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**Today A Reader, Tomorrow A Leader: How Reading Comprehension Plays a Role in
Academics Among Low-Income Students**

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Abstract:

For this Capstone Project, the researcher investigates how teachers and low-income families view the resources needed for students to increase their reading comprehension and what they thought could be done to improve access to those resources. Interviews included a fieldworker who has a child enrolled in a middle school, a middle school Community Liaison who is very familiar and close to low-income families and the issues they face with education. Additionally, three middle school students completed a survey on reading comprehension. Based on an analysis of the interviews, surveys and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they had learned to formulate an action that responded to the resources provided to low-income families in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Setting the stage:

Growing up was not easy for me, especially when it came to my education and school. I lived in Goshen, California with my father and older brother Panta after my parents divorced. My dad was a construction worker and he didn't make much money; he would have enough for the rent and groceries, but that was it. He eventually started to receive social security checks for me and my brother, but again it was a small amount. My brother and I would typically go to the ramate (flea market) for clothing and school supplies because it was cheaper than stores like Walmart or Target. When we came home from school, we would often struggle with doing homework assignments, especially when it came to reading and writing. My father spoke English as a second language and also struggled with understanding our assignments when we would turn to him for help. He graduated high school and tried to go to community college, but dropped out to find work because he could not afford it. My dad struggled as well with academics while he was in grade school up to high school due to financial issues his parents had. He had to work in the fields before and after school to help his parents with money.

Over time my brother became so overwhelmed by his consistent academic failures that by his Sophomore year in highschool, he essentially gave up completely. He felt like even when he was trying to do well there was no chance that he would succeed, so he developed an apathetic attitude towards schooling as a whole. I continued to try in school, I was not completely failing, but I was close. The school offered an after school program that my dad signed me up for in hopes I will find the help I needed with homework assignments. This was not the case. The program was three hours long and we barely worked on homework, most of the time we were playing games they set up and eating snacks. There was no way of affording the resources I needed when I was stuck with my academics. There would be book fairs and other

events that were similar, but the items and books were expensive, so I never got to take advantage of these events. I really needed one on one help with my assignments and I was unable to find it at school and at home.

My father was diagnosed with kidney disease and had an infected blister on his foot when I was 7 years old and my brother was 16 years old. He was in a coma on life support in the ICU, we were told he was not going to make it. While my father was in the hospital, my brother stepped up to the plate and took care of me as best as he could. He was not able to legally drive yet, so transportation to and from school was difficult. There were times when we would not be able to go to school at all because we had to be back in the hospital. As I previously mentioned, my brother had developed an apathetic attitude to school. When he was the person taking care of me, I had zero support in getting my schoolwork done, which caused my grades to drop in school. Turning to my teacher for support did not help the situation much. She had 30 other students that she had to teach, and often sent me to the counseling office to talk about my dad; which meant I was losing more class time. I found myself stuck and did not know what to do. I was slowly starting to give up and not care about school when I was in the third grade. The environment, which was already rough to begin with, became that much harder when my father was in the hospital.

There was not much the school offered to students in low-income families, besides the after school program. While my father was in the hospital we were only receiving the social security checks, the amount of these checks barely covered the rent. This is when we joined the CSET program; they help low income families with food and other grocery items that were donated. The CSET program's goal is to help the people in the community gain the skills, knowledge, and resources to achieve the American Dream. We would go every Thursday and get

a box of food; CSET was what we lived off of for a couple of months and rarely went to the grocery store. Eventually, my father woke up from his coma and suffered from memory loss for a little more than a week. He did not know who my brother and I were, told us about events that did not happen, and was confused about losing his leg due to the gangrene from the blister. He was in the hospital for a total of 3 months. My father was not able to work in construction anymore and applied to get disability checks. With my father back home I had some support with schooling, he may not have been able to tell how to do my homework correctly, but he made sure that I knew how important school was. I did not receive much help from school, my father would have meetings with my teacher often. The answer he was always given was to hire a tutor for me, but we could not afford one.

Looking back to those days, I am amazed how far I have made it. My father was in and out of the hospital throughout my life and we were barely getting by with social security and disability checks. I think if there was some type of reading intervention program during school, that all students would have had access to, could have helped me. Another possible solution that could have helped me would be having a tutor that my father could afford. The root of the problem with my academics was understanding the directions and the readings related to the assignments. Not having a foundation for reading and writing made school more difficult year by year. Providing extra attention and support to students who struggle in similar ways that my brother and I did is essential to providing a fair shot for students to excel academically. I work at a school where I see many students facing issues that are similar to the ones that I went through when I was young. They feel like they do not have support at school and at home, and will start to completely give up on their academics. I feel that I can understand them and help them receive the support that they need.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

Middle Schoolers with a lack of reading comprehension struggle in all academic areas. This lack of understanding can create a kind of academic apathy which follows through secondary education if not met with meaningful intervention. The role of the parents in supporting student learning is extremely valuable to students who struggle with reading, as well as other academic subjects.

