The benefits of family literacy

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The benefits of family literacy

Abstract
This paper examines the positive influence families can have on their child's literacy education and the development of a project to provide experiences to families that demonstrate ways they can extend the learning process with their children at home. This paper provides literature supporting the importance of family involvement and the specifics of how schools and families can work together to overcome common barriers to family involvement in a child's literacy development. The project for a family literacy night was developed from the literature, providing a school-based program for literacy support for families, highlighting effective practices and suggestions for enhancing literacy development at home.
THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY LITERACY

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master’s of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Cassandra Cate
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This Research Paper by: Cassandra Cate

Titled: THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY LITERACY

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the positive influence families can have on their child’s literacy education and the development of a project to provide experiences to families that demonstrate ways they can extend the learning process with their children at home. This paper provides literature supporting the importance of family involvement and the specifics of how schools and families can work together to overcome common barriers to family involvement in a child’s literacy development. The project for a family literacy night was developed from the literature, providing a school-based program for literacy support for families, highlighting effective practices and suggestions for enhancing literacy development at home.
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I want to thank my loving husband for wanting to help, being supportive during this busy time, and for eating frozen dinners and take-out while I was gone for class. I also want to thank my father and mother for instilling the value of education in me.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Parents are obviously a huge part of a child’s life and are often referred to as a child’s first teacher (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). If this is the case, why then are parents characteristically contacted either when their child has done something wrong or when there is cookie dough that needs to be sold for a school fundraiser? Involving families through well-built relationships is included as one of the National Middle School Association’s fourteen characteristics for successful middle schools (Reilly, 2008). This project will outline the steps I took in my school to create a family literacy night in which families were able to come to the school to gain ideas of how they could further the learning process at home, especially literacy development, in order to begin building strong relationships between the school and home.

Rationale

As someone who grew up in a literate home where I was constantly surrounded by print, I realized early on how important both reading and writing were to a life of literate success. I want to share this idea of success with the families in my school and to do so by creating strong home-school relationships. Each day when I swipe my security card at the door to let myself in, I ask myself, “Whom are we really shutting out of our schools anyway?” Because of this, I invited families into the school to begin this relationship building process.

Purpose

My goal with this project is to provide an effective family night program that creates a positive connection between families and the school and creates a relaxing
environment for parents to begin working with the school in supporting a rich literacy environment in their homes that will foster their children’s literacy development. I hope to benefit from the results of this program by sharing research on this topic and a feasible approach to my colleagues to help us expand as educators. I will also share with families how they can continue the education process at home. Lastly, I want to look at how we can gain insight on their funds of knowledge that will help us grow professionally in our classrooms.

Terminology

Below is a list of operationally defined terminology used in this paper to address key concepts in family literacy.

- **Family Literacy** – the collaboration of schools and families for the purpose of better educating the children in their lives (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006)

- **Family Literacy Programs** - opportunities for families and schools to merge in the hope of celebrating and assisting the development in literacy for the children in their lives (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006)

- **Funds of Knowledge** – the knowledge and skills developed by a family’s history and culture that are vital for household use and survival (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992)

- **Parent** – any family member or other adult that assists a child’s life by playing a role in the learning process or the child’s school improvement (Anfara & Mertens, 2008)
Research Questions

Three research questions were developed for this project. These questions drove both my literature review and the development of my literacy project.

1. What are the benefits and obstacles of family involvement in the school setting?
2. What are effective ways to connect home literacy and knowledge with school ideas and practices?
3. How can I best facilitate a home-school connection in my school?
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of processes I used to research and to develop this project for a family literacy night for Drezlin Elementary and Middle Schools in the rural community in which I teach in the midwest region of the US (Drezlin is a pseudo name for my school). The methodology involved two separate processes: the process used to research the topic for the literature review, and the process used to organize the development of the actual project.

Literature Review Process

To find information and professional articles to support my project and its topic, I searched professional databases. The two I used most frequently were ERIC (EBSCO) and Educational Full Text. The search terms I received most hits on included the following: family literacy; home + school connection; funds of knowledge; and parental involvement in schools.

Project Development Process

Volunteers for my project came both from outside agencies and from my school. I sent a letter to each member of the staff at the middle and grade school asking for help for the night (see Appendix A). Staff then responded back to me on whether they would be able to assist and in what way. I contacted outside volunteers personally through phone conversations. Some of these volunteers were referred to me by a member of my staff as a possible source of help. Others came from insight I gained through professional articles I had read. Donations were obtained through visiting local businesses. I went to each
business individually and gave them a letter explaining the event and asking for whatever help they could give (see Appendix B).
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the National Center for Family Literacy (2006), twenty percent of American children live in poverty and due to this will have missed out on the thirty-two million more words children from professional families will have heard by age four. These same children watch television an average of twenty-two to twenty-eight hours a week (Palmer, 2008). To complicate this issue further, ninety-seven percent of secondary school teachers, although identifying parent involvement as essential, also identify working with parents as one of their top difficulties (Palmer). These issues together create quite an obstacle for literacy development. However, Anfara and Mertens (2008) believe

