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# Bilingual Family Literacy Programming in West Michigan: Points of Alignment and Disconnect among Learners, Instructors, and Local Partners

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Bilingual Family Literacy Programming in West Michigan:

Points of Alignment and Disconnect among Learners, Instructors, and Local Partners

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**Abstract**

This research explores the beliefs and experiences of stakeholders in a family literacy program through the Literacy Center of West Michigan and Head Start for Kent County. The program is currently developing a curriculum to improve outcomes for learner specific goals. Therefore, one motivation behind this research is to analyze the goals, needs, and understandings for the multiple stakeholders within the program. On a national scale, there exists a need to better define the goals of family literacy programming in general. Points of alignment and disconnect for the participants in this study reflect realities that extend beyond the program at the Literacy Center of West Michigan. Goals for stakeholders are, after all, partly inspired by the family literacy needs that are observed on a regular basis for each participant.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with learners, tutors, and local partners that all participate in the program. The research questions included identifying the priorities for all stakeholders, how these priorities were aligned or disconnected with one another, and how stakeholders are communicating these priorities with each other. These questions inform program development by identifying the goals of these stakeholders in order to ensure coordinated efforts. Four learners and their tutors were interviewed, along with three representatives for Head Start for Kent County. The interviews were recorded and themes that emerged from the data were categorized. Results show that communication styles between stakeholders impacted alignment of goals (or lack thereof). Verbal communication and home to school connections were the most frequently identified goals for all stakeholders, but there were also unique goals for each group. These results indicate a need for open and direct dialogue about family literacy programming to align efforts and produce better outcomes for participants.

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Bilingual Family Literacy Programming in West Michigan: Points of Alignment

and Disconnect among Learners, Instructors, and Local Partners

The field of family literacy programming is relatively young when compared with other educational fields and bilingual family literacy programming is even younger. It is therefore useful to look at family literacy programs that have been operating for a considerable amount of time to see how programming has developed. The Literacy Center of West Michigan (LCWM) is a 33 year-old local nonprofit that focuses on serving adult learners by improving their literacy skills. Head Start is a federal program that serves communities by providing early childhood education to low-incomes families and Head Start for Kent County is the regional program connected to the LCWM. The two organizations have had a 12 year partnership program to improve family literacy outcomes in the region. The Literacy Center of West Michigan (LCWM) and Head Start for Kent County (also in West Michigan) have had a ten year partnership program. In the LCWM Adult Tutoring Program, Head Start recruits parents to study English literacy with a tutor through the LCWM. Additionally, monthly family activity nights are held for families to reinforce family literacy in order to increase English literacy outcomes for both parents and their children that attend Head Start. The author of this study has served for five years as the family literacy coordinator for the program and has been charged with developing a curriculum for the program. In studying a variety of family literacy curriculums, I noticed that there was immense diversity in the goals and missions across programs. Some programs prioritize generalized literacy improvement and focus primarily on literacy skill sets such as phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Others have family specific goals and focus on improving parents' abilities in choosing books for their children, navigating parent teacher conferences, or understanding school expectations. Anecdotally, I have observed in the LCWM

program that adult learners, tutors, and Head Start representatives also have varying understandings of the goals of the program. It is therefore crucial before embarking on curriculum development to better understand what individual stakeholders prioritize for this program to inform decisions moving forward, and also how these priorities and desired outcomes may align and disconnect from one another (Hung & Altschuld, 2013).

As there are multiple stakeholders with various priorities, these groups need to communicate their expectations effectively with one another. This communication is important both instructionally and logistically in maintaining data, ensuring that pairs are able to meet, and organizing the recruitment of parents. Consequently, the thesis also sought answers to how stakeholders are communicating their needs to one another. Since the introduction of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, more nationwide attention has been given to family literacy by educational stakeholders. This law provided more funding opportunities for family literacy programming, but also required accountability reporting for participants. Therefore the indicators for success in these programs require discussion and negotiation for all parties. This clarification can be a complicated task as constant changes in national family literacy programs have led to swift curriculum decisions as multiple stakeholders define the goals of such programs very differently with limited precedent as programs are often relatively new. It has been acknowledged by researchers in the field as recently as 2007 that many programs "naively work to 'help' them [parents] become literate as if the families had no literacy practices and were living in a vacuum" (Reyes & Torres, 2007). This deficit model approach to family literacy insinuates that parents and family do not have rich linguistic lives in their L1. Consequently, this understanding has often led to curriculum that is uninformed by the needs and experiences of parents. Indeed, Rolander concluded that at times

"top-down curriculum [runs] counter to their social realities." (Rolander, 2018). To help remedy this concern, there has been a growing trend towards inquiry-based family literacy programming (Barza & von Suchodoletz, 2016; Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001; Zentella, 2005), which involves the inclusion of parents in guiding their own family literacy education through their daily experiences. Due to these rapid shifts in trends and the diversity in experiences for all stakeholders, it is crucial to align efforts in order to ensure the quality of the LCWM program.

In addition to these shifts, the recent federal adoption of WIOA (Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act) in 2015 has led the focus of adult education providers to workforce development and educational attainment of the parents. The implementation of WIOA addressed the expiration of Workforce Investment Act and considered many important issues facing programs supported by these funds, such as addressing barriers for vulnerable populations, expanding job training opportunities, creating employment-based educational opportunities, and aligning policies and programming seeking to help the workforce. While these efforts are collectively beneficial, there is very little mention of family literacy among the emphasis on workforce development. As educational agencies such as the LCWM receive funding from WIOA, this shift impacts the reporting that is required of the LCWM. While the LCWM did not have to previously report on employment for parents who were traditionally not in the workforce, it is now are required to report on all learner's employment status changes. Furthermore, memoranda regarding WIOA state that family literacy programming should lead to job training, job advancement, and economic self-sufficiency for family members (U.S Department of Education, 2015). Specifically, this statement refers to parents that are facing barriers that could be both sociocultural (i.e. linguistic barriers) and logistical (i.e. childcare). While these goals are meaningful for families and expand upon the previous WIA intentions, the

change of language in program purpose is immediately evident as it maximizes workforce

development concerns and minimizes concerns related directly to family literacy programming.

In fact, members of the Department of Education shared concern that this transition would lead

to less of a focus on parent-based literacy and could limit abilities to serve those not currently in

the workforce (Department of Education, 2015).

As well as the implementation of WIOA, there have been national political changes that

have impacted family literacy practices for literacy councils and public education providers. The

federally funded nationwide Even Start Family Literacy Program recently ended its

programming in 2012. The Even Start Family Literacy Program offered classes to parents who

wanted to improve their child's literacy and also a home visit component that involved building a

bridge between home and school life. Due to the ending of such a well-recognized program and

questions about the benefits of such programs, many other related programs have been evaluated

under greater scrutiny and discussions about lowering funding for these programs is prevalent

(Clymer et al., 2017). This includes other national programs such as Reading is Fundamental,

which has been a well-known literacy program since 1966. With funds consistently being

reevaluated, many family literacy programs are operating with a wide variety of funding models

and are therefore following a greater variety of program models (Soliman, 2018). For example,

some are operating as partnerships between educational institutions for children and adult

education providers while others are entities that serve parents and children collectively. Within

this simple dichotomy, there is even greater variety in what these programs consider to be the

goals of family literacy programming.

WIA, which set standards for accountability within funded programs, suggested that

family literacy programs provide interactive literacy activities between parents and their

children, training in parenting activities, literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (Www2.ed.gov, 2019). In practice, however, some programs providing family literacy education exclusively teach language and literacy skills to parents with the hopes that parents will reinforce these lessons in the home. For example, the LCWM provides English as an Additional Language teaching to local parents, developing skills such as vocabulary knowledge, grammar awareness, and comprehension strategies. The funding for this program requires only 25% of their activity to be devoted to family literacy skills specifically. Interestingly, recent reports from the Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS) demonstrate that less than 300 parents engaged in state funded family literacy programming across Michigan for the 2017-2018 program year. Considering that more than 100 family literacy learners were served at the Literacy Center of West Michigan alone in 2017-2018, this strikingly low number raises the question of how other family literacy programs are being funded. Additionally, one wonders how these differences in funding could lead to different frameworks for family literacy. One of the difficulties in receiving state funding for this programming is that the state will only accept a limited number of commercially available tests for enrollment purposes. This concern is exacerbated by the reality that while there are a multitude of commercially available tests for adult life and workplace literacy (e.g., Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, Industrial Reading Test, Test of English for International Communication), it is difficult to find any assessment that has been developed specifically for family literacy skills as the definition of family literacy education is so broad.

As many funding sources rely on assessment tools to judge the effectiveness of an educational program, family literacy programming is at a disadvantage with limited means of

demonstrating development. The LCWM receives the results of school assessment of kindergarten readiness and ESL skills for adults, and as part of record keeping and program evaluation, family literacy programs will often report on language and literacy habits in the home and how those have improved after receiving services. This data can be problematic in that it is often subject to parents' interpretation and skills could have improved for a range of other reasons outside of the program's influence. This differs from assessing skills taught specifically for family literacy programming and parents' understanding of their role in their child's learning. These are the skills that WIA initially saw as the goals for family literacy programming. It could also be useful in promoting family literacy to assess parents' understanding of techniques that can benefit raising a bilingual family (Martin, 2017; Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Cunningham, 2011; Grosjean, 2009). Assessment can act as a tool to align goals for instruction and therefore the lack of assessment in the field further highlights the need for this research.

One purpose of this thesis is to investigate how community stakeholders, tutors, and learners prioritize their various goals for family literacy programming. It has long been the goal of the LCWM to develop family literacy curriculum that is informed by best practices for both family life education and English language learning. Due to the program's reliance on volunteer tutors, this goal has not always been realized as it relies on volunteer tutors with a variety of experiences and pedagogical backgrounds. Therefore, our curriculum has been in frequent flux. Learners come to the program with a variety of expectations and needs that have changed throughout the years. In particular, the LCWM staff has noted that citizenship has become a more frequent goal in the past five years. Learners' goals also develop as they participate in the program, as their literacy needs develop, and as their children get older. It is crucial to critically analyze where tutors, learners, and program coordinators stand in their expectations to lead to

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more effective programming.

      In addition to the benefits this study can provide for the LCWM, this research can also assist other local family literacy programs, the statewide efforts towards improving literacy rates, and the developing dialogue about the field at the national level (Chance & Sheneman, 2012; Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, Herppich, 2011; Michigan State Board of Education, 1999).

## Exploratory Study

Prior to this research, I conducted an exploratory study to address the needs of learners at the LCWM (Rodgers, 2018). That qualitative case study of four parents in the family literacy program aimed to address their thoughts on raising bilingual families. The information gathered from the four participants illuminated a need for more information from a wider range of families and stakeholders. It also acted as a catalyst for discussions on further developing the curriculum for our family literacy program participants.

In last year's exploratory study, I conducted interviews with the four parents around their family's bilingualism. The study also explored the social influences including parents' experiences with bilingualism in the local community and with their parent partners. The final topic addressed during the interviews concerned the actions that families were currently taking to achieve their family's language goals. The participant's responses were analyzed for patterns and possible reasons their responses differed.

Parents shared diverse expectations for the program and what they hoped to gain through their participation. It was immediately apparent that parents were inspired to become bilingual for a variety of purposes including helping other speakers of their L1 and improving their child's future opportunities. Concerns included their children growing up with negative opinions of their L1, while parents who had found positive L1 communities (such as dual immersion schools) shared no such concerns. While parents shared that schools had positive responses to their own bilingualism, they also shared mixed feelings and even discriminatory experiences in their local communities. Three of the parents spoke only in their L1 with their spouse and the same three shared that they rarely spoke about bilingualism with their spouse. Some families engaged in L1 activities including reading in the first language or teaching their child how to write in their first

language. The one parent who spoke French as an L1 mentioned that it was difficult for her to find books for her child in French, but acknowledged that the community had a positive response to her L1. Meanwhile, the three Spanish speaking parents shared that they could easily find resources but had less positive experiences in the community when speaking Spanish. Collectively, all of this information indicated the diversity in experiences for bilingual families in the LCWM program and the complex relationships that families have with their L1 and English.

As a follow-up to that exploratory study, the current study aims to expand on those effort by (a) reaching a wider range of stakeholders, including more fathers as learners (b) exploring the perceived effectiveness of communication between stakeholders in how they express their priorities, and (c) examining how these priorities align. The present study will explore how participants' beliefs about raising bilingual families lead to their prioritizing of literacy goals and communicating these priorities while in our program.

**Literature Review**

**Policies and Trends**

In analyzing the national and local policies that have influenced family literacy programming, it is beneficial to take a historical view of the field and its shifting trends. In the 1990s, it was argued that many family literacy programs often taught school values to the family in what was called a "transmission of school practices model" (Neuman et al., 1996). This model was focused on providing adult learners with prepackaged literacy practices that were not necessarily reflective of sociocultural realities of the parents. Parents were provided with parenting suggestions and reading ideas that did not account for cultural parenting beliefs and, in particular, parents' roles in their child's schooling. More recent work in the field suggests acknowledging how parent's beliefs and practices can impact their children's behaviors in both positive and negative ways (Lee & Bowen, 2006). For instance, Lee and Bowen identified how different strategies such as homework assistance, discussions about school, and school presence impact learners with different demographics in unique ways. Neuman's research along with Lee and Bowens suggest that culturally embedded lessons require time getting to know families to create individualized materials for learners. However, funding has been identified as a struggle for these programs and funders often look to expedient services that result in quantifiable assessment of improvement. For example, higher scores on standardized testing are often requested as a tool to see growth in learners for grants that are written for literacy programs. Additionally, a wide range in proficiency and ability in English mean that even if ELL parents may feel comfortable expressing their needs or programmatic desires, they may also feel limited in their ability to do so.

Reyes and Torres suggest a model to assist in getting to know participants more

effectively that can support instructors who have limited resources and learners with their

language concerns. This model is known as "culture circles" and involves parent participants

working with a coordinator to collectively discuss their needs as a family (Reyes & Torres,

2007). While this coordinator may not act as an instructor, they can share the learners L1 or

similar cultural background in order to more effectively engage families. Others have done more

recent work in implementing sociocultural practices in these settings and suggest problem-based

learning methodology (e.g., Iddings, 2009). Problem-based learning involves engaging learners

in instruction that allows them to address social problems or issues that they encounter in

everyday life. As family literacy participants frequently encounter demanding language and

literacy requests on a daily basis, this program is particularly appropriate. In light of trends in K-

12 education that show movement towards problem-based learning, it seems to suggest possible

alignment of best learning practices for both children and their parents.