What is the problem?

Middle School students from low-income families struggle with improving their grades in English classes due to a lack of reading comprehension, and therefore also struggle in other academic areas. As noted “not only do poor reading skills impact students' abilities to succeed in general education classrooms, but they impact them on both social and cultural levels as well (Jennings, Caldwell, & Lerner, 2009)” (as cited in Swan, 2013 p.1).

One aspect that creates this is a lack of support in the household. When the home life of a student is not conducive to learning, it is very challenging for students, to say the least, to excel in schooling. The role of parental involvement in a student's success with reading proficiently was focused on when Reglin, G. (2012) stated that “The research found a correlation between lack of proficiency in reading and a lack of support from parents; during the past 4 years (2006-2010), the percentage of seventh-grade students passing the state end-of-grade (EOG) reading test decreased from 71.1% to 28.1%, which represents a decrease of 43.0% in their performance level. The primary problem in this research study was that 72% of 98 students had failing EOG reading test scores on the state-approved standardized reading test for the school years 2006-2010 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010). The problem was strongly related to the students' poor performance in reading and the lack of local parental

involvement in the children's education.” (Reglin, Cameron, & Losike-Sedimo, (2012 p.1).

Another research article with a similar theme, written by multiple authors (Ni, S. 2021) agrees with the aforementioned concept that parental involvement has a very major role in the development of the education of a child, explaining that “parental involvement plays an important role in enhancing family reading outcomes and may improve non-reading-related family well-being, particularly for low-resource families.” (Ni, Lu, Lu, & Tan, 2021 p. 1).

Why is it an issue?

When students are not able to read, most often students can not succeed. The material that students are faced with in a variety of classes requires (at bare minimum) a decent understanding of the English language. When students do not understand what a math problem is asking, it does not matter how proficient at math they may be, because their approach will inevitably be flawed. This idea is explained well in an article from Swan, 2013, p.5; “According to the California Department of Education's Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools (CDE, 2007), the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" takes place between the third and fourth grades. From that point on, teaching reading for its own sake begins to fade, and content area learning becomes the target of daily lessons” (Swan, 2013 p.5). What really matters here is that these are students who, in many cases, are actually extremely bright. The problem is, that because of their lack of fundamental reading and writing skills, their intelligence hardly ever translates on paper.

While many students who struggle with reading seemingly are able to use English as a means to communicate with their friends, parents, and teachers, there is often a lack of understanding of academic language that would be used in the classroom setting. An author mentions that “competency with the register of academic English is defined by Bailey (2007) as

‘knowing and being able to use the general and content-specific vocabulary, specialized or complex grammatical structures, and multifarious language functions and discourse structures -- all for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills, interacting about a topic, or imparting information to other’” (Townsend, 2012,498-499). This incredibly worded quote reinforces a previous point about the difference between learning to read and reading to learn, and how the second really can’t exist without the first. The language used here in explaining academic language provides a perfect example of how dense (in some ways) and different academic English can be from conversational English. In many cases, whether it be middle school or high school, academic texts are written just this densely. Language that is unfamiliar to students in their vocabulary is introduced often. When students genuinely lack a foundation to the English language and its grammatical rules, these texts become overwhelming and very difficult to learn.

The key issue behind the lack of student success is the inability to read and comprehend information. This is a problem that needs to be taken seriously. Specifically now, after the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a common attitude of apathy from students who started out in the beginning of the year genuinely trying to succeed can be seen in most school sites. The research indicates that this is the result of trying, not succeeding, but most importantly, not being supported with these issues.

What should be done?

In practical terms, in Middle Schools throughout the nation, a program to support reading should be opened up to involve a much larger group of students than the ones that currently exist. Lots of extra support is given to students with disabilities, both physical and mental, which is a good thing. I believe that extra support needs to extend to students with a lack of fundamental reading education as these students will also face major challenges in life without

the intervention of someone who can help. While having a poor understanding of the English language is certainly not the same as having a learning disability, students who struggle in understanding and using academic English can struggle just as much as students who do have a learning disability. This is focused on in a research article titled Teacher practices and perspectives for developing academic language; “Even students who do not present with specific reading disabilities may struggle; limited exposure to academic English outside of school often prevents students, such as language-minority students and students from low-socioeconomic-status (SES) backgrounds, from accessing content in academic texts” (Zwiers, 2007, p. 98).

