

Scaffold for School-Home Collaboration: Enhancing Reading and Language Development

Ji-Mei Chang, San Jose State University

School reform progresses too slowly to address effectively the unique needs of children and young adolescents who face academic challenges. The slow rate of change is compounded by a rapid increase in English language learners and an extreme shortage of teachers, particularly bicultural and bilingual special education teachers. In the CREDE project "Expanding the Knowledge Base on Teacher Learning and Collaboration: A Focus on Asian American English Language Learners," researchers explored ways to address these challenges through school-home collaboration. To engage parents, grandparents, siblings, and family friends more effectively in learning and sharing ideas to sustain a student's learning, together researchers developed evening training sessions named "Family Literacy Nights."

Family Literacy Nights

Conducted by teachers, Family Literacy Nights provided a forum for families to work together with teachers and thus transfer students' classroom knowledge to the community and home environment, reinforcing their learning. Researchers constructed a graphic metaphor to symbolize a "scaffold" (see Diagram 1) to highlight six guidelines for home practices based on CREDE's Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy (Dalton, 1998) and Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) as tools for teaching and learning for understanding (Gardner, 1999).

Teachers from a Title I middle school in San Jose, CA sponsored and participated in four, 2-hour Family Literacy Nights. The teachers worked in two groups, each group participating in a set of two Family Literacy Nights held 3 weeks apart. The first group included three educators who taught different subjects to the same sixth grade English language learners in a sheltered instruction program. These students were primarily immigrants from Asian regions and had scored in the lowest percentile among all incoming sixth graders on school and state assessment measures. The second group consisted of two special edu-

cation resource specialists and two regular education teachers, each of whom had many culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional students in sixth through eighth grades.

To prepare for Family Literacy Nights, teachers and researchers co-taught and worked in sixth grade classrooms in language arts, history, math, and science. Over a period of 5 months, they engaged in joint productive activities, integrating their effective teaching practices with research frameworks. They field-tested a set of adult-child, integrated language and reading intervention strategies, which families learned and practiced at the Family Literacy Nights. The first set of strategies was modified from Palinscar and Brown's (1984) model, which engages students in predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing activities before, during, and after reading. The second set of strategies included student-centered multiple paths to teaching and learning vocabulary and content knowledge in history, language arts, math, and science. Such paths included role plays, drama, interviews, and art and book projects. These multiple paths to teaching and learning were co-constructed by the research team on the basis of MI as tools for diverse entry points, metaphors, and multiple representations.

The entry points, according to Gardner (1999), are like windows into the domain of knowledge. Hence, MI as tools for diverse entry points provides educators with a meaningful framework for closely examining and

designing school curriculum and instruction. When adopted properly, the entry points provide critical and fair access to diverse learners.

MI serves multiple functions in the education and lives of Asian American individuals (Chang, 1999). Such functions include sensitizing these learners' homes and communities to value their abilities in the face of perceived disabilities or limited English proficiency; validating respect among diverse pro-

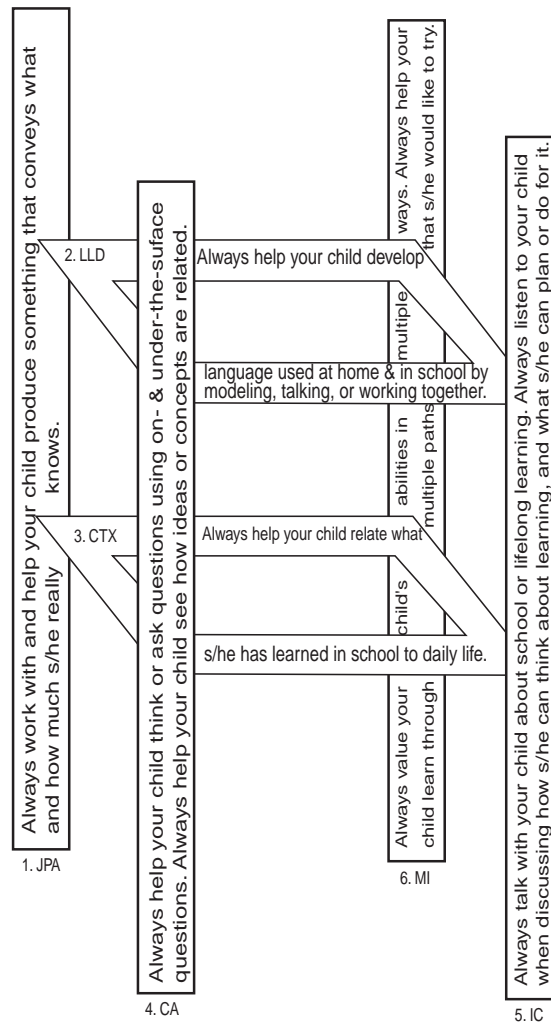


Diagram 1: Scaffold for Family Literacy Development

professional aspirations that go beyond traditional career paths; and realizing individual differences in formal schooling.

