
LATINO LITERACY PROGRAM

Gates Early Education Center

Los Angeles, California

Draw a flower with petals for each of your children. In the center, write the child's name. In the petals, write positive descriptive words about the child. Do the same for each of your children. Now, share the flowers with your children and let them hear positive words about themselves.

These are the instructions from one of the activities in which families participated during the Latino Literacy Program at Gates Early Education Center in Los Angeles. The program aimed to enhance parents' literacy involvement with their children ages two-and-a-half to five by providing a cultural-based educational program for Spanish and English speaking parents.

About eight to ten parents, mostly mothers but some fathers, attended each two-hour session of the ten-week bilingual program that is led by a school-based bilingual teacher. A total of more than forty parents have attended the program since its inception. The Latino Family Literacy Project© provided the curriculum which is designed to be a fun integration of critical reflection and dialogue with reading, writing, and art projects. At the Gates Early Education Center, families followed the "Cuentos Familiares/ Family Stories" curriculum in which they discussed parenting concerns, education, family goals, and family traditions. Each weekly session centered on a different bilingual children's book including: *Carlos and the Squash Plant*, *A Gift from Papa Diego*, *The Spirit of Tio Fernando*, *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun*, and *Uncle Nacho's Hat*. Participants made a family tree, wrote a letter to a family member, composed a creative description of their children, and wrote a letter to their children.

Throughout the ten-week session, parents created family albums as a final project. The facilitators distributed disposable cameras to the parents at the second session. Parents were instructed to take pictures of family events for the next two to three weeks. Then facilitators developed the pictures, and parents made family albums by using construction paper, binders, stickers, templates, stamps, markers, and other materials. At the last day celebration, parents had the opportunity to present their albums to the class as a way to share their family events and cultures.

In addition to supporting literacy interactions between parents and children, the Latino Literacy Program increased family-school connections. Parents had an opportunity to share their family experiences with other parents and with school staff; and they strengthened their understanding of parents' roles in helping their young children learn at home. School staff noted an increase in parents' use of the parent/home lending library and an increase in information sharing during parent-teacher conferences. Parents in the Latino Literacy Program at Gateway Early Education Center involved their children in the program's fun learning activities while increasing their own confidence in providing learning activities for their children at home.

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