One of the most important things that would have a profound impact on academic performance is the implementation of sustained silent reading programs. At many public middle schools across the nation, there are SSR periods for some classes, but not all students are involved in these. Schoolwide SSR periods have a significant impact on student learning, and more importantly, reading comprehension. When done in the best way, SSR periods also give students a sense of learning independence. There is a wide array of research that supports the benefits of SSR programs; a research article summarizes these beneficial aspects; “While teachers and teacher-librarians understand the need for students to read a lot, some parents and administrators may not see the long-term value in providing students reading time at school or encouraging children to read every day at home. Research indicates that time spent reading correlates positively with students’ performance on standardized reading tests.” (Miller & Kelley, 2014, p. 8)

If teachers can get students to engage more with reading material, whether it be textbooks, novels, or even signs on the wall, more students will be making mental connections

that will foster future learning. This idea is supported once again in the Miller and Kelley text which was previously referred to; “Beyond racking up reading miles, ensuring that our students read every day at school provides students opportunities to fall in love with books and develop stamina for reading. Daily reading practice builds students’ capacity for reading outside school in the same way that sports and fine arts practice lead to performance success on the playing field or stage. The more students practice, the more they enjoy and develop confidence in reading and the more likely they are to read in their free time” (Miller & Kelley, 2014, p. 9).

One of the significant causes behind the issue at hand is that many students that struggle with reading are immigrants to the United States, mostly from Mexico. As a result, most of the time, their parents are either English Learners themselves, or do not speak any English at all. Many schools do not offer any opportunities for tutoring or extra support, and for those living within low income communities, there are rarely enough financial resources available to hire a tutor. When students do not have an outlet of support, education as a whole seems like an unattainable dream.

The skills that are most essential to student success in all areas of school, no matter the grade, are reading and writing. When students lack these skills, they tend to do poorly in most academic areas. The solution to this is increased one-on-one intervention with students, silent sustained reading time for all students, and a home structure that facilitates and encourages reading and writing. As educators, it is our responsibility to help all students, especially those that struggle with language comprehension and use in the academic world.

Method

In the following Capstone Project the researcher investigated how teachers and low-income families view the resources for students to increase their reading comprehension and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the resources provided to low-income families in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

My research was done at a middle school in Salinas, California. This school was first established in 1936 and still has a lot of the original buildings and classrooms, along with newer classrooms as well. 72% of the students at the school come from low-income families. Also, only 31% of the students from low-income families had average test scores, while the rest were below the state average (citation?). The school as a whole, when calculating test scores, is 5/10 which is average and for equity it was 3/10 (below average). At Washington Middle school 27% of the students passed the math section of the state test and 42% passed the English section. Both scores are considered below the state average. The school is predominantly Hispanic, 88% of the student population is Hispanic, while 7% of the students are white. There are 17% of the students at the school that are English Learners. The area in which the school is surrounded by is not the best. Less than two miles away is a homeless camp known as Chinatown; a lot of drugs and violence takes place in this area.

Participants and Participant Selection

I gave surveys out to three student participants from Washington Middle School, and then

interviewed the one parent participant (of the three students), along with a staff member participant. There were two student participants in eighth grade, and one student participant in 7th grade; all student participants were males. The three students speak both English and Spanish fluently. The one parent participant was a female and is a field worker in agriculture. The parent participant is an English Learner. The staff member is a female and has been working at Washington Middle for 8 years as the school's librarian; she has worked in education for a total of 10 years. Also, I worked very closely with the Community Liaison throughout the project and was originally going to interview her, but was unable due to a family emergency. All participants are from a Latino/a background and the M. age is 25.

Researcher

This is meaningful to me because I see good kids with bright futures that don't have resources to be academically successful at the school I work at. When this happens to our students they become less motivated to learn and this may later result in the student(s) failing their classes. This school has a reputation of having bad kids, but in reality, they are not trying because they are not receiving enough help. I relate with my participants for the most part. When I was in 2nd grade up to my 8th grade year I did not have any resources to be successful in school, which made it difficult to further my education at home. Once I got into high school, they provided me with the resources I needed or pointed me to programs that helped low-income students and families. The only difference with the participants and my experience in school is that many, if not all, of the assignments are online. This became a huge issue when the pandemic hit. The school does offer hotspots and there is a program for students to get cheap or possibly free wifi, but a lot of the students and parents are not tech savvy and struggle from time to time accessing the correct resources. A good majority of the students and parents I talked with or

interviewed did not speak fluent English; I was mindful of this and was sure to have someone there to translate. Also I was not able to do in person interviews with the students' parents due to them working late.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

The following questions were asked to no fewer than one parent and one staff member.

1. What do you know about reading resources and reading intervention programs for low-income youth? What do you see as the challenges with low-income students reading at home?
2. What is currently being done to help low-income students have the resources to read at home? By whom and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
3. What do you think should be done to provide low-income students/families with resources to further their education at home through reading?
4. What do you think are the challenges to doing something about increasing reading at home?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about reading at home and/or the improvement of low-income students reading at home?

Spanish Version for Interview

1. ¿Qué sabe usted de los programas de intervención de lectura para los estudiantes de bajos ingresos? ¿Cuáles piensan que son las dificultades de leer para los estudiantes de bajos ingresos en casa?