This shift from pre-fabricated lessons to culturally aware and reactive practices has been

made explicit in recent work by Hurtado-Vivas and Torres (2011). They identify the previous

transmission of school model as representing colonization and how this model has harmed

Latino families in the U.S. in particular. For example, they acknowledge a trend that has been

documented since 1998 in which family literacy programs are often intended to promote

homework assistance in the home. At the same time, teachers may send material that is not

taught in the school with the hopes that parents and families will assist their children. This

practice has been documented as having multiple damaging effects as Latino families may have

limited resources in terms of time or language abilities to be of assistance. If parents are not able

to provide this supplemental assistance, then stereotypes regarding Latino parents ("I give them

(parents) spelling words, but they don't review them at home," was one statement from a teacher

in the article indicating distrust in Latino families' abilities or desire to assist their children) are reinforced by the school staff. Subsequently, the educational gap for Latino families widens by well-intended family literacy practices. The alternative is to engage families in material that acknowledges multiple literacies as beneficial in their work to develop new literacy skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Essentially, this means acknowledging that parents are able to express and make meaning of information provided in various ways (oral storytelling, digital information, paralinguistic cues, etc.) regardless of their ability to help with written tasks for homework.

Policies regarding early childhood education, K-12 education, and adult education almost certainly impact decisions in family literacy programming. Recently, there has been a call to action in the field of early childhood education to engage in social justice education that has been inspired by work by Freire and his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968). Social justice education also requires getting to know families and communities and their unique needs and working to build relationships with learners in any educational setting. At the same time, shifts in standardizing educational efforts and accountability through quantifiable data are at odds with the increasingly diverse students and families engaged in education (Schoorman, 2011). Along these lines, Schoorman calls for change in teacher preparation coursework and suggests that more critical pedagogy processes and skills should be provided for future instructors. This belief in the power of teacher preparation coursework and the need for empowering teachers through these methods has also been mentioned in previous work (Pelo, 2008; Wiedeman, 2002).

As tutors in the family literacy program are only given 12 hours of initial instruction, it can be difficult to accomplish such a shift in thinking in such a short time. However, the critical

model can be moved from theoretical to practical if tutors are equipped with examples of this process in action. Schoorman (2011) provides one example of a family literacy practitioner who shared a family based problem regarding Medicare and responses to health concerns with staff members. The staff then worked together to create culture-based lessons that were informed by family experiences and realities. In another lesson in the same program, parents are encouraged to initiate a meeting with their child's teacher and work on developing questions to ask the teacher. In this way, parents are treated as advocates for their child's learning and for their own beliefs about parent-school relationships. These types of strategies point at the need for improved communication among all family literacy program stakeholders.

**Family Literacy Programming in Practice**

The diverse sources of resource availability for family literacy programs leads to differences in how each program functions. One of the most precious resources, time, can depend on a number of factors. From a logistical standpoint, families may not be able to commit to frequent classes or to long stretches of time. Additionally, instructors and providers may not have the funds available to offer extended classes. While the LCWM adult tutoring program operates on a minimum of six months for learners and tutors, there are programs that operate within a much shorter time frame. Such programs are required to prioritize certain strategies with families. One such family literacy program exists in a Chinese community located in Toronto, Canada and operates for only eight weeks (Zhang et al., 2010). This program adheres to what is commonly known as the Parent and Child Together model (PACT) in that the lessons starts with the family learning collectively, followed by the parents and children learning separately, and ends with the family coming together again to share what they have learned. In addition to this model, this program had multiple components that led to its success and to retaining families.

One component that was relatively unique when compared to other family literacy programming is that the parent component was conducted in Chinese. This led to parents interacting with other parents about raising bilingual children in their own language. The research for this program indicated that parents found it incredibly useful to be able to connect in their L1 and to speak with fellow parents in the same context. Additionally, the families were not provided with school tasks or homework to do, but with realistic literacy activities that they could engage in together in the home. These included reading unassigned books in their first language or literacy games that allowed the families to engage in their L1 or in English. Their research, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative results, revealed positive results for both parents and children in their literacy development. However, they noted that the children of mothers with lower education levels advanced slower than those with mothers who had attained higher education. One can conclude from this that family literacy programming should address the concern of the adult's educational experience and acknowledge the program's role in furthering the parent's formal education.

Other national programs exist within an eight week time frame, but their structure and focus differ from the LCWM program. Wessels (2014) conducted research with a family literacy program for L1 Spanish speaking families who were also raising bilingual families. This qualitative study assessed the program through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and field notes. An eight week session was essentially organized into four sections: importance of the L1, building parent-child language and literacy routines, finding resources, and writing as a family. The focus here was more on child development and acting as an advocate for one's family. These goals differ from other programs in which learning literacy skills commonly taught in an ESL classroom are the dominant focus. Findings of Wessel's study shed light on the importance

of parent's learning more about how the L1 can be of great benefit for their children. This respect of the L1 and its acknowledgment aligns well with Zhang, Pelletier, and Doyle's (2010) research and how this can benefit parents in family literacy programs. The program for Wessel's study was also found to be beneficial because it encouraged parents to practice the routines as they learned them. One particular routine involved asking questions to children as they are reading to encourage discussion and thinking processes. Many parents were previously watching their child read, but not participating in the process and were unsure of how to read with their child effectively. These language and literacy routines could be accomplished in either the L1 or English, but led to the parents and children engaging more with each other and with text. The third theme that emerged was the importance of time for families and how time as a resource can be difficult and can limit language and literacy time in the home. This clearly demonstrates how programming should consider the time restrictions of parents and families and how families can get the most out of short-term programming. Table 1 summarizes a few of the common program models for family literacy and the LCWM program would be categorized as a partner based program based on this list. This list is not exhaustive and programs are continuing to develop and find unique ways to address the needs of both parents and learners. However, this list does address the many programs that are available in the region and those that are present at many family literacy program conferences and events. There are additional advantages and disadvantages to each program model and therefore programs have to decide which model best suit their own mission or goals. In addition to alignment with individual missions, programs have to decide which model is the most financially realistic as different programs require more or less staff members as well as different types of resources. The LCWM family literacy program operates as a partnership program between the LCWM and Head Start for Kent County.

Table 1

*Common Family Literacy Program Models*

| | |
|---|---|
| Home Based Programs | Instructor meets parent in the home to teach literacy skills |
| Partner Based Programs | Partnership between adult education provider and children's education provider |
| Community Based Programs | Nonprofit or public education facility where both parents and children learn literacy skills |
| Add-On Programs | Family literacy programs that act as a component of a larger literacy council or public education provider |
| Parent-Only Programs | Parents are taught lessons about family literacy, but children are not taught or evaluated through the agency |

**Family Literacy Programming Communication**

As discussed previously, families, providers, and funders may have differing opinions on what they expect from a family literacy program. There has been quite a bit of research demonstrating that communication between parents and schools can increase the academic success of children in K-12 institutions (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Guo & Mohan, 2008; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). Many family literacy programs are guided by the desire to help increase success for children in K-12 schooling, but ELL parents are also intended to benefit from these

programs. Therefore, the current study also explores how participants are communicating with one another. From my own anecdotal experiences, Head Start representatives and tutors will often have limited interactions, unless tutors provide instruction at Head Start sites. Meanwhile, learners and tutors have routine meetings for two hours a week and therefore are communicating on a regular basis. There have also been numerous studies on the benefits that home and school communication can have for ELL parents and their children (Allen 2009; Bermúdez, Kanaya, & Santiago, 2017; Mapp & Kuttner 2013; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999).

Mapp and Kuttner (2013) went even further in their work by developing a framework for parent involvement in schools. Their findings, after studying schools that adopted their framework, indicate that communication among parents about school engagement along with communication among school staff about parent engagement were indicators of success for students. Bermudez, Kanaya, and Santiago's recent work indicates how attempts at communication between schools and bilingual parents needs to be made more effective by informing parents of their child's unique educational needs. Children in bilingual households may seem perfectly fluent in English at home which can lead to confusion when schools send home reports indicating that they are struggling with their English abilities.

Bilingual family literacy programming research regarding the benefits of aligning goals and improving communication motivates the questions that are asked in this research. As this is a field that intersects many different fields including linguistics, education, family studies, and childhood development, it is useful to get a thorough idea of what the literature in these fields has to offer. An aim of the present study is to help add to this growing literature and provide insight into family literacy programming as an emerging field of its own.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this thesis should provide answers for how learners, tutors, and Head Start representatives are prioritizing components of programming and communicating these priorities with one another. Once these questions have been answered, we can have a better idea of what matters to stakeholders and how communication can impact the alignment of goals to lead to improved outcomes for the LCWM program. The following three major research questions were identified for this study and were used to guide the development of the methodology:

1. What do learners, instructors, and program partners prioritize in family literacy programming?

2. How are these three parties communicating with each other and how are they conveying their priorities and concerns?

3. What are the points of alignment and disconnect regarding each group's opinion on family literacy programming through the Literacy Center of West Michigan and Head Start for Kent County?

The research questions for this study were inspired by both the previous exploratory study and by literature on family literacy planning. The exploratory study highlighted the concern for and lack of resources for some families, or at least the lack of resource awareness. Consequently, an overarching question in this study focuses on prioritizing the needs for each of the participants. The issue of disconnect between providers' and learners' needs has also been investigated previously (Shanahan, 1995). Interview questions for this study were developed to observe the extent and potential causes for that disconnect, and how stakeholder groups in general are connected. In this effort, participants were asked to identify their own priorities so

that I could compare answers to one another independently as opposed to asking pairs directly if they perceived alignment or disconnect. Rather than simply distinguish the differences in the priorities that each party identified for themselves, I wanted to better understand the perceptions of other parties' motivations and actions between each of the three groups of participants. These discoveries can lead to programmatic improvement at the LCWM by ensuring that stakeholders are moving in similar directions and to assist in addressing potential disconnect between different stakeholder groups. In addition to this, the study also aims to identify more themes to consider within the growing field of family literacy programming.

As the exploratory study indicated (along with several previous studies, e.g., De Gaetano, 2007, Wessels, 2014, Zhang, 2010), parents often fear that their children will reject the L1 in the process of acquiring the L2. Tutors often feel frustrated that learners are not practicing English with their children, but learners feel the pressure to maintain the ability and pride in the L1 for their children. Learners and tutors will frequently share this concern with their coordinator, but are often ineffective at explaining it to each other as evidenced by their disappointment in actions being taken on either side. Some learners comment that their tutor often asks them to practice with their family even though they want to use the L1 with their family, and tutors share frustration that the learner is not practicing English in the home with English speaking family members that they have access to for practice. Therefore, this study also seeks to understand how stakeholders are communicating their needs and expectations to one another. As there are multiple agendas and needs for family literacy programming, it is crucial to look at how communication efforts (or the lack thereof) have addressed such diverse expectations.

**Methodology**

The following section outlines the methodology used in this study to address the research questions. The methods were informed by needs analysis discussion by Nation and Macalister (2010), Brown (1995), my own experiences as the Family Literacy Coordinator at the Literacy Center of West Michigan for five years, and previous policy and literature on developments and challenges in family literacy planning. Semi-structured interviews were used with individual stakeholders to establish patterns and themes from their responses and compared across stakeholder groups. Four tutors, four learners, and three Head Start representatives were interviewed, generating approximately four and half hours of audio data recorded. Through this process, common themes were identified and tabulated, and select segments were transcribed for use in quotes.

## Context

The Literacy Center of West Michigan serves learners within the greater Grand Rapids area of Michigan. Both native English speakers and ELLS are served, although 88% of the learners are English language learners currently. All of the learners are adults and are reading at 9th grade level or below as identified by the National Reporting System educational functioning levels. Two family literacy programming options are made available to parents within the LCWM (see Table 2 for details). In one program, AmeriCorps members provide ESL and parenting instruction to adults. This program serves parents of K-5 children and is held at their child's school during the school day and evenings. The program operates over the summer in local spaces such as churches or community centers. Alternatively, the Adult Tutoring Program serving families is a tutoring option for parents to be assisted with a number of literacy related goals including citizenship, workplace literacy, health literacy, and family literacy. My current

role with the program is the family literacy coordinator within the Adult Tutoring Program.

Table 2 outlines the differences between the two literacy programs that serve families within the

Literacy Center of West Michigan.

Table 2

*Literacy Center of West Michigan Family Literacy Programs*

|  | Family Literacy Program | Adult Tutoring Program |
|---|---|---|
| Learners | Parents of K-8 students | Parents of Head Start students |
| Instructors | AmeriCorps members | Local volunteer tutors |
| Length of Instruction | 11 week requirement | 6 month requirement |
| Weekly Time | 6 hours a week | 2 hours a week |
| Family Literacy Instruction | Classes teach family literacy | Family Literacy Workshops |

My role as the family literacy coordinator within the Adult Tutoring Program is to assist

in the recruitment, enrollment, and pairing of the tutors and learners that were participants in this

program. In the past 2017-2018 program year, I served 101 pairs in my role and 38 of these pairs

were individuals in the family literacy instruction program with Head Start for Kent County.

Tutors in the Adult Tutoring Program meet with parents in local settings that are close to their

homes and parents can choose the time they would like to meet. This accommodates parents and

limits the barriers that transportation and time restrictions often create. The Adult Tutoring

Program is designed specifically for parents of Head Start children that are from birth to age five

as it operates through a partnership with Head Start for Kent County. Head Start is a national

program initiated during the war on poverty era that provides comprehensive preschool for low

income families in the U.S. In both of the programs at LCWM, parents are invited to monthly

Family Activity Nights in which the Parent and Child Together model (as discussed in the

literature review) is used to provide instruction on activities that can be done in the home.

Parents in the Adult Tutoring Program are typically from low-income households, a prerequisite for their children to be enrolled in Head Start programming. Low-income household status is connected to the lower educational backgrounds noted for many of the parents. While the Head Start program primarily served Latino families in the past, the refugee population has grown dramatically and the demographics have shifted over the past few years. Burmese refugees were the largest demographic that we served in 2016-2017 and this population of learners continues to grow. Meanwhile, the Congolese population is also growing quickly in the region, as Grand Rapids is currently the most requested location for Congolese refugees when making resettlement decisions. West Michigan is noted for having a long history of refugee resettlement programs through the numerous Christian agencies in the area. Indeed, Michigan accepted the second highest number of Syrian refugees in 2017 and has had one of the highest rates of refugee acceptance per capita in the nation (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Language proficiency differs drastically from limited or interrupted formal education (LIFE) learners to learners that may have graduated with a degree in their home country and have built a foundation in English after being in the United States for quite some time. Instruction in the classroom based program with AmeriCorps members is often structured by leveled classes, while the Adult Tutoring Program instruction is (presumably) individually tailored to help individual students to address these needs.

Many parents in the adult tutoring program anecdotally express the desire to speak English "perfectly" or for their children to know the "right way" to speak English. Many parents also desire for their children to maintain their L1 for a variety of reasons, such as maintaining cultural heritage and enhancing future job opportunities (discussed in detail in the exploratory

study, Rodgers, 2018). Although the previous exploratory study did not engage parents about their use of language and literacy in parenting, there were notable themes that emerged from discussions with parents in the program for the exploratory study. Many parents shared they were appreciative of receiving information regarding child development and learning more about patterns for children in their language development both in their L1 and L2. Parent concerns in the exploratory study also included language loss or their child's negative perception of their L1 or L2. While the focus of this research was the parent's priorities and the priorities of other stakeholders, it is important to note the information shared in the exploratory study. Naturally, early childhood development is a focus for the Head Start representatives and the educational development of their own children is certainly a focus for the parent learners.

