

Promoting Family Literacy Through the Five Pillars of Family and Community Engagement (FACE)

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Abstract

Family literacy involves factors beyond what is done at home between parents and children. To help preservice teachers develop their understanding of the multiple dimensions of family literacy, this study uses the five pillars of family and community engagement (FACE)—early literacy, family involvement, access to books, expanded learning, and mentoring partnerships (Scholastic, 2013)—to examine how these five elements influence preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy. While each of the five pillars of FACE is critical to the needs of family literacy development and is well described in the literature, there is limited research on the impact of the five pillars of FACE on preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy. Thus, grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was incorporated in the present study to investigate the actualities in the classroom. After completing 20 sessions of in-class activities and 30 hours of fieldwork, the results indicate that the use of the five pillars of FACE not only increased the participants' knowledge of the multiple dimensions of family literacy but also positively influenced their practices in fieldwork.

Key Words: family and community engagement (FACE), early literacy, parental involvement, access to books, expanded learning programs, mentoring partnerships, preservice teachers, summer, home, families, fieldwork

Introduction

When asked: “What is your definition of family literacy?” in the first class session of a family literacy course, a group of preservice teachers responded: “Anything a family does to better their child’s understanding of literacy;” “the involvement of the family in a child’s efforts to grasp reading;” “the way that children and family members communicate at home;” “when both the parents and the child learn and read together;” “when parents are involved in helping the child with literacy;” and “how a child’s literacy develops with the influence of family.” (Note: These responses are excerpted from the participants in the present study.) The responses indicate that these novice teachers viewed family literacy as the types of literacy activities parents or guardians do with their children at home.

Taking into account a lack of awareness of the multiple dimensions of family literacy, it is not surprising to see how narrowly novice teachers viewed family literacy. According to the Florida Reading Association (2014), family literacy is defined as “the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home, at work, at school, and in their community life” (p. 2). Because family literacy involves factors beyond what is done at home between parents and children, teacher education should focus family literacy instruction not only on what family members do with their children at home but also how cultural and social situations impact a child’s literacy development.

Thus, to help preservice teachers develop their understanding of the multiple dimensions of family literacy, this study uses the five pillars of family and community engagement (FACE)—early literacy, family involvement, access to books, expanded learning, and mentoring partnerships—to examine how these five elements influence preservice teachers’ knowledge of and practices in family literacy. The five pillars of FACE compiled in Scholastic (2013) are discussed in the following sections.

Early Literacy

It is believed that a child’s literacy development starts from birth if he or she is raised in a literate environment (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005). Through exposure to literacy-rich environments, children build the knowledge of language and the world around them as well as cultivate their reading motivation. Researchers argue that children’s later school achievement can be predicted by how much they are immersed in literacy-rich environments in their young years (Bennett-Armistead et al., 2005).

A child’s overall literacy ability grows along with their literacy fundamentals, such as phonological awareness and word knowledge. These fundamentals

stimulate the maturation of children's brains for dealing with input information and output expression (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). To develop these essential literacy skills, adults need to attend to their children's different stages of comprehension development and incorporate evidence-based practices, such as sharing story books, dialogic reading, reading aloud, text talk, and print referencing in their learning environments (Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Giniewicz, & Madigan, 2008; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Lane & Wright, 2007).

It is important to note that children's early literacy development may differ for various reasons. For example, poor family and neighborhood socioeconomic status are correlated with lower quality of books and insufficient learning resources for children (Neuman & Celano, 2001). Thus, community-wide efforts on the development of children's early literacy, the quantity and quality of books, schools and teachers, and individual learners' different abilities all have potential impacts on how a child's early literacy skills will be developed (Kids Count, 2010; Paratore, Cassano, & Schickedanz, 2011; Snow & Juel, 2005).

Family Involvement

Family involvement is an important predictor of children's academic success and social relationships. When children know their parents care about their school lives and provide them with needed assistance, they tend to work harder in school, possess more positive personality traits, and have better relationships with their peers (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004; Bouffard & Stephen, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). To engage parents or guardians in children's school lives, schools need to make efforts to build good school–family partnerships (Epstein, 2011). Such efforts involve creating a sense of welcome, recognizing the value of all members and their input, having focused goals, and being aware of barriers to family involvement, including both school and social factors (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Warger, Eavy, & Associates, 2009). Delpit (1988) encourages educators to acknowledge the existence of the culture of power that is reflected in the classroom and to explicitly communicate with parents and students about each other's expectations. By doing so, it is likely to create a more inclusive school environment where parents and students of minority groups are willing to engage in school activities (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Delpit, 1988).

