

Fall 2017

The Effect of Take Home Literacy Bags on Parents' Feelings Towards School

Lisa Fernstrum

Northwestern College - Orange City

Follow this and additional works at: https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses & Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of NWCommons. For more information, please contact ggrond@nwciowa.edu.

The Effect of Take Home Literacy Bags on Parents' Feelings Towards School

Lisa Fernstrum

Northwestern College

December 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to determine by what method take home literacy bags have an impact on parents' feelings towards school. Parents completed a short survey early in the school year, prior to literacy bags being sent home. Literacy bags were sent home weekly for six weeks before parents were asked to complete the same survey for a second time. Analysis of the collected data suggests take home literacy bags have a positive impact on families' feelings towards school.

The Effect of Take Home Literacy Bags on Parents' Feelings Towards School

As educators work at school to promote individual growth and development in each student, families can aid in the growth and development process at home. When teachers view families as a child's primary teacher, a desire to collaborate with families occurs. Changing family dynamics, multiple languages spoken, and the fast-paced lifestyles of families now require teachers to be creative in how they seek to collaborate with families. Keeping family makeup and lifestyles in mind, educators can provide meaningful resources for families to utilize at home that promote development at home through authentic, developmentally appropriate activities. Take home literacy bags can provide families with structure and guidance necessary to foster skill development at home yet also the freedom to make it work for families individually.

For years, educators have stated the importance of the home environment in a child's life and education. Teachers who work to bridge this gap are often met with families being receptive and at other times find it difficult to connect with families. Numerous reasons account for this and teachers work hard to overcome the variety of reasons there is a school-to-home gap. At times families feel intimidated by teachers and school staff. Other families never receive the message that teachers and schools want to partner with them to support their child.

Many families want to be involved in their child's education but are unsure of how to do that. Implementing a take home literacy bag program can address this issue. Along with giving families developmentally appropriate activities to do at home, take home literacy bags can serve other purposes. This paper explores how take home literacy bags affect families' feelings towards school. More specifically, how do take home literacy bags affect families' feelings of intimidation towards school and the feeling that school wants to partner with them.

Take home literacy bags are put together by teachers and sent home with students with the intention that families use the bags to engage with students at home. The bags vary in makeup, depending on age of students, teacher, and reason for utilizing them. Some teachers use take home literacy bags as a replacement for homework, others to improve literacy skills, still others with the intention to bridge the home-school gap. Take home literacy bags contain at least one book and one activity. When teachers prepare the bags with students in mind, a variety of other resources or activities can be added to the bags. For example, a literacy bag may include a book, activity, questions, CD, puppets, and other literature pertinent to the book in the bag.

Teachers are often approached by parents with the desire to work with their student at home but are unsure of what to focus on or how to implement it. Take home literacy bags can provide an answer to this question. When given new, developmentally appropriate materials to interact with each week, families can work on numerous skills while doing something natural and enjoyable. It is the hope that by doing this, families will spend quality time together and promote a love for reading.

Literature Review

Preschool is often the first encounter with school for families. Questions, thoughts, and feelings arise prior to and during this year. Preschool teachers can help ease this transitional time for families in a variety of ways. One way this can be done is by strengthening the connection between home and school through home literacy programs. Most educators realize that the home environment can be a powerful factor in a child's literacy development (Mui, & Anderson, 2008; Hilado, Kallemyn, & Philips, 2013). Home literacy programs vary widely and include programs such as parent trainings, parent literature circles, or take home literacy bags. Each strategy touts unique advantages and challenges.

Families who want to support students in literacy development may be unsure of what to do to further their student's skills. Huang (2013) and Grande (2004) report that literacy bags not only promote parental involvement at home but also have positive effects on students, families, and teachers. Huang (2013) researched a literacy bag program in China with eighteen first grade students and their parents. The bags were sent home with students and contained a book in English, CD or tape, and additional activities. Huang (2013) concluded that the program encouraged literacy development at home amongst families, assisted parents in understanding how children develop a new language, and gave parents the confidence to implement literacy strategies at home. At the end of the project, the researcher noticed stronger connections between teachers, students, and parents

Marya Grande (2004) examined the effect home literacy bags had on parent participation and knowledge. She conducted research with four fully inclusive classrooms of first-grade students in a suburban elementary school. Parents filled out a survey prior to the home literacy bags program and once again, when the program was complete. Surveys measured parents' knowledge of literacy development and grade-level expectations. Students took home a literacy bag at least once during the year for a week. Bags included a book and numerous activities to be done at home. Grande (2004) used surveys, parent journals, and student work samples as data. She concluded that overall parents gained knowledge about appropriate grade-level expectations and literacy development.