The evidence is consistent and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and throughout life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 62)

Although the idea of family literacy is less than twenty-five years old, this lack of involvement by parents in their children’s school experiences seems strange when looking at the history of schools (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). In the nineteenth century, parents and the community were essential in running schools. The church, the families, and the community worked together to choose the teachers, the school calendars, and the curriculum presenting a united front on how young adults should be reared (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). This changed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when different school and family structures came forward, and the school was separated from the control of the parents especially in the area of curriculum.
This grew out of the belief by educators and the larger cultural consensus that teachers were best able to make curricular decisions because of their knowledge in the field (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). The 1920s brought even more separation due to parents actually “dumping” responsibilities on schools and this dynamic was actually coined “bake sale” mode because parents began letting the schools take on responsibilities that had previously belonged to the parents (Anfara & Mertens, 2008, p. 59). This led to teachers of the 1950s feeling parents needed to support teachers because they were the experts and allow the teachers to teach (Anfara & Mertens). How schools responded to the role of parents began to change in the 1960s when research published on parental involvement highlighted the connection between families engaged in schools and student achievement. -The federal government began mandating parental involvement as a part of effective schools (Anfara & Mertens).

Anfara and Mertens (2008) see a relationship between parents’ educational background and their acceptance by teachers as part of a child’s educational experience. “Because parents lack the language or the educational background, some educators might view them as incapable of anything that would make a difference in their child’s education” (p. 59). This is an unfortunate misconception on the part of education. To create a learning environment that is most effective in promoting student success, parents, whether well educated or not, need to become involved in the curriculum and their children’s education beyond simple-volunteer work (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). This need for parent involvement stems from the necessity to make genuine connections between a student’s home and school in order to best educate children. If a student’s home life is shown as important, and a connection is made between the literacy activities
at school and literacy at home, a child will develop a stronger love of literacy (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). Van Steenel (2006) has found that children’s literacy development begins with watching and learning through their experiences in their own households, not on the day they go to kindergarten.

Parental involvement frequently leads to more responsibility and ownership by parents for a child’s learning, as well as improved academic success for the child, and is a more accurate indicator of success in school than family income or education. Children instill within themselves a value in education when they witness the involvement of their parents in school (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). Teachers can have more access to and learn about the children’s family and cultural background and home experiences and home environment when parents are involved in schools (Reilly, 2008). This also makes a child’s self-esteem, behavior, goals, and emotional well being improve in a positive way (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Parent involvement helps schools nurture continued literacy experiences in the home, which can dramatically impact a child’s success in literacy learning. The National Center for Education Statistics claims those children who are not read to three or more times per week are not as likely to know their letters as those who are given this opportunity (Holloway, 2008). Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez (2003) concluded parent involvement can actually result in a more positive parent-child relationship, help parents improve their self-confidence, and create a better home-school relationship with multicultural families.
Obstacles to Parent Involvement

One of the greatest indicators of reading achievement is the amount of reading children do (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). However, Mraz and Rasinski found that most children only read ten minutes on average at home. They attribute this small amount of time on reading to two factors: many parents do not realize the importance of reading to their children, and their children are not confident enough to do so on their own (Mraz & Rasinski). An even greater issue could be the small amounts of books students have in their homes (Reeder & Sowers, 2002). And access to books outside the home, such as libraries, is not always feasible. Reeder & Sowers found that of the poorest children of America aged three to five, only thirty-seven percent visit a library at least once a month. Due to summer reading loss because of these circumstances, a gap of approximately three grade level years can be seen between high and low income students by the end of sixth grade (Mraz & Rasinski).

Children in low socioeconomic status homes and ethnic minority children do not have the same literacy experiences as others (van Steensel, 2006). Holloway (2008), in his study on the National Household Educational Survey, found that Black and Hispanic children, especially those who speak languages other than English, tend not to have stories read to them as often as White children. Holloway believes that parents’ willingness to read aloud to their children is influenced by their level of literacy. He suggested that these families might need some help with literacy in their first language in order to help their children in English.

According to Quezada, Diaz and Sanchez (2003) in their research on family involvement in Latino parents, many Latino parents believe that because they cannot
understand English, they cannot help or support their children nor their children’s teachers, or they feel school personnel may have a negative attitude toward them. Some parents also fear they may interfere with the school’s work and may hesitate to become involved because they are unfamiliar with the schools system. Quezada, Diaz and Sanchez also found other supposed barriers to be a lack of education, too many other issues to deal with, or no childcare or transportation.

