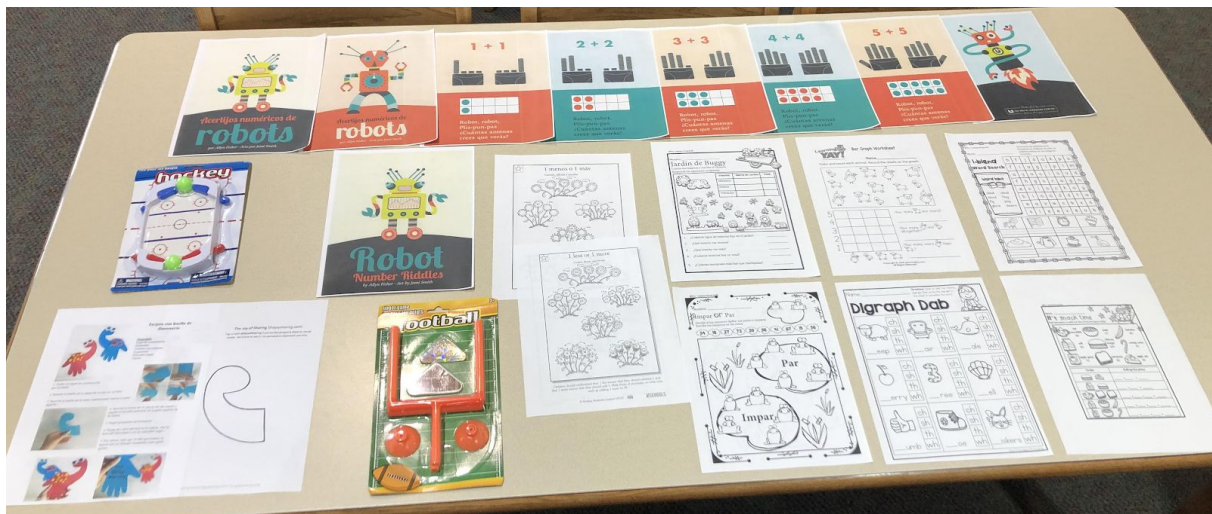


Bilingual literacy packets for Pre-K students: Week 4





Bilingual literacy packets for 1st grade students: Week 4



Bilingual literacy packets for 1st grade students: Week 5

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/ Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Become acquainted with Library mission/purpose	Understand capstone project expectations/library mission	Fall 2019	Mentor- Dawn Vest and staff
Define target population	Get to know community and fully understand ways to better reach them	Fall 2019	Mentor/Library staff
Learn library role in the community and services they have to offer	Understand the library services/purpose	Fall 2019/Early Spring 2020	Mentor/Library staff
Create bilingual literacy packets for capstone project	Fill an educational need for the community	Summer 2020	N/A
Print out packets and begin distributing literacy packets during Lunch at the Library Fall program	Create a tool and resource for families to spend time together and learn	September-October 2020	Mentor/Library staff
Gather data and verbal feedback- measure effectiveness of program	Obtain necessary information to help determine program impact	November 2020	Mentor/Library staff