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Home-school reading journals and parental involvement

Annalisa Marie Miner
University of Northern Iowa

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Home-school reading journals and parental involvement

Abstract

"When schools encourage children to practice reading at home with parents, the children make significant gains in reading achievement compared to those who only practice at school" (Tizard, 1982).

Throughout my teaching career I have always worked with many students who are from homes that do not participate often in school and do not appear to have school-like literacy activities as a part of their family culture. I want to find a way to involve all families as collaborators in increasing their children's literacy achievement, because I feel this will benefit the children academically and also create a love of reading as a family. I started thinking about what I could do as a classroom teacher to get my students involved in extra literacy activities while they were outside of school. This led to my creation of a reading program in my classroom that is designed to promote literacy and to encourage parent involvement, with an overall goal of improving academic scores of students.

Home-School Reading Journals and Parental Involvement

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Literacy Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Annalisa Marie Miner

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This Project by : Annalisa Marie Miner

Titled: Home-School Reading Journals and Parental Involvement

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

December 4, 2004
Date Approved

Deborah L. Tidwell

Graduate Faculty Reader

December 4, 2004
Date Approved

Penny L. Beed

Graduate Faculty Reader

Dec. 6, 2004
Date Approved

Rick C. Traw

Head, Department of Curriculum
and Instruction

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Introduction

“When schools encourage children to practice reading at home with parents, the children make significant gains in reading achievement compared to those who only practice at school” (Tizard, 1982).

Throughout my teaching career I have always worked with many students who are from homes that do not participate often in school and do not appear to have school-like literacy activities as a part of their family culture. I want to find a way to involve all families as collaborators in increasing their children's literacy achievement, because I feel this will benefit the children academically and also create a love of reading as a family. I started thinking about what I could do as a classroom teacher to get my students involved in extra literacy activities while they were outside of school. This led to my creation of a reading program in my classroom that is designed to promote literacy and to encourage parent involvement, with an overall goal of improving academic scores of students.

The following are key terms, along with their descriptions, that will be used in this paper.

academic achievement: accomplishment or attainment pertaining to areas of study.

Authors Chair: a time when students have the chance to read aloud to the class and share about what they have read or written.

choral reading: reading aloud in unison.

curriculum: the subject matter that teachers and students cover in class.

dialogue journal: an informal written conversation among readers, writers, and thinkers.

genre: a specific category of literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

illiterate: a condition of being unable to read.

informal survey: a gathering of data or opinions done in a casual setting.

journal: a book into which students write about a specific topic and a place for students to display the connections between what they know and what they have learned.

minority: an ethnic, racial, religious, or other group having smaller number of members.

model: to display or show others a specific style, method or strategy.

multicultural literature: written books highlighting subjects from diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender perspectives.

native language: the language that a person has spoken from earliest childhood.

operational goals: the process or guide used in achieving desired results.

reading comprehension levels: the amount of understanding a person builds while reading.

strategies: a plan or method for obtaining a specific goal or result.

student reflection: a set time for students to think about and comprehend what they are learning.

Methodology

The purpose of my project is to create a home-school reading program. I have been teaching early elementary and English as a Second Language in the upper Midwest for seven years. The population of students in my classrooms has been at least 60% Hispanic, all coming from blue collar agricultural families.

I have a Bachelor's of Arts in Elementary Education, a Spanish minor, and am currently finishing my Master's of Arts in Literacy Education. I want to be able to combine all I've learned in my classes to create a reading program involving literacy and parent involvement, including the families of Hispanic students in my classroom.

To help build the foundation for my program I drew from a research project I conducted in early 2004 to obtain information for my operational goals. In that study, I looked at case studies of families and teachers who were involved in collaborative home-school reading programs. I looked for common threads in how they viewed the importance of literacy in their homes and their views of home-school programs. In that study I chose to interview families who attended the same school in which I taught, but came from different backgrounds. They included:

1. A family of middle-high Socio-economic status (SES) with high parent involvement.
2. A family of low SES with little parent involvement.
3. A Hispanic family where the parents are literate in Spanish, but not English proficient. Their daughter is literate and proficient in Spanish and English. They try to be very involved in school, but it is difficult due to language barrier.
4. Two public school teachers who have implemented their own home-school reading programs.

From conducting that research I found that the parents and teachers had many commonalities in regards to their perceptions about home-school activities and parent involvement. I will present these findings in the Literature Review section of my paper under the operational goals (Miner, 2004).

As I have been developing this home-school collaborative reading program I have been implementing parts into my own classroom. I have seen tremendous response from students and their parents. I have seen overwhelming gratitude from my Hispanic parents. They are overjoyed to be given the opportunity to read and write in Spanish with their children. Because of my Spanish abilities I can read in their first language and write back to them in Spanish. This is an opportunity many of them have not been given from the schools.

Maria Guadalupe Hernandez, a parent of two children who have been a part of this program wrote me a letter in Spanish which has been translated as follows, "Annalisa, Thank you so much for helping my children and sending home books in Spanish. My husband and I love to read and work with our children at home, however we do not have a lot of Spanish books. My kids love for us to read these books with them and it is fun to be able to have a conversation about the books. It is very hard for us, because usually they want us to read to them in English or help with their work and we can not do that. We feel terrible when we have to tell them we do not understand and can not help. This is the first time we have been asked to do something in Spanish and we feel so blessed. Thank you Annalisa." (Personal communication, February, 2003).

The children are also filled with excitement to pick and take home books each night. This is increasing the time spent reading and writing each day and will benefit them in the future.