Anfara & Mertens (2008) feel many parents also do not see any opportunities to become involved, do not have the resources to become involved, have a lack of education themselves, have experienced negative school occurrences, or get little communication from schools. Teachers may cause this lack of communication due to their lack of time or the fear that parents will question their expertise and authority (Anfara & Mertens). Often, most communication between the teacher/school and parents happens when there is a problem with a student (Reilly, 2008). Whitmore and Norton-Meier (2008) find trust to be a key element, “Teachers must trust that parents are supporting their children in many positive and proactive ways at home regardless of school assumptions about individual and social backgrounds or belief systems.” (p. 460)

While parents do see value in education, they may not know how to be involved, especially when dealing with adolescents (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Anfara and Mertens refer to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in discussing the decline of parent involvement as children progress through intermediate grades and into middle school and high school,

Despite the clearly documented benefits of parental involvement for students’ achievement and attitudes toward school, parent involvement of all types declines
progressively during the elementary school years. By middle grade school, the home-school connection has been significantly reduced, and in some cases, nonexistent. (Anfar & Mertens, 2008, p. 59)

**Effective Communication between School and Home**

Communication is key to the development of a bridge between home and school, but according to Reilly (2008), it generally only takes place when there is a problem at school. This shows why Reilly believes, “Parents crave communication—real communication that specifically describes how their child is doing, tells them what is going on at school, and gives them practical and reasonable ways they can help their children at home.” (p. 45) In order to offer parents this environment of open communication that they are asking for, Quezada et al. (2003) believes schools need to ask for parent input by sending school information home in necessary languages, making home visits, and offering flexible times and transportation to families who may not have any.

There are different forms of communication a school can use with its parents. Many schools or individual teachers provide newsletters to inform parents of academic and extra-curricular events (Werderich, 2008). This calendar could further help families by sharing dates of upcoming quizzes, tests, or projects so parents know what their children need to be doing ahead of time (Reilly, 2008). One suggestion is to have students create a newspaper to report school and classroom happenings that could even go into the local paper (Werderich).

Some teachers choose to connect with families through home visits where teachers are able to get a one-on-one meeting to learn about their students' home
environment, issues, and values. These home visits help parents feel more comfortable because they can visit with their child’s teacher on school topics in a place that is comfortable to them (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). Through home visits teachers are more likely to be successful in having face-to-face meetings with families for all the children in their classroom. And parents find these types of meetings more convenient for them because they do not need to find transportation to get to school nor do they need to find childcare assistance (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe). Probably the best way to involve parents, however, is to extend an invitation to the parents to come into the school. Reilly (2008) found, through his middle school parent contact program, that when parents are involved in activities like tutoring, speaking as a guest, or leading discussions on community issues, student performance is enhanced. Reilly discovered through his program that involved parents help students have a positive relationship with school (Reilly).

**How to Increase Family Involvement**

As previously discussed, Epstein (2008) indicates the value of parent involvement in academic success and advancement of children in schools.

Studies confirm that when families are involved, more students earn higher grades in English and math, improve their reading and writing skills, complete more course credits, set higher aspirations, have better attendance, come to class more prepared to learn, and have fewer behavioral problems. (Epstein, 2008, p. 10) As Moll et al. (1992) suggest, teachers need to remember their students are not passive bystanders but are active participants in many social relationships in and out of school, and sometimes these students may even help with money for their families or are
translators, connecting their families to the outside world. In order to join these active members of society and their families into the school, we need to dismiss the old idea of involvement, such as having an open house and inviting parents on field trips, and replace it with new ways such as providing student progress reports and effective sharing of written communication such as newsletters (Reilly, 2008).

In changing the way a school manages parent involvement, all parties need to be involved, including parents, children, teachers, and administration. A way to begin this is through the administration reaching out and initiating the efforts to change the school's culture by matching school changes with needs of the community and making a genuine effort to see the assets community members can bring to the school (Guerra & Valverde, 2008). In connecting home and school practices, Mraz & Rasinski (2007) suggest that teachers need to share ways parents can effectively work with their children through adjusting classroom practices so they are not too rigid and classroom like. Teachers can begin to make these invitations to parents to become familiar with classroom practices by creating an open door policy, sending surveys for feedback, having a strong parent-teacher organization, and holding special events parents are encouraged to attend (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). One such example is a family literacy night.

Family literacy nights can be beneficial in many ways. These nights can provide education to adult family members on the importance of literacy learning in their home (Holloway, 2004). Events such as a family literacy night give families a chance to partake in different literacy activities that can be transferred to home. Most parents value education but need more information to foster this growth (Epstein, 2008). Mraz and Rasinski (2007), in their study of summer reading loss, have found that “parents,
especially lower socioeconomic-status parents, need to be offered concrete, specific programs and suggestions on how to participate in family literacy, and they need to be supported in their attempts to do so.” (p. 786) According to Holloway’s (2004) study on family literacy nights, parents and students alike benefited from these programs. Children showed more interest in reading, and parents gained an increased confidence in their ability to play the important role of literacy educator in their homes.