2. ¿Qué es lo que actualmente se está haciendo para ayudar a los estudiantes de bajos ingresos a leer en casa? De quién son estos esfuerzos y cuál piensa que son las virtudes y debilidades de estos esfuerzos?
3. ¿Qué piensa que se debería de hacer o probar para ayudar a los estudiantes de bajos ingresos a ampliar su educación en casa a través de la lectura?
4. Cuál cree usted que son las dificultades de aprendizaje a través de lectura en casa?
5. ¿Tiene usted cualquier otra cosa que quiera decir sobre la lectura en casa o cómo mejorar la lectura?

Survey Questions

These surveys were done by the 3 middle school student (7th and 8th grade) participants and answers will be written responses.

1. What are your thoughts or feelings about reading?
2. How often do you read at home? What about for fun or pleasure?
3. Did you read more in elementary school or now (middle school)? Briefly explain the changes.
4. How often do you use your school library? Do you have access to reading materials other than the school library? If so, where?
5. Is there something that motivates you to read more at home or for pleasure?

Procedure¹

Participants were interviewed. All interviews and surveys were done individually with the exception of a translator being present. When it was not possible to interview participants in

¹ <http://my.ilstu.edu/~jhkahn/>

person, they were invited to complete a phone interview, zoom meeting or paper and pencil surveys of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, and were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place at Washington Middle School. The semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Interview with Ana Chaves

Parent of Noé Chaves

November 4th, 2021

Meeting: This google meeting was with Sandra Cervantes and Ana Chaves. Sandra helped translate the questions and the answers for both me and Ana. Sandra and I worked together the next day and I was able to translate Ana's responses; so the translations were put in after the meeting.

Marissa: Hi, how are you both today?

Sandra: I am doing well. Ana, Marissa preguntó cómo estás.

Ana: Muy buena, gracias.

Translation: Very good, thank you.

Sandra: She is doing well Marissa.

Marissa: Awesome, well lets begin, I have five questions to ask and want to thank you ahead of time for your feedback. Sandra if it is okay we can discuss the translation of her answers afterwards, since she has limited time.

Sandra: Yes that is fine Marissa. Empecemos, Marissa tiene cinco preguntas y agradece sus comentarios.

Marissa: Okay first question is what do you know about reading resources and reading intervention programs for low-income youth? What do you see as the challenges with low-income students reading at home?

Sandra: ¿Qué sabe usted de los programas de intervención de lectura para los estudiantes de bajos ingresos? ¿Cuáles piensan que son las dificultades de leer para los estudiantes de bajos ingresos en casa?

Ana: Unos de los recursos para los estudiantes de bajos ingresos sobre la lectura serían las bibliotecas públicas y las de las escuelas.

Translation: One of the resources for low-income students on reading would be public and school libraries.

Marissa: Okay next one is what is currently being done to help low-income students have the resources to read at home? By whom and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

Sandra: ¿Qué es lo que actualmente se está haciendo para ayudar a los estudiantes de bajos ingresos a leer en casa? De quién son estos esfuerzos y cuál piensa que son las virtudes y debilidades de estos esfuerzos?

Ana: En las escuelas se les dan muchos libros para leer además de sus Chromebooks donde también pueden leer.

Translation: In schools they are given many books to read in addition to their Chromebooks where they can also read.

Marissa: Alright, next is what do you think should be done to provide low-income students/families with resources to further their education at home through reading?

Sandra: ¿Qué piensa que se debería de hacer o probar para ayudar a los estudiantes de bajos ingresos a ampliar su educación en casa a través de la lectura?

Ana: Los padres necesitan apoyar a sus hijos con el ejemplo. Se necesita establecer hábitos con amor a la lectura. Es muy importante que los niños lean a los padres y los padres a los niños.

Translation: Parents need to support their children by example. You need to establish habits with a love of reading. It is very important that children read to parents and parents to children.

Marissa: The next question is what do you think are the challenges to doing something about increasing reading at home?

Sandra: ¿Cuáles cree usted que son las dificultades de aprendizaje a través de lectura en casa?

Ana: Algunos de los retos que los estudiantes de bajos ingresos enfrentan son, que sus padres trabajan mucho, falta de espacio, familias rentando un cuarto o durmiendo en el carro. Y el último reto es el Idioma.

Translation: Some of the challenges that low-income students face are that their parents work a lot, lack of space, families renting a room or sleeping in the car. And the last challenge is the Language.

Marissa: Is there anything else that you would like to say about reading at home and/or the improvement of low-income students reading at home?

Sandra: ¿Tiene usted cualquier otra cosa que quiera decir sobre la lectura en casa o cómo mejorar la lectura?

Ana: Para mantener el interés despierto sobre la lectura, los padres debemos ayudar a nuestros hijos a buscar temas de su interés y de su nivel académico.

