

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

Through socialization, children acquire a similar “habitus” to that of their parents. While it is impossible to accurately measure the influence of parental attitudes on language learning because of the other variables involved, scholars recognize some correlation (e.g. Panferov, 2010).

Gardner, as cited in Bartram (2006), claims the “relationship between the parents’ attitudes and the students’ orientations suggest that ... the degree of skill which the student attains in a second language will be dependent upon the attitudinal atmosphere in the home” (p. 213). By supporting students’ studies through active or passive means, parents can affect student acquisition and achievement (Chao, 2013; Dyson, 2001).

If parents are also learning English, or have existing knowledge of the English language, they can support their child’s acquisition through scaffolding

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

Because of the social nature of second language acquisition, students are likely to experience the greatest success when schools and parents work together to provide language socialization opportunities:

Parental involvement is meaningful when the school and family work together:

the academic and linguistic growth of students is significantly increased when parents see themselves, and are seen by school staff, as co-educators of their children along with the school. Schools should therefore actively seek to establish a collaborative relationship with minority parents that encourages them to participate with the school in promoting their children's academic progress.

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT- LISA OLDING

Many school

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

completion, give verbal reminders about the importance of education, or take their children to their workplace to see the struggle of manual labour (Nelson & Guerra, 2009; Guerra & Nelson, 2013). Li (2006) explains that Chinese parents are more likely than Caucasian parents to involve their children in daily literacy activities and to provide additional formal education opportunities. Depending on the human capital in the home, home learning experiences could be vastly different. Some parents utilize their economic capital to afford their children the chance to participate in tutoring or practice academic skills using workbooks and textbooks in both the home language and English (Chao, 2013; Li, 2007; Li, 2010)

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

familiarity of the practices and procedures of the school (Ashworth, 2000). In many cases, there is a disconnect between the expectations of the school and the prior knowledge and experience of the culturally or linguistically diverse parent (Panferov, 2010). In some countries, parents are not expected to come to the school to volunteer or to seek out the teacher for brief or casual conversations about their child's progress. These cultures often see the role of the parent to send the child to school prepared and encourage the child in their studies at home. Questioning the teacher is viewed as disrespectful in some countries (Coehlo, 1994; Colombo, 2006). In many countries, a teacher will only contact the parents when there is a serious concern. A misunderstanding of the cultural norms and "different values and expectations often result in discontinuity between school and home literacy goals" (Li, 2006, p. 28). For these reasons, ELL parents regularly have a negative view of school participation and parent-teacher communication in North American schools.

Sometimes the barrier to parental involvement is something more challenging

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

staff is available to help parents and answer any questions as they arise. Families are taken on a tour of the school the first time they visit to acquaint them with the building and program.

Before the start of the school year, each family at Peace Christian School receives a home visit from one of their children's teachers. The purposes of this visit include informing families of upcoming events, changes to policy, and to prepare them for 'Enrollment Completion Day' (when all forms and cheques must be turned in to the school). However, teachers see the real value of home visits coming from the chance to connect with families and build relationships. It is common for a younger student to show the teacher photos, awards, or their favourite toy; teachers will sometimes play video games or discuss summer activities with older students. On occasion, teachers will be served refreshments or even be invited to stay for a meal. One visit that is especially memorable for me was with a family that had been in Canada for less than six months. We had an interpreter present for much of our visit, but she had to leave, and I was invited to stay for lunch. When we sat down to eat, the mother was surprised and pleased that I knew how to use chopsticks. Although our verbal communication took some negotiation, we were able to form the beginnings of a relationship that gave the parents confidence to approach me for assistance a few months later when their son was struggling with schoolwork. A number of sources confirm that home visits are a valuable tool to increase participation of ELL parents by making them feel welcome and comfortable, as well as helping the teacher gain insight into the family and community funds of knowledge (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Panferov, 2010; Pease-Alvarez & Vasquez, 1994; Scanlan, 2011).