Promoting family involvement requires both policy and research support as well. Federal laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), have clearly described the essentials of school–family partnerships (NCLB, 2002; IDEA, 2004). In addition to federal laws, most state governments have their own programs to

promote family involvement in education. For example, the Georgia Department of Education (2014) has adopted the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) National Standards Assessment Guide for family–school partnerships. These programs incorporate evidence-based practices, such as differentiated family support (Edwards, 2011), school assistance systems (Ferguson & Rodriguez, 2005), a positive school climate for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity (Lopez, Barrueco, Feinauer, & Miles, 2007), and consultation for families of children with disabilities (Patrikakou, 2011).

While it is important to be aware that parents from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations for education and have different ways to interact with the teachers of their children, Dantas and Manyak (2010) caution that educators should not view families from the same cultural groups as homogenous entities. Instead, educators should expand their conceptualization of family differences and view each family as an individual entity which possesses its own identity. Also, creating an environment where educators and parents feel safe to share their struggles regarding family involvement is crucial to establish effective home, school, and community partnerships. This can be done through multiple means, such as creating an inviting school culture or using anonymous survey questionnaires. Without a safe environment, people tend to provide politically correct responses and not their real thoughts or opinions, which in turn helps little with the promotion of family involvement (Edwards, 2004).

Access to Books

Although there may be some improvements with more services available to diverse learners in different neighborhoods, Neuman and Celano's (2001) study pointed out that, on average, one child in a middle-income neighborhood has access to approximately 13 books, while one book in a low-income neighborhood is shared by 300 children. The differences of access to books in different neighborhoods are particularly obvious when schools are closed for a summer break. Many studies reveal that children from families with higher socioeconomic status learn more over the summer than their counterparts from families with lower socioeconomic status (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2010; Burkam, Ready, Lee, & LoGerfo, 2004). Consequently, the differences of having access to books widen socioeconomically disadvantaged children's summer learning gap, which is known as the Matthew Effect: "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" (Stanovich, 1986; Walberg & Tsai, 1983).

Therefore, children from low-income families need outside help in order to prevent them from falling behind their peers especially during summer months. Researchers argue that home libraries have a substantial effect on children's educational attainment (Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010). Teachers can work with parents and seek book donations through programs like "Reach Out and Read" or "Reading is Fundamental" (RIF). If having a home library seems challenging to some parents, teachers can encourage parents to use public libraries or school libraries to support their children's literacy development. Materials or activities like storytelling, family recipes, and newspapers are also great resources to support family literacy. At school, teachers can incorporate evidence-based practices to help students read better, allocate time for students to read independently, and take fidelity into consideration when providing interventions to struggling students who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (Allington, 2013).

Expanded Learning

Expanded learning opportunities, such as afterschool and summer programs, provide a means to reinforce the skills that have been taught in school and to prevent children from engaging in delinquent activities (Little, 2009). Research shows that high-quality expanded learning opportunities improve children's learning outcomes and social interactions with peers and adults and reduce children's disciplinary problems and dropout rates (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011; Little, 2009; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). Although the benefits of expanded learning opportunities are many, schools and nonprofit organizations cannot sign children up for expanded learning programs if parents are not aware of these opportunities.

It is found that children from lower income families have less access to expanded learning programs than their more affluent and advantaged peers (Little, 2009; Posner & Vandell, 1999). Therefore, offering educational support for families, particularly in lower income areas, is necessary to maximize the potential of expanded learning opportunities and to strengthen the overall literacy development of family members. Redd et al.'s (2012) study highlights that schools and communities play an important role in providing children with high-quality expanded learning opportunities and differentiated support.

Mentoring Partnerships

Studies have shown there is a significant correlation between mentoring partnerships and children's development (Rhodes, 2008; Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Mentoring partnerships increase positive outcomes in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and identity development (Rhodes, 2005) and help

children stay in school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). These occur because mentors can challenge negative views that children hold of themselves, their peers, or their parents (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rhodes, 2005). Mentors can help children better understand, express, and regulate their emotion and behaviors through guidance, modeling, activities, and examples (Rhodes, 2005), and redirect their attitude towards literacy and education. Furthermore, when mentors understand what support needs to be provided within the school and within the home, it increases the chances of fostering effective communication between families and schools. Mentoring programs can take on many different forms, such as counselling for parents or for students as well as teens helping early elementary students.