In order to best design my program I used these operational goals as a guide:

1. Find aspects of successful home-school programs.
2. Find research on dialogue journals.

3. Find out why parent involvement is so crucial in a child's education.
4. Find an over-all estimate of how much importance parents place on reading at home with their children and having reading materials available.

I feel obtaining this information helps me make informed decisions as I create and develop my Home-School Reading Program. I have used these operational goals to guide my research; the results of my research are included in the Review of the Literature in this paper.

Review of the Literature

"Educational researchers have long stressed the importance of home-school connections and have suggested that these connections may be especially critical for lower socioeconomic students" (Allen & Mason, 1989). "The significance of the interactions that take place when parents read aloud and discuss texts with their children has also been documented" (Snow & Ninio, 1986). Throughout this review I will describe literature that supports these topics: parent involvement, home-school programs, and dialogue journals.

Parental Involvement

The Department of Michigan (2002) has conducted research on how parent involvement relates to academic achievement. Their research states that, "86% of the general public believes that support from parents is the most important way to improve schools." They used results from a study by Rose, Gallup, & Elam in 1997 to conclude that when parents are involved students have the following:

- Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates

- Better school attendance
- Increased motivation, better self-esteem
- Lower rates of suspension
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol
- Fewer instances of violent behavior

In a study done by Walberg (1984) in a review of 29 studies of school-parent programs; he found that family participation in education was *twice* as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status. Some of the more intensive programs had effects that were *10 times* greater than other factors.

According to a study done Binkley and the National Center for Education Statistics (1996) there is a substantial relationship between parent involvement and reading comprehension levels of fourth grade classrooms. For students who have low parent involvement, the classroom mean reading score is 46 points below the national average. For students who have high parental involvement, classrooms score 28 points above the national average. This is a gap of 74 points. In this study when they controlled for attributes such as community, schools, principals, classes, and students, the gap was still 44 points.

Research published in *Parent Involvement: The Key to Student Success and Community Support* (San Diego County Office of Education, 1997) shows that when parents play a positive role in their children's education, children do better in school. This proved to be true whether the parents had a college or elementary education and regardless of the family income, race, or ethnic background. This research shows that the level of education held by parents is not crucial to the academic success of their children.

What was important was that the parents had a positive attitude about education and they believed their children would succeed.

The previous studies provide evidence that when parents are involved in their children's academic lives, it only increases their level of achievement.

Home-School Reading Programs

In researching home-school reading programs I found many accounts of specific programs that teachers are using and what they feel are important aspects. Many of these programs were subjective and detail their individual ideas. While researching these I found many common threads between programs. Many of these programs were literature-based and included some form of writing. They also utilized collaboration between parents and children, student choice, and student responsibility. Below I will describe two successful programs which used many of the above factors. From these programs I gained ideas to incorporate into my Home-School Reading Journal Program.

Backpack reading program. Richgels and Wold (1998) were looking for a way to get children reading more at home and to get parents involved with their children. They created a backpack program that is a partnership between school and home. In this program they looked at key elements such as social constructivism, long-term scaffolding, and explicit instruction. They combined all of these into their program and built the backpack program.

The core of the backpack program consisted of four steps: selecting books, categorizing books, preparing support materials, and scheduling use of the backpacks. They give detailed instructions on each of these areas. Some of the key components to reading and writing in their program include:

1. Each backpack contains three levels of books from different genres. Students are instructed on how to categorize and use each book. The students refer to the books as: "read-by-myself", "read-with-me", or "read-to-me".

2. In each backpack there is a letter to parents, a response journal, writing and drawing materials, hand puppets, a lost-and-found tag, and a checklist of the backpack's contents.

3. The teacher schedules time in class for students to report their results of what they learned and worked on in their backpacking experience.

4. Before backpacks go home and throughout the year the teacher demonstrates and models different strategies and activities that could be used. Students are encouraged to decide with their parents how they wish to use the backpack.

5. Parents receive a letter at the start of the program with instructions and suggestions for talking about the books and using the journals. Also, throughout the year the teacher includes other suggestions in their weekly newsletter that parallel's the current in-class literature activities.

The authors of this study feel that in the first four years of use, the program has been very successful. They feel strongly that "Choice is a crucial component..." (pg. 7). They have had all positive feedback from parents and children.

"Blueberry Bear" reading program (Pasadena ISD, retrieved January 7, 2004).

"Parents play a vital role in their child's success in reading, as well as all other subjects," states Joyce Eversole, an associate superintendent. "Our teachers make it a point to incorporate creative and fun reading activities into their curriculum where students

require parental involvement. The students benefit so much from it, and it also creates a special bond between the parent and child" (p.1).

The "Blueberry Bear" program was created by Pam McDonald; every Friday a student takes home the bear and follows the instructions that involve reading and parental assistance. The bear comes home in a bag saying that he loves it when people read to him. The bag also contains the books "Blueberries for Sal," which the parents read, and "Brown Bear, Brown Bear," a book that each child has already practiced and can read to the parent.

Another aspect of this program is that the families are required to cook blueberry muffins (the mix is provided). They are expected to read the directions together, mix the ingredients, and bake the muffins. On Sunday, the families write down how they spent their weekend with Blueberry Bear and can include pictures or drawing. The students may write individually or with the help from a parent.

Ms. McDonald says, "The Blueberry Bear activity has made my students excited about reading and the enthusiasm also has rubbed off on the parents. It is a fun activity and is something the students look forward to every week. The activities emphasize a high level of parental involvement, and many times, the whole family becomes involved" (p. 1).