Holy Cross School in Kemptville, Ontario, hosted a family literacy night in order to provide parents with information they wanted on reading strategies and how they could support their children in reading at home (McGahey, 2005). This school found it essential to be well-organized, and did so through first determining a purpose for the event, followed by a format with date, time, and location. Verifying the number of volunteers for conducting workshops, facilitating children’s games, etc., was essential in deciding if the implementation of this program would be a success. Sponsors were also important to this night for advertisement, as well as for donating prizes to be used as door prizes and drawings (McGahey). Holy Cross School also worked to create handouts and used handouts that were already created by outside agencies that parents could take home for further reference (McGahey).

Holloway (2004) has found that these family literacy activities add to student success and present opportunities for literacy success in both parents and students alike. Some programs involve libraries signing families up with library cards and sharing programs available to students (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Others show the value of modeling reading through activities such as cooking, using the phone book, and browsing the World Wide Web (Mraz & Rasinski). Anfara and Mertens (2008) found one
important way to involve parents is through making a connection between local resources and community groups to families, which can enable all parties to become involved with the community. Most importantly, they show ways families can expand upon the regular school day (Holloway).

Schools need to involve parents in order to effectively educate them on school information and culture. School need to go beyond just educating families to including the community by embracing cultures, enabling relationship outside of the school to foster, and ultimately changing what happens within the schools (Guerra & Valverde, 2008). By engaging families with school and connecting with the community at large, schools are better able to include all stakeholders in decisions about how to effectively communicate between families and schools. The school needs to begin focusing instruction on student interests and classrooms versus imposing information upon students. Drawing on these funds of knowledge takes students beyond the context of the classroom, which teachers rarely do (Moll et al., 1992).

One way to capitalize on student interest and involve family and community is by profiling members of the community (Werderich, 2008). This type of project that Werderich is suggesting is a way to gain new funds of knowledge for teachers and students both, while also encouraging questioning, exploring, and discovering (Werderich, 2008). In this process, students would conduct interviews after creating questions and engaging in a mock interview to practice their speaking skills. They, then, would explore and discover through conducting a real interview and using the interview to compile information, which could later be published for the classroom library. Werderich believes this act of profiling community members not only helps in bettering
writing skills, but “also provides students the opportunity to reflect on their learning about the real world and merge their thinking with the ideas and information they have read and studied.” (p. 34)

Reeder & Sowers (2002) found the initiative America Reads is helpful in the program’s suggestions for ways that families can be influenced: place value on literacy, push for achievement, make books and magazines accessible, have family reading time, and encourage vocabulary practice, language development and conversation. To make materials available for activities such as family reading time and vocabulary practice, schools could initiate many programs. Take Home Book Programs, also commonly known as “book in a bag” (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006, p. 265), involve students choosing books to take home or teachers choosing books to send home. Another program, Literacy Learning Kits, goes beyond the book in a bag idea by providing many learning materials and activities, not just books, that may also include activities in native languages to help English as a Second Language families (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). Having these activities in native languages helps families to make better use of these programs as these activities become accessible to non-English speaking parents (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe).

To further involve families, teachers could encourage student journaling (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). Journal writing can aid in knowing students at a deeper level by having students share in their interests and writing in ways that access their funds of knowledge. Teachers could also assign writing projects that invite parents, students, and teachers to all share on the same topic. Crawford and Zygouris-Coe found that such journaling activities help all involved learn from one another. Another form of
sharing between home and school could include the exchange of photos from each context. Sending photographs from school would allow parents to see what is happening in the classroom, and home photos brought to school give teachers and other students a better understanding of the sharer’s relationships, activities, and culture (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe). One other way to connect between families and the school is through a culinary activity, which invites parents, students, and schools to come together to share foods from their own cultures. Parents can come into the school to share their expertise in cooking. Through home- and school-based cooking activities, literacy is enhanced by sharing recipes which also provides a better cultural understanding of others while practicing reading, oral, and exploration skills (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe). Moll et al. (1992) also places value in allowing students to share about trips they have taken, especially those traveling to their native countries. Sharing these experiences provides students a chance to engage with others in ways that express their funds of knowledge and enable them to see their funds of knowledge as legitimate and appreciated.