When incorporating mentoring programs, schools and communities need to carefully monitor the different stages of relationship development between the mentor and the mentee. Keller (2005) identified the stages of mentoring relationship development as follows: (a) contemplation—“anticipating and preparing for relationship;” (b) initiation—“beginning relationship and becoming acquainted;” (c) growth and maintenance—“meeting regularly and establishing patterns of interaction;” (d) decline and dissolution—“addressing challenges to relationship or ending relations;” and (e) redefinition—“negotiating terms of future contact or rejuvenating relationship” (p. 86). Although these stages are sequential, the effects of each stage are intertwined and lead to different qualities of mentoring (Keller, 2005).

Cultural diversity is another important issue in mentoring partnerships. On one hand, families of children with disabilities often feel uncomfortable with having novice mentors work with their children (McDonald, Balcazar, & Keys, 2006). On the other hand, families may have stereotypes against certain racial groups and thus do not want their children to work with mentors who are from these racial groups (Sánchez & Colón, 2005). Also, families from different cultural backgrounds may have different values regarding mentoring, such as collectivism (i.e., village raising a child) in African, Asian, and Latino cultures versus individualism (i.e., Big Brothers Big Sisters which emphasizes one-on-one mentoring) in western countries (Sánchez & Colón, 2005). Due to the fact that parents’ feelings can impact the way they react to additional help outside the home, schools and communities must take cultural diversity into consideration when offering mentoring programs to children and their families.

Conceptual Framework

The five pillars of FACE—early literacy, family involvement, access to books, expanded learning, and mentoring partnerships—promote a broader

view of family literacy which goes beyond the interaction between parents and children at home around literacy. The five pillars of FACE involve multiple theories and research-validated evidence, such as literacy fundamentals (Bennett-Armistead et al., 2005; Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lane & Wright, 2007), parental engagement (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004; Bouffard & Stephen, 2007), the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986; Allington, 2013), and mentoring (Redd et al., 2012).

While each of the five pillars of FACE is critical to the needs of family literacy development and is well described in the literature, there is limited research on the impact of the five pillars of FACE on preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy. Thus, this research aims to explore: (1) to what extent did the use of the five pillars of FACE impact the preservice teachers' *knowledge* of family literacy? and (2) to what extent did the use of the five pillars of FACE impact the preservice teachers' *practices* in family literacy?

Method

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in a family literacy course which utilized the five pillars of FACE in course construction. There were a total of 11 preservice teachers enrolled in this course taught by the researcher. These preservice teachers were all undergraduate students majoring in special education at a midsize public university. Among the 11 preservice teachers, 10 students (all female; 3 African Americans, 7 Caucasians) were willing to let the researcher analyze their course assignments for the purpose of this research study. Participating in this study was completely voluntary, and the participants signed an IRB-approved consent form. All preservice teachers completed the same course assignments regardless of participating in the study, including 30 hours of fieldwork at a nonprofit literacy center where free 1:1 tutoring was provided to low-income students (K–12) during the summer months.

Course Description

The intensive course, "Family Literacy," was three credit hours. Each week's class discussions and activities focused on one of the five pillars of FACE. Each pillar was covered through four sessions, and each session was 105 minutes, including a 5-minute break. There were a total of 20 sessions throughout the semester (four sessions per week for five weeks). Class activities included lectures, group activities, and leading discussions. The texts used in this course were: (a) Patricia A. Edwards's (2004) book *Children's Literacy Development: Making It Happen Through School, Family, and Community Involvement*; and

(b) selected articles related to the five pillars of FACE compiled in *Scholastic* (2013). When the participants were doing their 30 hours of fieldwork at the literacy center, the director of the literacy center, two coordinators, and the researcher were observing their practices to ensure the integrity of the fieldwork. Table 1 shows the course schedule.

Table 1. Course Schedule

Weekly Topic	Fieldwork (Literacy Center)	In-Class Session (On-Campus)
Week 1: Introduction & Early Literacy	6 hours/per week	7 hours/per week
Week 2: Family Involvement	6 hours/per week	7 hours/per week
Week 3: Access to Books	6 hours/per week	7 hours/per week
Week 4: Expanded Learning	6 hours/per week	7 hours/per week
Week 5: Mentoring Partnerships & Recap	6 hours/per week	7 hours/per week
Total hours	30 hours	35 hours

Note. The fieldwork happened during the same five weeks as the in-class sessions.