Dialogue journals. Research supports the use of dialogue journals. As described by Wells, "The distinguishing aspect of dialogue journals is informal conversation, either among peers or between teachers and students" (1992, p.294).

In the article "At the junction of reading and writing: How dialogue journals contribute to students' reading development," Wells described how she used dialogue

journals and she believes that these journals offer opportunities for student reflection and that they appear to foster reading development. Wells feels that her "comments also reinforce good thinking" (p. 299) and "that to get maximum benefit from journal writing, they (the students) have to buy into the procedure" (p. 300).

According to Wells, "Journals are the place for students to show us how they are making connections between what they know and what they learn while reading. By reflecting on reading through writing, students refine and take ownership of their ideas. Journals are not fill-in-the-blank workbooks; they are dialogues among readers, writers, and thinkers" (p. 301).

In another similar program, Jean Hannon, an early elementary school teacher, also used dialogue journals (Hannon, 1999). Hannon's students were routinely writing in their journals because that was the assignment, but she was looking for a new design that offered opportunities to engage her students in authentic dialogue. She introduced the use of dialogue journals.

In the article "Talking back: Kindergarten dialogue journals," Hannon (1999) described the process she used to add dialogue journals into her classroom. She felt that "the addition of dialogue to journal writing makes the activity more purposeful for some of the children and allows me to communicate with young writers in a nonevaluative way" (p. 2).

Hannon gave students an invitation for them to have her read their journals and write back. Students were given a choice to participate. However, they all bought into this concept. Beyond dialoguing with them, Hannon continued to confer with students once a week. She began to feel that journal writing was a comfortable and valued time

for her students. It encouraged students to practice their skills and show what they were learning.

Research does support the use of dialogue journals (Hannon, 1999). Research indicates that dialogue journals provide students a time for reflection about what they are reading/learning and it fosters reading development. Through dialogue journals it is possible for teachers to reinforce "good" thinking and communicate with their students in an informal, non-evaluative manner.

Using dialogue journals in a home-school program provides opportunity for the families and teachers to work together. It also creates another line of communication

Aspects of successful home-school programs. Successful home-school programs consist of many components. The teacher needs to be very organized and have a well-thought out program. The program needs to include literature written in different genres and at a variety of levels so that all ranges of learners can find literature that is appropriate and interesting to them. The literature needs to be motivating and include different cultures and languages. We want all our students to feel they have opportunities to view literature from their own culture and also be exposed to new and different materials.

Informing parents and modeling for the students are important in order to make efficient use of the time they spend on activities at home. Having a parent meeting, sending newsletters, or laminating idea/strategy pages are all ways to educate parents on how to work with their children. Parents want to be involved and they appreciate examples and direction on how/what they work on with their children. The activities should be engaging to the families and offer them some choice and flexibility.

Take-home assignments need to be at different levels. Some of the work or reading needs to be independent and some should require the parents to model or for the parents and students to work together. Parents appreciate having set days for homework to come home. That way they can expect assignments and can schedule time each night to accomplish the tasks. Also, parents prefer to have multiple days to complete larger assignments in which their families may be involved.

Parent involvement in a child's education. Support from home and parental involvement is a vital part of a child's success in school (Cromwell, 1998; Miner, 2004; Morrow, 2003; Richgels, 1998; The Parent Institute, 2004; The Parent University, 2004; Schockley, 1995; Tizard, 1982). Even without the studies we can assume that students who have parent involvement do better than those who are not supported from home, because they have many more experiences and different types of exposure to materials. However, it is very difficult to get an accurate measure of the impact parent involvement has on children's education because there are so many outside factors to consider. We do know that parental involvement supports and heightens student achievement (Cromwell, 1998; Michigan Department of Education, 2002; Morrow, 2003; San Diego County Office of Education, 1997; Wells, 1992).

Most parents know that reading at home with their children is important. They try to have reading materials available and like to read with their children. They know that what they are doing at home is likely to increase their children's academic scores and hopefully the children enjoy this time. Some families may say time or money is an issue, but I feel if they believe in the importance of reading at home they could find time or other ways of finding literature for their children to read. For example, they could go to

the library or buy cheap books at a garage sale. (However, I realize there are some extreme cases, for example in the inner cities, where libraries may be very poor and sometimes not accessible. These families could use paper and pencils to create some of their own family stories or write a retell of a book they have heard before. The children could illustrate.)

From this project and from reading the literature I have concluded that there are many benefits to using Home-School Reading Journals.

1. Students will have more time spent reading and writing and therefore reading scores should increase.
2. By doing the activities together, it will get the families to 'need' and 'want' more literacy in their homes.
3. Parents and children will increase the quality time spent together reading and writing.
4. Hopefully siblings will be involved with the literature and this will provide them with extra experiences.
5. Communication between families and teachers will improve.
6. Parents will form a greater appreciation for what teachers do. I have had many comments about what hard work this is!
7. It will teach students' responsibility and accountability.
8. It will be FUN for families to do together!

The Project

The Pilot

I piloted this program for two years while teaching first grade in the upper-Midwest. The groups of students I worked with were 80% Hispanic. During the pilot students took home books two nights a week and wrote with an adult in a journal. My Hispanic students were required to choose one book in Spanish and the other in English. I wanted to get the families of the Hispanic children in my classes involved in reading and writing with their children. The majority of the families did not have Spanish literature in their homes and I wanted to provide them with this opportunity. I ask them to journal back to me in either language, Spanish or English. After each entry I responded back to families in the language in which they journaled. At this point the program consisted of only choosing books, taking them home, reading and writing with an adult, and returning them to school for me to respond.