Translation: To keep interest awake in reading, parents must help our children to search for topics of interest to them and their academic level.

Marissa: Okay that was the last one, thank you so much Ana for your feedback and your time, have a great day.

Sandra: Ana, ese fue el último, Marissa dijo gracias por sus respuestas y su tiempo.

Ana: Sí, gracias, que tengas un buen día.

Translation: Yes, thank you, have a good day.

Ana left zoom meeting

Marissa: Thank you as well Sandra for your help with translating. I have the meeting recorded, and tried my best to write down what I thought she said.

Sandra: No problem, I wrote down everything she said also, we can meet at work tomorrow and go over the recording.

Marissa: That works, thank you again and have a great day.

Sandra: You too Marissa, see you tomorrow.

Interview with Anabel Torres

Librarian at Washington Middle School

November 15, 2021

Marissa: Okay, how are you?

Anabel: I'm good, thank you.

Marissa: You're good? Awesome, okay. So the first question, we'll just jump right into it; What do you know about reading resources and reading intervention programs for low-income youth? What do you see as the challenges with low-income students reading at home?

Anabel: At the middle school level there are many reading intervention programs available to be purchased by districts. The problem is that Reading Intervention is not a part of the approved

curriculum during the school day. Our school uses **Rosetta Stone** but this course must be offered before and after school. Many newcomers and students who want to be proficient in English are not able to come before and after school. They need systematic reading intervention during the school day in order to be able to appreciate reading at home and at school. The challenge at the middle school level with low income students reading at home is that our students come from homes that have multiple challenges that interfere with reading at home. Many of our students live in apartments or homes with multiple families and little space to live, let alone take time to read. Students get home from school and are responsible for babysitting their siblings and those of the families that are living with them. Our experience with remote learning has taught us that the noise levels of households is very high and students do not have the time for extra school work at home due to many family based responsibilities.

Marissa: What is currently being done to help low-income students have the resources to read at home? By whom and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

Anabel: Our district has a lot of great initiatives, however currently, there are none that specifically focus on helping low income students to read at home. The strength of programs that focus on students and reading at home is that the more students are exposed to the language, the greater their potential for success in school and beyond. The weakness is that the school has no control over the climate and atmosphere of the home for reading. A great majority of our students do not have home lives that are conducive to reading at home.

Marissa: What do you think should be done to provide low-income students/families with resources to further their education at home through reading?

Anabel: I think that schools should offer parents the opportunity to read and/or learn to read in English. This would necessitate a systematic reading program for parents to participate in with

flexible entry levels. By valuing the power of reading with parents, it becomes positive modeling for students. Like students, parents need a space and place to be able to read. Oftentimes their homes do not provide this. With adequate funding the school can serve as an anchor for reading for parents and students and provide the resources for them to read at home. Our parents want to know how to read. They would welcome the opportunity to learn.

Marissa: What do you think are the challenges to doing something about increasing reading at home?

Anabel: As I said above, the challenges are rooted in our lives or our families. Due to the high cost of living, our families are living day to day. Our middle school students bear the responsibility of childcare, cooking, cleaning, homework help and even getting their siblings dressed in the morning to go to school. Any 'home' reading program must be rooted in the reality of our families lives and be easily accessible.

Marissa: Is there anything else that you would like to say about reading at home and/or the improvement of low-income students reading at home?

Anabel: I believe that if our schools were funded to support literacy for parents, then it would thrive with our students. I meet with many parents weekly. Many of them are field workers. They are here to achieve the 'American Dream'. Let's give it to them by fully supporting literacy at school and at home. Whatever it takes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, a staff member and a parent were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve reading resources for low-income students at middle school in Salinas, California. Also, three students from low-income families participated in surveys asking questions about their personal reading experiences. This is important because there are many students that do not have the proper reading resources to be academically successful. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: cost, availability, and effectiveness. Cost is very important because the Salinas Union High School District has limited funds for programs and other resources that are useful for students. Accessibility is another key evaluation criteria because many low-income students struggle to obtain the resources that are offered to them. Lastly, the effectiveness of each Action Option plays a major role and helps determine how successful or helpful each option is for low-income students and families. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1: *Evaluation of Action Options*

	Cost	Accessibility	Effectiveness
In-School and After School Reading Intervention Programs	Medium	Medium	High

Home-Based Summer Reading Interventions	Low to Medium (depends on the program)	Low	High
Incorporating More Cultural Appropriate Books in the School	Medium	Low	High