**Participants**

At the time of this study, there were eight family literacy pairs that had been working together for a year or longer. Ten other learner and tutor pairs were active at the time of the study, but had been meeting with one another for less than a year. These eight tutors and eight learners were recruited for this study, but only four of the pairs were able to participate in the study. In addition to the tutoring pairs, four staff members at Head Start for Kent County were also recruited for the study based on their participation in the partnership as administrators or family advocates, but one was unable to participate. These participants included one individual working in the central office of Head Start for Kent County (position withheld to maintain anonymity) and two family advocates. It should be noted that I engage Head Start for Kent County representatives in regular conversation about programmatic improvements due to the requirements for their positions.

The family participants that participated in this study included individuals that have been

enrolled in our tutoring program for at least a year. These learners have more history with the program and therefore their answers were predicted to be more informed. There was also an attempt to interview a diverse group of parents that represented the diversity of the parents at the LCWM (in the previous exploratory study, nearly all of the participants were Latino mothers whose first language was Spanish). In addition to linguistic and ethnic diversity, the involvement of fathers in this study was also prioritized. At a First Steps for Kent County conference last year for early childhood education, it was routinely discussed that the language and research in the field disproportionately targets the mothers and their interactions with the child (First Steps for Kent County, 2018). This factor was also noted as a limitation of the previous pilot study (Rodgers, 2018). All of the parents were older than eighteen (as required by the Literacy Center of West Michigan's funding sources), had children that were ages 0-5, and live in a lower income household (as required by Head Start of Kent County and defined by national poverty guidelines). In order to engage with parents that represented all language abilities, participation was not limited by National Reporting System Educational Functioning Levels (NRS EFLs). Table 3 illustrates the demographics of the learner participants in the study and pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity. Tutors and learners with matching first initials work together. For example, Alejandra and Ann are partners in learning together.

Table 3

*Learner Participants Demographics*

| Learner | Gender | Age | Home Country | L1 | Time in Program | Children's Ages |
|---------|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|
| Alejandra | Female | 45 | Mexico | Spanish | 1 yr, 3 months | 16, 9, 4 |
| Benito | Male | 39 | Guatemala | Spanish | 1 yr, 4 months | 9, 7, 5, 4, 2 |
| Claudia | Female | 35 | Mexico | Spanish | 1 yr, 4 months | 12, 10, 3, 2 |
| Daniel | Male | 37 | El Salvador | Spanish | 1 yr, 3 months | 9, 4, 3 |

In order to be included in this study, tutors had to have been volunteers in our program for at least a year. All of the tutors that were recruited had also been in partnership with their particular learner for at least a year. Fortunately, the learners that each of the tutors have worked with were also the learners interviewed for this study. While our family literacy program assists learners who have children in Head Start for Kent County, many of our learners have a wide range of goals including employment and citizenship, among others. As stated previously, it is quite possible that family literacy has not been a part of their lessons (despite this being an explicit goal of the program). All of the tutors in our program also need to be 18 years or older, have at least a GED, and need to have attended 12 hours of tutor training at LCWM. Tutors that were recruited for this study had varying degrees of pedagogical experience and experience working with English language learners. The demographic data for the tutors is presented in Table 4 below and the letters align with the learners in the previous table that the tutor has been working alongside. The ages of the learner's children has been included as a part of this demographic table as the perception parents had for their role in their child's education was predicted to be somewhat dependent on the age of their children.

Table 4

*Tutor Participant Demographics*

| Tutor | Gender | Age | Employment | College Ed. | Program Time | Pair Time |
|-------|--------|-----|------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| Ann | Female | 62 | Retired | Graduate | 1 yr | 1 yr |
| Bonnie | Female | 69 | Retired | Graduate | 2 yrs, 3 mths | 1 yr, 1 mth |
| Carol | Female | 62 | Teacher | Graduate | 2 yrs, 3 mths | 2 yrs, 3 mths |
| Donald | Male | 52 | Entrepreneur | Undergraduate | 2 yrs, 4 mths | 9 mths |

The final group of participants in the study were the three Head Start representatives.

Their demographic data has not been collected by the LCWM and it was not collected for the purpose of this study in order to preserve anonymity. However, all three members have been active with Head Start for Kent County for at least a year or longer and were chosen due to their role in the partnership. Lucy has been in the program for the shortest amount of time, but has an administrative role in coordinating the partnership with the LCWM and other community partners of Head Start for Kent County. Melanie and C are both family advocates that have served at the Head Start sites with the most ELL parents. They assist with the recruitment of parents in the program and address issues that arise for families much like a school social worker. In addition to this, family advocates have also attended family activity nights and therefore can provide insight to this component of the program.

**Data Collection**

The recall prompt methodology was utilized during the interviews to assist the learners (all ELLs) as suggested by other researchers who have interviewed beginning level English speakers (Yeong, Ismail, Ismail, & Hamzah, 2018). This method involves asking participants to recall an experience prior to asking more direct questions that I hope to answer. Findings in studies with interviews involving children have shown that this assists in ensuring more accurately detailed answers in the interview and does not limit responses in the same way that opening with direct questions can (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007). In order to maintain consistency in the methods, the recall prompt interview method was also utilized for the Head Start for Kent County representatives and tutors. To illustrate, stakeholders were asked to share their most positive experiences in the program and then elaborate their responses by identifying specifically what about that experience was positive or effective for them. While all parent learners were able to use English to respond to questions adequately, I

spoke in Spanish when necessary to clarify the question. Learners did not make the request for this information to be asked in Spanish, but the interviewer responded to verbal displays of confusion by utilizing Spanish when necessary.

The semi-structured nature of the interview ensured that focus was maintained on certain themes to be able to align analysis of these themes as they arise from the different stakeholders. Although the recall prompts led to more information than anticipated, which was helpful, interviewees would occasionally stray from the focus of the intended questions. Questions for each of the groups are based on the democratic philosophy and discrepancy philosophy (Brown 1995). The democratic philosophy involves using more open-ended questions to encourage more dialogue. While the discrepancy philosophy traditionally refers to observing the discrepancy between where learners are and where instructors feel they should be, it is used slightly differently in this context. The discrepancy of interest in this study is not concerning the learner's abilities, but rather the discrepancy between learner goals and the goals of other stakeholders.

Subcategories were developed within each research question in order to align the research questions with the variables that have been identified in previous research, and then with the interview questions for each participant group (See the Appendix for a detailed mapping between research questions, subvariables, and semi-structured interview questions). The first subcategory of research question 1 (1A, as illustrated in the Appendix) involves the stakeholder's perception of the priority of the program as it is currently operating. One aim of this question was to see the lens with which each stakeholder views the family literacy program. Perceptions of program goals would influence responses across the interview questions and serve to establish a foundation for what brought each stakeholder to the program. This was also a direct way to ask individuals to identify their priorities by identifying themes. Learners were asked specifically

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why they joined the program. In alignment with this question, subcategory (1B) aims to identify how this program differs from others to better understand their priorities in choosing a family literacy program. This was an indirect way to ask about priorities as some may have provided less nuanced answers for subcategory 1A as participants were directly asked to state their goals in the program. The third and fourth subcategories comprising priorities (1C and 1D) both required participants to identify valuable and effective family literacy program components from their own experiences. The final subcategory (1E) asked how these priorities are acted upon and this provided insight into whether stakeholders' actions aligned with their spoken priorities.

After establishing the priorities and actions of each stakeholder group, research question #2 sought to explore how these priorities and actions are being communicated between learners, tutors, and the program administrators. The first subcategory of communication (2A) focused on the methods of communication that are currently used between the stakeholder groups. ELLs are often limited in their ability to approach the pragmatics of making requests or advocating for their education (Myers, 2018) and this may be especially true when interacting with volunteer tutors. Learners are encouraged to contact their literacy coordinator at the Literacy Center of West Michigan if they have issues with their tutor. Communication issues with different parties involved in the learner's instruction can occur if tutors and learners provide conflicting information. For example, a learner may share that they find material too easy or simplistic and yet tutors may report that learners are struggling with the same material. Therefore, the first subcategory (2A) was included to reveal perceptions of how communication is being approached by the pair.

Parents commented in the exploratory study that they felt supported by their schools in their family's bilingualism and commented positively on interactions with their child's teachers.

However, it is a reality that parent learners in the program are not engaged in regular communication with the Literacy Center of West Michigan in the same way. Additionally, tutors have limited interaction with Head Start for Kent County through the LCWM program. Therefore, the second subcategory for communication (2B) aimed to establish whether all parties see an advantage to increasing communication with one another and how they feel this might impact programming success. As one of the goals of the research is to improve the program at the LCWM, the final subcategory associated with communication (2C) explicitly elicited what can be done to improve communication with the LCWM.

Research question 3 aims to explore the points of alignment and disconnect between learners, tutors, and program coordinators. This was accomplished by both coding and comparing the previous answers that each stakeholder had provided as well as directly asking about each stakeholder's perception of alignment between one another. Each sub-question was organized uniquely for each of these three stakeholder groups and aimed to bridge the gap between learners, tutors, and organizational providers, as there is an observed disconnect between lesson plans in Family Activity Nights, tutors' essays on reasons they joined the program (documentation we typically collect), and what learners state they need during their intakes. These questions were designed to determine whether the stakeholders sense such disconnect, or are actively making connections and shifting to fit the needs of one another. For example, one question asks stakeholders to share what experiences have led them to their conclusions about what other stakeholders prioritize and another requires them to explicitly state whether they sense alignment or disconnect to that self-identified priority. The appendix shows the actual interview questions in their entirety.

**Interview Process**

In an attempt to arrange interviews to take place at an undistracted time for the learners, they were contacted during the day as their children were in school. All of the participants were either not in the workforce, worked second shifts, or had a changing schedule and therefore were not prevented from participation due to work. Learners were provided with information about the study and then were contacted over the phone to request their participation in the study. IRB clearance had been obtained through GVSU prior to this stage and this information along with a dialogue for participation agreement was shared with all of the participants. Due to transportation restrictions for learners, phone conversations were more feasible than in-person interviews. Learner interviews ranged from 15-20 minutes and were recorded by the interviewer by placing the individual on speaker phone (in a private room) and utilizing another recording device, with participants' permission. During the interview, notes were taken on the responses to assist the interviewer in clarifying any misunderstandings that could have occurred during the interview. Following this, the recordings were listened to in order to identify recurring themes and select and transcribe the most relevant and revealing quotations to support and describe frequent themes that emerged. Each interview was listened to a third time to ensure that quotes were collected accurately and to reaffirm any patterns identified across the data. For example, a tutor and learner pair both used the phrase "a little bit" when referring to their communication regarding goals. While this phrase was heard during the first two listenings of the recordings, it was not until the third and final listening that this similarity was acknowledged and documented as a source of interest.

Tutors were contacted to evaluate their time preference and all shared that they were available during the LCWM work hours (Weekdays, 9:00 - 5:00) and therefore the interviews

were conducted at this time. As both learner and Head Start for Kent County representative interviews were conducted over the phone I was mindful of the time and transportation for our tutors and therefore tutor interviews were also conducted by phone. Tutor interviews lasted from 20-30 minutes and tutors would occasionally add requests for materials or unrelated questions during the interviews as I, the interviewer, was also the Family Literacy Coordinator and support for the tutor. Interviews were recorded and listened to following the same procedures as learner interviews. Notes for all of the participants (taken both during and after the interviews) were then added to a spreadsheet in order to organize similar patterns or discrepancies in the responses.

The representatives for Head Start for Kent County were contacted at their offices and participated in phone interviews due to their limited availability. Due to frequent weather concerns and a series of school snow days at the time of the data collection, many staff members needed to remain at the school and interviews required rescheduling. The interviews with the Head Start representatives lasted from 15-25 minutes. Interviews with Melanie and Norah were briefly interrupted due to the need to respond to nearby requests for information as they were working. However, both participants were able to finish providing answers to all of the questions.

Prior to the interview, I shared with the interviewees that I would try to be as limited as possible in my responses in order to ensure they were not guided to provide certain answers. This was reiterated during interviews as I had familiarity with the interviewees and occasionally issues separate from the interview would arise (e.g., requests for new materials, questions about testing). Follow-up questions were also asked to participants if the answer they provided was not connected to the question that was asked. To help guide interviewees and stay on course, I would occasionally acknowledge that they had already answered a question, but asked if the participant

had anything else they wanted to share on the topic.

**Data Analysis**

Once the interview data had been collected, it was entered into a table with a number of themes and quotations from each subcategory. After listening to the interviews for the final time, these themes and quotes were categorized to organize them for each stakeholder. For example, a phrase such as "I need to learn how to speak English to speak with my children's teachers" fit into the two categories of "verbal communication" and "home-school connection". These themes were then tallied for how often the topic arose in conversation to illustrate priority. At first, it was assumed that the first items to be discussed chronologically may be representative of the stakeholder's order of priority. However, as learners needed time to process the questions and more complex subtleties were likely to be expressed later on in their discussion (i.e., many identified "learning English" immediately, but were not able to expand on this until later in the interview), chronological presentation of information was not found to be an accurate representation. As the different subcategory questions revealed different information for other stakeholders, the chronological order of discussion was not as indicative for these groups either. Therefore, the frequency of the themes being discussed was used as supplementary data in presenting the qualitative results.

Following the development of these categories and marking their frequency, this data was organized into tables to help facilitate discussion on these themes. As each question required alignment across different groups, individual answers were compared against one another. For research question 1 on priorities, the individuals representing each stakeholder group were compared with others within their stakeholder group. Themes regarding communication were compared between stakeholder groups and their three possible intersections (tutors/learners,

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learners/Head Start representatives, and tutors/Head Start representatives). For the final theme of

alignment and disconnect, the themes were analyzed in two different ways. The themes for

expressed priorities for each stakeholder group were compared to one another across stakeholder

groups to see if there was actual alignment or disconnect between their priorities. In addition to

this, their perceptions of priorities were compared to one another to see if there was perception of

alignment between each stakeholder pairing.

## Results and Discussion

The following section presents the interview data along with an integrated discussion of the themes that emerged. Results are organized by research questions and tables are used to visually highlight reoccurring themes and points of alignment and disconnect. Data for tutors and their paired learners are labeled with letters to provide context for the pairs and provide some insight into reasons for individual goals for tutors, learners, and Head Start representatives.