The program followed a very basic format, but the response was over-whelming. I was astounded by the feed back I was getting from students and parents. Parents who had rarely taken part in school activities or infrequently returned notes were looking forward to the nights when their children would bring home books. I saw the love and excitement for reading and writing growing each day in my students and their families. This is when I decided I wanted to take this a step farther. I wanted to research and expand on what looked like a very positive home-school reading program.

An Overview of the Current Project

In order to create the most successful home-school reading program I used the information from my classes, my pilot study, and research to make informed decisions on the most successful practices. The reading program I developed is called Home-School Reading Journals. In this program, students choose and take home trade books throughout the week. The students read with a parent (or adult), discuss, and write in their journal. It is a very open-ended program. At the beginning of the year I give families different ideas and activities they may do with the literature. It is then their choice how they may want to read at night (child reads, parent reads, picture walk, make-up a story, choral reading, turn taking, etc...). After reading each night families write in a dialogue journal and I respond back to them. They may choose how they want to respond (summarize, compare to a different book, write something unique to the book, draw a picture, or tell what it reminded them of). The key concept is that they are reading and writing together and...having FUN!

Description and Details of Home-School Reading Journals Program

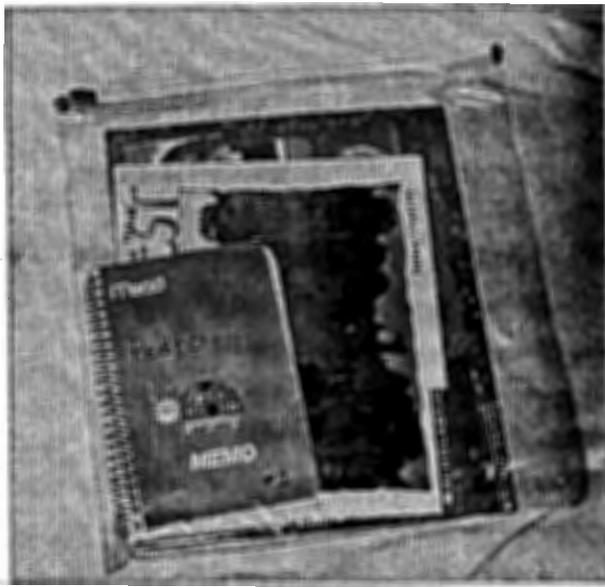
This section provides a description of my Home-School Reading Program followed by an Appendix which includes communication letters written in English and Spanish that I use as part of the program.

Students who are in my reading group participate in a home reading component to accompany the reading curriculum. My main goal is for students to practice their reading and writing at home. Students and their families are at different levels of literacy, have

different ways of interacting, and have different literary tastes. For this project I want them to explore their reading, writing, and working together

At the beginning of the year parents receive information and I invite them to attend a two hour parent informational session (see Appendix A, Parent Letter for Informational Session). At the informational session I provide them with all the necessary information about Home-School Reading Journals and model ways they can read and write with their children (see Appendix B, Beginning of the Year Parent Informational Meeting Agenda). At this time I ask them for some background information on their child (see Appendix C, Your Child). I also provide snacks and child care for families. I encourage all families to attend; however if they are unable I offer them an explanation another time. Throughout the year I encourage them to try different practices and ask me any questions. If I feel that a family would like some new ideas on ways to interact with the literature I will include these in my responses.

On Monday and Wednesday students take home two books and a journal in a baggie. If we have a change in the schedule or a break I send home a letter stating the change (see Appendix D, No Journals this Week). Students select their own books from the container filled with many different levels, genres, and languages. The children feel like they are choosing what they want and are motivated to read the books. Spanish-speaking students are required to take at least one book in Spanish.



An example of a student's take-home baggie with books and journal.

It is the job of the student to read and discuss both books with a parent or adult in the home. A few suggestions I give to the families on how to read the books are: the child could read, the parent could read, the parent and child could take turns by page or paragraph, or they could read chorally. After they have read the literature they write about one of the books in their journals.

Journaling is different for each family depending on the level of the child. If the child is at a prephonemic stage the parent does most of the writing, but the child would be encouraged to dictate and draw pictures to express his or her ideas. If the child is developing some sight words and phonemic spellings I would suggest the child and parent take turns doing the written portion. Some nights the family may want to draw their response and that is appropriate. It is all a part of the learning process. If the children are in the developing stages they may want to do all of the writing. It is wonderful for the students to write the majority of time, but I do suggest for parents to

write occasionally to model for their children. However, the choice is theirs! I stress to parents that they make sure to not pressure their children or correct their responses. This is a time for exploration and fun as a family. I *do not* expect, nor want, things coming back perfect. They do not get graded or judged. If a child or parent is continually doing all the writing, I encourage them through my journal responses to try some other ways. The important part to me is that they are having fun reading and writing together!

I feel it is appropriate for them to write and tell me things they notice and discuss about the literature, not strictly writing events from the stories. For example, maybe a child is having a hard time learning the word "how". While the parents and child are reading they notice this word frequently so they decide to go back through and find all of the "how's." That night they may journal and tell me they found it five times in the book.

I journal back to families each day they return their Home-School Reading Journals. As the research states, it is important for the children to receive feedback (Hannon, 1999). The students enjoy reading my responses and answering questions I pose to them. I learn a lot about the families and this creates an open line of communication between parents and myself. Many days I have parents write me separate notes about their children or ask questions about other schools events. I feel this is another major benefit of using these journals.