In-School and After School Reading Intervention Programs

In school and after school reading intervention programs are the most accessible option for students, teachers, and parents. These programs can consist of specialized “pull-out” sessions, which is a minor scheduling change to the student’s typical day. An option that works in many cases is scheduling a class or two into the students daily schedule that is focused on reading instruction. The cost of these programs are not any different than the cost of regular class costs. Out of school reading programs are also a good alternative to in-school support, and tend to reinforce learning that is already happening at school while filling in gaps with remedial education (things they may have missed that are hindering their current performance). The cost in these kinds of programs vary, as some may be a part of the school system a student already attends, and others are private companies, such as Sylvan Learning Centers, or the KUMON math and reading centers. One source I found useful in understanding the impact of these services elaborates more on this subject; “To help students attain proficiency in reading, many educators are considering out-of-school time (OST) strategies and programs. These educators are looking for effective programs to mitigate summer learning loss, remediate skill deficiencies,

accelerate learning, and prepare students for the intellectual challenges of later schooling and work. In addition to addressing these academic focuses, OST strategies and programs enable educators to address the safety, behavioral, cultural, vocational, emotional, and social needs of students”(Miller, Lauer, & Snow 2013, p. 1).

The accessibility of in-school support services is high, and specifically as it applies to English Language Learners, it is actually guaranteed by law that they receive some sort of learning accommodations. On the *Reading Rockets* website it states, “Individual students who are struggling with reading may be eligible to receive supplemental instruction from special educators, ESL teachers, or reading specialists. In addition, individual schools may be eligible for Title I funding, which can be used to provide extra help to struggling students. Schools are required by law to provide special education to students with disabilities (including learning disabilities), and some form of support for English language learners” (Leipzig, 2013).

Home-Based Summer Reading Interventions

Home-based summer reading interventions are a good way for students to keep up with skills they have recently learned over the course of the school year, and to focus on learning remedial skills in reading comprehension. There are a few challenges that come with this approach, which are: 1. Motivation to engage with material (because it is summer and most youth-teenagers want to do things outside with their friends rather than continue working on school related tasks); 2. accessibility to the material (getting rides to and from school to pick up assignments/learning materials, access to technology for online reading support, etc.); and 3. Support from within the home. When students come from an environment that is not conducive to learning, they can still get by in the educational setting because of the consistent availability of staff during a regular school day. When this option is removed, and the student can not receive

help from members of the family, it can be even more difficult to understand the material than it would be in a standard school year. The cost of home-based interventions vary. There are many programs that qualify as home based; some of them are completely free while others require some sort of payment in order for the student to register. This cost and availability of services changes depending on the area in which a student lives.

One example of a program that is designed to influence students to read consistently (and therefore, make greater improvements in their own reading) is the Scholastic Summer Reading Program. This is a free online program that students can be a part of for the entire duration of summer vacation. The program states, “We know summertime can provide tremendous opportunities for kids to accelerate reading, to experience the social-emotional impact of good literature and stories, and to make up for any lost learning time as access to instruction and reading has had to be completely rethought due to the pandemic. Research has proven that in a typical year, summer reading supports skill gains, and its absence leads to widening skill gaps” (*Scholastic Summer Reading Program*).

Another free Summer reading program that parents can use to support their students is the Chuck E Cheese Summer Reading program, which is nothing more than a printable chart that demonstrates that a child read for 2 weeks in a row. Upon completion of the chart, parents can bring their children in to receive 10 points. While this may seem like a silly concept, younger students become totally motivated by things like this. Not only does it allow students to receive tangible rewards for their efforts, but it also charts their progress and shows them that working hard at reading is a good thing for them to do.

Incorporating More Culturally Appropriate Books in the School

Students like to read stories that they can relate to and see themselves as a part of in some way. Incorporating more culturally appropriate books; more books that reflect the cultural identities that students possess, often brings students closer to a relationship with reading. It shows students that reading can be inspiring, powerful, and fun, rather than a chore that is done to get a good grade at school.

Another major impact of culturally diverse literature is that students begin to understand each other more. When cultural differences are explained, expressed, and shown through writing, students learn more about students who have backgrounds that are different from their own. In an article the author states, “Multicultural literature has special effects for both students and teachers. Minority students feel recognized and understood when their culture is acknowledged. Students from the mainstream culture learn that there are other perspectives and ways of doing things that are just as valuable as their own.” (Boles, 2006, p. 4).

Outside of the fact that students make lifelong connections with reading by studying different cultures and language systems, it truly helps students become well rounded in their world-view; in how people interact with one another and how they should treat others; in how surface differences can be appreciated, as well as how commonalities can. This can be demonstrated through the research of Suzanne Evans; “Suzanne Evans (2010) conducted research on critical literacy using a range of multicultural picture books. Her aim was to determine whether student perspectives on diversity and the acceptance of others altered once they were exposed to multicultural texts. Evans concluded that exposure to multicultural literature increased students’ awareness of the various social practices, values and belief systems of other cultures.”

The cost behind this kind of intervention depends on the quantity of books being purchased. This really can be a low cost strategy if books are bought once or twice a year at low quantity, but enough so that the presence of the new literature is being felt in the classroom. The degree of effectiveness behind incorporating culturally diverse and appropriate literature into schools is dependent on the instructors who facilitate reading education. By incorporating these types of books into lessons, students can receive a guided approach to reading and learning about ideas, concepts, and cultural groups with which they are unfamiliar.