This course was designed to help preservice teachers: (a) understand how literacy develops and predicts later academic success of children who are at risk or have special needs; (b) promote family involvement in school and the literacy performance of children in low-income communities; (c) explain why access to books matters and how family system and culture have an impact on children’s access to books; (d) expand the learning opportunities of children in culturally diverse contexts; (e) improve mentoring partnerships to help children achieve day-to-day successful living; and (f) practice competencies in field placements under the supervision of collaborating teachers and university professors. Class sessions were delivered face-to-face, and course assignments included readings, quizzes, fieldwork reflection papers, and personal projects.

Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to explore the impact of the five pillars of FACE. A grounded theory research design is used to generate or modify a theory through qualitative procedures (Creswell, 2015). An important characteristic of grounded theory research design is that “the inquirer collects data more than once and keeps returning to data sources for more information throughout a study until the categories are saturated and the theory is fully developed” (Creswell, 2015, p. 444). Adopting a grounded theory design is important for this study because even if the existing literature has revealed the importance of each pillar of FACE, there is

limited research on how the use of the five pillars of FACE can impact preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy. Exploring such an impact can maximize the use of the five pillars of FACE in family literacy. The data collection for this study included participants' fieldwork reflection papers, personal projects, and a survey questionnaire.

Fieldwork Reflection Papers

The class sessions and fieldwork were scheduled from Monday to Thursday for five weeks. At the end of each week, the participants turned in a one-page single-spaced reflection paper based on the lesson focus in class and their fieldwork experiences at the literacy center during the week.

Personal Projects

Throughout the semester, the participants were developing and working on their personal projects at their own pace. These projects related to family literacy could be art projects, book reviews, interviews, research projects, practitioner articles, literature reviews, or video modeling. The researcher served as a consultant to facilitate the completion of the participants' personal projects. One check-in point was arranged in the middle of the semester when the participants shared their project's progress, and they received feedback from the class members. A self-evaluation checklist was provided to enhance the quality of the projects.

The Survey Questionnaire

To understand the participants' perspectives toward the use of the five pillars of FACE in the family literacy course, an open-ended questionnaire was conducted in class at the end of the semester. The survey question was: *How do the five pillars of FACE help you understand family literacy?* This open-ended question allowed the participants to address the topic based on their own experiences without being constrained to any presumed answers. The participants were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The researcher began with identifying open coding categories and used the emerging themes from the participants' responses to discuss the impact of the five pillars of FACE on participants' knowledge of and practices in family theory. Several steps of the coding process suggested by Creswell (2013) and Tesch (1990) were taken. First, the researcher and two trained graduate research assistants tried to get a sense of the entire data by reading through the data. Second, they picked one of the most in-depth responses to each data source in order to brainstorm possible ways of coding. Third, they began to code the qualitative

data. After coding all responses and making a long list of all code words, they began to reduce the list of codes by clustering them into themes. Coding disagreement among the researcher and the two graduate research assistants was resolved through revisiting the data multiple times, discussing, and consulting until the agreement was reached. Lastly, each participant, as well as any student they mentioned by name in their writing, was assigned a pseudonym. The visual model of exploring the theory is shown in Figure 1.

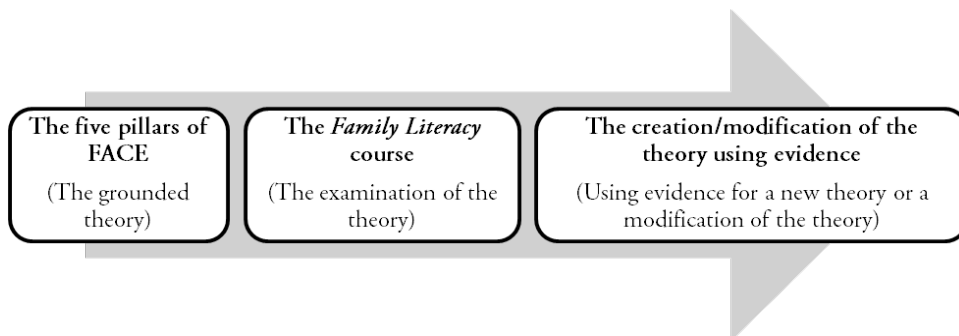


Figure 1. Using a grounded theory to examine the use of FACE.

Figure 1 indicates that the five pillars of FACE were identified as the grounded theory of the present study. The researcher then integrated the theory into a family literacy course to examine whether a new theory would be generated or the existing theory should be modified. Finally, the evidence was used to support the argument of the study.