Responding daily to journals requires a lot of time and energy. Depending on the size of my class and time availability, I may change how often I respond. For example, if I have a large class I may respond to half of the class on Monday and the other half of the class on Wednesday. I do feel it is crucial that I follow through with responses, because the families are counting on and looking for my response each night.

Students need a time to share their responses with teachers and their peers. I feel it is important for students to have the opportunity to share and discuss what they are reading and writing at home with their families. Throughout the year we do an Author's Chair where students have the chance to share about what they read and wrote the night before. I send home a note the day before and say that they will have the chance to share tomorrow if they so choose (see Appendix E, Your day to SHARE!). I do not want anything fancy on these days, just what they normally do. On other occasions children have the chance to share what they have done in small groups or with a partner. These will be quick 5-10 minute share times.

Sometime during the year, families have the opportunity to do a special project together. I explain this project during the parent informational session at the beginning of the year. During the project week I change the format and only send books on Monday. With these books the families have numerous options on a special project they may choose to do. Choices are available to the families and they are given one-two weeks to complete the project. I give them ideas for what they can do, but they may also come up with their own activities. Some examples would be using the literature to create puppets for a play, a door hanger, a mural, a pop-up book, puzzle, cartoon, diorama, shoebox filmstrip, bookmark, or a special book.

The aspect I emphasize most is that the families enjoy their time together and make it as fun as possible! Occasionally, I try to send home a thank you to parents for the time they have spent working with their child on the program (see Appendix F, Thank you not to parents). If the families develop a love of reading and writing this will carry with them through the years and have a positive impact on all involved. Not only does it

create a foundation for the enjoyment of reading and writing, but in turn it increases academic scores.

Preparation for starting my Home-School Reading Journals Program

Starting the Home-School Reading Journals program requires a lot of preparation and organization. The initial time spent preparing materials is the timeliest aspect of the program.

First I purchased or found organizations/people to donate these items:

1. 4-5 plastic containers to hold books
2. Large plastic baggies for each student (they use approximately two a year)
3. Labels/nametags for baggies and books
4. As many texts as possible from many genres and levels (I found garage sales were a cheap way to increase my classroom library.)
5. Tapes for recording books on tape
6. If possible a couple of tape or CD players to rotate between students for books on CD or tape (many low-income families do not have a player available and therefore these students miss the opportunity to listen to the stories at home). I had a couple of old tape recorders which were donated and the students were very careful and respectful with these.

After obtaining the above items, the annual cost for the program is very minimal. (The baggies and labels are needed each year, but they can usually be requisitioned or I ask for them to be donated by parents.)

In preparation for starting the program, I need to make journals for each student. To help cut down on cost I make my own journals using a binding machine or just stapling pages together. For a cover I put a colored sheet of paper or a piece from a wallpaper book. (I could purchase little notebooks, but the cost is much greater.) I let the students design their own covers, including writing their names clearly on the front. Inside I put 25-30 pieces of blank paper. Extra journals will be needed later in the school year.



An example of student journals used in the Home-School Reading Journal Program

Plastic containers will be used to hold all the student choice literature. I fill each container with carefully selected literature from different genres and have literature at all levels. I try to have equal amounts of Spanish and English literature in each container. The picture below shows a sampling of some of the literature that I put in each container.

In an article by Alicia Salinas Sosa (1997), the author states, "Literacy programs in the home language can provide meaningful, useful experiences to immigrant parents. When properly implemented literacy programs can tap parents' resources and can ease the tension caused by role reversal when even young children translate for their parents. Ideally, the books should be meaningful and relevant to the lives of the children and their families" (p.6).

In order to get second language books on tape I ask parents to volunteer reading books. I have them come to school and we discuss how we will record the story. I record the parent reading on a blank tape and we use a bell when it is time to turn the page. This provides the families with more literature on tape and the tapes are easy for them to understand because they are read by a native language speaker. (I also do this for some English books. It is much more cost effective than always ordering books with tapes.)

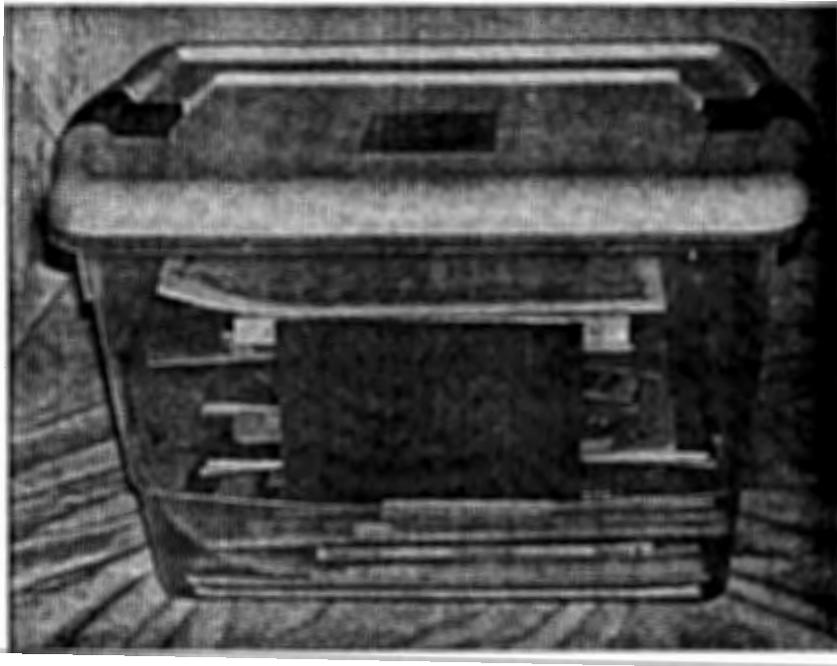
To record and document the books students are choosing I use the Home-School Book Check-Out (see Appendix G) sheet for each child. I write each student's name at the top and keep these forms in a binder that is quick and easy to access. I document all the books the students are reading on these papers.

