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Improving the quality of homework of culturally and linguistically diverse students through translation for parents

Robin Thorne

Rowan University, robinfthorne@hotmail.com

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**IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HOMEWORK OF CULTURALLY AND
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS THROUGH TRANSLATION FOR
PARENTS**

by

Robin Thorne

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities
At
Rowan University

Thesis Chair: S. Jay Kuder, Ed.D.

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Dedications

This is dedicated to my family for their support and love. To my husband Marvin, thank you for being patient and getting the kids out of the house when I needed to work. To my parents, thanks for always showing an interest in the work that I do. To my children, Blake, Noah and Maya, let this show you that you can do anything if you put your mind to it. Shoot for the stars always. Love you all very much.

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Abstract

Robin Thorne

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HOMEWORK OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS THROUGH TRANSLATION FOR PARENTS

2016-2017

Sydney Kuder, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this study was to determine if culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students were provided with Spanish versions of homework for their parents to assist them, their homework performance would improve. Research has shown that in order to remove biases in education, the academic program and the characteristics of the student must be compatible. The sample consisted of 6 CLD students in the same Social Studies class. Student grades on homework were used to determine if student homework averages increased when homework assignments were translated into the parent's native language.

The results of the study does give some support to the hypothesis that the homework performance of CLD students would improve when they were sent home with homework in both Spanish and English. Through the results it was apparent that some students had a slight increase in their averages when comparing the pre and post-data of both homework and test averages.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Homework is a common problem for many families. Parents attempt to clear their child's schedule to free up time for the child to do their homework. However, students may feel as though completing homework is meaningless busywork. They have many other after school activities that they may prefer that compete with their ability to give full effort to completing the assigned tasks. This is true even for regular education students that are fluent in their native English language.

Then there are other students who are not considered mainstream. In fact they have many barriers such as being special education students and/or they may speak English as a second language. These issues may cause them difficulty in completing homework other than simply finding homework to be pointless work that they do not want to complete.

My school is an inner city school that serves grades 5th through 8th. It is located in New Jersey with approximately 450 students. Roughly 10.5% of the population are special needs students. And 68% of the total population consists of Hispanic students (Issuu, 2014). My fifth grade inclusion Social Studies class includes 6 students who are culturally linguistically diverse, with Spanish being their primary language at home and English as their second language primarily used in school. Social Studies is considered a very necessary course in the school program because it is used to support the Language Arts curriculum. Everyday homework is assigned and expected to be completed and returned the following school day. Homework assignments for this class are comprehension based questions that follow each lesson. The comprehension questions

include open-ended type questions that require the students to look back within the lesson to find the correct information in order to answer the question.

Typically, when I check the homework the 6 culturally linguistic diverse or CLD students did not complete homework properly or they did not demonstrate the fact that they put forth true effort to complete the homework. In other words, the homework looked as if they wrote just anything on the lines so that they may simply say they completed homework. In the classroom, we would go over the homework. However, because the homework was not done, or not done properly, those students missed out on the opportunity to reinforce the information that was learned the preceding school day.

Some of the CLD students are already in a very difficult academic situations as they have IEPs for various learning disabilities, such as communication impairments. That information coupled with the fact that they did not have academic support at home from their families because of their families only speak and read Spanish, made completing assignments to the best of their abilities very difficult. The students did not understand some of the reading passages, questions or directions that are in the homework assignments. Children that live in a home with parents that can speak and read English have the fortune of having parents that can assist the student with completing the homework assignment. I have asked the CLD students if they found the homework difficult. They have stated that at times understanding the questions on the workbooks do seem to be difficult to understand. I asked if there was anyone at home that can help them with their homework, to which they replied that they have parents and some have older brothers and/or sisters. However the problem exists because the older brothers and/or sisters sometimes are not willing or able to help their younger siblings. As for the parents, all the CLD students have stated that their parents would like to help however they do not

read English and therefore they cannot help their children. These students are forced to go home and complete work that they do not understand completely on their own. For those that do not complete the homework correctly, their parents were unable to check their work for correctness. This cycle continuously seemed to leave the parents out of the loop of helping their child become successful in school.

