CAPSTONE PROJECT WRITEUP

Introduction

My main motivation in pursuing a Master of Arts in Education, Literacy degree was to be a stronger voice in the community for helping parents understand the important benefits of reading to their children. My capstone proposal was to give presentations to parents to educate and motivate them to make reading in the home a priority.

Project Activities

Over the past nine months I have given five literacy presentations to a variety of audiences including church groups, school groups, and a homeless parent group. Each presentation was tailored to the specific audience based on the general age range of their children as well as particular concerns of the group. The presentations included a combination of research and coursework from BSU classes as well as "mom wisdom" from my own experience and other moms that shared ideas with me. A summary of the presentation information I compiled for use is included in Appendix A. Literacy handouts applicable to each audience were provided by the Idaho Commission for Libraries for me to distribute. Information regarding the details of each presentation such as type and size of audience, message focus, and handouts given is listed in Appendix B. After presentations to the two largest groups, a survey was distributed to those in attendance. A copy of the survey and summary of responses is given in Appendix C.

In an attempt to reach more parents with the important message of reading at home, I added an additional component to my capstone to specifically promote summer reading. The summer slide in reading achievement that occurs when kids do not engage in reading over the summer months is an issue of great concern to educators and is receiving a great deal of attention
and discussion in education circles. For example, in 2014 the Idaho Commission for Libraries launched a Stop the Summer Slide Pilot Project wherein six Idaho elementary school libraries received funds to have the school library open at various times throughout the summer to make books more accessible to students. The Project funding also provided books for the children to take home over the summer. In his evaluation of this Project, Dr. Roger Stewart noted the following, based on surveys of parent/caregiver in the participating schools:

The high percentage of children being cared for in the home over the summer underscores the need for parent/caregiver education about the important role they play in their children’s literacy development and the types of reading and literacy activities that they can engage in with their children over the summer. (2015, p. 5)

My goal was to raise parent's awareness of the summer slide issue and motivate them to make reading at home a priority, especially over the summer. The Idaho Commission for Libraries produces a brochure entitled, "Don't Let Your Kids Slip and Slide" which provides critical information about this issue at a glance. I met with Staci Shaw at the Commission on 4/9/15 to propose the idea of giving the ICfL Slip and Slide brochure, along with verbal encouragement for summer reading, to elementary school parents at end-of-year school events. My proposal included sending a sample of the brochure along with a letter to principals extending the offer of the brochures and gentle nudge to parents at a parent-attended year-end event.

Staci was supportive of the idea but concerned that some of the community youth service librarians visit schools to promote summer reading, although whether those visits from the librarians would include parents was not known. We agreed that before I contacted principals I would investigate which schools would be receiving visits and if the visits would include contact
with parents. I set up a spreadsheet of all the elementary schools in the Boise and West Ada school districts to keep track of the data as it was gathered.

I contacted the youth service librarians at the Boise, Collister, Garden City, Hillcrest, Cole/Ustick, Eagle, and Meridian libraries explaining my interest in connecting with parents and asking which schools they would be visiting. I found that most of the librarians were making their school visits during the day to assemblies of students to motivate them to participate in the summer reading program but no contact was being made with parents. The librarians were very supportive of the idea of using the brochure to connect with parents to promote summer reading. I accompanied the librarians to several school presentations to increase my awareness of what was being presented to the students.

When all the information on school visits was gathered, I used the State Department of Education's gold star rating system to narrow down the list of schools to be contacted. This rating may not always reflect the schools most in need of additional support, but it seemed a logical way of coming up with a manageable number of schools. The gold star rating system rates each school between one and five, with a five representing schools with the highest academic quality based on a variety of measures such as academic growth. After making a list of all schools in each district with a gold star rating of 3 or less, I cross checked it with my list of schools that would not be receiving librarian visits to parent-attended events. In the West Ada District, this was 10 schools and in the Boise District it was 12 schools. I then sent the principal of each of those schools a letter and brochure sample. A sample of the letter sent to principals is included as Appendix D.