As a reward students receive a sticker each time they return their books if they have read them and written with a family member. On a chart I write each student's name and have a place for them to keep their stickers. When they reach a set number they get to choose a reward such as a pencil, stickers, candy, etc. I have found that this added incentive increases the return rate and ensures that I get all my literature back. If books are not returned I use the Book Return Notice form (see Appendix H).

Organizing and Choosing Books

Here is a description of how students choose their literature. I describe how I organize the literature and how students choose their books to take home.

1. Students are organized into groups of four-five.
2. On top of each box I put a card representing their group. For example, I code the boxes by colors or animal names. The groups' card will be placed on the container of books that they are to use for two-three weeks. When it is time to rotate books all I have to do is change the cards on top and the students will have a new container of literature from which to choose.



An example of my student choice container filled with literature.

3. Students choose two books they want to take home each night.
4. After they have chosen their books, they check them out. On the Home-School Book Check-Out Form (see Appendix G) write down the title and the level of the book for the

student; for example, I record whether the book is at, above, or below a student's current independent reading level.

5. After checking out their books, students find a partner and read together or read silently by themselves. If the books they have chosen are too difficult or long I encourage them to take a "picture walk" through the book.

Throughout the year I read the books aloud or give a book talk about the literature in the student choice containers. My goal is that students will be taking books they have background on and are familiar with. I want them to feel successful or comfortable with the books when they take them home to share with their families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through Home-School Reading Journals I am creating shared accountability between parents as teachers and myself. With this project I expect to raise academic reading scores because of increasing time spent reading and writing. Because I see positive benefits from the Home-School Reading Journals I am encouraging others to adapt and use this program in their classrooms.

According to the pilot data I found the Home-School Reading Journals to be successful for numerous reasons. Students showed more excitement about reading and writing at home. They were willing to discuss and share about their literature and journaling in the classroom. The Home-School Reading Journals created an open line of communication between families and myself. As we were writing back and forth I got to know more about the families, which in turn made things easier if a problem arose with a student. I already had a relationship with the family, but the journals created an open line of communication and respect between the parents and myself. It made it easier for us to discuss and help each other solve the problem. The primary benefit, however, was that students were increasing their time spent reading and writing. This can only increase their academic scores!

A goal of the current program is to increase academic scores. Due to ethical considerations there will not be a control group that does not receive the benefit of the program. All of the families will be invited to participate. Therefore, for assessment purposes, I will use classroom measures of a child's reading, especially in the area of proactive behaviors toward reading, response to books and materials read. I give an informal survey to each student in the classroom at the beginning and end of the program

(see Appendix I, Student Survey on Reading and Writing). I will also ask parents to complete an informal survey two times during the year (see Appendix J and K, Parent Survey on Reading and Writing). The first survey will be filled out at the Parent Informational Session and the second at the end of the year. The results will help determine if the program has helped change the child's use of books, response to books, and attitude toward reading books. As time goes on I will continue to look for and create other measures for determining growth.

As with any project there are limitations and cautions. Parents who have reading difficulties or who don't feel confident about their skills may have a difficult time with this activity. It also affect minority parents for whom we do not have the literature to support their native language or who may be unable to respond to their journal writing in their native language. In order to accommodate these groups, a few options might be drawing pictures as responses, listening to books on tape, using siblings to help translate or having a high school volunteer respond and read journals. In the book Engaging Families: Connecting Home and School Literacy (Schockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995) the authors mention the idea of parents who are not comfortable with their own literacy or only literate in their native language copying text from a book lightly and having the child trace over the letters. Students could also have an adult at school to read with on certain days to get that extra time. This could be a volunteer, older student, or teacher's assistant. Some parents may not be interested in participating in this program and volunteers would also be an option for those students whose parents choose to not be involved.

Correlating curriculum and the Home-School Reading Journals project may be difficult to do. This program does not support specific lessons. The program could be altered to support a specific reading curriculum and literature could be assigned to fit the needs of students and current lessons. However, this would require a tremendous amount of planning and finances in order to best suit the needs of all students.

I feel this is a program that could be implemented in ALL K-3 classrooms. It could also be easily adapted for older students. Schools could incorporate this program as a part of their literacy instruction, as well as their parent involvement component. They could expand the program and do grade-level or building-wide activities relating to the program. The options are endless!

Teale (1986) suggests, "The secret to developing more literacy oriented homes is, in essence, to get families to 'need' more literacy" (p. 200). I want to empower families to work together to support their children's literacy, while building a foundation for a lifelong enjoyment of reading and writing.

Appendix A
Parent Letter for Informational Session

Dear Parents,

This year as an addition to your child's academic reading program, we will be adding a home-school reading component. Research shows that "When students read at home with parents, these children show greater academic gains than those who only practice at school" (Collaboration Between Parents and Teachers in Teaching Children to Read, Tizard, 1982). A 1997 study by the National Center for Educational Statistics verifies that "Students who read and write more at home do better on tests of reading and writing ability" (Cromwell, 1998). There are many studies that show the academic gains of students who are involved in home-school reading programs.