Peace Christian School seeks to involve parents in a variety of school events and activities. The Parent Teacher League (PTL) facilitates parental involvement by sponsoring a subscription to a website that parents can access to indicate their interests and areas of expertise

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

(www.signupgenius.com). Parents are invited to drive for and attend field trips, help supervise at lunch, assist with extra-curricular activities, and attend social events. In addition, children are given homework activities they can complete with the support of their parents. The school sees parents as an integral part of the community and their involvement as necessary for the success of the students and the school.

One strategy

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

feasible to translate all important school forms, Peace Christian School could consider creating a pamphlet for ELL parents “in their language, giving basic information about the school program, the structure of the school day and the school year, special activities and events, and the role parents are encouraged to take” (Coelho, 1994, p. 315). At minimum, the school should make a

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

planning: language-as-resource. Rather than viewing students as deficient when learning English, it is necessary for schools to recognize the abilities students and their families bring to the community when they speak more than one language. Teachers can legitimize the participation of the students and their parents, encouraging investment and further participation, by

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

they are more likely to feel welcome and invest in participation. Because Peace Christian School has already communicated an expectation for parent participation hours it is favourably positioned to invite parents into the classroom for a variety of activities.

Although primary teachers at Peace Christian School already encourage parents to participate in a home reading program, this participation could be enhanced in two specific ways. First, teachers could provide direct training for all parents, but specifically to help ELL parents support their children's literacy development. Senechal and Young, as cited in Shah-Wundenberg et al. (2012), state that "tra

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

rather than attempting to eradicate children’s bilingualism ‘in order to help them learn English,’ educators should encourage students to develop their linguistic talents and also provide parents with advice and resources (e.g., first language [L1] books) to enable them to promote the L1 in the home (p. 38).

It would be wise for the school to invest in bilingual books for the library and classrooms.

Panferov (2010) states, “providing resources in multiple languages is critical, as is showing the value of all languages and the maintenance thereof” (p.111). Many studies have corroborated that L1 use in the home can positively impact L2 literacy (Ashworth, 2000; Law & Eckes, 2000; Li, 2005; Liu & Vadeboncoeur, 2010; Roberts, 2008). As Coelho (1994) explains, “If parents read or tell stories to their children in the first language, the children will continue to acquire a variety of rhetorical forms and genres of the written language as well as in the language of day-to-day interaction” (p. 324). When parents are empowered to use their L1 with their children, they can enhance literacy in both the first language and English. However, Dixon et al., (2012) suggest that “rather than recommending a certain language be used at home, teachers can recommend that the parents engage in vocabulary-building practices, such as conversations, storytelling and re., (201640 -0.2 (t)m BT 50 0 0 50 080.2 (i) 0 ot0nTm /TT1.0 2 (rs) -0.2 (a) 0.2 (t) 0. 0. (nga

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

could expand the instructional space beyond simply an English-only zone to include students’

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

parents about educational expectations in North America. Peace Christian School has a vibrant community and plans regular social events to allow parents the opportunity to connect with one

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

as they gain confidence in English language use; strengthening parents' English proficiency can enable them to be better advocates for their children.

Peace Christian School can also promote more effective ways to communicate with parents by seeking to incorporate L1 in oral communications. For example, one of the administrators has noticed a need to expand ELL parent participation (during PTE meetings). One parent suggested holding a separate meeting where ELL parents can communicate in their L1, but in order to maintain unity in the parent community, the administrator suggested having breakout times after a topic is introduced, where

INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

improving school-home communications with ELL families (p. 653-655). Peace Christian School should engage in careful planning as they implement change so it does not occur haphazardly.

Peace Christian School's mission statement claims they "work with families as a community to educate and develop each unique child". For this claim to be true, Peace Christian School must recognize their responsibility in creating a welcoming community that accepts culturally and linguistically diverse families and validates their participation regardless of the forms in which it occurs.

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INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

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INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

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INCREASING ELL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT– LISA OLDING

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