

SIPPS Plus with Adult Language Learners

By Robin Pfeiffer | Categories: SIPPS, Adult Learning, Implementation, SIPPS Program

Strengthening the home-school connection is a vital aspect of planning at my school. With the highest ELL population in our county, the parents are willing to participate in their child's learning but not always sure how to go about it. During parent conferences, we often suggest helping their children with schoolwork and then immediately notice some reluctance on the parents' part. Their hesitation seemed to stem from insecurities with the English language. Perhaps it wasn't that they didn't want to help, but that they lacked confidence in their ability to help.

That is when we had an "ah-ha!" moment: the instruction we typically provided in the adult language classes might not be the instruction the parents needed for this situation! Maybe the parents needed strategies to help them read more efficiently so they could become more involved with their children's learning.

Our solution—offer the parents *SIPPS Plus!*

As I began to prepare for the class, I was a bit nervous about how parents would respond to the wall cards with the mnemonic pictures of a cat in a chair or the *Dreams on Wheels* texts. *Would they find these materials childish? Was I not being respectful of my learners?* I decided to give it a try and see how they responded, and I am happy to say it was a success!

I do not speak Spanish, which was the first language of all my participants, so I knew I would not be able to explain directions in a typical manner. However, the visual cues and the wall cards used in the lessons were very supportive in helping me convey what I was asking them to do. The class relied heavily on the wall cards, especially when we engaged in the Guided Spelling routine. I prepared folders containing copies of the spelling-sound wall cards and sight word dictionaries, a set for the classroom and one for each of them to take home. Also, after each class they would add a copy of that day's story to their folder.

During these classes the parents were extremely devoted and focused students. Like their children who I taught during the day, they worked hard to learn the correct way to pronounce sounds, blend these sounds into words, and then apply that work to the text. They were diligent in continuing to practice their sight words and stories at home, and they built their confidence in the same language I was teaching their children.

Many of the children whose parents attended this adult language class were also in my *SIPPS* groups during the day. This was a perfect pairing—parent and child were both learning about reading through the *SIPPS* program and shared a common experience. Now, parents had activities they could work on with their child at home— practicing sight words, reading text, working on spelling. In short, the parents became better readers, and in doing so, transformed into at-home teachers. It was a "win-win" for both the parents and children.

As we all know, COVID changed everything! Yet, it provided a unique opportunity for parent and child to engage in learning together during virtual learning. I invited parents to join their child during the virtual *SIPPS* lessons. Although there were challenges with virtual

learning, these experiences provided a wonderful opportunity for students and parents to build their reading skills and learn together.

I have always been confident in the *SIPPS* program and its effectiveness in helping children to strengthen their foundational skills to become independent, strong readers. However, I was pleasantly surprised at how effective *SIPPS* is as an instructional resource when teaching foundational skills to adults. Using *SIPPS Plus* to bring parents and children together in a collaborative learning opportunity was one of the most powerful teaching experiences I've had.