When very important literature has to go home from the school such as the parent manual for the PARCC test, there is a Spanish version that is provided. Copies for English speakers as well as copies for Spanish-only households go home so that the parents can read over the manual and know what to expect during this crucial testing time. If schools understand the need to keep parents involved with standardized testing, why isn't that same method used for all material that should go home including homework? If schools want students to be successful for the annual testing, then why wouldn't that same preparation be given for the mastery of skills leading up to the test?

As an educator, I want all of my students to be successful but it would be naive of me to think that once students leave the school building they have all the tools that they need to finish their work to my expectations. It is my responsibility to arm my students with as many tools as I can to help them become successful students. I also realize that my students are faced with many difficulties such as in some instances being the only one home until a parent arrives much later after the student. I do not want to add more pressure to these already difficult situations. So if I can not only lessen the stress in the home life and improve my students academics, I am all for it. I can empathize with a parent being tired as they come home from work. With this tiredness is the aggravation of wanting to assist their child but knowing that they do not understand the words that are printed on the pages of the homework. If a copy is provided in their native languages the

parents would be able to scan the homework reading the directions and questions. Then in turn, those parents can ask the students what was their answer for the various questions. Now with this idea put into play, parents would hopefully be able to explain the correct answer to their child. They would also be made aware of the instructions that the student is learning in school. In this manner families are given the opportunity to become involved with their child before the report card conference which unfortunately in some cases, they find out late in the school year that academically it is too late to turn things around for the student.

As the instructor, it is very disappointing when students do not master content skills. Because of the fact that I have identified at least some barriers in the student's education, I could not help but wonder was it possible to help students feel confident enough to complete the homework so that they understand the skill? If students were supplied with the homework in English and in their native language would they be able to get the support from home to correctly complete the homework so that the skill that they were taught during the school day can be reinforced? Would the fact that parents and families were now included in the student's academics improve the students' overall investment into their education?

It is apparent that these at-risk students needed support from their home. When parents become involved with their student's academics it has been found that students can become more successful at school. Parent involvement supports the development of knowledge, positive behaviors and attitudes (Hoover-Dempsey, et al, 2001). In addition, some of these CLD students have learning disabilities. So that was an added barrier to the student's education. Research has shown that students with learning disabilities experience higher levels of stress in having to complete homework compared to their

general education counterparts. This stress results from the deficits that these students have cognitively along with their fear of failure and motivation to learn (Katz, et al, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of providing 5th grade CLD students with Social Studies homework both in English as well as in their native language, which in this case is Spanish. It was my belief that students' homework average as well as their performance on tests will improve overall due the support that they would receive not only from school but also from home. The rationale was to build up the students' confidence and reinforce skills that were learned during the school day.

This research is important because student academic success is at stake. I receive the students early enough in their educational career to assist them into developing better work habits as well as giving their families a way of becoming involved so that the parents feel less isolated. Parents would have the opportunity to know what it is that their children are learning and how they were doing academically. There would be less surprise at the report card conference, as parents could see early on where their children had difficulties. Students would also lose the ability to hide their deficiencies at home. All of the guess-work will hopefully be removed. It was my hope that the outcome of this research is that most of the students' grades in Social Studies would increase. If this method was successful, other educators could use this method to improve the academic performance of their students with language differences.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“All parents care deeply about their children’s education and academic progress. Indeed, for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents education ranks as a priority” (Cynthia Duke, 2001).

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of homework is, “An assignment given to a student to be completed outside of the regular class period”. In the process of completing assignments outside of the regular class period, there are benefits that students can receive. Benefits that can be included are the improvement of retention and understanding of content skills (Cooper, 2009). Homework can improve critical thinking and enrich the curriculum by demonstrating to students that learning about a topic can take place anywhere, not just within the four walls of the school. Homework can also help to develop a student’s independent and responsible character traits and it involves parents in what their children are learning in the classroom. Homework can allow parents to be aware of their child’s growth and achievements (Sullivan and Sequeira, 1996).