A few simple reminders can be made to families to encourage the literacy process every day and extend it beyond school. First, children need to see parents modeling reading and discussing what they have read. They also need to create a positive environment in which to read (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Parents also can provide children with literacy opportunities through cooking, using the phone book, reading newspapers, looking over directions, etc. (Mraz & Rasinski). Parents can also encourage reading for enjoyment by creating a regular reading time or by giving books and magazine subscriptions as gifts (Knowles, 2008). In engaging young adults to read, it is important for parents to provide books on their teen’s interests, recommend books, and keep
reading materials handy; for example, keep high interest magazines in the car in case of a long wait at the doctor’s office. Lastly, parents should set limits on television. Palmer (2008) suggests study time should be equal to television time or the television needs to be viewed as a family and discussed. Whatever the case, Palmer strongly encourages families to set limits.
CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

The Drezlin Elementary and Middle School Family Literacy Night which I conducted as my project was a way to introduce families involved with the two schools to learning activities they could do at home with their children. These activities were not all directly related to literacy, but they were ideas on what families could do at home with their children besides watching television. The project was an open house, which gave families twelve stations with information and prizes to visit. Table 1 provides a brief description of each station, the information it provided, and the prizes available.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station Name</th>
<th>Literacy Support Provided</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Public Libraries</td>
<td>This station outlined the importance of visiting the library and provided information on services available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drezlin Middle School Library</td>
<td>This station outlined the importance of visiting the library and provided information on services available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local County Conservation Board</td>
<td>This station linked the importance of literacy and outside resources, as well as the importance of literacy in real-world contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Telegraph Herald</em></td>
<td>This station linked the importance of literacy and outside resources, as well as the importance of literacy in real-world contexts. It also discussed with students the importance of staying current in the news and reading nonfiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking with Children</td>
<td>This station showed the importance of modeling in real-world context to develop literacy skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgusting Science</td>
<td>This station showed the connection of literacy to other content areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>This station covered the importance of early literacy development to a child’s literacy successes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Basket Gifts</td>
<td>This station connected the importance of giving the gift of reading to literacy success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>This station showed positive websites and technologies that could be used in enhancing the literacy process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning a Staycation</td>
<td>This station connected the real world to literacy by introducing map reading and planning skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Literacy Information</td>
<td>This station shared general literacy information with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing/Journaling</td>
<td>This station discussed the importance of the writing and journaling component in literacy acquisition.</td>
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I began developing the actual project in July. I used the research I had done to set a focus on how the night would be designed and what sorts of stations would be included. I met with my principal on August 22, 2008, to discuss the event and set a date. Staff members were contacted through a letter on August 29, 2008, and asked to respond with ways they would help no later than September 9, 2008 (see Appendix A). I contacted outside agencies on the telephone between September 2, 2008 and September 16, 2008 with the help of suggestions from staff members.

Eight staff members from my building assisted in the project. Six of these staff members ran the following stations: Drezlin Middle School Library, Cooking with Children, Disgusting Science, Early Childhood Literacy, Technology, and General Literacy Information. Two other staff members helped in the dispersal of tickets for prizes and worked a treat table. Two other teachers from other schools ran the following stations: Literacy Gift Baskets and Writing/Journaling. Four outside agencies ran the following stations: two local public libraries, Local County Conservation Board, and Telegraph Herald.

I visited over thirty donors personally and gave them a letter explaining the project (see Appendix B). They were visited between September 8, 2008 and September 16, 2008. All stations and donations were to be finalized no later than October 1, 2008, as a goal.

Communications

To begin this project, I first had a meeting with the principal of my middle school over the need for a family literacy night and the feasibility of its implementation. My principal agreed that if I could coordinate it, the school could host it for me and would
also provide some funding. After receiving this endorsement from the administration, I then contacted my fellow staff members through word of mouth to determine their willingness to be involved in and to assist in the family fair and to determine the interest my colleagues perceived families having in such an activity. The staff that responded was very excited about this project and was open to assist in any way possible. These staff members felt the families of our schools would be excited about this night and many would attend. They also recommended outside agencies that I could contact that might be willing to come assist in our efforts to join not only the school and home, but also the school, home, and community.

Borrowing from the success of the family night program at Holy Cross School in Kemptville, Ontario (McGahey, 2005), I formatted our family literacy night activity as an open house. Such a design better accommodates families, allowing them to drop by during a two-hour span and visit stations that related to their particular needs or interests. Holy Cross School also believed students needed to be invited to help with the turnout. This family night project incorporated the idea of using workshops of children’s activities (McGahey, 2005), and the idea of inviting students to help with the turnout. By asking the students to be hosts for their families at their own school, it fosters the students’ awareness of the value of education as seen through their parents’ participation in school activities (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003).

Once the family literacy night began to take shape, I sent out a letter to every member of the staff asking for their assistance and ideas. I directed them to call, email, or visit with me personally if they could offer either of these. From this letter, I received contact from eight of my coworkers. Knowing I did not have enough professionals to run
and organize booths, I also recruited my mother, a veteran teacher of thirty-two years and adjunct professor, as well as my sister, a teacher with six years of experience.