Results

Theme 1: Early Literacy

Most of the participants did not work with students young enough to engage in topics of early literacy. However, during the week they learned about early literacy, their reflection papers were already making connections between early literacy and other topics of the course/family literacy development.

Children With Special Needs

The participants noticed that some of the children at the literacy center seemed to have special needs such as autism, attention deficits, or language disorders. For example, participant Ada stated:

Student C was a young man who worked on the fifth grade level. I believe this student had some type of special needs. Although the young man had no trouble reading each word, it was challenging to understand

him. I typically tried to ask a question after each page, however getting him to stop reading was challenging. In many instances, I had to physically cover the book for about two seconds. He would then look up at me to hear the question, and then retrieve the answer from the text.

Like Ada, other participants also worked with children who had special needs. Lilian, for instance, expressed that “my second day working in the literacy center I was given a student who was supposed to be going into third grade but was on a first grade reading.”

Instructional Methods

To meet the needs of the students, the preservice teachers began by discovering the children’s strengths and weaknesses and then incorporated evidence-based practices to help them develop literacy skills. This excerpt from Sarah’s paper illustrates how she worked with the children at the literacy center:

The students were drawing upon prior knowledge when I asked them questions about the story, describing experiences that related to the text. Furthermore, we delved into some of the five components of reading. We manipulated letters and letter sounds, using them in different words. At the end of each activity in a young boy’s book, there was a fill-in the blank sentence. I chose to use the repeated reading method from class discussion. I read the sentence twice, he read with me, and lastly independently.

At the same time, all participants strived to have interaction with the parents of the children at the literacy center to promote early literacy at home.

Theme 2: Family Involvement

Interaction With Parents

It was not surprising to see how challenging it could be for these novice teacher candidates to initiate a dialogue with parents. Some parents were engaged in the dialogue while some were not. For example, Ada described in her paper, “When I began telling her about the child’s tutoring session, the mother quickly interrupted saying, ‘we have to go, we are late for an appointment.’” Although initiating and maintaining an effective dialogue was hard, the participants still tried to be understanding and reflective and to apply different strategies to meet parents’ different needs. Ada wrote, “For parents consistently on the go, I will write a note on a sheet of paper that can be quickly handed to them.” Sarah also stated, “I decided to end five minutes earlier to allow time for discussion. The extra time helped those parents to feel less rushed. I sought to involve them by giving them take home activities and notes detailing the day’s

lesson.” Similarly, Janet’s reflection paper exemplifies how the participants responded to parents’ diverse needs:

I would like to make a dialog journal to send home with each family. I would also love to create home literacy bags to send home to better help a struggling child. I plan to show that I am willing to collaborate with them. I will stay positive and make an effort every time to talk to someone who is a part of that child’s life.

The participants’ responses imply that it might not be a matter of whether or not they had positive or negative experiences when interacting with parents. Through the texts and activities in class, the participants knew they should not take parents’ reaction personally, and they should keep trying different strategies to engage with the children’s parents.

Parent–Tutor Partnerships

All participants expressed that parental involvement was vital to the success of a child. Without parental involvement, it took more time for the participants to figure out where to start to help the children. For instance, Skylar reported:

I have found it harder to prepare work for Zena to do while at the literacy center because I do not know what subject she needs to work on, as well as I don’t know what level she’s actually functioning at. After spending my second week at the literacy center with Zena, I have observed that she always comes 15–20 minutes late, and whoever comes to pick her up is never on time.

Welcoming Environment

In spite of the challenges resulting from children’s different home lives, the participants made an all-out effort to create a welcoming environment and maintain a positive climate at the literacy center. Several participants discussed in their papers that they wanted to make sure that all the parents, guardians, and family members felt welcome and supported.

Differentiated Support

Moreover, many participants were aware that differentiated support must be used to meet parents’ different needs. As Kaylee said in her paper, “we as tutors/teachers have to differentiate the way we instruct our students. But we also have to think about the way we approach our student’s parents. We have to change our ways of talking to the parents and understand parents.” Echoing Kaylee, Sarah wrote, “I have to differentiate for parents as I would for their children. The activities that I give for students to complete at home have to

be parentally appropriate.” The results show that the participants tried to find ways to support parents and tailor their intervention to meet children’s different learning needs.