### Research Question 1: What do tutors, learners, and program partners prioritize in family literacy programming?

There were five subcategories in the interview quetions that explored how stakeholders prioritized components of the program and there were multiple themes identified for each of these subcategories in the participants' responses. The first subcategory targeted stakeholders' perceived goals of the program in addition to their own goals. Common themes in the responses included the modality of literacy (i.e., verbal goals vs. written goals), the life skill associated with literacy (e.g., reading to children, filling out applications), and more holistic goals (e.g., developing a love of reading, improving quality of life). The second subcategory required stakeholders to compare the program to similar ESL or family literacy programs. These questions gathered more information about the logistical priorities of participants (e.g., individualized attention, scheduling flexibility). The next subcategories were related to what components or lessons had been the most effective and ineffective. Answers for these subcategories were both goal-based and logistics-based (e.g., learning life skills literacy, flexibility in lesson scheduling). The final subcategory explored the actions that are taken by both participants. Answers to this subcategory included themes such as workbooks (e.g.., family life skills workbooks, comprehension workbooks), activities (e.g., using computers, writing

about experiences), and focusing on specific literacy genres (i.e. - how to read the newspaper, how to read children's books).

**Tutor Priorities**

Table 5 summarizes the themes uncovered for the first research question in tutors' responses. Next to each theme is a number that represents the themes frequency. The frequency of each theme across the stakeholder group overall is indicated by asterisks following the theme. Three asterisks indicate that a theme was mentioned by all four tutors, two asterisks indicate that it was stated by at least three, and one asterisk indicates that it was mentioned by at least two tutors. Each time a theme was mentioned, it was given a tally in the frequency of theme. Sometimes one phrase could fit under two themes and therefore a frequency tally was given to each theme (e.g. – "I think it's important to for my learner to improve their speaking skills so they can talk more with the teachers" would fall under the verbal skills theme and the home/school connection theme).

Many of the themes described are fairly self-explanatory, but other theme phrases may be difficult to define based on its usage in the table. One such example is "routine practice", which referred to the tutor prioritizing the learner practicing their skills at home outside of the lessons. Other less frequently discussed priorities included "level appropriateness" (referring to available materials and literacy levels) and "informal assessment" (one tutor's priority involved frequent informal assessment practice to make sure his learner was developing his skills). The more frequently discussed themes are analyzed following the table.

Table 5

*Tutor Priorities*

| Tutor Demographics | Tutor Priorities | Frequency of Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Ann | Verbal Skills *** | 5 |
| Female | Home/School Connection*** | 4 |
| 62 | Program Support | 3 |
| United States | Community Resources* | 2 |
| English | Quality Materials* | 2 |
| Retired | Quality Instruction* | 2 |
| | Clear Program Expectations | 1 |
| | Grammar Skills* | 1 |
| | Workbook Focus* | 1 |
| Bonnie | Life Skills Literacy* | 5 |
| Female | Love of Reading | 4 |
| 69 | Reading Comprehension | 4 |
| Unite States | Verbal Skills*** | 3 |
| English | Home/School Connection*** | 3 |
| Retired | Quality Materials** | 3 |
| | Scheduling Consistency** | 2 |
| | Routine Practice* | 2 |
| | Grammar Skills* | 1 |
| Carol | Home/School Connection*** | 5 |
| Female | Community Resources* | 4 |
| 62 | Balanced Lessons | 4 |
| United States | Routine Practice* | 2 |
| English | Verbal Skills*** | 2 |
| English Teacher | Health Literacy | 1 |
| | Quality Materials** | 1 |
| | Scheduling Consistency** | 1 |
| | Level Appropriateness | 1 |
| Donald | Home/School Connection*** | 7 |
| Male | Life Skills Literacy* | 5 |
| 52 | Quality Materials** | 4 |
| United States | Verbal Skills** | 4 |
| English | Quality Instruction* | 3 |
| Business Owner | Improve Quality of Life | 3 |
| | Informal Assessment | 2 |
| | Scheduling Consistency** | 1 |
| | Workbook Focus* | 1 |

As can be seen in Table 5, there is considerable overlap in what each tutor prioritizes as part of their goals. Priorities fit into two different categories of instructional priorities (what is actually being taught in lessons) and logistical priorities (logistical concerns regarding the lessons). The following three sections provide further insight into the three most frequently mentioned themes among multiple tutors including home and school connection, verbal communication, and scheduling consistency.

### *Home and School Connection*

As the program acts as a partnership between an early childhood school setting and a non-profit serving parents of these children, it is stated explicitly to tutors during their orientation that this is a goal of the program. However, this connection can be defined in many ways as evidenced by our annual surveys with learners to assess their connection to the school. Learners identify a range of activities that can build this connection including verbal communication with staff, attendance at school events, or even volunteering in the classroom. It was therefore useful to address how tutors perceive this connection and what actions they felt would be helpful to work on developing this connection. It could be implied that the actions that tutors felt would be helpful to build this connection would inform their lesson planning.

Ann shared that she initially thought the connection with the school would be more stable:

When I started out we met at the Head Start place and it was kind of there was a little connection with people at Head Start at her son's school. We're not meeting there anymore and so that connection has been lost a bit. I think I started thinking there'd be more communication with the school – but, um – that has turned out not to be the case so much.

Ann went on to share the logistical concerns including lack of available space and Wifi at the

school setting leading to a decision to meet in a different location. Her answer indicates that

physical presence is one component of the connection between the LCWM program and the

school and the home and school connection as an extension of that. As this no longer was

feasible for Ann and Alejandra, it was useful to discuss other types of interactions that could

prove useful. Ann responded positively when asked if she felt further communication with Head

Start through other mediums (phone conversation or written conversation) could be useful for

her lesson planning:

> Ya know, it could. Last week when we met she had three little books that [child's name]
>
> took home from school. She said I've been reading this with [child's name]. So like that
>
> sort of thing […]  I think maybe knowing from the child's teacher what he's working on
>
> and I think that would be probably a good thing for me to work on with her.

Ann's response to this question brought to mind the importance of awareness raising for tutors

and parents to know what children need to be doing in school. Although Ann's response did not

indicate a preferred medium to communicate this information, it did acknowledge the benefits of

such information sharing and how this could impact the home and school connection.

Bonnie's first mention of home and school indicated that she perceived the connection as

based in assisting the child at home with their school experiences:

> But I think his biggest goal is his kids. It's improving his kid's opportunities and helping
>
> them with school and what they need. He wants to help them and – I think – I think this
>
> is important to show them he does homework like them. Like we'll do a lesson and he
>
> introduces it to the children and he'll tell me. Then he tries to help them – ya know,
>
> when he can.

These expectations of the connection between home and school differed greatly between Ann and Bonnie and yet they both acknowledge the importance of this connection to their learners. Benito's schedule often limits him in having a physical presence in the schools with the exception of infrequent conferences when necessary. This differed from Pair A's experience in frequently visiting the school and Ann's disappointment that this was discontinued. Tutors may benefit by learning more about various methods to build the home and school connection that enable parents to engage with schools in unique and meaningful ways. Carol captures the urgency of trying to build this connection in her first statement during her interview:

> When I started out and tried to figure out what her needs are in learning English um bottom line is I guess the goal is for her to speak with her children's teacher and to just kinda get outta the bubble she's been living in for 13 years. […] So because of that my goal right now is just for her to learn English. Period.

### *Verbal Communication*

During orientation at the LCWM, tutors are asked to fill out an application that asks why they came to the LCWM and which of their own attributes they feel will be useful during sessions. It has been noted by literacy coordinators that tutors will often discuss their skills with written communication and desire to teach reading. Alternatively, learners will often identify verbal communication as their greatest need during intakes with literacy coordinators. Although both are certainly addressed during lessons, it was revealing that all the tutors in this study had prioritized verbal communication after working with their learner for at least a year. While it would certainly warrant more study, it does indicate for these four pairs that the learner's needs were prioritized.

Verbal communication as a priority can also be defined very differently depending on the

tutor's interpretation. Verbal skills can include linguistic features including building vocabulary or improving pronunciation. However, it can also be defined in functional terms and in terms of the settings for verbal communication. Ann initially shared that her learner wanted to improve her general verbal communication skills, but became more specific in her later responses:

> My learner was particular in wanting to learn speaking in English. I think – for her – that continues to be a priority. She told me her children don't speak to her in Spanish. So she'll come to me with words that they – maybe the kids use a lot. Like the other day it was 'bored'. So like even communicating with her kids.

This response illuminated the importance of verbal communication even among family members. While this study included multiple stakeholders, it did not address the experiences or expectations of the children in families participating in a family literacy program. The previously mentioned exploratory study identified the complicated nature of raising bilingual families and Ann's response furthered this by exploring the tutor's role in working with bilingual families.

Bonnie shared, "My priority is to help my learner with his goals. His goals are speaking correctly and comprehension and his big goal is just learning how to speak better" and therefore prescriptive grammar in speech became her priority. In discussing verbal communication as a goal, Carol stated, "Communication with her children's teachers. Talking with the doctors. She still speaks poor English after 13 years and I want to make sure she feels comfortable wherever she goes." These comments indicate her focus was on conversation specific to particular settings. Donald shared a different approach by saying, "Our goal is to increase literacy rates in the community. I want to help him with speaking English and being part of his children's educational life. I want him to be able to connect to others and discuss what's important to him." Donald's goals were much more holistic than the others and viewed verbal skills as key to

building a sense of belonging in the community.

*Scheduling Consistency*

The third most common item that was brought up as a theme by three different tutors was the priority of scheduling meetings consistently and making sure that they were meeting with their learners regularly and at similar times. Scheduling consistency was a logistical concern that many tutors shared in being able to achieve their instructional goals. It should be noted that the flexibility that is often touted as a strength of our program for learners may be perceived as a weakness or barrier for tutors who are volunteering their time on a weekly basis.

Bonnie shared the concern about scheduling consistency as one of the weaknesses of the program:

> I get hung up on make-up sessions. We end up getting far behind and I can't catch up. It's not that he doesn't want sessions, but things come up. And when we get behind then I have to reteach and I don't know if we'll get to where we need to go. The make-up sessions are the tough part. I don't always have time either.

The tutor's mention of make-up sessions refers to the expectations that pairs will reschedule their sessions if necessary in order to still meet the requirement of meeting two hours a week. The importance of scheduling consistency was defined in similar ways by the three tutors that brought up this concern and therefore may warrant further discussion between tutors and learner.

*Ann's Priorities*

Ann's unique themes included program support and having clear program expectations. Both of these priorities fit under the logistical theme and relate more to the connection with LCWM. As a retired teacher that worked with bilingual students, Ann likely had the most experience with ELL instruction and family to school connection. Interestingly, Ann shared

concern in that she was not an ELL trained teacher and felt concerned that she had not done this work before. However, Ann's main concern was ensuring she had alignment with the program and that she was addressing the goals of the LCWM and her learners. Knowledge of the program's mission and the clarity of this mission was brought up on three separate occasions. Ann shared, "What I like about this program compared to others is that the expectations are clear. I get great support from the Literacy Center and have access to good materials. That's important!" These responses indicate that pedagogical backgrounds may have significant impact on tutor priorities and that tutors may benefit from individualized training based on their background experiences

*Bonnie's Priorities*

As Bonnie has worked in the health sector, she may have been more concerned about how reading can improve one's well-being more than the functional outcomes that were mentioned more frequently by tutors with more pedagogical experiences. This may be particularly important to Bonnie as a retired nurse as she acknowledged how mental wellbeing can improve health outcomes. Intriguingly, none of the goals for Bonnie were directly related to health literacy. Both of the themes that were unique to Bonnie were related to written literacy skills specifically.

Bonnie was concerned about fostering a love of reading and increasing reading comprehension. These two themes were the most frequent themes for Bonnie outside of increasing life skills literacy specifically (although life skills literacy often includes the use of written literacy skills). Bonnie was the only tutor to mention that passion for reading was an end goal and mentioned it frequently. Bonnie's very first comment was, "I want Benito [learner] to have a love of reading and just to be able to enjoy it." Many of the tutors who come to the

LCWM from the health sector are primarily interested in improving health literacy outcomes as demonstrated by their discussions during tutor orientations. However, it has been anecdotally recognized by LCWM staff that retired tutors who may feel limited in being able to assist learners with workplace skills may feel more equipped to assist learners with building a passion for their reading skills. Bonnie has identified both of these as her highest priorities as a tutor. This response may indicate the need to include discussion on how to cultivate a love for reading and literacy within our training or in-service offerings through the program.

### *Carol's Priorities*

Carol shares a teaching background with Ann, but currently teaches English with English L1 speakers as opposed to ELL specific instruction. In addition to this, Carol is actively teaching and Ann is a retired teacher. Carol's unique priorities contrasted with Ann's unique priorities in that they were grounded in instructional priorities and not logistical ones. Carol's unique priorities included balanced lessons, health literacy, and level appropriate materials. Although it should be noted that those final two were only mentioned once during our interview. Instead, the specific goal that received the most attention out of these three was the need to develop balanced lessons. Indeed, this particular theme was discussed four separate times and was the second most frequently discussed priority for Carol. As opposed to choosing one specific strategy or goal, Carol would list various strategies and goals and reiterate the need for balanced lessons while doing so. Carol shared at one point in the discussion:

> I'm not always sure what the goals are because we have so many. We'll read the news or do multiple choice questions. I'll have her practice by reading children's books or doing homophone work together. Or I'll have her write about her school experiences and that was good. She did good on that. We try to keep things balanced and tackle everything

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she needs.

Carol's responses differed from others in that her lists were often prefaced and then ended by the need for lessons to be balanced and to cover a wide array of things that are of value to the learner. When Carol would list items, these lists often changed and there was not always a pattern in what was contained within them. It could be argued that Carol saw priorities and goals as evolving and that instead, the goal of providing balanced and wide-spread lessons best serves the learner. As Carol comes from an educational background, this may be the case. However, it should also be noted that Claudia (as will be discussed below) identified the fewest concrete goals and that Claudia has least verbal linguistic demands of all of the learners as she identified the fewest English based social interactions. When Carol shared that she is unsure of what the goals are, this may be more indicative of her tutee (Claudia) being unsure of her own goals. This example elucidates that there is a need for learners to do explicit work in defining their goals with a tutor so that tutors who are responsive to learner needs will feel more confident in identifying goals.

### Donald's Priorities

Donald's priority that set him apart from the others was his reflection on improving the quality of life for his learner. When asked about the goals of the program and his priorities, Donald shared:

> The goal is to definitely increase the literacy rates within the community. But the way I see it is this is a quality of life issue. I want to make sure my learner can communicate with others and navigate life using literacy to help him out. He can do more this way. I think part of the goal is for learners to be more actualized.

This more holistic approach to tutoring stood in contrast to others and the more daily practical

tasks that they had prioritized. This theme was expressed on multiple occasions for Donald and this is considerable when one observes that it did not show up for other tutors. It is worth mentioning though that this theme was far from the most frequently discussed item for Donald and therefore there are other themes that Donald appears to prioritize more. However, this theme sets the stage for a larger discussion that was not asked as a research question. It may be valuable for future research to identify first the role that providers feel literacy has in the life of family literacy program participants. This foundational belief certainly would inform the priorities and expounded beliefs that were explored for each of the participants in this study.