In the first Family Literacy Night, parents participated in joint productive reading activities with their child. They were then shown how to use CREDE's Five Standards during the reading activities. For example, in an after-reading activity, parents included Challenging Activities by using a "questioning tree" graphic, where the branches have text-explicit questions and the roots have text-implicit questions, to summarize the reading. In the second Family Literacy Night, parents were introduced to the scaffold graphic (Diagram 1), so that they could use multiple paths to conduct the reading activities. Parents, for example, used drawing as a path to contextualizing a reading passage with their child.

Incorporating CREDE's Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy with MI provided an effective approach to support school-home collaboration. The theoretical perspectives helped the team establish a scaffold that supported participating teachers, families, and friends in applying a set of research-based classroom intervention strategies and activities to home practices.

Diagram 1: Scaffold for Family Literacy Development

The Scaffold for Family Literacy Development was designed to illustrate how the same six major guidelines used in the classroom practices would be equally relevant for home support. This was a concrete response to parents' frequent question: "How could we help our child at home?" It was proposed that each family follow the guidelines to scaffold their child's language development and school learning at the Family Literacy Nights. The six guidelines for parents are as follows:

1. Always work with and help your child produce something that conveys what and how much s/he really knows.

Joint Productive Activity (JPA) highlights the need for families to interact and work jointly with their child to produce something that will clarify and reflect their child's learning. It is particularly important that the parent and child sustain motivation and avoid fatigue by taking turns reading at night. Parents are encouraged to work on a log or word map designed for paired reading, as well as search for multiple paths that will help their child master the assigned vocabulary.

2. Always help your child develop language used at home and in school by modeling, talking, or working together. Always give your child opportunities to use the new words in different ways.

Language & Literacy Development Across the Curriculum (LLD) informs families of the importance to talk and listen to their child, while restating, probing, or praising their child's ideas, opinions, or judgments related to specific topics or a school assignment in a calm and encouraging manner. The use of multiple paths, such as role play, is encouraged to enrich the quality of such adult-child interactions and to highlight the similarities and differences among words or phrases.

3. Always help your child relate what s/he has learned in school to daily life.

Contextualization (CTX) emphasizes the need for families to connect their child's experiences and skills from the home and community with school learning. This is most critical in reading and vocabulary development when their child encounters new words or concepts; families are encouraged to use related events to strengthen vocabulary comprehension.

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4. Always help your child think or ask questions using on- and under-the-surface questions. Always help your child see how ideas or concepts are related. Always give positive feedback.

Challenging Activities (CA) stresses the need for families to guide their child to apply a set of reading comprehension strategies and to address "who, what, where, when, why, and how" text-explicit questions. Families also need to generate and address a deeper level of questions by probing into their child's opinions or interpretations of the author's intent through text-implicit questions.

5. Always talk with your child about school or lifelong learning. Always listen to your child when discussing how s/he can think about learning, and what s/he can plan or do for it.

Instructional Conversation (IC) guides families to engage their child in relaxing two-way conversations by showing interest in what their child has to say and what needs to be clarified in relation to reading or school assignments. By listening and responding, families can relate to their child's knowledge and experience and promote lifelong learning.

6. Always value your child's abilities in multiple ways. Always help your child learn through multiple paths that s/he would like to try.

MI as tools for learning enhances families' abilities to verbalize how their child may develop a healthy and productive sense of self-respect and confidence. It provides a framework to help them access domain knowledge, such as history and literature, through drama, films, pictures, and stories.

Conclusion

The Scaffold for Family Literacy Development highlighted the important guidelines for home practices that were consistent with classroom instruction. Once researchers operationalized each of the guidelines in the context of hands-on, adult-child reading activities, participants were generally willing to explore the guided practices with their child. They also engaged in encouraging conversations with their child regarding the child's multiple abilities and use of multiple paths because the child had already acquired such concepts and skills.

Overall, the participants felt that more frequent teacher-led training sessions for family and friends were needed in the beginning of the school year. Researchers observed the need to provide one-on-one support for families where the adult participants might also face reading challenges. The interpreters provided for immigrant families were critical as well in providing responsive Family Literacy Nights.

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For more information on this CREDE project and other documents, contact Ji-Mei Chang, San Jose State University, College of Education, Division of Special Education & Rehabilitation Services, San Jose, CA 95192, (408)924-3705, jmchang@email.sjsu.edu, or visit www.crede.ucsc.edu/Programs/Program2/Project2_2.html.