With the goal of community involvement, I contacted local agencies to see who could come to discuss the idea of literacy at home or give ideas of alternatives to watching television with my school’s families. Two libraries which service the school’s population agreed to get involved. The education department representative of the Telegraph Herald, a local newspaper, was excited to come and share as was the naturalist and program educator for the Local County Conservation Board. An employee of the Dubuque Chamber of Commerce agreed to come and share about the opportunities Dubuque had for education.

A vital element of a successful family literacy night program is the need for donations from the community (McGahey, 2005). I personally visited over thirty local businesses asking for donations that could be used in creating literacy baskets. Literacy baskets are a collection of materials from books, activity books, movies, gift cards to Borders Book Store, etc. that could help in the advancement of literacy at home. During the family night activity, students could have a chance to win these, creating an incentive for students to come to the event. I visited these businesses with a letter approved by my principal explaining the cause and gratefully accepted anything made available to me.

I also wanted to advertise for this night not only within the school, but also throughout the community, so my school’s computer teacher and I collaborated on posters that were hung at local places of business and throughout the schools (see Appendix C). I also requested to my school’s technology coordinator that information for
this night would be posted on the district, as well as the schools’ websites. Information was also noted in both schools’ newsletters (see Appendix D).

**Development of the Stations**

The stations for this project were chosen for one of two reasons: I recognized the importance through literature I had read or someone volunteered an idea for a station an outside agency or they could implement. Through literature, I knew libraries were an important part of family literacy, and that is why Drezlin Middle School set up a station for their library. Two local, public libraries also came to share information on their libraries and services available through them. Literature also showed the importance of literacy as a gift, so there was also a station on literacy gift baskets to provide parents with ideas of how they could give literacy as a gift. There were also two stations on basic literacy information; one station was for all ages and the other for early childhood literacy that would provide parents with general ideas they could take home and use with their children. Research also showed the importance of quality technology use, which is why there was a station set up to show valuable websites parents and students could use. There was also a cooking station because cooking has been shown as a way to promote literacy in children. Literature I read shows the importance of the writing component in literacy, so there was a station on writing and journaling. Involving the Local County Conservation Board and planning a staycation were both ideas from a staff member that would give families ideas of places they could visit in the Dubuque area to further education and turn off the television. The Telegraph Herald was also a staff member’s idea of how to incorporate the importance of different kinds of literacy materials and
staying current in society. The station on science was an idea from the science teacher on how literacy truthfully is a part of science and other subjects.

I coordinated with each of my volunteers individually to design each station. Not only did each booth hold information on its topic, it also had a minimum of two gift baskets containing literacy supplies relating to its topic that was raffled off to the students. Recognizing the importance of reading to children, we supplemented these families with baskets full of literacy materials (Reeder & Sowers, 2002).

The central focus of the family literacy night was the different stations that families could visit and participate in activities. Following are the twelve stations for the family literacy night. Each station description includes the literacy purpose of the station, information to be displayed at the station, and the activity or activities designed for the station.

Local public libraries. Mraz and Rasinski (2007) found it important for libraries to share programs available to students and make library card sign-up easy. As mentioned previously in chapter two, only thirty-seven percent of America’s poor aged three-five visits a library at least once a month (Reeder & Sowers, 2002). Both libraries in my community shared information on how they could lessen this trend in our area. Both libraries had representatives that outlined services they provide to their corresponding communities, but also provided information on the importance of bringing children to the library as a family. These libraries brought their most highly requested books they had to offer within their library. They also brought and talked about information on the different activities they were having in the upcoming months that families would be able to attend. The prizes available at these two stations included award winning and best selling books
for all ages, book sets, and book bags, which held many different books, bookmarks, and gift certificates donated from local businesses.

**Drezlin Middle School Library.** This station provided information on the library at Drezlin Middle School and the services it provides to students and families to help literacy advancements. This is relevant to literacy because Reeders and Sowers (2002) have discovered only thirty-seven percent of America’s poor aged three-five visits a library at least once monthly. This station included information on the services the library provides. Also, the librarian had a trivia activity to win prizes. Students answered a certain amount of questions at certain difficulties to gain book certificate prizes for the book fair. The prizes available at this station included award winning and best selling books for all ages, book sets, and book bags, which held many different books, bookmarks, and gift certificates donated from local businesses.

**Local County Conservation Board.** The naturalist and program educator for the Local County Conservation Board shared the vast amount of free resources the county offered for families to take advantage of. Anfara and Mertens (2008) believe this link between outside resources and the school is an important type of parent involvement. This station shared in literacy because it showed how reading could reach many domains, such as map reading, trail signs, and guide books. The station included places families could visit to learn about nature from others and places the families could visit to experience nature themselves. This station provided brochures and maps families could use to find these sights together to increase literacy in the home. There was a display with pictures to get families excited about places they could visit. The volunteer talked with families about places they could explore and different activities and supplies they would
need in doing this. The prizes available at this station included books on Iowa hiking trails, Iowa places to visit, and fiction and non-fiction books about nature and animals.