When homework is completed, checked on, commented on and given back to students it gives immediate feedback to all parties. Students are able to see their errors, parents are able to find out how well their students understand the topic they were assigned and teachers are given the opportunity to modify their instruction (Sullivan and Sequeira, 1996). With feedback of homework that students have earnestly completed teachers can use the data to either move onto the next topic or spend more time working to help students understand where they may have made their mistakes.

Homework Barriers for Students with Learning Disabilities

While there are many benefits for good homework practices, there are also many barriers to successfully completing homework in the CLD household as well as in households of students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities are students that are within a normal intelligence range but they are delayed in one or more areas of mathematics, reading, writing, or have language impairments (Bryan, Burstein, and Bryan, 2001). Bryan, Burstein and Bryan in 2001 have found that students with learning disabilities experience more problems with homework when compared to nondisabled students as they are more likely to be off-task and disorganized. Students with disabilities spend more time on homework and need more support from their parents in the effort to complete the homework. The parents of these children find themselves in a more stressful situation in their attempts to help their child understand the homework. Children with learning disabilities have many cognitive difficulties that impede on their ability to complete homework. Their deficits in reading, math, poor communication and organizational skills make it difficult to understand let alone properly complete homework successfully (Margolis, 2005).

Homework Barriers for English Learners

While having a learning disability may seem like enough of a difficulty to have success in school, not understanding the native language of the school and its academic material is another problem in and of itself. The Cardenas-Cardenas Theory of Incompatibilities by Blandina Cardenas and Jose Cardenas in 1972 tested the idea that minority children have not had the same success as 'typical middle class Americans'. It was found that academic programs developed for mainstream English-speaking middle school students was not acceptable for minority, non-English speaking students. In order

to remove biases in education, the academic program and the characteristics of the student must be compatible. The study gave example using the idea that schools recognize that it is difficult to teach blind children to read with a typical book, however schools are willing to teach a Spanish speaking student with an English book (Cardenas, 1974).

As an ethnic group compared to the White non-Hispanic population, the Latino population displays a wide educational gap in terms of being on the lower spectrum of holding a bachelor's degree and maintaining a high dropout rate. This area of educational disparity has been explored citing the lack of educational resources and the lack of identity with the school. However, it was noted that there was not a lot of focus on the homework routine of Latino students. Again homework is a tool that when used correctly can only help to make a student more successful. But those benefits will not be seen if homework is not done. This research done by Sylvia Martinez explored the notion that Latino students may not have the necessary support needed to properly complete homework (Martinez, 2011).

Parental Involvement

It is a natural notion for a parent to be involved in and support their children in all areas of their lives. Parents provide a home environment that is conducive to the child's education such as making sure that they go to bed on time. They monitor how much television and computer time that their child watches to it does not negatively impact on their study habits. And they also will talk to their child maybe about their school day. However a Latino parental involvement after that point may be limited. These parents may have a limitation on the availability to attend school functions, volunteering for school trips, communicating with their child's teacher and more importantly, monitor

their child's homework may prove difficult. In fact it has been found that among culture groups Latino parents were less likely to monitor their child's homework. (Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Knight-Lynn, Moallem, Goldberger, 2012).

The lack of support may not be by parent choice, but by barriers that the CLD families must adapt to. There is a belief that the lack of achievement among CLD students and the break in connection between home and school are related. In fact the longer some CLD students stay in school the greater the gap of educational performance between them and White and middle class students. While time is spent in school CLD students have limited opportunities to develop their 'intellectual identities and identification with academics' (Chu, 2011). In addition to learning language arts and math these students must move through both home and school (Columbo, 2006).

Most mainstream families do not have perceived barriers to their educational experience. They are fortunate enough to have a shared communication as well as cultural and linguistic understandings with the school environment. For CLD families however, there is a true disconnect. These families have reported a lower active involvement due to the inability to speak and understand English. They are also unfamiliar or intimidated by inner workings of the educational system. There may also be a lack of trust for some professionals that parents feel do not meet their need for increased communication and cultural sensitivity (Matuszny, Banda and Coleman, 2007).