Four schools responded to the letter expressing interest in the Summer Slide brochure to increase parent commitment to summer reading. A stipulation was made by the Commission
that the brochures needed to be given in face-to-face encounters with parents. This requirement was communicated in the letter. Each school worked out the details of how the brochures and parent interface would be handled for their school event. A summary of the contact with parents and distribution of the brochure for each school is listed in Appendix E.

Long Term Impact

The literacy parent presentations were my most successful method in educating and motivating parents to make reading in the home a priority. I found the audiences interested in what I had to say when I was introduced as not only having a master’s degree in literacy but also having raised six children. Attendees seemed to appreciate not only hearing research and instruction, but also real-world mom experience from someone who has been where they are. Many stayed after to ask my ideas on specific questions related to their family. At each of the presentations I encouraged the coordinator to contact me again in the future if they felt another presentation would be beneficial for the group. I also invited attendees to share my contact information with other groups they thought might be interested in a presentation. This fall I will be presenting to a different type of audience than I have thus far—grandparents. I have also been approached about providing continued literacy support through workshops at the City Light Shelter for Women and Children; however the details have yet to be worked out. I will continue to seek out opportunities to present this important information to parents in a presentation and question/answer setting.

The effectiveness of getting the summer slide brochure and verbal encouragement to parents may be able to be tracked through data gathered by the libraries on the summer reading program. The registration and tracking for Treasure Valley library summer reading programs are now done online so it may be feasible to see if there is an increase in the amount of summer
reading done by students at the participating schools. However, librarians report that the overall participation rate in the summer reading programs has declined sharply since the registration and reporting switched to online in the past few years, so this may not be the most reliable measure of summer reading at home. Fall IRI scores as compared with previous years for the schools could also be indicators of whether it would be helpful to continue the effort to connect with parents in promoting summer reading. With the groundwork laid, it would be fairly easy for the summer slide brochure effort to continue each spring. The librarians at each of the community libraries were very willing to provide needed information and are supportive of the continuation of this effort in future years. The sample letter sent to principals and detailed outline of the steps taken have been provided to the Idaho Commission for Libraries. In future years the letter could be modified to include suggestions of how schools have successfully used the brochure at parent-attended school events.

Perhaps the most effective impact of this effort has been the heightened awareness that most promotion of summer reading is done only with students, and especially in the case of young students, the critical piece of engaging parents warrants further discussion and action.
References

Appendix A
Presentation Material Notes

1. **Benefits of reading to children**
   - Creates positive attitude toward books and reading
   - Fills the ear and mind with language rhythms and structure
   - Builds general background knowledge
   - Builds vocabulary
   - Stimulates the imagination
   - Develops ability to concentrate and lengthens attention span
   - Gives knowledge about print, how print maps to speech
   - Builds phonemic awareness in natural way
   - Helps child be more empathetic toward others and socially adept
   - Gives child tools to express himself easily and clearly, both orally and written
   - Bonding time for parent and child and gives shared experience for family

2. **Strategies and Techniques for Building Early Literacy Skills**
   - **Phonemic Awareness**
     - Teach alphabet and letter sounds; point out letters in child's surroundings, discuss other words that begin with those letters, etc.
     - Include books that use rhyme and predictable words as part of read alouds
     - Enjoy and extend the rhymes or language pattern encountered in the books
     - Use nursery rhymes and songs.
     - Enjoy clapping syllables of names, interesting words, etc.
     - Talk with child, encourage conversation.
     - Encourage writing and validate invented spellings
   - **Print Awareness**
     - When reading, point out letters learned or words of interest to child
     - Point out capital letters and why they are used
     - Point out where you are reading and how you read across the page
     - Allow child to point to words as you read if they would like
   - **Vocabulary**
     - Talk about the words the child may not know, use them again in later conversations
     - Help child relate words and story to past experiences
     - Watch for interesting, fun, or new words as you read and share with child
     - Engage in conversation with your child throughout the day
   - **Narrative Skills**
     - Encourage your child to tell stories, make up new endings to stories, or act out stories
     - Write down stories as your child tells them
     - Encourage your child to interact with you and the book

3. **Making stories come alive**
   - Read with expression in eyes as well as voice
   - Make the first line sensational!
   - See the things you're reading about in your mind's eye
   - Encourage the child to interact with you and the book
4. **Ideas of books preschoolers enjoy**
   - Good read alouds have rhythm and rhyme
   - Lots of repetition, sounds that are silly or dramatic or exciting
   - Captivating illustrations
   - Action should move quickly to keep interest
   - Repeated readings of favorite books is valuable too
   - Nonfiction can be enjoyed as well
   - Use Jim Trelease Read Aloud Handbook or check the Read Aloud America website http://www.readaloudamerica.org/books_Preschool.htm for specific book recommendations for all ages. Novelist Plus on the Lili website is also a great place to find books of appropriate level or interest for a child. Take a list with you to the library.

