

OUTREACH INCENTIVE GRANT FUNDING: END-OF-YEAR PROJECT REPORT

Title of Proposal: Family Literacy for a Multilingual Community: Helping Parents, Helping Children (Project HPHC)

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Project Date: 1/8/2013-5/21/2013

Additional project support received from other university or external sources:

None

Please use this sheet to answer each of the following questions about your project (1-2 pp total)

1. **ASSESSMENT:** How did this project document or assess its engagement with the community?

Project HPHC, dubbed "Literacy Night" by all participants, was held twice a month from January through May in 2013. Qualitative data were collected to assess the impact of the project. Methods included observations of parent-child interaction and interviews with the parents, children, principal, and the children's homeroom teacher.

2. **PARTNERSHIP/RECIPROCITY:** How did the university and community work together?

University researchers and Lenoir City Elementary School professionals cultivated a close partnership facilitating the success of Project from the beginning of the project. The principal arranged the initial meeting between the university researchers and the teachers to identify potential participants for the project. The principal allowed the school library to be used for the project. The principal also called the parents to remind them about Literacy Night, and came to the beginning of each session to greet the participating parents and children.

3. **BENEFITS:** What were the benefits (University/community) of this partnership?

The most important way this project benefitted children is that some of the most struggling readers took an interest in reading. According to participants' homeroom teacher, participating children asked for more books to take home and took more risks while reading in class. The teacher added that participating in the "Literacy Night" boosted their confidence in reading and children became less intimidated by the challenges of reading.

University researchers observed, while conducting Literacy Night sessions and collecting data, that participating parents and children cultivated closer family relationships through the shared reading time. Parents reported that more time was spent at home reading with children.

4. **SHARED DECISION-MAKING:** Did the community have a "voice" or role for input into this project?

The university researchers met with the teachers who had the inside knowledge concerning which parents would be enthusiastic about participating in the project and concerning ways to manage communications with the children and parents. Based on teachers' recommendations, all participants came from one third grade teacher's class. This selection enabled more efficient communication with parents.

In addition, a few participating parents provided valuable feedback to university researchers about the success of practicing the literacy strategies. One parent in particular said that he would be interested in participating in the project again, and expressed his willingness to share his enjoyment of the project with other prospective participants.

5. **SCHOLARSHIP:** Are there any examples of faculty scholarship that will be informed by this project?

University researchers will prepare a manuscript and submit it to a journal once a full scale of data analysis is completed. A proposal to a conference will also be prepared and submitted. Based on the findings, the university faculty will pursue funding from an extramural agency for conducting HPHC in the future.

6. **CONCLUSIONS:** What conclusions and best practices can be drawn from the partnership?

Based on the preliminary data analysis, the project was highly informative regarding the issues related to family literacy: **(1)** parents appreciated “literacy coach strategies” that they learned through the project and found them very useful; **(2)** some parents did not believe reading aloud would help struggling readers to become better readers; **(3)** Parents expressed that by interacting in a group combining Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking parents they learned from each other as to how they interpret and apply the literacy coach strategies; **(4)** books chosen in Spanish only for the participating parents turned out to work against the children who speak Spanish but do not know how to read in Spanish. Some of the children refused to interact with their parents when reading Spanish books. After researchers observed this challenge, bilingual books were selected.

The latter is considered a very significant finding and reveals the complex nature of working with bilingual families with the goals of developing children’s literacy skills. Literature related to bilingual education suggests that family literacy has to be developed in a native language. However, this project reveals that bilingual children who are not literate in their native language will feel discouraged when presented with books in their native language. Furthermore, reading with parents in their native language only will not facilitate this family relationship.

An additional issue related to family literacy is that: **(5)** while participating parents agreed on the importance of family literacy, it was a challenge to get the opportunity to work with the parents who juggle different work schedules and home situations (i.e., baby sitter issues). This challenge affected the project attendance. Ironically, the parents who most need literacy coaching strategies for effective reading time with their children who are struggling readers cannot benefit from projects because their work and home obligations prevent them from attending. Participants’ attendance is an issue unrelated to literacy strategies. However, literature regarding family literacy needs to acknowledge that non-attendance hinders conducting family literacy projects.

7. FUTURE PLANS: What are the future plans for this partnership?

Lenoir City Elementary School wants to implement this project in the Fall semester of the school year, rather than Spring semester. This implementation poses a challenge since the UT Outreach program winners are announced at the end of the Fall semester. Nevertheless, the university faculty will approach the school to find ways to replicate the project without funding from UT.