Recommendation

My recommendation is students that are struggling with reading participate in at school or afterschool reading intervention programs. I came to this recommendation after doing interviews with people in the community and doing research on the way that these sorts of programs impact student learning. These programs are the most accessible option out of the 3, and in impoverished, multicultural communities, accessibility really means everything. This option allows students to participate in their normal summer activities and does not necessarily require support like technology being available in the home or transportation from one place to the other.

Concessions

The recommendation of participation in in-school or afterschool reading programs is not to suggest that the other two options are insufficient to support student learning, in fact, all three of these programs are most effective when used together. The key factor that makes this option stand out as the best for students who struggle with reading, as referred to previously in the recommendation, is the accessibility to the program itself. The accessibility of this option is what will make the most students succeed. While the other programs are very helpful to reaching the

same end of student success with reading, many students and their families can not support the accommodations they need to make in order to get their students to and from these programs or be able to afford them.

Limitations

In-school intervention programs and after school programs can take students away from extra curricular activities like sports and sometimes can make them miss out on regularly scheduled classes that their peers are in. While students may thrive academically, they may start to have some social consequences to this type of intervention. The ultimate goal to prevent this sort of social discomfort and lack of opportunity to engage in extra curricular activities is to balance scheduling in a way that does not dominate the school life of a student, but still makes consistent progress in their academic performance. A second limitation which can become an issue for some students is that they feel less intelligent than other students because they are receiving help while others are not. While this is a significant factor, programs can model positive thinking and help students overcome self doubt and feelings of inferiority because of the services they are receiving.

Potential negative outcomes

The removal of students from normal class schedules and after school activities can make students feel more isolated and alone than they did by performing poorly in classes. There needs to be a good balance between supportive education and a solid social life for students to truly feel comfortable in school. Another negative outcome that comes from in-school intervention programs is an increased reliance on supportive systems for help in school. When students find that they succeed with the help of a supportive group, they will tend to lean on that group in the

future for support. This is not always a bad thing, but at a certain point, this can hinder a student's ability to work independently and figure things out on their own.

Conclusion

The integration of in school and after school learning programs is the most beneficial option for students who are in need of remedial reading education. Students find themselves in situations where they struggle to excel in their other classes because of a basic lack of reading comprehension. The most accessible way for students to address these issues is to participate in school-sponsored intervention throughout the regular school day, to take part in after school learning programs at the school-site, or to take part in a third party learning group from an outside agency. Once students develop better reading and writing comprehension, they are able to apply that knowledge to all of their subjects. Without this intervention, however, many students can find themselves struggling throughout their academic career.

Action Documentation & Reflection Paper

In the beginning of my Capstone Project I decided to pick an issue that low-income middle school students face in Salinas, California. I did most of my research at the middle school I work at and partnered with the Community Liaison, Sandra Cervantes, who was close to many low-income families. I also started working with Anabel Torres (school librarian) in the beginning of November. The Community Liaison introduced me to two mothers whose sons went to the middle school I work at. After meeting with both parents and students, I started to make dates for when I could interview the parents and send their sons home with surveys about their personal reading experiences. The Community Liaison introduced me to another student, and they were also willing to take home my survey. I asked the three boys to drop the surveys off in my office or with Mrs. Cervantes (Community Liaison). The first interview was over google meets with Ana Chaves; Mrs. Cervantes was present to translate because my Spanish is not the best. Originally, I was going to interview the parent on my own, but just to be sure they fully understood the questions I had Mrs. Cervantes there.

I found that it would be difficult to interview the second parent due to conflicting schedules. This was one of the first modifications I had to make. Originally, I asked Mrs. Cervantes if I could interview her; we set a date, but sadly something popped up and I was unable to meet with her. Luckily, Mrs. Torres was free and I was able to interview her instead of the other parent. This worked out a little better, because she meets with low-income students often during school and is familiar with the reading issues they face. After the interviews and once I collected the three student surveys, I used the interviews, surveys, and peer-reviewed articles to come up with three action options.