By sending home books and materials, teachers can support families at home through high-quality books and questions that develop students' literacy skills (Roberts, 2008). Frank and Schneider (2015) concluded that take home literacy bags can serve as a developmentally appropriate, less intense intervention that can affect students' literacy development.

Frank and Schneider (2015) found that take home literacy bags can help families improve the home literacy environment and support children's literacy development. Take home literacy bags have been found to promote development for a variety of populations of young children. Roberts (2008) found that take home literacy bags promote vocabulary development in preschoolers whose second language is English. Zeece and Wallace (2009) shared that promoting literacy development at home can enhance overall family literacy for children who are considered to be in high risk families with low literacy and children who are considered English Language Learners.

Parents who have been a part of a take home literacy bag program reported positive feelings towards the program (Brand, Marchand, Lilly, & Child, 2013). A study was done with twenty three- to five-year-old children and their families in a suburban preschool. Families participated in a literature circle and participated in a take home literacy bag program. Literature circles gave families the opportunity to read at school with their child, share any projects done at home, and socialize. The take home literacy bags consisted of a book, parent letter, story prop, activity with instructions, journal, and parent survey. Families who utilized take home literacy bags reported increased engagement with their child at home, a better understanding of the importance of reading together, and gleaned new strategies for meaningful activities to do at home (Brand, Marchand, Lilly, & Child, 2013).

Methods

Participants

This action research was conducted in an integrated preschool program. The class is comprised of 28 students ranging in age from three to five. Students' families are majority white; five families were Hispanic, and one Asian family. One family that participated is a foster family

to the child in the class. Another family decided not to be a part of the program. Four students in the class are on an individualized education program (IEP). Eighteen of the students live in the same house as both their parents. Two students live with just one parent and have little contact with the other parent. Four students live with one parent and have another adult in the house. Two students spend time at both parents' homes. Twelve students have two parents working outside the home.

Data Collection

The focus of this action research project was to determine the effect of take home literacy bags on families' feelings towards school. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected through surveys filled out by families. Surveys utilizing a Likert scale were sent home with families and completed prior to implementing the take home literacy bag program and then again, seven weeks after the program began. Families rated their feelings on each statement on the survey. They could choose strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree/somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. After each statement, a comment section was available for families to record any comments about the statement. Surveys consisted of the following statements:

- This program respects and values my family.
- My child's teacher encourages me to be actively involved in my child's education.
- I am involved in my child's education.
- I have a good relationship with my child's teacher.
- If I have a concern about my child's education, I feel comfortable bringing it up to my child's teacher.

Surveys (Appendix A) were completed at home prior to the beginning of the take home literacy bag program. A letter was sent home informing families of the program and a few guidelines (Appendix B). Take home literacy bags were sent home once a week and families may keep them at home for five days before returning them back to school. If students return their book, a new one is sent home with them that week. Families were able to have a maximum of six or seven books prior to completing surveys for the second time.

Prior to the beginning of the literacy bag program, families were informed of the program at home visits. The letter sent home informed families not only of the logistics but also how it is intended to be carried out. The take home literacy bags are intended to be a resource for families. Creativity and flexibility are encouraged as families make it work for their family. It is not mandatory that everything or anything be done but rather that it is something enjoyable for families to do with their students.

The take home literacy bags consisted of a book, a materials list card, an instructor card informing families of what they can do with the literacy bag, a question card with three to five questions pertaining to the book, and at least one other activity that coincides with the book. The activities vary widely and covered a variety of subjects and content areas. Some books also had quick response (QR) codes that featured the books being read aloud. Instruction and question cards were printed in English and Spanish, as those are the two languages spoken by students in the current class.

Findings

Data Analysis

The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data to minimize bias and maximize validity and reliability. Families were asked to fill out surveys anonymously utilizing a

Likert Scale with the option of adding comments. Surveys were sent home and handled by other professionals in the room and then completed once again at conference time. The surveys completed at conference time were completed without the teacher looking and placed into a folder to ensure anonymity and that families were not influenced by the knowledge of the researcher, who was also the teacher, being within view of the surveys.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The data was collected prior to implementing the take home literacy bag program and once again around the seven week mark of the program. If families returned their bag each week, they had a maximum potential of having seven literacy bags by the occurrence of the second survey.