**Learner Priorities**

The following Table 6 identifies the priorities for the four learner participants. Again, the language in this table does not represent the learner's words specifically. The same theme labels (phrases in the table) that were used for tutors were used for learners when appropriate. The asterisks that follow each theme serve to show the frequency of mention for each of the themes among all the learners.

As has been previously stated, the first initial of the learner's pseudonym aligns with the first initial of the tutor's pseudonym that constitutes a pair (i.e. – Ann and Alejandra are a pair and Bonnie and Benito are a pair). The frequency of themes was tallied in the same way as it was for tutors, but was somewhat easier for learners as learners' responses were often more segmented. For example, when asked about the priorities for learning, learners were more likely to respond with lists rather than narrative even when asked to provide a narrative about their priorities or experiences. This is likely due to the limited English skills when compared to the tutor's language abilities.

Table 6

*Learner Priorities*

| Learner | Learner Priorities | Frequency of Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Alejandra | Home/School connection*** | 6 |
| Female | Verbal skills*** | 3 |
| 45 | Personalized attention** | 2 |
| Mexico | Workplace literacy** | 2 |
| Spanish | Life Skills literacy* | 2 |
| Self- | Financial literacy | 1 |
| Employed | Open conversation** | 1 |
| | Everyday language | 1 |
| | Workbook focus** | 1 |
| Benito | Home/School connection*** | 3 |
| Male | Scheduling flexibility | 3 |
| 39 | Written skills** | 2 |
| Guatemala | Verbal skills*** | 2 |
| Spanish | Workplace literacy** | 2 |
| Employed | Workbook focus** | 2 |
| | Life Skills literacy* | 1 |
| | Open conversation** | 1 |
| | Grammar lessons** | 1 |
| Claudia | Written skills** | 6 |
| Female | Verbal skills*** | 4 |
| 35 | Focus on vocabulary | 3 |
| Mexico | Grammar lessons** | 2 |
| Spanish | Home/School connection*** | 2 |
| Unemployed | Digital literacy | 1 |
| | Routine practice* | 1 |
| | Level appropriateness | 1 |
| | Personalized attention** | 1 |
| Daniel | Verbal skills*** | 4 |
| Male | Home / School connection*** | 3 |
| 37 | Open conversation** | 2 |
| El Salvador | Written skills** | 2 |
| Spanish | Personalized attention** | 2 |
| Employed | Grammar lessons** | 2 |
| | Routine practice* | 1 |
| | Workplace literacy** | 1 |
| | Workbook focus** | 1 |

As can be seen from the asterisks in this list, it is evident that there was much more alignment among the learners in the study than the tutors. Many of the learners frequently identified similar themes and there was not nearly as much of an immediate focused priority as was evident with the tutors. Only for learners Alejandra and Claudia does one priority (home-school connection for Alejandra and written communication for Claudia) stand out strongly against the others, but the following priorities are relatively similar in their frequency. The following sections considers themes prioritized by all learners and the unique themes for each learner as well.

### *Home and School Connection*

The connection between home and school was seen as important to both the learners and tutors. As learners come to our program through their child's school recruitment efforts, this goal would appear to be well-established from the beginning of their entry into the program. Similar to the tutors, however, learners also had their own definitions for that connection and what they saw that connection as including.

Claudia shared the following priority for herself as a learner and for her home to school interactions:

> It's important for me speak to teachers of my children. For me learning - it's important to know and understand what they are learning with the teachers - the teachers of my children - and to know what my children are doing in the school.

Claudia's priorities include the awareness raising concept that was discussed with the tutors and that knowing what is required of her children is important to her. In addition to this, Claudia saw verbal communication with teachers to be important to this connection as well.

Although the tutors had mentioned differences in the modes of communication, the the language of that communication was not mentioned. Head Start for Kent County provides interpreter services free of charge to parents and serves a linguistically diverse community. However, not all of the teachers in the schools are bilingual or speak the L1 of the parent. Daniel discussed how speaking in English with teachers has been beneficial for him, although he used to interact with other staff in Spanish:

> The Head Start teacher for my little boy is at [school name]. She spoke in both
>
> languages for English and for Spanish. She my little boy's teacher and I used to just
>
> Spanish – just speak Spanish. But there are two different teachers in the classroom. But
>
> now I can speak with both of them in English and that's good. The one she always tells
>
> me to keep it up with my English and I sometimes try Spanish with her. But it's good we
>
> try to learn each other – learn from each other.

Daniel's experience shows that the language used to build connections between the home and school was important for him as a parent. This balanced appreciation of Daniel's L1 along with encouraging his development in L2 seemed useful to Daniel as a parent. This approach could be useful to share with Head Start representatives and stakeholders to reinforce these communicative efforts.

*Workplace Literacy*

All of the learners that were currently working identified workplace literacy as a priority. This was valuable information in that it indicated that those in family literacy program skills still prioritize and work on literacy skills in other areas. This also indicates that family literacy lessons should be informed by this need as well. As the program currently functions, tutors and learners only meet for two hours a week. With such a limited time, cross-curricular or literacy

efforts are necessary to reach all of the learner's needs.

When Alejandra discussed her favorite lesson, she said excitedly, "Oh for all different skills, my favorite is, um, for the job. For the jobs I look for different places to work and now I know how to find jobs. Is good for me." Benito shared similar sentiments about his favorite lessons, "When we learned about the applications – the job applications. That helped me a lot. Like my name and address and phone number and all the things on the application. There's a lot." With the wide range of skills that are being taught, it was worth acknowledging that two of the four participants mentioned job searching as the most effective lesson for them. With the shift from WIA to WIOA, this connection between family literacy skills and workplace literacy skills is predicted to develop even further in the upcoming years.

### *Personalized Attention*

Personalized attention was also discussed as a strength of the program by three of the learners and the benefits of working with a tutor. Interestingly, the goal of this research was to measure alignment in goals and yet individualized or differentiated instruction was much more prized by the learners. This relates to the priority that many learners had towards open dialogue with their tutors and being able to discuss needs and questions with them. Both of these indicate that a positive relationship with an instructor is a logistical priority for learners that is considered necessary for the building of other skills.

When asked about the difference she feels between the tutoring program and other class-based family literacy options, Alejandra shared:

> It's one teacher and it's different. This is good. Because my teacher is good for me and she's nice people and we can have more conversations this way. The conversations are different with just one. More conversation than in a class.

Personalized attention is certainly more possible in a one on one setting and provides more of a conversational space than a lecture-based English language class might offer. Alejandra felt that this structure allowed for different conversations and more frequent conversations and later expanded that these conversations addressed her individual needs.

*Workbook Activities*

Perhaps one of the more surprising findings was that three of the four learners prioritized their workbooks and mentioned these when discussing actions that they take to work towards their goals. Daniel stated:

> Well, we work on our workbooks and I have three. I have From Home to School about my kids. Then we do my workbook. It's like reading and writing. Then I have this one. It's like for work. It's like workplace something. It's for that.

This perhaps could relate to the tutor's prioritizing of quality materials as three of the tutors mentioned this priority. Learners may also have limited knowledge of language learning and may judge the program through the lens of comparison with other programs that used different workbooks. It should also be noted that the three tutors who prioritized this did not align precisely with the three learners that prioritized working on workbooks. This focus indicates that learners also assess a program's value through the materials they provide and therefore quality materials are as important to learners as they are to tutors.

Benito shared his description of a traditional lesson that he enjoys, "A lesson for me that's good is like the workbook. Like the "I am" or 'they are" or like something like that. Like the grammar books […] yeah, the books are good for me." Although grammar was not mentioned as a focus or priority in Benito's initial identifying of goals, it could certainly be considered a component of learning both verbal and written English. Both of these responses

indicate that at least two of the four learners feel that workbooks are the structure of the lessons and form the basis of their instruction. If this is the case, then it seems logical that learners would prioritize quality materials that are enjoyable and instructional.

*Alejandra's Priorities*

While home-school connection was discussed by all of the learners, this particular item was brought up on six different occasions for Alejandra. As a theme, it was much more frequently discussed than the other priorities. The second highest frequency item was verbal communication and this was discussed comparatively on 3 different occasions. It should be mentioned that some of the sentences from Alejandra fit into both of these categories. One example included when Alejandra stated, "I need to learn more talking in English. Then I can help my child and do everything. I can talk in their school with the teachers." This response indicates that the ability to speak English for learners can be connected to a specific setting or goal. This implies that tutors can benefit by individualizing their English speaking instruction to the settings or goals that are most important for their learner.

Although it was only discussed once, Alejandra was the only learner to mention financial literacy and the need to learn how to navigate finding an apartment and the financial needs associated with doing so. As financial literacy is a topic that is frequently discussed as a team, it was interesting that it was not mentioned more frequently by learners. It may be that learners may have less language to discuss this theme and therefore did not bring the theme up during discussion. As the theme of finances can often cause discomfort, it may be that learners did not feel confident or particularly comfortable in discussing these needs. An alternative theory is that the stakes for financial literacy are much higher than for the enjoyment of a book and therefore learners feel more comfortable navigating this theme in their first language. As many banks and

financial institutions offer materials and Spanish speaking staff members, this may not be perceived as an immediate need. As financial literacy is often interconnected with family literacy programs, it may be beneficial to explore this theme with learners and to see if any of these potential reasons may be limiting learner's discussion about the theme.

*Benito's Priorities*

Benito's goals were aligned with many of the other learners, but he did have one logistical priority and that was scheduling flexibility. Benito, who is the father of five children under the age of nine and has an erratic work schedule, identified scheduling flexibility as a strength of the program. This was Benito's most frequently identified priority along with building the home and school connection. Benito compared the program favorably to others and that its strength was its ability to fit his work schedule. Although this logistical priority stands out from the instructional priorities of many of the other learners, it was evident from the interview that this flexibility is what allowed Benito's participation within the program. That it was the most frequently occurring priority for this learner implies that working through barriers may be a priority for many of our learners and potential participants in the program. Much work at the LCWM has been done in the past to identify barriers specific for family literacy program participants and this seems to indicate that this work is critical to increase participation within local communities.

*Claudia's Priorities*

Claudia's responses to the priority questions differed the most from other learners. This is likely due to her not being employed and not having the same verbal linguistic demands in English as many of the others. In many ways, Claudia is much more isolated that the other three pairs and her tutor's answers also indicate this. The most noticeable difference is the priority she

had for written skills as opposed to the others. As Claudia has much less opportunity to practice

speaking English, her priority was defined as building her writing skills in English. This far

outweighed her other goals and may be due to the fact that she has the capability to practice this

skill set more than speaking and listening skills. Claudia's prioritizing of this skill demonstrates

how social realities can impact learner's priorities and the limitations that social realities can

create. In other words, Claudia may very well benefit from improving her verbal skills in order to

develop her writing abilities. However, a learner is often forced to think through the lens of what

is possible for them currently to do on a regular weekly basis. As there is a connection between

writing skills and verbal skills, it behooves the LCWM and other family literacy programs to

think creatively about ways that learners can engage in verbal practice if face-to-face dialogue is

not part of participants' daily routine.

### *Daniel's Priorities*

Daniel did not raise any unique themes as at least one other person (typically more than

one) shared in Daniel's priorities. He was, however, the only learner that had been engaged in

classes previously with the LCWM prior to working with a tutor. Daniel shared, "Class is nice,

but I like special time just for me." This provided insight into the preference for individualized

attention that was a priority for multiple learners.

The one theme that was perhaps framed differently than others was Daniel's prioritizing

of grammar and open conversation with his tutor. While these themes were both valued by other

learners, it was particularly interesting the way that Daniel framed grammar development as

enjoyable and overly helpful. Daniel stated, "I like learning how to write and being corrected."

and "Sometimes I don't read correctly or write it correct. [Donald name], he always corrects me

and that helps me a lot." Donald shared similar sentiments by saying "Daniel wants to be

corrected, so I don't sugarcoat it when I correct things with him and grammar." As stated previously, Donald had other priorities that far outweighed grammar and yet he has been perceptive enough to acknowledge that this matters to his learner. Although it was not mentioned frequently by the learner, it was framed as a positive and enjoyable experience as opposed to a priority that learners had simply by grammar being viewed as helpful to them. Grammar skills are often much more teachable than other themes discussed and learners can often see growth with these skills at faster rates than growth in more complex verbal skills such as pragmatics. Providers can benefit from discussing where grammar skills can best be placed in a family literacy programming curriculum as this clearly has value for multiple learners and some learners can even find such work enjoyable.

**Head Start Representatives**

While tutors and learners work directly with one another in pairs, the Head Start representatives work to assist multiple families and to assist the program's development. Lucy's role is administrative and she is charged with managing community partnerships and collaborating for the improvement of the LCWM Adult Tutoring Program family literacy program. Lucy is part of a team that meets annually with the LCWM to work collaboratively on a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations and to make planned improvements for the program. Melanie and Norah are both family advocates for their respective schools and serve in a role similar to a school social worker in addressing the multiple social needs for families. Within the partnership, family advocates are often tasked with recruitment of families and some of them (such as Melanie) are also in attendance to support the Family Activity Nights. I meet with new family advocates at the beginning of each program year to discuss our program and to address questions about recruitment and the operation of the program

as well. Table 7 below shows the priorities of each of the Head Start representatives.

Demographic data was not collected for these three individual participants.

Table 7

*Head Start Representative Priorities*

| Head Start Representative | Representative Priorities | Frequency of Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Lucy | Increase Children Outcomes | 8 |
| | Empower Parents*** | 4 |
| | Home/School Connection*** | 4 |
| | Program Flexibility | 4 |
| | Program Clarity | 4 |
| | Workplace Literacy | 2 |
| | Kindergarten Readiness | 2 |
| | Developmentally Appropriate | 2 |
| | Quality Resources*** | 1 |
| Melanie | Verbal Skills* | 5 |
| | Reading Skills* | 2 |
| | Reading Appreciation* | 2 |
| | Community Engagement* | 2 |
| | Household Bilingualism | 2 |
| | Engaging Activities | 2 |
| | Home/School Connection*** | 2 |
| | Quality Resources*** | 1 |
| | Empower Parents*** | 1 |
| Norah | Reading Skills* | 4 |
| | Empower Parents*** | 3 |
| | Life Skills Literacy | 3 |
| | ELL Specific Instruction | 2 |
| | Reading Appreciation* | 2 |
| | Home/School Connection*** | 2 |
| | Verbal Skills* | 2 |
| | Community Engagement* | 1 |
| | Quality Resources*** | 1 |

As to be expected, all three of the representatives prioritized building the home and

school connection. Head Start for Kent County's participation in the program is grounded in the

understanding that building parent's communication skills assists in increasing parent

involvement in schools. In addition to this, parent empowerment was mentioned by all three as a top priority and parent learning was viewed as a source for empowerment. Although quality resources were only mentioned once by each representative, all three of them felt this was a priority for the program. It should be noted that the most frequently mentioned theme by each Head Start representative were not aligned with the most frequently mentioned themes for all three. In addition to this, the responses were the most unique among these three representatives when compared to the responses from tutors and learners. This is likely due to the fact that the role for each representative differs among one another as opposed to all of the tutors and learners whose roles are identical to one another in the program.