The name of our program is Home-School Reading Journals. In this program students will be taking home books two nights a week. Your child will be taking home books on _____ and _____. As a family, your job is to read the literature your student chooses and write in a journal.

I will be holding an informational meeting on _____ for all families to attend. I would encourage you to come to learn about the program and your role as a parent. We will provide childcare and snacks for the children.

I hope to see all of you then. If you can not attend this meeting please talk to me about setting up an individual time to meet.

Thank you for your support and for making your child's education a top priority in your life!

Sincerely,

Parent Letter for Informational Session*

Estimados Padres,

Este año en adición al programa de lectura, nosotros usaremos un programa de casa-escuela. Los recursos muestran que cuando estudiantes leen en casa con sus padres, estos estudiantes muestran un crecimiento mejor en academia en comparación con los que solamente leen en la escuela.

El nombre de nuestro programa es Diarios de Lectura a Casa-Escuela. En este programa estudiantes se llevarán libros a casa dos noches a la semana. Su niño se llevará libros a casa el _____ y _____. Como padres de familia, es su responsabilidad de leer los libros que su niño/a traiga a casa y de escribir en el diario.

Tendremos una junta obligatoria acerca del programa el _____ para todas las familias. Es muy importante que todos ustedes vengan para aprender del programa. Habrá cuidanza de niños y bocadillos para ellos.

Espero ver a todos ahí. Si no pueden venir a ésta junta por favor hablame para arreglar otro tiempo que usted pueda venir.

¡Gracias por soportar y poner la educación de su niño/a primero!

Sinceramente,

*Spanish translation by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner.

Appendix B
Beginning of the Year Parent Informational Meeting

NOTE: While parents are waiting to start have them fill out the "Your Child" sheet (see Appendix C) and Parent Survey on Reading and Writing (see Appendix J)

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Overview of the program
 - a. supporting research
 - b. details about the program
- III. Introduce baggies, journals, and literature
- IV. Model reading the literature and writing strategies for journals
- V. Discuss what to do with different leveled books
 - a. how to decide how to read the book; (e.g) parent reads, child reads, turn taking, etc...
 - b. stress having fun and being relaxed!
- VI. Present different activities to do with literature
 - a. give hand-out
 - b. explain throughout the year they will be receiving new activities they could do in their journals and on their own for fun
 - c. explain the family project
- VII. Questions and comments
- VIII. Ask for classroom volunteers and donations for classroom (baggies, labels, old books)
- IX. Get feedback if they would like to have another meeting mid-year to discuss program and be presented with new ideas.
- X. Closure - thank them for coming and encourage them to have fun!

I will recommend and show parents the book Read to me: Raising kids who love to Read, by Bernice E. Cullinan. This is an informative, easy reading book that gives tips on when to read with your child, how to make them a reader and writer, and booklists and ideas for infants through age 12.

Appendix C

Your Child

I have the pleasure of working with your family and child this school year. I feel education is a team effort. I want to provide your child with the best education. In order to do this I am asking parents for some of their thoughts and information about their child. Please fill this out and return it when you have the opportunity.

My child's name is _____.

Her/his birthday is _____.

She/he has _____ sisters and _____ brothers. Their names and ages are:

I am so proud of my child because

She/he is very interested in

This year I hope she/he learns

Please tell me anything else you want me to know about your child.

Su Niño*

Es un placer de trabajar con su familia y su niño/a este año escolar. Yo siento que la educación es un trabajo de equipo. Yo quiero darle a su niño/a la mejor educación. En orden para hacer eso necesito información de los padres acerca de su niño/a. Favor de llenar lo de abajo y regresarlo lo más pronto posible.

El nombre de mi niño es _____.

El cumpleaños de él o ella es _____.

Él o ella tiene _____ hermanos y _____ hermanas. Sus nombres y sus edades son:

Estoy muy orgulloso/a de mi niño/a porque

Él o ella tiene interés en

Este año espero que aprendan

Por favor dime otras cosas que quiere que yo sepa de su niño/a.

*Spanish translations by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner

Appendix D

No Journals this Week*

Dear Parents,

We have not sent home Home/School Reading Journals this week and will not be sending them next week. We will continue them after Winter Break. Thank you so much for all your work with these. The children love reading to you and they are showing a lot of growth. Thank you!

Estimados Padres,

No hemos mandado los Diarios de Lectura a Casa/Escuela esta semana y no los vamos a mandar al hogar la semana de Navidad. Continuaremos los diarios de la lectura despues de las vacaciones del invierno. Muchisimas gracias por todo su trabajo con éstos. A los niños les encantan llevar sus libros a casa para leerles y el esfuerzo está beneficiando sus habilidades de lectura. ¡Gracias!

*Spanish translations by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner

Appendix E

It's your day to SHARE!

Tomorrow, _____, will be your child's day to share about what your family read and wrote about tonight. This is a special time for the students, so please spend a couple extra minutes discussing or writing.

¡Es su día de compartir!*

Mañana, _____, será el día en que su niño compartirá lo que su familia ha leído y escrito esta noche. Este es un tiempo especial para los estudiantes, así que es beneficioso tomar unos pocos minutos discutiendo o escribiendo con su hijo/a.

*Spanish translations by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner

Appendix F
Thank you note for parents*

Hello! I wanted to send you a note and thank you for all your time and work with your son/daughter in their Home/School Reading Journal. I have been seeing tremendous growth in the students. They are always so excited to take books home and are continuously talking about reading with you (the parents).

Writing in the journals is very important. At this point in the year you and your child may both want to write. I love to read what you write and appreciate all your good comments. Thank you! You all deserve a gold star!