5. **Connecting kids and books – Raising Readers**
   - Model reading – read when/where kids can see you. Express your enjoyment of book!
   - Give child the right to choose book/ right to not finish book
   - Provide variety of reading materials of interest to child lying around the house—books, magazines, comics, etc. Switch them up on occasion
   - Keep child's reading at home for enjoyment, no worksheets, specified pacing, etc.
   - Provide quiet, comfortable place time with sufficient light and away from TV
   - Be interested in what child reads; talk about it
   - Don't require reading aloud if child is hesitant. Continue reading to them. Perhaps shared reading strategies could be used.
   - Help child build own personal library of favorite books

6. **Helping reluctant readers**
   - It is critical to find books of interest to the child
   - Try something new—comic books, graphic novels, jokes and riddle books, magazines, etc.
   - Make the reading a shared experience (each read the same book and discuss together) with child's friend, parent, grandparent, etc.
   - Have a time at home when other electronics are off and reading is expected, allowing child to choose reading material.
   - Have parents model enjoyment of reading, (dad too, especially for boys)
   - Avoid making reading feel like a punishment ("this many minutes for this many days, etc.")
   - Keep a variety of engaging reading materials very accessible to the child

**Reference Materials Used:**
Reading Lessons – Gerald Coles
The Read-Aloud Handbook – Jim Trelease
The Book Whisperer – Donalyn Miller
Reading Magic – Mem Fox
Literacy for the 21st Century – Gail Tompkins
Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Course Notes
Children's Literature Course Notes
Various research articles from courses
Appendix B
Recap of Literacy Presentations Given

- Mothers of Preschoolers – Covenant Presbyterian chapter
  Date: 9/26/14
  Size of group: 45
  30 minute presentation/ 10 minute question/answer
  Focus: Importance and benefits of reading at home, early literacy skills, family reading, choosing good books for kids, helping reluctant readers
  ICfL Handouts Given: 6 literacy traits handout; Rhymes, Songs & Finger plays; Literacy on the Go booklet; DayByDay bookmarks

- "Moms Next" K-12 Parents
  Date: 11/6/14
  Size of group: 15
  30 minute presentation / 15 minute question answer
  Focus: Creating a reading centered home, building a home library, Family reading time, connecting kids and books, helping struggling readers
  ICfL Handouts Given: Lili reference card, Grandparents and Literacy

- CATCH (homeless parents)
  Date: 11/19/14
  Size of group: 10
  15 minute presentation
  Focus: Tips for reading with and talking with their children and how doing so can help "level the playing field" for their kids in being successful at school
  ICfL Handouts Given: Literacy on the Go booklet, bags given to CATCH staff to distribute to each family with book, library card information, etc.

- Mothers of Preschoolers – Calvary Chapel chapter
  Date: 4/10/15
  Size of group: 50
  30 minute presentation/10 minute question/answer
  Focus: same as preschool presentation above
  ICfL Handouts Given: 6 literacy traits information; Rhymes, Songs, & Finger plays; Literacy on the Go booklet; Lili reference card; DayByDay bookmarks

- Read with Me Parent Night – Whittier Elementary kindergarten class
  Date: 4/15/15
  Size of group: 12
  15 minute presentation
  Focus: Importance and benefits of reading at home, connecting kids and books, helping reluctant readers, building a home library
  ICfL Handouts: Rhymes, Songs, & Finger plays; Literacy on the Go booklet; DayByDay bookmarks
Appendix C

Literacy Presentation Feedback

What information in the presentation did you feel was most helpful or informative?

Is there additional information you would have liked on this topic?

Will you be trying anything different in your family as a result of the presentation? If so, what?