Table one displays the composite scores of families' surveys. Surveys utilized a Likert Scale and could total a maximum of 25. A one rating conveyed that families' strongly agreed with the statement and a five strongly disagreed. After the program was implemented, composite totals went down, indicating an increase in positive feelings towards school from families.

Table 1

Composite Totals of Surveys

Family	Prior to Program	After Program Implementation
1	5	5
2	6	6
3	6	5
4	9	5
5	6	5
6	10	8

7	8	5
8	6	5
9	5	5
10	6	5
11	6	5
12	5	5
13	10	7
14	5	5
15	5	5
16	5	5
17	9	5
18	5	5
19	10	7
20	5	5
21	7	5

Question one stated “This program respects and values my family”. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mean answer of this question was 1.29. After the program was implemented, the mean of this question was one, indicating that after the implementation of this program families' feelings of being respected and valued were higher. Each parent who completed a survey after the program was implemented stated that they strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 2

Question One

Question One		
Prior to Program	After Implementation of Program	Change in Score
1.29	1	.29 Less

Question two stated, “My child's teacher encourages me to be actively involved in my child's education”. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mean answer to the question was 1.29. After implementation of the program, the mean answer was 1.1, indicating an increase in parents' feelings that their teacher wants to involve them in their child's education. All parents recorded strongly agree with the exception of two, who recorded that they agree with this statement.

Table 3

Question Two

Question Two		
Prior to Program	After Implementation	Change in Score
1.29	1.1	.18 Less

Question three stated, “I am involved in my child's education”. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mean answer to the question was 1.24. After implementation of the program, the mean answer was 1.14, indicating an increase in parents' feelings that their teacher wants to involve them in their child's education. One family fell outside the norm as they had previously

marked strongly agree on question three and after program implementation, marked that they agreed.

Table 4

Question Three

Question Three		
Prior to Program	After Implementation	Change in Score
1.24	1.14	.1 Less

Question four stated, “I have a good relationship with my child's teacher”. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mean answer to the question was 1.48. After implementation of the program, the mean answer was 1.1, indicating an increase in parents' feelings that they have a positive relationship with their child's teacher.

Table 5

Question Four

Question Four		
Prior to Program	After Implementation	Change in Score
1.48	1.1	.38 Less

Question five stated, “If I have a concern about my child's education, I feel comfortable bringing it up to my child's teacher”. Prior to the beginning of the program, the mean answer to the question was 1.33. After implementation of the program, the mean answer was 1.05, indicating an increase in parents' feelings comfortable with working with the teacher.

Table 6

Question Five

Question Five		
Prior to Program	After Implementation	Change in Score
1.33	1.05	.28 Less

Qualitative Data Analysis

Families were given the option to share comments along with completing the Likert Scale. The majority of families did not comment. All comments that were shared were positive both prior to program implementation and after implementation. A pattern of specificity emerged with the second set of surveys. Overall, families were more specific with their comments on the second set of surveys. Table seven displays family comments.

Table 7

Family Comments

Family	Prior to Program	After Implementation
1	<p>“She is giving me the opportunity to participate as volunteer. What I really appreciate.”</p> <p>“She is nice and helpful”</p>	

6		<p>“Welcomes input. Willing to take time to stop and discuss issues”</p> <p>“We are updated on the weeks activities and given suggestions to incorporate learning. Activity books sent home to work together on.”</p> <p>“We work on letters, numbers, and concepts at home. We talk about classroom work and activities done at school.”</p> <p>“We are able to discuss openly”</p>
8	“School is very accommodating”	
12	<p>“We get a weekly paper home explaining what we can at home and what they did at school that week”</p> <p>“I ask his teacher often for her advice and we come up with a decision together”</p>	<p>“Very much agreed. I just had a visit at my house to teacher me what they are doing in school.”</p> <p>“Love her! She’s great and seems to really understand how to help kids who learn differently”</p>
16	“Good teachers”	

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

Data collected throughout the study suggests that a take home literacy bag positively impacts families' feelings towards school. Based on data, it can be concluded that the take home literacy bag program helped families feel less intimidated by school and view teachers as partners. The area of greatest gain in this study was the families' view of their relationship with their child's teacher. Each area researched showed a gain, indicating that the program had a positive impact on families' feelings towards school.