### *Home and School Connection*

The partnership between LCWM and Head Start began in order to build the home and school connection for parents that struggled with verbal and written English communication. This theme was a priority for all three groups of stakeholders and yet each participant within each stakeholder group defined Home and School connection slightly differently.

In discussions about the home and school connection, some participants were very specific about what that would look like and others shared it as an end goal. Lucy shared at the beginning of the interview that home and school connection was a primary goal of the program:

> I also feel like a goal around - ya know, besides literacy - is that relationship building piece. By creating a safe place for um, ya know, families to build relationships – that's going to improve family engagement with our program. And we actually know language can act as a barrier for family engagement.

Her answer presents language as a barrier to participation in the school setting and sets up tutoring as a way to work through that barrier. In addition to this, Lucy's use of the phrase "safe

space" may indicate that the connection benefits by taking place in the physical school and that an end goal would be physical participation in school activities.

Melanie added that she felt that verbal communication was important to the families themselves and said the following during her interview:

I think parents are really concerned about the education for their children. So it's important for us to be able to talk with them about their children and all the different things – like the things they do at school or stuff like that.

Melanie's priorities throughout the interview involved verbal communication in particular and verbal skills was her most frequently mentioned theme. Although Melanie did not specify the modality for this verbal communication (in-person or through phone), it was apparent that she felt this would assist in building family and school connection.

Conversely, Norah's most frequently mentioned theme was reading and written communication as an extension of this. This priority connected to her goals for home and school communication in her interview as well:

The way I'm looking at it, from my perspective, from my side is, I want the families to be able to just - to just read a simple statement and understand. You know what I'm saying. Just being able to read. Period. […] Some of our parents do not read at all, but I just want them to be able to read something from our school and understand. Like a lot of time they sign our documents and don't understand it. That just makes me scared - and sad.

Norah's primary goal is for parents to be able to understand written communication that comes from the school and she mentioned this in different ways throughout the interview. As parents may be limited in their ability to verbally interact or to be physically present in the school, the

extensive written communication that often comes from schools may be a foundational step for the home and school connection.

### *Empowering Parents*

Head Start for Kent County has a number of programs for parents to engage them in the school and to provide them with helpful skills as well. The parent policy council is a group of Head Start administrators and parents that gather regularly to make operational decisions and provide input about Head Start development. Other opportunities exist that are targeted towards dads and male involvement in the school as well. Head Start staff are trained on the importance of their program's ability to empower parents and may see the LCWM program as a tool towards that goals.

One of the methods to empower parents is to engage them in their child's education and to encourage their involvement. Lucy spoke to this concept during her interview and shared:

> We recognize that parents are children's first teachers and therefore we want them to feel capable and competent to support their children's literacy development and we believe that would come from, you know, their own personal fluency.

The phrase "parent's as child's first teacher" was used by all three of the Head Start representatives. This phrase involves increasing both parent's awareness and confidence when it comes to their child's education.

As an extension of involvement in their child's education, empowering parents also can indicate strengthening their ability to engage successfully in the community. When speaking about family activity nights, Melanie included the following as a strength:

> Being able to watch the families do the game nights and watch the parents [...] I really have enjoyed watching parents though – parents that know Spanish or Burmese or some

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other language and they talk to each other. And they help each other out that way. That's

really good to see.

Melanie's statement as well as further examples of parents assisting one another indicate that

part of her idea of success was seeing the parents navigating their own parent community.

Through assisting parents with their English skills and communicative abilities, the program is

also providing parents with a tool to increase their engagement and leadership within the

community.

### *Available Resources*

Available resources were not a theme brought up significantly by any single member and

yet was one of the few themes that was mentioned by all three participants. Instructional

materials for regular tutoring is provided by the LCWM, but Head Start provides free books and

literacy activities regularly at family activity nights and throughout the school year. When Head

Start representatives mentioned quality resources, they spoke about the materials provided by

Head Start. As this is the material that Head Start representatives have the most interaction with,

it is natural that these would be the subject of their responses.

Both Lucy and Norah mentioned the importance of offering children's books and literacy

materials. Lucy mentioned, "To me, one strength has been the resources we provide. Available

resources has been key for us." Norah stated in her interview, "We give books to the parents so

that we can make sure they have the books in the home. That's important because they don't

always have those." Although the quality of the resources was not discussed at detail, the

availability of resources and increasing literacy materials in the home was identified as important

to the program. Melanie also mentioned the importance of having interactive materials at events

as well, "Sometimes I think we might need to change stuff at the FAN Nights. Sometimes the

hands on stuff isn't as elaborate as it was. The parents like stuff like that […] - more hands on activities and materials." Although Melanie did not expand on what these materials should look like, she did provide insight into the importance of having interactive materials in regards to family literacy.

*Lucy's Priorities*

Head Start Representative, Lucy, plays an administrative role different than the roles of Melanie and Norah and Lucy's answers reflect this. Lucy's answers were more informed by statewide and national issues that are traditionally of concern for family literacy programs. When asked to discuss her impressions of the goals of the program and family literacy programs, Lucy replied:

> A lot of them are driven by improved test scores for children and now especially with
>
> the third grade reading law. They also look at comparisons with other countries and
>
> think what will it take. What will it take to make sure they [students] are there. Funding
>
> is usually data driven. I think now they look more at barriers for parents. It's also
>
> connected to the economic advancement of the parents and employability. It's tied to the
>
> employment sector.

This answer was more informed by policy shifts (the employability connection certainly relates to WIA changes) and therefore guided Lucy's priorities.

*Family Advocate Priorities*

Melanie and Norah discussed the needs of families that they encounter and what arises naturally. As Melanie and C both act as interpreters for Spanish speaking parents, they prioritized parents building their verbal skills and being able to build their confidence and comfort with using English. Interestingly, Representatives B and C both brought up the desire for

parents to be able to enjoy reading and to build a passion for literacy for the parents. Melanie shared, "The basic goal is to get parents to develop their reading, but also to realize the importance of reading and how reading can change their lives." Norah shared similar impressions and reflected, "The goal is for parents to be able to read, but also not to be scared. I want parents to be comfortable with reading materials and understanding them and not to stress them out." Melanie and Norah's responses were most unique from one another in the modality of communication that they prioritized. As stated earlier, Melanie's discussion was more focused on verbal communication and Norah's responses were concerned with written communication. As parents have different availability and skill sets, it is important to work on both of these skills in the LCWM program.

As the discussion on each stakeholder group indicates, there are quite a number of goals on the mind of each individual and they each require attention to ensure that stakeholders are pleased with the program. The second question addresses how stakeholders are addressing these priorities through conversation among each other.

**Research Question 2: How are these three parties communicating with each other and how are they conveying their priorities and concerns?**

For this research question, three subcategories organized questions (see Appendix) that provided insight into how the stakeholders communicated between the three different groups and the value they placed in that communication. The first subcategory aimed at identifying the methods of communication between various stakeholders depending on the interviewee. In other words, tutors and representatives were asked about their interactions with learners and learners were asked about their interactions with their tutors. Common themes in this subcategory involved frequency of discussion of goals (i.e. - "He always asks me", "We do that a little bit"),

initiator of these discussions (i.e., tutor led, learner led), and involvement in planning (i.e. -

learner requests lead to lessons, learner requests are evaluated before lesson development). The

second area within the theme of communication required stakeholders to evaluate their

communication with Head Start and the value they feel this has for them. For this subcategory,

Head Start representatives were asked to discuss their communication with tutors and examine

the value this might have. Questions here covered purpose of communication (i.e. -

encouragement, assistance in lesson planning, assisting in English practice) and the perceived

need for communication to exist (i.e. - perceived as beneficial, perceived as unnecessary,

unknown value of communication). As all three parties work with the LCWM, the third

subcategory examined how each party communicates with the LCWM.

Table 8 summarizes how tutors and learners responded to questions regarding

communication. The data indicates what tutors and learners reported for communication with all

three stakeholder groups.  The phrase reported communication has been used as communication

patterns were not observed for this study. The first two lines for each pair represent their

communication with one another. Lines three and four represent their reflection on

communication with Head Start. The final two lines of information for each pair are reflective of

the pair's communication with LCWM. As opposed to the tallying of themes, general themes

were provided. As there were limited questions about this particular research question, this was

more appropriate as a way to provide the information.

Table 8

*Tutor and Learner Communication*

| Pair | Tutor Reported Communication | Learner Reported Communication |
|------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pair A | Actively listens to learner | Makes requests to tutor |
| | Indirect communication with learner | Tutor plans lessons |
| | HS interaction beneficial | Monthly HS communication |
| | Limited HS interaction | Learning child needs |
| | Attends LCWM events with tutors | Visits LCWM for testing |
| | LCWM written communication | Limited LCWM interaction |
| Pair B | Limited learner goals communication | Limited learner goals communication |
| | Learner requests evaluated | Learner initiated goal communication |
| | Limited knowledge of HS | Parent Teacher Conferences |
| | HS communication benefits unknown | Practice English w/ HS staff |
| | Positive interaction with LCWM | Visits LCWM for testing |
| | Attends LCWM events with tutors | Limited LCWM interaction |
| Pair C | Direct communication on learner's goals | Frequent learner's goals discussion |
| | Learner initiated goal communication | Tutor initiated goal communication |
| | Limited knowledge of HS | Occasional HS communication |
| | Hs interactions perceived as unnecessary | English has assisted HS communication |
| | LCWM offers safe space | Visits LCWM for testing |
| | LCWM communication w/ fellow tutors | Limited LCWM interaction |
| Pair D | Learner initiated goal communication | Tutor initiated goal communication |
| | Focus on pragmatics | Focus on prescriptive correction |
| | No Head Start communication | Occasional HS communication |
| | HS communication benefits unknown | English has assisted HS communication |
| | Attends LCWM tutor events | Visits LCWM for testing |
| | E-mail materials requests | Limited LCWM interaction |

**Frequency and Approach of Goal Discussion**

The tutors experienced varying levels of discussion with their learner about the learner's

goals, but each tutor shared that the learner felt comfortable sharing their needs with the tutor.

Ann's approach to communication was grounded in active listening to natural scenarios. "I try to

incorporate what comes up naturally when she [Alejandra] brings things up. We don't really

directly talk about her goals," shared Ann. Bonnie approached discussions about goals or

interests with some hesitancy as she shared, "He shares that he wants computer help and we do that a bit. He wants library materials, but they're too hard sometimes." Bonnie is in an interesting position in that Benito's linguistic demands are likely much higher than other learners, but his English abilities are not necessarily enough to handle these demands. Benito has shared that his current job requires more written communication and Benito is determined to assist all five of his children with their learning and homework. Tutors frequently have to navigate this challenging reality for learners and yet Bonnie's responses indicate that Benito does feel comfortable expressing needs. Carol is comfortable with having more direct and frequent conversations with her learner about her goals and this may be informed by Carol's background in the educational field. Donald also engages his learner in active discussions about goals and shared that these are often related to his needs. "He usually will share issues at his place of employment or he'll provide me with some scenario and asks questions. A lot of times it's about how to navigate situations that are complicated to talk about," shares Donald. This focus on life skills relates to Donald's initial beliefs about the goals of the program being to increase community engagement and the wellbeing of the learner.

One of the most revealing instances of frequency of goal conversation was for Pair B. When asked about sharing goals, Benito was very limited in his response and only shared, "We talk about this a little little bit. Not too much, but yeah sometimes, yeah." His tutor, Bonnie, shared the following when asked about discussing goals:

> Really, he'd like to learn everything. I mean, for me, I'd like him to be able to – well, for me it's important for him to be able to read fluently. But yeah, he'll share things like computer help and I do that a little bit. Not too much, but when we can

This individual sharing of information illustrated that tutors may indeed be wary of their

learner's requests for information if they feel it does not align with what the tutor feels the learner needs. However, it was interesting that there was alignment in the perception of the frequency of goal communication between tutors and learners.

**Initiator of Goal Communication**

Although there was alignment in the perception of the frequency of goal communication, there was difference in the perception of who initiated goal discussion. Claudia and Daniel, whose tutors felt the pair had open dialogue about the program, both shared that this dialogue was tutor initiated. However, both of their tutors felt that the learners initiated the discussion about goals. Benito was the only learner to share that there were infrequent conversations about goals, but it should be noted that the goals that Benito indicated were the most generic of the four learners. For beginning learners, it can be difficult to both assess and prioritize ones goals and can be even more complicated to express those clearly and pragmatically to an instructor. This could feasibly be the reason that Benito provided these answers. As the interviewer trains tutors on the importance of learner-directed dialogue, tutors may have felt they needed to share that this is what they were doing. Meanwhile, learners who have a positive bond with their tutors may have felt they needed to share that tutors frequently ask them about their needs in order to present them positively to the interviewer. One strong example of this is Daniel emphatically sharing:

> Oh! Oh yes! Yeah, he asks for me – uh, uh – for each lesson. For every lesson I talk with
> him for tutoring session and every time he does different lessons what I want and he ask
> me. […] Every story that Don shares is for me. He explains things to me and asks for me
> what I want. […] Don corrects me. I appreciate him for everything. For everything!"

One pattern that can be drawn from the answers from these pairs is that learner communication

about goals is more likely to occur if it is tutor directed at the beginning. Learners may feel discomfort in making requests to tutors for their learning goals and therefore tutors acting as initiators or creating space where learners feel comfortable to make these requests may be necessary for goal discussion.

**Perception of Benefits of Communication with Head Start**

All of the tutors expressed limited or entire lack of communication with Head Start representatives. Three of the tutors shared that they could not identify what the benefit of more communication with Head Start might be for them as tutors. Carol shared, "To be honest, I don't really know anything about it other than funding cuts. I don't really see how that would work though. They work with the kids and I work with the adults." All of the learners reported varying frequencies of interaction with Head Start staff, but all felt that interaction was positive and beneficial for themselves as learners and to better assist their children with schooling. As stated in the literature review, there are multiple studies that point to the benefits of parent and school communication (e.g., Allen 2009; Bermúdez, Kanaya, & Santiago, 2017; Mapp & Kuttner 2013; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999) and therefore responses to this question provided answers to questions that the LCWM and Head Start have been continuously asking.

Out of the four parents, the only two that mentioned limited communication with Head Start were due to transportation barriers and work schedules. As tutors already are prioritizing home and school connections, it would be useful for tutors to be informed of these barriers and provided with methods to address these during sessions. For example, written communication skills could be taught to parents with scheduling issues in order for parents to connect more with schools. For those with transportation issues, lessons could be provided on how to use public transportation or how to effectively communicate on the phone.