In sum, the findings from participants’ reflection papers show that there were barriers to family involvement, such as parents’ time and energy, limited room in the building for interaction, ineffective dialogue, and transition time. However, the participants had been trying a variety of strategies to engage parents, including sharing learning resources with parents, providing learning logs, valuing parents’ voices, providing high-quality instruction to children, maintaining a positive attitude, creating a welcoming environment, and differentiating parental support.

Theme 3: Access to Books

Enjoyment of Reading

The third week’s class activities brought the participants’ attention to how access to books affects children’s perception and enjoyment of reading. For example, Skylar had been working with two students: Lisa and Zena. Lisa’s parents had her bring a new book to read every week, while Zena never brought a book or any kind of materials with her. She wrote:

When I see Lisa bring a new book every day, it shows me that the student has a very large access to a variety of books at home. Even though she needs to work on a few aspects of her reading skills, Lisa loves to read and does it with such enthusiasm. In comparison to Lisa, Zena, who doesn’t bring in any type of books or materials, has expressed to me that she really doesn’t enjoy reading. She’s even said that the only reason she reads is because people at school force her to.

Children’s Home Lives

The fieldwork at the literacy center gave an opportunity for the participants to understand the impact of children’s home lives. Angie shared that when working with a child who always brought two workbooks, flashcards, a sight word list, and well-sharpened pencils to the literacy center, she could tell that the child’s family was very involved in his learning, and he had many resources available to him at home. Unlike the child with whom Angie worked, Kaylee mentioned in her paper that only a small handful of her students at the literacy center brought their own materials for tutoring.

Quality of the Materials and Personnel

In terms of the book organization at the literacy center, nearly half of the participants pointed out that it would really help if the books donated by

community organizations and individuals could be labeled by grade levels. Furthermore, because the center was short-staffed and always needed volunteers, some participants noticed that there were not any specific criteria to be a tutor at the literacy center. They were concerned that not every tutor at the center was capable to teach literacy to children, particularly to those with special needs.

Theme 4: Expanded Learning

Tutors' Perceptions

Most of the participants valued the literacy center for bridging the gap between grades for children during the school year and during the summer and for helping children grow fully. As Evelyn wrote, "summer programs like the literacy center can be beneficial for anyone; they not only help with academic skills, but with social skills as well." Bella also stated that the literacy center is a great expanded learning program because "it is free for the community so that parents who cannot afford to pay for their children to be tutored can also get their children the help that they need." The benefits of summer programs are broad and the impact is far beyond measure. In her reflection paper, Sophia wrote:

Expanded learning programs can benefit all students no matter the age, academic level, or ethnicity. Students who attend these programs are provided with educational help as well as adult supervision, leading to better decision-making and academic improvement.

Several participants further expressed that students who participate in expanded learning programs are more likely to develop better learning behaviors and are less likely to participate in delinquent behaviors. The preservice teachers encouraged parents to incorporate some of the strategies and resources at home to help their children maintain and generalize the skills that they gained in expanded learning programs.

Strategy and Resource Sharing

Many participants were willing to share strategies and learning resources with parents, including online programs, self-made materials, think-aloud activities, self-regulation strategies, and behavior modeling. The participants believed that the parents of the children at the literacy center were eager to help their children succeed if they could be given more instruction and knew how to assist their children in learning at home.

Theme 5: Mentoring Partnerships

The focus of the final week was mentoring partnerships, which covered mentoring strategies and the characteristics of mentoring partnerships, such

as establishing a personal connection and positive relationships, being open-minded and willing to listen, making time to follow up with the child, modeling behavior, communicating with parents, understanding cultural diversity, and creating a trustful and comfortable mentoring environment.

The Awareness of Mentoring Partnerships

The class activities seemed to raise the participants' awareness of the importance of mentoring partnerships. As Ada shared, "while at my field placements, I did not necessarily think of myself as a tutor; however, when I look back, I can see this partnership between me and some of my students." Furthermore, Evelyn noted,

As I spent my time at the literacy center, I viewed myself more as a tutor than a mentor, but in reality I was just as much as a mentor than I was as a tutor. I feel like it is very important to model appropriate behavior.

It is evident that providing training about mentoring partnerships through the course was helpful. It not only increased the participants' knowledge, but also improved their practices in their fieldwork. As Sarah described:

In my interactions with the students and children in my life, I always strived to be honest, patient, and caring. But I have learned that there are other qualities that mentors should have as well...I must not try to change who the child is, rather guide them to do the best they can do. Reflecting on this aspect of my experience, I would have made more time for conversations with the students to learn more about their home settings.