*Telegraph Herald.* This station related to literacy development by providing students with a purpose for reading nonfiction text and staying current in the news. The representative had several newspapers to share with families and talked about the different sections and what they could offer to the students and their families. She also shared different educational opportunities available through the newspaper itself. She talked on the many different benefits to staying current in the news and times. This booth provided other community opportunities for education as well that the newspaper supports. The prizes available at this station included books on current events, best-sellers, and prizes from the *Telegraph Herald,* such as a TH umbrella, shirt, etc.

*Cooking with children.* The life management teacher at my school put on this station. She discussed with parents the importance of literacy in cooking. Mraz and Rasinski (2007) talked about the importance of this modeling of reading through real-world activities like cooking. The reading of recipes is also an important way to show how literacy spans different curricular areas and applies to many aspects of life. With this, she outlined the importance of children selecting recipes, shopping for recipes, and making recipes to develop their literacy skills. A brochure was provided for parents to take on different activities they could do with their students at home (see Appendix E). An activity of following a recipe for trial mix was given to students and families to complete. They were given a recipe to follow and were directed to measure ingredients to put together their snack mix. The prizes available at this station included cook books for families, cook books for children, and gift certificates donated from area restaurants.
**Disgusting science.** The science teacher from my school put this station together where she outlined disgustingly interesting scientific findings. This booth showed the connection of literacy to other content areas besides just reading and language arts. Books were made available to share about different disgusting science discoveries and also about different scientific experiments families could do at home with their children to expand the learning process. There was a display board made available that showed pictures and activities parents could do at home with their children that the science teacher discussed with the families. The prizes available at this station included various copies of Guinness Books of World Records, Ripley’s Believe it or Not books, and at-home science experiment books.

**Early childhood literacy.** This station had a plethora of information for children aging birth to five. This station was important in showing how early literacy development is vital to a child’s later literacy successes. The early childhood teacher at the grade school put together information on helping children discover literacy through every day experiences and through experiences parents could specially bring to their children. This station included information on developmental stages and where students should be as well as different resources parents could use if they felt their child was not up to speed. She also outlined positive learning toys for students and provided handouts on activities parents could do with their children (see Appendix F). Families were also given the opportunity to explore different books, flashcards, and puzzles at the station that would be useful in this early childhood stage of language acquisition. The prizes available at this station included bags filled with early literacy materials, such as books, flash cards, puzzles, journals, and book marks.
**Literacy basket gifts.** According to Knowles (2008), it is important to give the gift of literacy to encourage it with presents such as books and magazine subscriptions (Knowles, 2008). Different ideas of gifts parents could give to their students that incorporated all kinds of literacy and learning aspects were on display for parents to discover. Gifts included puppets, books, plays, cassette discs, paints, art supplies, and other themed items based on selected books that were the theme of the basket. At this station, three literacy baskets were used as prizes. These baskets included books, magazines, DVDs, games, and toys.

**Technology.** Literacy can be learned through the use of positive technology, so this station outlined educational websites and learning programs students could use at home. This was a place where parents could gain an understanding of some different technologies that are helpful in educating children. Parents were given a list of worthwhile website (see Appendix G) and a brochure on the importance of technology in literacy from the International Reading Association (see Appendix H). Computers were available for students and parents to explore some of the recommended websites. The prizes available at this station included educational computer programs students could use at all ages to increase literacy.

**Planning a staycation.** This station connected the real world with literacy by showing families how important it is to have children see parents reading maps and planning for events. This was a real-world application of literacy for students to see. A staff member of the Dubuque Chamber of Commerce and a teacher at my school provided maps of Dubuque along with brochures on educational places families could visit. There was information on different historical sites as well as the many museums.
and other places of interest Dubuque has to offer. She asked students different facts about places in Dubuque and the surrounding areas to visit to earn prizes. The prizes available at this station included gift certificates for local places of business, including the Grand Harbor Waterpark and local restaurants, travelers' journals, and a book on places to visit in Dubuque.

*General literacy information.* This station contained multiple brochures from the International Reading Association parents could take home to read (see Appendix I) and a brochure I created on supporting readers (see Appendix J). There were also copies of *Jump In,* a magazine about families and schools working together, that parents could take home. A teacher from the middle school was available for parents to ask any questions they might have had on the information provided. The prizes available at this station included fifteen five dollar Border's Book Store gift cards.

*Writing/Journaling.* This station discussed the importance of writing in literacy acquisition. Writing is a major component of literacy. According to Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2006) teachers should encourage student journaling, which can also involve families. Journal writing can aid in knowing students at a deeper level by having students share in their interests and writing in ways that access their funds of knowledge (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006). This station supplied a handout on the importance of writing and journaling and different activities families could do with these at home (see Appendix K). It also shared a brochure from the International Reading Association on the importance of writing in reading (see Appendix L). This station displayed many different types of journals, pens, stickers, books, and stamps parents could supply with children to make writing activities enjoyable for students, and gave students a chance to use some of
these materials to write with and take home that night. The prizes available at this station included various journals and writing notepads with different types of pens, markers, stickers, and stamps for writing.