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**Perception of Communication with LCWM**

Tutors shared positive interactions with LCWM through e-mail correspondence, attending events, and interactions with fellow tutors. However, all four of the learners indicated that there was rarely interaction with LCWM outside of the regular assessments that learners are required to take every 6 months. It should be noted that all four of the learners have been unable to attend Family Activity Nights due to their work schedules or lack of transportation. Daniel shared when asked about his interactions with LCWM, "I went to the Family Activity Night one time. Maybe two times. I get the reminders and texts, but I work so I'm busy. Maybe next time we can go though. Maybe I'll ask my wife about it." Once learners begin with the program, they are only ever required to come to the LCWM for testing and this is done to accommodate learners who are meeting around the greater Grand Rapids area and may have limited access to transportation to come to the LCWM. As the LCWM has multiple resources for learners including library materials and in-service events to teach literacy skills, learners stand to presumably benefit through more interaction. The LCWM benefits by this interaction by getting more familiarized with the learner's needs directly as opposed to tutors acting as speakers for the learner's needs.

**Head Start Representatives Communication Responses**

Head Start representatives engage with the other stakeholders in the program in a very different way than the tutors and learners. They engage more frequently with LCWM staff at a variety of events and through regular conversation about programmatic updates. They do interact with learners, but as parents of the children that they serve and typically the interactions are to address needs outside of the parent's individual literacy needs, such as their child's medical or educational needs. With the exception of tutors that meet at the school sites, the Head Start

representatives have very limited communication with tutors. Table 9 below shows some of the key themes or ideas shared by the Head Start representatives based on their responses to questions regarding communication. The first two section for each representative represent their responses to communication with learners. The second section demonstrates their communication beliefs about tutors. The final section indicates the Head Start representatives' responses regarding their interaction with the LCWM and specifically myself as the coordinator for the partnership.

Table 9

*Head Start Representatives Communication*

| Lucy's Responses | Melanie's Response | Norah's Response |
|---|---|---|
| ELL informed comm. Personalized attention Learner centered comm. | Frequent learner comm. Encouraging learners comm. | Learners comm. excitement Comm. about community |
| Limited tutor interaction Tutor comm. plan | Positive tutor interactions Tutor comm. at FAN | Positive tutor interactions How to help comm. Positive comm. w/ LCWM |
| Trust with LCWM Routine comm. w/ LCWM | Positive comm. w/ LCWM Enjoyed tutor training Shares passion w/ LCWM | LCWM initiated comm. Desired increase in comm. |

**Communication with Learners**

There were a number of common themes noted for all areas of communication for all three Head Start representatives. All of the representatives shared a personalized story about an individual learner they had encountered or worked with frequently. This connects to the personalized attention concept that Lucy shared:

I think that the other thing that stood out to me is that we sought out through

conversation to learn more about them [learners]. To hear them recount their personal

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experiences. To kind of meet them where they're at in an authentic conversation. Like oh – where are you from – what is that like. Like, tell us about you. I think they enjoy that personalized attention.

The response from Head Start representatives indicates that learners are not perceived as a monolithic audience, but rather a group of individuals that benefit from personalized responses to their educational needs. As we try to develop communicative strategies and curriculum concepts in the future, it is clear from their responses that Head Start representatives see the need for space for individualization and differentiation based on family needs.

All three see their role in communicating with parents to be as a supporter and encourager for their engagement in the program. When talking about one learner in particular, Melanie stated, "She [learner] shares with me her struggles in learning English and I will always encourage her. When I see her now and we speak, I think, 'Wow! She is learning!' I let her know to keep it up and that I see a difference." As Head Start representatives do not serve an educational roles in the traditional sense for the parents, it makes sense that their role differs from the tutors. As parents continue through the program in the LCWM, it is important that they feel supported by the community to build their language skills. The previously mentioned exploratory study also found this to be true with the parent participants in that study . Head Start representatives are able to act as recruiters and encouragers in their role and this is a crucial component of programmatic success for the LCWM.

**Communication with Tutors**

All three administrators shared positive interactions with tutors, but it should be noted that Melanie and Norah operate at the two locations where few tutors meet for their instruction. Lucy shared a plan for increased tutor communication:

They could be part of our tiered team process with teachers. Since the teacher is the

primary caretaker for family needs, they often pull in support from others. We can start

getting tutors on teacher's radars so that teachers could reach out to them.

When Lucy shared this, she meant the Head Start teacher of the child could develop

communication with the tutor of the child's parent.

Norah enjoys tutors and commented that they will often ask her how to be of more help

to their learner. Intriguingly, not many of the tutors in the study shared that they felt the

partnership could be useful to them. Head Start representatives' responses to this question

differed strongly and this may be indicative of perceived benefit for the party. In other words,

familiarization with Head Start and their educational system may not be perceived as useful to

tutors as this is not an area that is tested for their learners and their learners often come with a

host of other goals. However, Head Start representatives stand to benefit from increased

partnership in working towards the goal of increasing the educational success of the children that

they serve. At the very least, this distinction shows that there may be a need to share

opportunities with tutors to engage in communication with Head Start and tutors may choose

whether or not they would like to participate.

**Communication with LCWM**

As the interviewer is the LCWM employee with whom the representatives have the most

interaction, their answers could have been impacted in that the Head Start representatives may

have felt it was necessary to maintain positivity due to the partnership. However, all three shared

that communication with LCWM was positive and frequent and Lucy added that there was a

sense of trust with the organization. Norah shared, "I think you're [LCWM] wonderful. You

always reach out to us and check in. We need more parents in this program. Let's go full force!"

Norah added that we can increase communication to increase the recruitment of new parents in the program.

Communication with the LCWM is crucial for the partnership program's existence and is therefore not as negotiable as some of the other intersections. However, communication has evolved and changed frequently since the inception of the program and necessary modifications have been made. It may be useful to discuss the other themes of communication including frequency, initiation, and content to see how these may benefit the partnership between LCWM and Head Start.

Table 8 and 9 indicate that communication across various stakeholders differs based on the intersection and the stakeholders' roles. The final research question observes how goals and communication are aligned with one another across stakeholder groups to better inform future dialogue.

**Research Question 3: What are the points of alignment and disconnect regarding each group's opinion on family literacy programming through the Literacy Center of West Michigan and Head Start for Kent County?**

The final research question investigated the points of alignment and disconnect among the three different intersections of stakeholders. The priorities for tutors and learners have been discussed briefly, but this section will examine possible causes for alignment and disconnect and the perception each has of each other's priorities. In addition to this, tutors and Head Start representatives will be compared to see collectively what themes were aligned or disconnected. Finally, learners and Head Start representatives' answers were compared and contrasted to glean information on how their priorities align. Table 10 below provides points of alignment for tutors and learners and Table 11 shares points of disconnect for the same pairs. The first column

indicates alignment between the individually shared priorities, whereas the second column

indicates alignment of what each individual felt the other prioritized. The third and final column

shows that alignment and disconnect for the communication themes depending on the table.

Blank spaces in either table indicate that there was no point of alignment or disconnect.

Table 10

*Points of Alignment for Tutors and Learners*

| Pair | Priorities | Perception of Alignment | Communication |
|------|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Pair A | Verbal skills<br>Home/School connection | Verbal skills | Limited goal comm. |
| Pair B | Verbal skills<br>Grammar skills | | Limited goal comm. |
| Pair C | Home/School connection<br>Life skills lessons | Verbal skills | Open comm. |
| Pair D | Homework help<br>Prescriptive corrections | | Open comm. |

Table 11

*Points of Disconnect for Tutors and Learners*

| Pair | Priorities | Perception of Alignment | Communication |
|------|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Pair A | Grammar focus | | Comm. Initiator |
| Pair B | Scheduling needs<br>Focus on writing | Long term goals / Tasks completed | |
| Pair C | Community engagement | | |
| Pair D | | Life skills/Practice based | |

As can be seen in the tables, there were more points of alignment than disconnect for

Tutor-Learner pairs. Ann and Alejandra felt that learning English verbal skills was a top priority.

When asked questions regarding identifying effective lessons, both Bonnie and Benito identified

a lesson about filling out applications. Benito shared, "I can fill out applications now. Like my

address, my work. I know how to do that now. That's good." Both Carol and Claudia listed a

number of priorities for the program, but they did align in saying that communication with teachers is certainly one of them. Pair D identified assisting children with their homework and schooling was important for the program and a priority for both of them. Daniel shared, "I have three children and now I help all of them. I can help them all." Ann and Alejandra were aligned in how they discussed the communication between the two. Ann stated, "I try to incorporate what comes up naturally with her. We don't have direct conversations about her literacy needs." Alejandra shared a similar response, "No, I let Ann plan lessons." C felt that each other prioritized verbal skills, and Carol added to this by saying that she felt Claudia prioritized being comfortable speaking English specifically.

**Alignment and Misperception**

Perhaps the most immediately apparent information in Table 10 is that pairs are actually aligned in their goals and yet do not perceive this to be the case. Each of the pairs stated similar goals of the program and their personal priorities as tutors and learners. However, only two of the pairs shared the same information when discussing what they felt the other pair prioritized. Interestingly, Pair A had alignment in both their shared individual priorities and in their perception of each other's priorities, and yet Ann has been in the program for the shortest amount of time. Conversely, Pair C, the pair that had been in the program for the longest amount of time, was the only other pair to align in their perceptions of one another. As opposed to time with one another, communication seems to be much more indicative of how well pairs are able to perceive one another's priorities. Pair B, which had minimal conversation regarding goals, had the most disconnect about perceptions of one another's goals. Indeed, Bonnie at times seemed to be wary of Benito choosing books that Bonnie felt were not at his level.

**Benefits and Challenges of Alignment**

This concern and disconnect alerts us to a topic that has not yet been discussed in trying to acknowledge whether alignment is truly beneficial in and of itself. For example, learners can share areas of their life where they struggle with literacy and yet make requests to do work that may seem to be of little benefit. This may be the case for Pair A and their use of tutor-led decisions regarding lessons. It is important to note that Alejandra did share that she felt comfortable communicating with her tutor and making requests for what she wants to learn. Ann's responses indicate that she bases lessons and goal settings on information that she gathers while actively listening to her learner.

The approach of pair A is unique in that it includes active and responsive listening to needs, but not direct questioning of needs and open discussion of learner goals. This strategy may be useful for the tutor that may be wary of learner's requests not aligning with their end goals. For example, a learner whose goal is to increase their verbal skills may feel more comfortable or require workbooks where they feel more likely to be successful. However, it is the tutor's role to challenge the learner and to address their goals in the best way that the tutor knows. Pair A illustrates a pair that has successfully balanced the need to address goals and yet ensure that lessons are meaningful and guided by best practices.

**Communication Styles and Alignment**

There can be a number of reasons why Pair A had the most alignment, but their communication style surrounding goals and lesson plans can provide some insight into the cause. Pair C and D reported open and direct communication and frequent conversations about the learners' goals. While Pair D did converse freely with one another, the topics included items such as workplace literacy, everyday language scenarios, navigating pragmatics, and decoding

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written materials. Although the perceptions of each other's goals were not aligned, it may simply be that Pair D is working on such a wide range of topics that they were less likely to report the same items. At the same time, there is a benefit to focused goals and to having a shared mission that any stakeholders in an educational program may be working towards (Sheridan & Wheelers, 2017). Contrastingly, Pair C (who had alignment in the perceptions of the other party's priorities) were aligned with the same topic in their personal priorities. When independently sharing their priorities, they both shared improvement of the home and school connection and life skills lessons. When discussing the perceived priorities for one another, they both perceived the other party as prioritizing verbal communication. This was interesting in that the themes differed and yet they were aligned in their responses for both questions. As home and school connection traditionally requires verbal communication skills, the priorities were not entirely disconnected. However, this did present a scenario in which pair's perception of one another and their actual goals can differ. If pairs are working towards the goals they perceive for one another as opposed to their actual priorities (particularly if these priorities are aligned), then they are missing an opportunity to both be working towards their true goals. For the pairs that did align with one another, verbal skills were the source of alignment for both parties and therefore the focus of lessons. It is interesting to note that those that were aligned on written skills based goals (i.e. – filling in applications, helping with homework) were not aligned with their perceptions of each other's goals.

**Points of Alignment for Tutors and Head Start Representatives**

As stated previously, the Head Start representatives and tutors do not necessarily work directly with one another. Therefore, the answers for these two stakeholder groups were collectively gathered to see where the two groups align and disconnect overall. Table 12 shows

where the two general groups had agreement for the three different research questions. There is

no table for points of disconnect as there was limited or insignificant disconnect noted between

these two stakeholders.

Table 12

*Points of Alignment for Tutors and Head Start Representatives*

| Stakeholders | Priorities | Communication | Perception of Alignment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tutors / HS Representatives | Verbal skills Home/School connection | Limited comm. | Home/School connection Increased parent literacy Limited goal awareness |

Although the pairing of Head Start representatives and tutors is the intersection that

arguably communicates the least, there was still considerable alignment between the two. Many

of them felt that verbal communication was a priority for the program and certainly a priority

from their vantage point. Encouraging the connection between home and school was also a

common theme that arose from both parties. The one area of disconnect when it came to

priorities was that tutors frequently brought up life skills literacy tasks outside of family literacy,

whereas this did not occur for the Head Start representatives. As family literacy needs are

traditionally the needs that are brought to the Head Start representatives' attention, this

difference in priorities certainly would make sense. While both tutors and representatives agreed

that there was limited conversation between the two, their perception of the value of

communication differed strongly. Nearly all of the tutors were unsure that increasing

communication with Head Start would prove useful for their lessons, while all of the Head Start

representatives were eager for more interaction and Lucy even had a plan for what this

interaction could look like in action. This may be due to only one of the tutors having interacted

with Head Start, whereas all of the representatives had regular interactions with tutors not discussed in this research.

**Points of Alignment for Learners and Head Start Representatives**

The final intersection of learners and Head Start representatives was explored in the same way by comparing data collectively for each stakeholder group. Table 13 presents the points of alignment for this intersection of stakeholders and there was minimal disagreement between the two.

Table 13

*Points of Alignment for Learners and Head Start Representatives*

| Stakeholders | Priorities | Communication | Perception of Alignment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Learners / HS Representatives | Verbal skills Children's success Home/School connection | Positive interactions Encouragement | Home/School connection |

Similar to the other pairing of Head Start representatives and tutors, this intersection between Head Start representatives and learners had considerable alignment. They, too, felt that verbal skills and home/school connection was a main priority of the program. However, in their roles as parents and child education providers, the two were also focused on how this program could lead to the child's success. Although different frequencies of communication were reported, there was consensus that communication between the two was seen as encouraging and positive. Daniel shared, "At the parent teacher conference, my child's teacher said to keep it up. I was waiting for a tutor and now I'm learning." There was only one point of disconnect and it was the same item identified for the tutors and representative and that was the focus on life skills. Although one could argue that Norah's assistance with learners writing their name fits under this, it was done particularly for school forms and family literacy related items. Both learners and

Head Start representatives had a similar perception of priorities in that they felt the other

prioritized building home and school connections. As this is the role that each plays in each

other's life, it makes sense that they each have an understanding of this mutual goal.