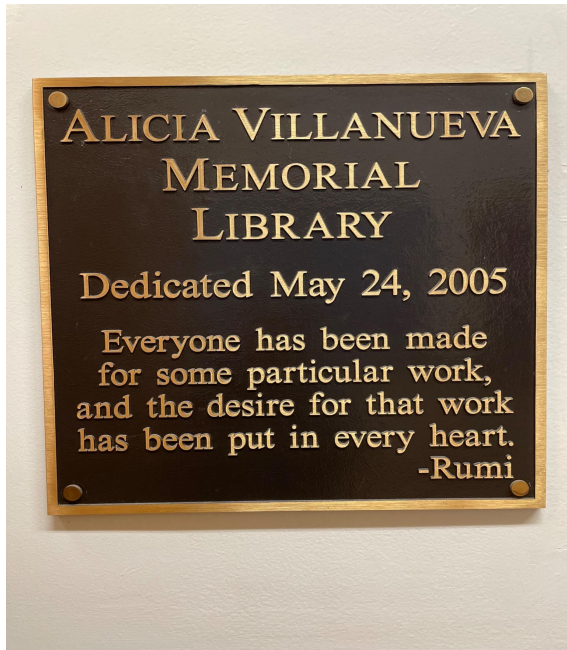
The outcome of my research was more focused on intervention programs before, during and after school and providing enough reading resources for students. Due to the school district having limited funds, and the high schools receiving most of the funds, middle schools are left in the dust. Mrs. Cervantes has been trying to get more funds and resources for her low-income students in the past, but struggled. After meeting with Mrs. Cervantes, and the librarian at the school (Anabel Torres), we all found the best way to get more resources for students is to accept any possible donations. The school had already planned for a canned food drive from November up to winter break. I asked the principal, Teri Lopez, if it was possible to do something similar, but with books. Once I got the confirmation that we can do a book drive, I shared it with Mrs. Cervantes and Miss Torres. Mrs. Cervantes and I are still planning when exactly we can do a book drive, but the goal is to have a book drive next year in March or April.

Another thing we are still trying to figure out is creating a reading intervention program during and after school. The only issue with this is we would need some extra staff to help the students with reading comprehension and supervision. Mrs. Torres has offered to help students before school since she is at work an hour before classes start. I was also considering staying an extra hour, as a volunteer, after school for the students who are unable to get help before school. Also, having an in-school reading intervention program might take longer than after school programs because we would have to change the bell schedule. Luckily, we do have a spot for a future reading program; Miss Torres is offering her library as a designated spot. My next steps moving forward is setting a date for the book drive and figuring out if it's possible for the school district to create a position for an afterschool reading program. If not, I'm hoping that I can create a volunteer signup sheet for teachers in the school who are willing to stay after or come in early for an hour.

While working on this project I learned a lot about myself. One of them being that I want to help students, whether they are low-income or not. I want each student to have the resources and opportunities that I did not have to be academically successful. I want to be a teacher that can provide extra resources that the school may not be able to provide to students. After working with Mrs. Cervantes on this project, I realized I want to be like her when I become a teacher; helpful, kind, and understanding. One thing that I learned when it comes to teaching after doing this project is understanding that low-income students need a little extra help in class. Also, not everyone has access to getting help at home after school, and as a future teacher I need to be aware of this and be sure that all my students understand the work. When working toward change, I learned how difficult it is to get immediate help. There was a lot of waiting and being patient during this project, some people had things pop up, others did not email me until weeks later, and other similar incidents occurred often.

The MLOs, the coursework, and this project has impacted my professional development in several ways. One of the first MLOs that has helped me with my development is evaluating others' experiences and reflecting on my own. The project has helped me better understand what struggles certain students face and why they may not be academically successful. I think an important step to take to become the future teacher that I want to be is to remember where I came from. I think it's important for me to acknowledge that some students come from a similar background. When a teacher is able to understand and relate to a student struggling with their academics, they have a better chance of helping the student. Another important step to take as a future teacher is to create some relationships with your students; this will also encourage students to want to learn because they know you care.

Here are some pictures of the school library and the take home surveys the students filled out; this is at the school where I did most of my research.



Reading Survey

1. What are your thoughts or feelings about reading?
I like it. I also like scary books
2. How often do you read at home? What about for fun or pleasure?
I don't read that much at home. I don't got time.
3. Did you read more in elementary school or now (middle school)? Briefly explain the changes.
way more in elementary. coz in elementary I had time, not anymore.
4. How often do you use your school library? Do you have access to reading materials other than the school library? If so, where?
Zero, not at all.
5. Is there something that motivates you to read more at home or for pleasure?
No, only read when have to.

Reading Survey

1. What are your thoughts or feelings about reading?

I Love it I always read for fun.

2. How often do you read at home? What about for fun or pleasure?

Every day and I enjoy it

3. Did you read more in elementary school or now (middle school)? Briefly explain the changes.

I read more in middle school
since I have more time

4. How often do you use your school library? Do you have access to reading materials other than the school library? If so, where?

weekly

5. Is there something that motivates you to read more at home or for pleasure?

No just for fun

Reading Survey

1. What are your thoughts or feelings about reading?

It's boring
It's hard and I get tired

2. How often do you read at home? What about for fun or pleasure?

no I don't read at all

3. Did you read more in elementary school or now (middle school)? Briefly explain the changes.

elementary

4. How often do you use your school library? Do you have access to reading materials other than the school library? If so, where?

no I never use it
because at home I get
distracted

5. Is there something that motivates you to read more at home or for pleasure?

my parents
might motivate
me

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