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization reports that it is unquestionable that the best method for teaching a child is 'in his mother tongue'. It is the way in which a person's mind works for expression and understanding. It is also a method of identification among members of his/her community and a person learns more quickly than through an unfamiliar language (Brice, 2001).

Conclusion

Communication in English can be a problem for second language learners because English is a content subject and it is used in the instruction to the students. It has been found that students that speak both English and another language commonly switch between the two languages. For culturally linguistically diverse children this switching can be a communicative strategy used to aid in comprehension. This language switching amongst ESL students has not been found to be a place of confusion. In fact the use of a student's native language demonstrates an appreciation of the student's language and culture. Language switching also allows for more spontaneous language use which increases English use (Brice, 2001).

If students are given homework both in their native language (Spanish) and in the language used in school (English), then they are given an opportunity to understand the homework questions thoroughly in order to answer them correctly. If the students are still unsure of or confused by the homework, then they can now have the assistance of their parents whose native language is Spanish to read with them and help them understand the homework. By allowing for this language switching on worksheets students and families that must deal with a language barrier among other issues will have another avenue to success.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study examined the results of providing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with homework that the entire class is given in both English and Spanish. A single subject research design was used. Single subject research is the type of research a researcher uses in the attempt to change the behavior of a small group of individuals. Participants in a single subject research function as both the control and treatment group (Siegle, 2017). Results in this study were based on how much of an increase in grade percent, if any, an individual student experienced. The results were solely based on whether or not and how well students and parents are able to utilize the provided versions of homework.

Setting and Participants

The school where this study was conducted is an inner city school with approximately 450 students that serves grades 5 through 8. It is located in an urban community in New Jersey. Roughly 10.5% of the population are special needs students. And 68% of the total population consists of Hispanic students (Issuu, 2014). The fifth grade inclusion Social Studies class includes 6 students who are culturally linguistically diverse, with Spanish being their primary language at home and English as their second language primarily used in school.

The 6 students chosen to participate in the study included 4 girls and 2 boys. Student A is an 11 year old female. She lives with her mother and stepfather. She has 2 other siblings, both boys. One is older by 4 years and the other is younger by 1 year. She learned to speak English at 7 years old when she was enrolled in the 2nd grade. Spanish is the only language spoken at home. Her homework average for Social Studies pre-data

was 63%.

Student B is an 11 year old male. He lives with his mother and father. He has 1 sister that is 5 years older. He learned to speak English at the age of 5 when he was enrolled in kindergarten. Spanish is the primary language spoken at home, however he and his sister do converse in English sometimes. Student B has been classified with a Specific Learning Disability in the area of Oral Expression. His homework average for Social Studies pre-data was 32%.

Student C is a 10 year old female. She lives with her mother and father. She has 1 adult brother. She learned to speak English at the age of 5 when she was enrolled in kindergarten. Spanish is the only language spoken at home. Her homework average for Social Studies pre-data was 77%.

Student D is 12 year old female. She was retained in the 2nd grade. She lives with her mother and father. Her father speaks a little English but does not read any English. She also has a brother that is 2 years younger. She learned to speak English in kindergarten. Spanish is the only language spoken at home. Student D has been classified with Specific Learning Disability in the area of Basic Reading Skills and Written Expression. Her homework average for Social Studies pre-data was 35%.

Student E is 12 year old male. He was retained in the 4th grade. He lives with his mother and 2 sisters, both of whom are older. One is older by 2 years and the other is older by 3 years. He learned to speak English in kindergarten. Spanish is the only language spoken at home. His homework average for Social Studies pre-data was 65%.