The Benefits of Mentoring Partnerships

Mentoring partnerships benefit both mentees and mentors. Like Sarah, Skylar expressed that mentoring is a great opportunity to lead and influence positive values and behavior, and individuals involved can learn and grow in many aspects of their lives. Learning about the impact of mentoring partnerships on children's learning and development, several participants articulated that mentoring skills should be taught in teacher education programs to model appropriate behavior and help children succeed academically, emotionally, and socially.

A Cross-Theme Activity

After learning about the five pillars of FACE, all participants turned in their personal projects across the elements of family literacy at the end of the semester with a presentation in class. Some participants completed their personal projects in small groups, while others finished theirs individually. Among the

eight projects, three of them were related to family literacy activities for parents and children. One project was a report of a child's literacy development through the lens of the five pillars of FACE. Another project was a participant's transforming experience of being a mentor to a child with special needs. There was one interview project on discovering the relationship between cultural diversity and home literacy, and one project reporting how attending an expanded learning program for children with autism influenced a boy with autism and his family. Finally, there was one project about guiding parents to help children develop literacy skills through the five pillars of FACE. Overall, each project was unique with a strong focus on some or all of the five pillars of FACE.

In one of the projects related to family literacy activities for parents and children, Ava and Janet created station activities for a family literacy night. As they described:

Station one requires students to work on expressive language skills. The second station requires the students to word hunt which forces the student to recognize letters. The next station requires the student to write and communicate with their parent. The fourth station requires the student to read each word and sort it appropriately. The fifth station requires students to look at a bottle and identify the different objects they see. The student will then write the word. The sixth station is mad libs in which students will be required to fill in blanks to complete a story.

When Ava and Janet demonstrated the station activities in class, the class members were very engaged in the activities and found that the station activities were created with clarity and fun. Ava and Janet wrote in their paper that the family literacy night activities could create opportunities for mentoring partnerships. Additionally, the content words of these activities can be adjusted so easily that all students from different grades and different cultural backgrounds would find these activities joyful and meaningful.

Considering cultural differences, Sophia discussed in her paper that she developed two parallel family literacy guides for parents who have computer access and for those who do not. In short, the products of the personal projects implied that the use of the five pillars of FACE provided a means for the participants to deepen their knowledge about family literacy in multiple ways.

The Survey Questionnaire

The participants' responses to the survey question were consistent with their responses in the reflection papers and personal projects. All participants had a positive attitude on the use of the five pillars of FACE. Some participants stated they never recognized how multidimensional family literacy could be.

For example, Sophia wrote, “I now see and understand how each component relates to one another as well as the effect each component has on a child’s education.” All participants agreed that many factors need to be taken into consideration when working with students, and the use of the five pillars of FACE helped break down issues of family literacy into individual factors. They now understood how lacking in one or the other factor could hinder a child’s literacy development. The participants further discussed how each pillar deepened their understanding of family literacy. Sarah, for instance, wrote, “Each pillar is pivotal for families. When there are so many families that do not have opportunities or support for one area, the importance of each pillar becomes even more evident.” Overall, the results of the survey provide evidence that the use of the five pillar of FACE was beneficial to increase participants’ knowledge and skills of promoting family literacy.

Discussion

While the importance of each pillar of FACE is acknowledged in the existing literature, this study’s focus on the use of the five pillars of FACE to improve preservice teachers’ knowledge of and practices in family literacy offers a unique contribution to the field of teacher education for family literacy. Prior to this course, there was a general tendency that the participants steered family literacy away from the involvement of teachers, schools, and communities. Some participants were not even aware of the consequences of children’s different access to books and expanded learning during summer months as well as the importance of mentoring partnerships. As a result of incorporating the five pillars of FACE, the findings confirm that their use not only increased the participants’ knowledge of the multidimensional nature of family literacy but also influenced their practices. After completing 20 sessions of in-class activities and 30 hours of fieldwork, the participants became more involved in the development of family literacy. Some of them even requested higher level courses in teacher education programs to help them become better mentors in children’s lives.

As discussed earlier, both Biemiller and Boote (2006) and Lane and Wright (2008) argue that evidence-based practices are crucial for promoting early literacy. The findings of the present study support that the participants developed a better understanding of these evidence-based practices and employed them in their fieldwork. The application of the evidence-based practices helped more children at the literacy center become engaged in their learning. However, it is important to point out that it was challenging for the participants to document children’s learning outcomes at the literacy center. This is because the free 1:1

tutoring at the literacy center is mainly to provide children from low-socio-economic households and communities with additional support after school or during summer, and there is no specific curriculum used at the center. Additionally, children's attendance was not mandatory, and while some students attended regularly, others did not. When children do not show up, the literacy center staff have to readjust tutors. This highlights the importance of administrators improving scheduling and parents making the effort to bring their children to expanded learning programs on time and on a regular basis.