¡Hola! Deseo mandarles una nota y para agradecerles por su esfuerzo en trabajar con su hijo/a en sus Diarios de Lectura a Casa/Escuela. He estado viendo el enorme crecimiento en los estudiantes. Los excitan siempre para llevar los libros a casa y están hablando continuamente de la lectura con ustedes (los padres).

La escritura en los diarios es muy importante. A este punto en el año, ambos usted y su niño/a pueden escribir en el diario si desean. Me encanta leer lo que ustedes escriben y aprecio a todo sus buenos comentarios. ¡Gracias! ¡Todos ustedes merecen una estrella de oro!

*Spanish translations by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner

Appendix G
Home-School Book Check-Out

- T - book on tape/CD
- at students reading level
- - below students reading level
- + - above students reading level

Name _____

Title of Book/Author

Date

Level

Appendix H

Book return notice

Your child has checked out the book _____ by _____ . It is due back to our classroom. Please spend a couple extra minutes looking for and returning the book. We greatly appreciate it! Thanks for keeping our classroom library full of great reading materials!

Noticias para regresar libros*

Su niño a sacó al libre este libro _____ por _____ . Se necesita regresar al salón pronto. Por favor busca por el libro y regresalo. Nosotros les agradecemos mucho. ¡Gracias por mantener la biblioteca del salón lleno de libros!

*Spanish translations by Francie Woerner-Bitker and Annalisa Miner.

Appendix I

Student Survey on Reading and Writing
(younger students will need to dictate responses)

Name _____

Date _____

What type of books do you like to read?

Do you like to read at home? Where do you read in your house?

Does anybody read with you at home? Who?

How often do you read at home? (Each night before bed, on the weekends, etc...)

Do you like to read aloud or silently? Why?

Do you think you are a good reader? Why or why not?

Do you think it is important to read? Why or why not?

Do you write at home with your family? What types of writing?

Do you think you are a good writer? Why or why not?

Cuestionario del Estudiante acerca de la Lectura y la Escritura*
(Estudiantes jóvenes necesitarán las respuestas dictadas)

Nombre _____

Fecha _____

¿Qué tipo de libros te gustan leer?

¿Te gusta leer en casa? ¿Dónde lees cuando lees en casa?

¿Hay alguien quien lee contigo en casa? ¿Quién?

¿Cada cuando lees en casa? (Cada noche antes de acostarte, los fines de semanas, etcétera.)

¿Te gusta leer en voz alta o en silencio? ¿Por qué?

¿Piensas que eres un buen lector? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?

¿Piensas que es importante leer? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?

¿Escribes en casa con tu familia? ¿Qué tipo de escritura haces?

¿Piensas que eres un buen escritor? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?

*Spanish translations done by Francie Woerner-Bitker.

Appendix J

Parent Survey on Reading and Writing

Beginning of the Year

Name _____

Date _____

Does your child enjoy reading?

How did your child learn to read? (Please answer this question based on what you think.
Don't ask your child.)

Does he/she like to read at home? What does he/she like to read?

How do you think your child is developing as a reader?

Does your child like to write?

How do you think your child learned to write?

How does your child feel about school in general?

Adapted from the book *Engaging Families: Connecting Home and School Literacy
Communities* (Schockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995, p. 23)

Cuestionario de Padres acerca la Lectura y Escritura*

Al principio del Año

Nombre _____

Fecha _____

¿Su hijo/a disfruta la lectura?

¿Cómo aprende a leer su hijo/a? (Por favor contesta ésta pregunta según lo que usted piensa. No le pregunte a su hijo/a.)

¿A su hijo/a le gusta leer en casa? ¿Qué le gusta leer?

¿Cómo piensa que su hijo/a esta desarrollando en la lectura?

¿A su hijo/a le gusta escribir?

¿Cómo piensa usted que su hijo/a aprendió a escribir?

¿Cómo se siente su hijo/a acerca de la escuela en general?

Adaptado del libro *Engaging Families: Connecting Home and School Literacy Communities* (Schockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995,p. 23).

*Spanish translations done by Francie Woerner-Bitker.

Appendix K
Parent Survey on Reading and Writing
End of the Year

Name _____

Date _____

Does your child enjoy reading?

Does he/she like to read at home?

How do *you* think your child has developed as a reader this year?

Does your child enjoy writing?

Does he/she enjoy writing at home?

How do *you* think your child has developed as a writer?

What role have you played in your child's growth in reading and writing?

What are your thoughts about the Home-School Reading Journals? Did your child benefit from these?

Adapted from the book *Engaging Families: Connecting Home and School Literacy Communities* (Schockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995, p. 23)

Cuestionario de Padres acerca la Lectura y Escritura*

Final del Año

Nombre _____

Fecha _____

¿Su hijo/a disfruta la lectura?

¿A su hijo/a le gusta leer en casa?

¿Cómo piensa *usted* que su hijo/a ha desarrollado en la lectura este año?

¿Su hijo/a disfruta la escritura?

¿A su hijo/a le gusta escribir en casa?

¿Cómo piensa *usted* que su hijo/a ha desarrollado en la escritura?

¿Qué papel ha tomado usted en el desarrollo de la lectura y escritura de su niño/a?

¿Cuáles son sus pensamientos acerca de los diarios de lectura Casa-Escuela? ¿Piensa usted que su hijo/a benefició de ellos?

Adaptado del libro *Engaging Families: Connecting Home and School Literacy Communities* (Schockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995, p. 23)

*Spanish translations done by Francie Woerner-Bitker.

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