The first round of surveys conveyed that families had positive feelings toward school. Of the five choices offered, all families consistently marked strongly agree or agree. The second round of surveys revealed that families still had positive feelings about school as all answers were either agree or strongly agree. There is a noticeable increase with each question, indicating that families' positive feelings became stronger throughout the program. On each question, with the exception of one, every family either kept their answer the same or marked a lower (indicating strongly agree) answer. One family did go from "strongly agree" on the first survey to "agree" on the second survey on question two. Aside from this abnormality, all other data remained consistent.

The comment section divulged on family answers utilizing the Likert Scale. Each comment can be interpreted as positive. One family shared how they feel valued and respected. All other comments addressed the family's relationship with the teacher or feeling comfortable approaching the teacher. Comments convey that families feel comfortable with their child's teacher. Comments from the second set of surveys are more specific which could be attributed to greater knowledge of or increased involvement in their child's education.

Limitations of Study

Limitations of this study should be considered. Surveys could have been filled out by a different family member. Prior family relationships with the teacher and families' unique experiences with school may have influenced families as well. It is the goal of all teachers to build relationships with families throughout the year and can be done in a variety of ways. The teacher in this study did work to cultivate family relationships in a variety of ways. This may have influenced the results of this study.

Further Study

Data from this study suggests parents responded positively to the take home literacy bag program. Further study could be done regarding other factors that influence families' feelings towards school such as teachers' communication with families, teacher demeanor, home visits, or other common practices used to cultivate family relationships. Further research could be done with the take home literacy bag program and focus on family demographics to determine the, if any, effect it has on families' feelings towards school.

Conclusion

The findings from this study conclude that take home literacy bags have a positive effect on families' feelings towards school. Data collected from preliminary surveys indicates that families in this study felt positively towards school. Surveys given after the implementation of the program depict stronger positive feelings towards school. It can be inferred that the take home literacy bags program had a positive effect on families' feelings towards school.

References

- Brand, S. T., Marchand, J., Lilly, E., & Child, M. (2013). Home-school literacy bags for twenty-first century preschoolers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 42*, 163-170.
- Frank, N., Schneider, W. (2015). With a little help: Improving kindergarten children's vocabulary by enhancing the home literacy environment. *Reading and Writing, 28*(4), 491-508.
- Grande, Marya. (2004). Increasing parent participation and knowledge using home literacy bags. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 40*(2), 120-126.
- Hilado, A. V., Kallemyn, L., & Phillips, L. (2013). Examining understandings of parent involvement in early childhood programs. *Early Childhood Research & Practice, 15*(2).
- Huang, S. (2013). The use of literacy bags promotes parental involvement in chinese children's literacy learning in the english language. *Language Teaching Research, 17*(2), 251-268.
- Mui, S., & Anderson, J. (2008). At home with the Johars: Another look at family literacy as teachers work with increasing numbers of children and families from different culture groups, it is essential that they recognize and value the different ways that literacy is supported in homes and communities. *The Reading Teacher, 62*(3), 234.
- Roberts, T. A. (2008). Home storybook reading in primary or second language with preschool children: Evidence of equal effectiveness for second-language vocabulary acquisition. *Reading Research Quarterly, 43*(2), 103.
- Zeece, P. D., & Wallace, B. M. (2009). Books and good stuff: A strategy to building school to home literacy connections. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*, 35-42.

Appendix A

Family Survey

1. This program respects and values my family

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comment:

2. My child's teacher encourages me to be actively involved in my child's education

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comment:

3. I am involved in my child's education

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comment:

4. I have a good relationship with my child's teacher

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comment:

5. If I have a concern about my child's education, I feel comfortable bringing it up to my child's teacher.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Comment:

Appendix B

Letter to Families

Take Home Book Bags

Preschool Families- We are trying out a new program this year- take home book bags! They are a large ziploc baggie with a book inside, questions, and an activity or two. Each week your student will have the chance to take home a new book (if they return theirs from the last week). The questions and activities are simply suggestions, you do not have to do anything exactly as listed. The goal is to give students a different book to read at home and help develop a love of reading. Another goal is to help families get involved in their child's education in a meaningful way. Have fun with the activities and be creative!

Books will be sent home on Thursdays and I ask that you would return them by Tuesday so we can send another one home on Thursday with your child. If they do not return their bag, we will not send a new one home until they do return it. If you do not get to a book or all the activities, no big deal. This is not required but is just a resource for you at home. Let me know if you have any questions!

Mrs. Fernstrum

lfernstr@rvcsd.org