Regarding family involvement, it is encouraging to learn how the participants strived to involve parents or guardians. The participants were aware of the barriers to family involvement, such as cultural and linguistic diversity (Lopez et al., 2007; Warger et al., 2009) and the climate of environments (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). More importantly, the participants took action to involve parents by offering them differentiated family support as suggested in their text (Edwards, 2011). The participants' reflection papers provide a conjecture on why involving parents at the literacy center was not an easy task. Without the training of family involvement embedded in this course, the participants might have developed negative attitudes or shied away from engaging parents when constantly facing the same challenges. This finding also suggests that when the participants built a repertoire of family involvement skills, they become more willing to confront the challenges when parents did not seem to be actively engaged in children's learning.

The use of the five pillars of FACE not only raised the participants' awareness of children's differing access to books (Allington, 2013; Neuman & Celano, 2001) and expanded learning opportunities (Redd et al., 2012), but also helped the participants develop a critical view of the "quality" of the access. For example, many participants expressed their concerns about the organization of the books and the quality of the tutors at the literacy center. Moreover, an overwhelming majority shared educational resources and learning opportunities with parents, and they guided parents to build home libraries (Evans et al., 2010) and incorporate literacy activities at home. While no participants discussed in their reflection papers if parents actually built home libraries for their children or got more involved in expanded learning programs after receiving their advice, the participants' effort has certainly moved the development of family literacy forward by giving parents new perspectives.

Lastly, rather than prioritizing tutoring at the literacy center as delivering knowledge to children, the participants began to think about how mentoring partnerships could serve the whole child academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially (Rhodes, 2005). The participants' critical reflection on their practices indicates that they were aware of positive and negative impacts of

their role modeling for the children at the literacy center, and so they strived to be the best they could be. Although a related strand in the literature argues that parents of children with disabilities may feel uncomfortable for their children to work with novice mentors (McDonald et al., 2006; Sánchez & Colón, 2005), this study provides evidence that novice teachers can still be good mentors and work well with children and their families if they are properly trained.

While this study used several measures to ensure the rigor of the data analysis such as triangulation among different data sources and long-term engagement in fieldwork (Erickson, 1986), there are some important limitations to this study. First, this study drew on the five pillars of FACE. There are still many other factors that also need to be taken into consideration when preparing teachers for family literacy, such as the qualities that teachers bring to the classroom and situational factors (Kennedy, 2010). Future research can include additional factors to expand the scope of the five pillars of FACE.

Second, although the major goals of this study are to explore the impact of the five pillars of FACE on preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy, it would have provided a more comprehensive picture of the use of the five pillars of FACE in relation to children's learning outcomes if formal assessments were conducted. Systematically monitoring children's progress will lead to the betterment of intervention and services. Alternatively, expanded program providers can utilize a social validity measurement to ensure that the intervention and services of their programs meet children's and parents' needs.

Moreover, exploring the reasons that parents do not bring their children to expanded programs on time or on a regular basis is important. Future studies could investigate the quality of expanded programs, such as their scheduling and book organization as pointed out by the participants, to discover how it impacts the frequency of parents bringing their children to the programs on time and on a regular basis. It is important to note that, ideally, it would be beneficial if each preservice teacher could work with the same student throughout the five weeks of fieldwork (6 hours per week). In this way, they could know their students better and provide instructional support more consistently. However, one challenge of such a free, open-to-the-public summer program was that tutoring program attendance was not mandatory. Thus, when students did not show up or were late, tutors would be assigned to work with different students. Finding solutions that improve student attendance in expanded programs is needed.

Last, the order of introducing the five pillars of FACE to preservice teachers should be adjusted for future practice. For example, when fieldwork experiences are embedded in coursework, introducing how to establish a good mentoring partnerships with students at the beginning of the course will be beneficial to both preservice teachers and their students.

In conclusion, the five pillars of FACE could powerfully inform frameworks for promoting family literacy through teacher preparation programs. Preservice teachers need to be given opportunities to learn that family literacy goes beyond literacy-related activities that parents or guardians do with their children at home. By doing so, it is more likely that future teachers (and the community as a whole) can effectively promote the development of family literacy.

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