Student F is a 10 year old female. She lives with her mother and 2 older sisters (ages unknown). She learned to speak English in preschool and does not speak much Spanish. Her mother does not speak any English. Spanish is the only language that the

mother uses at home. Student F can understand her mother, however she mostly will respond to her mother in English. Student F has been classified with a Specific Learning Disability Communication Impaired. Her homework average for Social Studies pre-data was 64%.

Materials and Procedure

The item used for the purpose of collecting data consisted of the student Social Studies workbook *My World: Building Our Country*. This is a fifth grade consumable workbook that the students have an English version of. The students that participated in the study were given a Spanish version of the book as worksheets, which they used to complete the homework. This homework was given to them four times a week for three weeks.

The homework grades that the students have received in the past were reflected on their chapter test average. Each chapter is comprised of 3 to 4 lessons. When all of the lessons in the chapter have been taught then there is a computer based test that is given to the students that is used to assess their mastery of the chapter that was covered. This test demonstrates the student's understanding of all the lessons throughout the chapter that were presented to them.

Previously the students had taken the chapter 4 assessment with a cumulative average of 45.66% with a range of scores from 51% to 43%. The previous work that the students completed in Chapter 4 was used as the pre-data for the purposes of this study. The students were expected to complete the daily homework assignments with Spanish versions provided for their parents to assist them. The homework was used as a guide to assess their growth and finally they were given the Chapter 4 test in English to verify if their parents assisting them with homework has in fact benefitted them.

Parental letters of consent were given to the student's families to obtain permission for the child to participate in the study. Once all parental letters were received approving the students to participate, then surveys were handed out to both students and parents. The student survey consisted of questions about whether they receive help at home with homework. The parent survey consisted of questions about whether they give help at home with homework. The parent survey also asked whether, if the homework were given in Spanish, would they help the child more. The importance of the survey was to gauge how invested the parents and students were in the student completing the homework correctly. In order for the study to work parents and students had to demonstrate a desire to the parents to assist the student in completing the homework and doing it so that the answers are not only correct but the student understands the content material.

Based on the results of the surveys, parents expressed that if the homework were given in Spanish they would be able to help their child more and that it did at times bother them that they cannot assist their child with homework. On the student survey, all of the students shared that they typically let their parents know when they do not understand the homework and they would like their parents help to complete their homework.

Chapter 4

Results

Data was analyzed to compare student's homework averages before and after they were given the homework in Spanish to complete with their parents help. The results show that some students had a slight increase in their homework averages when comparing the pre and post-data.

Table 1

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student A

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
52.5	83.75	62.5	87.5	60	85

The results for student A are shown in table 1. The student improved her homework average each week. During the pre-intervention observations, she had a mean homework average of 52.5. Following the intervention, her mean homework average increased to 85.

Table 2

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student B

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
35	12.5	27.5	52.5	52.5	85

The results for student B are shown in table 2. The student did not improve his homework average for the first week of intervention. In the following weeks however, there was an improvement in the homework average. During the pre-intervention observations, he had a mean homework average of 35. Following the intervention, his mean homework average increased to 85.

Table 3

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student C

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
80	77.5	72.5	77.5	66.25	82.5

The results for student C are shown in table 3. The student did not improve her average for the first week of intervention. In the second week there was a slight

improvement in her homework. Following the intervention her average increased to 82.5.

Table 4

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student D

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
45	52.5	25	75	60	83.75

The results for student D are shown in table 4. The student improved her homework average each week. During the pre-intervention observations, she had a mean homework average of 45. Following the intervention, her mean homework average increased to 83.75.

Table 5

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student E

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
75	75	55	67.5	55	65

The results for student E are shown in table 5. The student did not improve his

homework average each week. During the pre-intervention observations, he had a mean homework average of 75. Following the intervention, his mean homework average decreased to 65.

Table 6

Homework Averages Pre and Post-data. For Student F

Week 1 Pre	Week 1 Post	Week 2 Pre	Week 2 Post	Week 3 Pre	Week 3 Post
55	83.75	72.5	85	57.5	72.5

The results for student F are shown in table 6. The student improved her homework average each week. During the pre-intervention observations, she had a mean homework average of 55. Following the intervention, her mean homework average increased to 72.5.