## Summary of Findings and Considerations

While the LCWM will benefit from these suggestions, other family literacy programs could potentially benefit from these findings as well. This section consolidates the key themes that were elucidated from this study and provides a list of programmatic suggestions.

One of the main findings for this study was that all three of the stakeholder groups prioritize building home and school connections. The discussion illustrated how this may have different meanings depending on the individual. It is therefore important that our program addresses this goal by providing parents with methods to cultivate this partnership. Tutors can also benefit from this knowledge and informing fellow tutors about methods that work for their partnership. Verbal communication was also found to be important to all of the tutors and therefore instructional materials that assist with this skillset will be beneficial to develop or gather. Scheduling consistency was a point of disconnect for tutors and learners as tutors saw time flexibility as detrimental to instruction and yet learners saw this as necessary for their involvement in the program. This barrier will require future discussion as to how to address this opposing need or goal from both stakeholder groups.

Learner's brought insight into the importance of workplace literacy within a family literacy program. Participants in the LCWM program clearly have a host of goals that are important to them as learners. The shift from WIA to WIOA has been seen as a threat to the development of family literacy programs as indicated in the literature review. However, the response from learners may indicate that this shift is actually an opportunity to align family literacy goals and workplace literacy goals in new and meaningful ways. In addition to this theme, the importance of personalized attention was discussed my multiple stakeholders and a frequently mentioned priority for learners in particular. Future programmatic development

should therefore aim to provide space for individualized or differentiated instruction. This individualization can lead to supporting parents in new ways for their specific goals and could therefore assist Head Start in their mission to holistically empower parents.

**Programmatic Implications**

The following bullet points provide implications for the LCWM family literacy program with Head Start. In addition to this, they can act as a tool for providers and stakeholders in the field to consider for their programs. Specifically, these items can act as discussion points for the LCWM and its programmatic development. While these bullets cannot act as implications from the study (due to the low number of participants and limited mention of some themes), they can act as suggestions program leaders.

- Instructors and tutors can benefit by receiving individualized training based on their background in the field or lack thereof.
- Stakeholders can benefit by learning more about strategies that cultivate a love for reading and literacy practices.
- Learners can benefit by working on identifying and developing clear goals for their literacy skills.
- As multiple stakeholders acknowledge the importance of workplace literacy and financial literacy in the lives of learners, work can be done in the field to provide cross-literacy skill lessons
- Stakeholders collectively identify home and school connection as crucial to family literacy programs and can benefit by learning about methods to increase this connection.

- Stakeholders may have different logistical priorities regarding the consistency of sessions and the flexibility of sessions and therefore establishing clear expectations and having open dialogue about realistic time allotment for sessions will assist stakeholders

- Learners have benefited by the LCWM addressing logistical barriers and further work done in this area can assist in the recruitment of learners

- Many stakeholders prioritize both grammar skills and life skills and therefore research regarding the best methods to teach grammar through life skills should inform instruction

- Some learners have limited access to practice their verbal skills and community work to address this need will need to occur in order to find solutions for learners

- Open communication about goals leads to the alignment of goals and tutors should initiate these discussions until learners are pragmatically comfortable to do this themselves

- More important than aligning goals across the program is the need to ensure that instruction has enough flexibility to be individualized for the learners.

The logistics of some of these implications are easier to address than others as funding and scheduling limitations are certainly present. However, some of the implications can lead to more immediate action through modifying tutor training and adding concepts explored in this study to current curriculum. Other family literacy programs can look to these items to inspire communication about these concepts for their own stakeholders as well.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of participants (22% of current family learners in the Adult Tutoring Program) and the similarities within the stakeholder groups. All of the learners were Spanish speakers and it would have been useful to see how individuals from different L1 backgrounds may prioritize skill sets. In the current program year, Spanish speakers represent 50% of our learners. For example, Burmese learners, who currently represent 17% of the learners who utilize a completely different alphabet system may have had opposing thoughts on written skills compared to Spanish speakers. 3 of the 4 tutors were retired and conceivably were K-12 students at a similar time. It would be useful to see how personal educational experiences may influence priorities that tutors bring to sessions. However, it should be noted that there was still considerable diversity in tutors' responses regarding their priorities. Another limitation of the study was the interviewer's connection to the interviewees. This relationship could certainly influence answers and it would be useful to conduct this type of interview with a neutral party as interviewer. Participants displayed varying levels of comfort in sharing their opinions as to be expected with the relationship between the participants and researcher.

I developed the thematic phrases for the stakeholder groups and then reworded these phrases after multiple listenings of the recordings. There was unfortunately no inter-reliability for this coding, but it could be argued that this process led to intra-rater reliability due to the multiple examinations of the themes and coding system. Additionally, the interview was conducted in English for all of the learners and Spanish was only used to assist learners when there were misunderstandings in the questions. Initiating the conversation in Spanish could have fostered more complete responses. However, all of the learners were functioning at an English

verbal level that enabled them to engage in demanding educational conversations with a monolingual English speaker on a weekly basis.

Finally, the study could have benefited through the addition of interviews with Head Start representatives that plan the lessons for family activity nights. These staff members were unfortunately not available at the time of the study.

## Conclusion

While a qualitative study with a small sample of participants cannot be used to justify recommendations for programmatic changes nationally, insights gained from this data can add to the dialogue in exploring family literacy planning. Based on the responses from the participants, there are a few questions that national programs can begin to ask themselves to improve programmatic outcomes.

For example, this research made it clear that there is connection between stakeholders' goals and that there is potential for alignment in instruction. However, the prioritizing of these goals is where we differences are observed among stakeholders. It is important for organizations to have open dialogue about the priorities and mission of their program as this research has demonstrated that stakeholders are capable of making false assumptions of one another. This conversation is also important for instructors and learners to have to ensure that all participants aligned in their mission. One could argue that the priorities should be guided by the learner's needs and therefore the discussion needs to shift to how instructors and providers can be mindful about their personal priorities (Windisch, 2016). The lack of accessible information about national models demonstrates a need to bring more attention to bilingual family literacy programming. It also implies a need to connect to one another to share best practices and questions we are facing at our own agencies. Local efforts can be bettered by looking to statewide and national models that have been beneficial for family learners. The PACT model that has been discussed is one example of a national model supported by Toyota that has been adapted by the LCWM family literacy program and numerous other family literacy programs. The lack of assessment for bilingual family literacy programs presents a problem in uniting efforts towards indicators of success for participants.

United efforts are important as the wide variety of answers provided by all stakeholders could prove problematic if both tutors and learners are unsure of where to direct their energies and resources. For example, Carol's lists of actions and goals were extensive as an individual response and consequently Pair C needs to consistently prioritize what they are able to accomplish each week. Local groups such as KConnect (a network of local organizations focused on families, education, and community engagement) have recently started work on indicators for success in family literacy programming and similar national work should be considered by agencies. The learners' discomfort in addressing program improvements raises concerns as to whether learners feel able to advocate for their educational experiences.

It may also be useful for program directors to develop systems for learners to provide feedback in preferred methods in order to improve outcomes and experiences for families. The similarity in actions for all participants contrasted with the diversity in their priorities and perceived mission of the program. For example, many pointed to workbooks as an action taken to work towards goals although these goals were varied. As verbal skills was the skillset that united all participants, it was interesting that written workbooks was one of the most frequent actions. More research on how to achieve particular outcomes would be beneficial and ensuring this scholarship is accessible to ELL families and volunteers in various fields would assist in this.

Attentive listening and direct communication were both shown to be helpful in aligning efforts and pairs had similar ideas of how they communicated to one another. For tutors that feel direct communication may be difficult for their learner, it will be important to provide them with resources to assist beginning learners in sharing their ideas. At the same time, learners may not feel comfortable directly communicating their needs and this will need to be considered when developing communication suggestions for instructors and learners. Another item of interest is

how beneficial stakeholders believe communication is to the program. Admittedly, participants in family literacy programming are often performing multiple jobs and increased communication is an extra task added to an already considerable workload. The development of quick, routine, and useful communication tools (routine texts, meetings in convenient locations, scheduled phone discussions, etc.) for stakeholders may therefore be of more interest and more manageable.

Perceptions of the goals of other stakeholders were relatively accurate. However, one particularly noticeable exception was that tutors perceived learners goals as being future outcomes and learners perceived tutors goals for them as being related to current ongoing tasks (e.g., reading to their children, completing homework). For example, tutors perceive their learners being concerned with achieving citizenship or finding a job, whereas learners perceive tutors as prioritizing completing assigned tasks or literacy activities for that week. While learners sign an agreement form prior to beginning the program, it may be useful for organizations to encourage participants and instructors to encourage them to share their goals with one another and for the program, and perhaps systematically updating them collaboratively. This will help to clarify expectations and could lead to more positive relationships and outcomes in the future.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the field of family literacy programming is young and stands to benefit from research such as this to gather more insight into its stakeholder's perceptions. It also demonstrates the importance of actively listening to one another and responding effectively to learners for their own educational goals. Interestingly, it further exposes the need for individualization as demonstrated by the connection between the identified goals and social realities of the learners. Discussion of these themes at a statewide level can lead to better dialogue at a national level to see common goals of family literacy

programming and how we can align our efforts. The results of this study indicate that active,

open, and frequent discussion regarding goals is crucial for effectively aligning goals in order to

lead to desired outcomes.

Appendix

*Research Questions and Subcategories*

| Research Question | Subcategories | Head Start Questions | Tutor Questions | Learner Questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. What do learners, instructors, and program partners prioritize in family literacy programming? | **A. What is your interpretation of current program goals?** | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goals of the partnership between Head Start for Kent County and the Literacy Center for West Michigan are.** Follow up question: In what ways does this program assist children and parents with their literacy goals? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your involvement with the program what you feel the goals of the program are.** Follow up question: What is most important for your learner at this time related to family literacy or general literacy? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your involvement in the program and why you joined.** Follow up question: What do feel is most important for you to learn to improve your family literacy skills? |
| | **B. What does the LCWM family literacy program prioritize differently than other family literacy programs?** | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goals of national family literacy programs tend to be.** Follow up question: In your opinion, how is this program different from others in the field? | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you know about national family literacy programs.** Follow up question: Why do you think this program is beneficial for you compared to other programs? | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your experiences with this program and how it differs from other family literacy programs you may have experiences with.** Follow up question: What do you think this program offers |

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| | | | you as a tutor that other similar programs do not offer? |
| | **C. What do you feel qualifies as "effective programming"?** | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a moment when you felt this program was the most effective.** Follow up question: What about this moment made the program particularly effective? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a moment or time when you felt this program was the most effective.** Follow up question: What about this moment made the program particularly effective? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a moment or time when you had a wonderful lesson.** Follow up question: What about this lesson made it useful for you? |
| | **D. What do you feel qualifies as "ineffective programming" or doesn't meet your priorities for the program?** | **D. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a time you felt this program didn't meet your expectations or goals for the partnership.** Follow up question: What about this moment made it less effective? | **D. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a time you felt this program didn't meet your expectations.** Follow up question: What were the elements of this moment that made it less effective? | **D. Recall Prompt: Please speak about a time you were disappointed in the program.** Follow up question: What happened that made it disappointing? |
| | **E. In what ways do your actions (or the actions you expect) show what you prioritize in family literacy programming?** | **E. Recall Prompt: Please speak about how your team develops lesson plans for family activity nights.** Follow up question: What | **E. Recall Prompt: Please speak about how you develop your weekly lessons with your learner.** Follow up | **E. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what a typical lesson looks like with your tutor.** Follow up question: What do you feel your |

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| | | do you feel the focus should be for developing lesson plans for family activity nights? | question: What are your priorities in designing lessons for your learner and how are these included in your plans? | tutor should do more of in your family literacy lessons? |
| 2. How are these three parties communicating with each other and how are they conveying their priorities and concerns? | **A. What are the methods of communication that are utilized by all stakeholders?** | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interactions with families being served by the family literacy program.** Follow up question: What methods do parents have to share their experiences with the program to you? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interactions with your learner during lessons and how you communicate.** Follow up question: How does your learner share their literacy needs with you during your lessons? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about conversations with your tutor and how you communicate.** Follow up question: How do you let your tutor know what you want to learn in your lessons? |
| | **B. What are the perceived benefits of better communication between the stakeholders?** | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your communication with tutors serving families in the program.** Follow up question: What do you think would help improve this interaction? | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interaction with Head Start for Kent County and their programming.** Follow up question: Why do you feel this interaction could be useful and how would it impact your lessons? | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interaction with Head Start for Kent County.** Follow up question: Why is it helpful to interact with Head Start for Kent County? |

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| | **C. How can communication with the Literacy Center of West Michigan improve specifically?** | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interactions with Literacy Center of West Michigan staff that you partner with.** Follow up question: How do you communicate change that needs to occur to improve the program? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interactions with the Literacy Center of West Michigan.** Follow up question: How do you communicate your needs as a tutor with the Literacy Center of West Michigan? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about your interactions with the Literacy Center of West Michigan.** Follow up question: How do you communicate your needs with your literacy coordinator? |
| 3. What are the perceived points of alignment and disconnect between each group's opinions and actions regarding family literacy programming through the Literacy Center of West Michigan and Head Start for Kent County? | **A. What do you feel the priorities are of other stakeholders in the program? (For learners: Tutors)** | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel families hope to get out of the program and what they prioritize.** Follow up question: Do you feel this aligns with what you want for this program? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel learners hope to get out of the program and what they prioritize.** Follow up question: Do you feel this aligns with what you prioritize as a tutor or what you feel would most benefit your learner? | **A. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel your tutor wants to teach you.** Follow up question: How do you feel this is similar or different to what you want to learn about family literacy? |
| | **B. What do you feel the priorities are of the Literacy Center of West Michigan? (For Head Start** | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel tutors or instructors hope to provide for the families.** | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goals of the family literacy program are for the Literacy** | **B. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goals of the family literacy program are for the Literacy** |

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| **partners: Tutors)** | Follow up question: Do you feel this is in alignment or disconnect with what you or participants want from the program? | **Center of West Michigan.** Follow up question: What experiences with the Literacy Center of West Michigan have informed these beliefs? | **Center of West Michigan.** Follow up question: Why do you feel these are the goals that the Literacy Center of West Michigan has for their learners? |
| | **C: What do you feel the goal of the program is for Head Start for Kent County? (For Head Start: Literacy Center of West Michigan)** | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goal of this partnership is for the Literacy Center of West Michigan.** Follow up question: In what ways is this similar or different from your other answers for other stakeholders? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you feel the goal of this partnership is for Head Start for Kent County.** Follow up question: In what ways is this similar or different from your other answers for other stakeholders? | **C. Recall Prompt: Please speak about what you think Head Start for Kent County hopes that you will learn through this program.** Follow up question: In what ways is this similar or different from your other answers for yourself, your tutor, and the Literacy Center of West Michigan? |

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