What do you see as the biggest challenges in regular reading with your child at home?

Any other comments or feedback?

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Summary of Responses

In response to question one, many parents indicated the most helpful information was the many benefits of reading because they were not aware of specifics of why reading was important. How to help struggling or reluctant readers and tips for family reading time were also frequent responses to this question.

The main response to question two after my first presentation was information on specific book recommendations since parents didn't know how to find books their kids would like. After seeing this was such a major concern to parents, in future presentations I included information on Novelist Plus available to parents on the Lili website (provides a search engine for books similar to others or by the same author), as well as a few websites with book recommendations for various ages and interests. The majority of parents in the second presentation listed this as very helpful information they received. This underscores the importance of a recommendation made by Dr. Stewart in his evaluation of the Stop the Summer Slide Pilot Project, referenced earlier. He said,

"Since home libraries are a significant source of books over the summer and most children receive the bulk of their care in the home over the summer, it is especially important for these libraries to be of adequate quality. In the future, the ICfL and librarians might consider producing information for parents/caregivers about what should be in a home library and also how parents/caregivers can maximize utilization of those resources to address summer reading loss." (p. 24)

When asked what changes they would be making in their home as a result of the presentation (question three), there were two main responses. One was that parents would be making reading to their kids a higher priority, and the other was that responders would be doing more pleasure reading at times their child would see them rather than waiting until naptime or bedtime. This is a result of Dr. Steiner's research on kid’s perceptions that their parents don't
read since the kids may not see them reading. More discussion with their child during reading and more expressive reading were also listed as changes parents were planning to make.

The two challenges to having regular reading with their child at home identified by responders were lack of time and not knowing what to read.
April 22, 2015

Jean Lovelace
Whitney Elementary
1609 S. Owyhee Street
Boise, ID 83705

Dear Principal Lovelace,

In an effort to encourage parents to make reading with their children over the summer a priority, the Idaho Commission for Libraries is offering to provide Treasure Valley grade school parents a copy of their “Don’t Let Your Kids Slip and Slide” brochure. A sample of this brochure is included for your review.

Because of the importance of the message and the expense of the brochure, the Commission has stipulated that the brochure is to be given directly to parents rather than just sent home with students. A few minutes at the conclusion of an event where parents are in attendance, such as an end-of-year music program, could be ideal. As students are returning to class, a short presentation regarding the importance of summer reading could be given to parents as the brochures are distributed. An evening event is also a possibility. If carving out a few minutes at the conclusion of a year-end event is not feasible, perhaps doing so at a PTO meeting would be an alternative. I have been giving such presentations to various parent groups around the valley and am happy to do so, or you or a staff member could present and I can supply the brochures to hand out.

We appreciate all you do to help students be successful and confident readers and look forward to assisting you in more fully engaging parents in this effort. As part of my BSU Masters of Literacy Capstone project, I am working with the Idaho Commission for Libraries and the local libraries to make the brochures available. If the brochure and/or presentation are something you feel would be beneficial in providing a gentle nudge and reminder to Whitney Elementary parents, please contact me so we can discuss the particulars. My contact information is listed below and a card is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Jill Call
323-1683
read15forfun@gmail.com
Appendix E

Slip and Slide Brochure Distribution

Cynthia Mann Elementary – I set up a display and greeted parents as they arrived at the school's Evening of the Arts held on April 30, 2015. Parents were given a Slip and Slide brochure and verbal encouragement to keep kids reading over the summer. (150 brochures were distributed).

Peregrine Elementary – the principal gave parents the Slip and Slide brochure and encouragement to read over the summer as she greeted them at the school carnival held the evening of May 8, 2015. (250 brochures were requested and provided).

Barbara Morgan STEM Academy – I teamed with Kate Radford of the Meridian Library to promote the library's summer reading program at the school's STEM night on May 14, 2015. As Kate talked with kids about the 3D printer she had set up, I provided parents with information about the importance of keeping kids reading over the summer and details about the summer reading program. (Estimated contact was 100 parents).

Summerwind Elementary – the principal and school librarian distributed the brochure and talked with parents at the school STEM night held on May 28, 2015. (250 Slip and Slide brochures were requested and provided).