The results of the chapter 4 pre and post tests are shown in table 7. Four out of five students had an increase in average in their chapter 4 post test. Yet only one student passed the examination with a score of 71. Student B had a decrease in his average following the intervention.

Table 7

Pre and Post-Test Results

	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F
Chapter 4 Pre- Test	43	51	51	37	43	49
Chapter 4 Post- Test	71	41	63	53	53	65

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of providing 5th grade culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with social studies homework both in English as well as in Spanish. Students A and C informed me that they followed the directions of the study. Student A had a consistent 20 to 30% increase in her grade average from week to week. Student C's average however, seemed to contradict her response that she was following the directions of the study. When Student C's averages were compared it showed a drop in average from week 1 pre to week 1 post. Week 2 post only had a 5% increase from week 2 pre. Week 3 post-data however revealed a little over a 15% increase. Student F's parent informed me that she had difficulty in understanding all of the words that were in Spanish. But when she could understand the words she did help her child. She did however have other difficulties in that she initially did not understand that the answers to the homework were to come back to school written in English. She had her child for the first assignment write the answers in Spanish. Student B prior to the study did not always turn his homework assignments in. He continued this behavior into the beginning of the study. His parents were contacted and after that he managed to bring his assignments in. However, it should be noted that his homework averages did not have much change so it is possible that he did not get help from his parents. Student D also had a pattern of not bringing in homework that was assigned prior to the study. Once she started to bring the homework from the study in her homework average in week two rose by 50% and in week 3 it rose almost 23%. Student E is another student that based upon his grade appears to not have received help from his parents. From week 1 pre to week 1 post his overall average showed no change. Week 2 pre and

post showed an increase by 12% and week 3 only had an increase by 10% when comparing pre and post scores.

At the conclusion of the study the students were asked if they liked the fact that their parents could be involved. They said that it was different for them to have the support of their parents in homework, but they liked to have the ability to ask for help when they could not find information in the text or when they did not understand a question.

The students were given a Chapter 4 post-test to analyze if they had mastered the content once they had completed all of the homework from the lessons in the chapter. The only student that mastered the chapter with a passing grade of 71% was Student A. The results of the study does give some support to the hypothesis that if CLD students were provided with homework in both Spanish and English so that parents could assist the student at home there would be an increase in students' homework average as well as their performance on tests.

Limitations

Further research would be needed over a longer term to determine if there would be a positive effect for CLD students receiving homework in both English and Spanish. Limitations in this study included the fact that the sample of subjects was very small compared to the overall Hispanic population of the school. This was a sample that was made available from one 5th grade class. A clearer understanding could be determined had the study been throughout the entire school with all grade involved and for a longer length of time. This way marking period grades could be compared to get a more precise answer as to whether providing CLD students with specific additional aid would be

benefitting to that population.

Implications

It is necessary that students realize that they do not have to be alone left to struggle to complete homework. There are many versions of textbooks for a variety of subjects that have a Spanish version that can and should be utilized. Teachers, however, must be aware of the different obstacles that their children must face daily. It is imperative to get to know students so that the teacher can identify their weaknesses and strategize with ways that may help the student. This particular study helped the students to know what it is like to have the opportunity to receive help from their parents. The one student that consistently sought after her parents for help was able to witness the fact that her homework and test average went increased.

In the future it would be recommended that school districts identify those students that come from culturally linguistically diverse homes, and more specifically identify those students that have parents that speak and read little to no English. Through this identification extra support can be given to those students that may not always speak up for themselves and ask for help when it is needed.

In closing, by studying how improving the quality of homework for culturally linguistically diverse students through the translation for parents it is my hope that all students will have the chance to receive the support that they need from their parents and families so that they may be successful. All parents should be given the opportunity to be involved in their children's academics. They should not have to sit by idly and hope that their child can make it through the school year without great difficulty on their own. I truly believe that if schools can give families the tools to empower themselves all aspects of a student's academic life can improve.

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