Implementation of the Project

Family Literacy Night at Drezlin Elementary and Middle Schools took place on Tuesday, October 14, 2008, from 6:00-8:00 P.M. in the Drezlin Middle School Gym. There were approximately one hundred people and forty families in attendance. Families were surprised at what was available for them to learn and what was available as prizes and information for them to take home. Many families commented that they did not know what to expect and that this was way more than they had anticipated. My principal and curriculum director were both surprised at the amount of information families were able to obtain and are both excited to see this happen again year after year. Volunteers were excited about their chance to share so much, and many have already contacted me about ideas for next year. I think this project will only keep growing when families spread the word to other families about what the event is really like. I was very pleased with the event, and am excited to implement it again next year.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This section provides conclusions found based on this project. It discusses my findings, limitations, and recommendations.

Findings

Through the research completed for the literature review and the development of this project, the biggest benefit of family involvement is the example parents show when being involved with literacy themselves. Parents who show a love of literacy through reading themselves, reading with their children, and through showing value in doing activities outside of watching television and playing video games are fostering a love and importance of literacy in their children. The school can help in developing this love through creating ways a parent can show a strong literacy example, such as a family literacy night.

Through my research, I have found two different obstacles to be most inhibiting to family involvement in the school setting. The biggest obstacle is a lack on both the part of the school and home with communication. Communication is essential in aiding students in their literacy growth. Without these two entities working together, students are not given the proper instruction they need to receive either at home or at school. Another obstacle is a lack of the school's part in using family funds of knowledge in teaching literacy. Teachers do not use their greatest resource, parents, in order to capitalize on instructing children in a way they would be most confident and comfortable.

I feel the most effective way to connect home literacy and knowledge with school ideas and practices is to create an open relationship between the two places. In order for
each to know and understand the other, there needs to be more time spent getting to know the values that each holds. This time can happen during events that invite parents into the school, such as home literacy nights, or through times where the school goes to the parents, such as at-home visits. Through each of these, parents can share what is important to them and what they can give to the school as far as new ideas of knowledge teachers can build off of in their classrooms. Teachers can also share with families on ways they can help in aiding the literacy process at home with their child.

Limitations

The biggest limitation to my program was family involvement. The turnout for this program was about forty families. I felt this was a problem this year because it was the first year for this event, and, even though it was heavily advertised, families were still unsure of what the event entailed.

Another limitation was lack of volunteers. Had more volunteers stepped forward, more stations could have been presented, sharing more information with families. The last limitation I found with the stations was time. There was not a lot of time to get together and plan with each individual volunteer due to the timing at the beginning of a new school year.

Recommendations

In doing this project, my recommendation is that Drezlin Elementary and Middle School continue after this year and begin an annual literacy night were families, students, teachers, and administrators can get together. In doing this, I feel an open line of communication will be made between the school and the home, which will help in fostering our students’ love of literacy.
Following a similar format to this example is something I feel would be crucial to this annual night. I do, however, feel there needs to be more involvement with volunteers from the school. I also recommend a committee be formed so this night is not organized by one person. I felt there was not enough time for one person to organize and meet all volunteer needs. More school volunteers would also help in the set-up of additional stations for parents to see and would help to reach more of a variety of interests. To reach these interests, I also recommend a survey go out to families at the end of the year, asking for information and resources parents would like to see at literacy night in order to better suit their needs.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
LETTER TO STAFF
Dear DES & DMS Staff,

On October 14, 2008, from 6-8 P.M., I will be hosting a family/community literacy night in the Drexler Middle School gym for both elementary and middle school students and families. This night is all about bringing our families and community together with the school in order to bridge that gap and give families some ideas of at home activities they can do with their children to further promote our mission of creating lifelong learners.

I am looking for volunteers to assist me in this effort. I will need people to work booths, direct families, and help in any way possible. Remember, literacy spans all content areas, not just reading and language arts!!! I am also looking for any suggestions on booths and materials to share with families, as well as donations of any kind that will go as prizes for students. These donations will be used to make bags for students, which will be linked to literacy activities they can do at home. If you know of any businesses that you feel would be willing to donate, please let me know this as well. Anything we can get our hands on for this will be used and greatly appreciated!!!

This date is drawing near, so please let me know if you can help in any capacity by September 10. You can reach me by phone or email. Please help me in making this dream a reality that will encourage more enthusiasm and participation with our Western Dubuque families!

Sincerely,

Cassie Cate
Literature and Language Arts
Drexler Middle School
563-744-3371
cassandra.cate@w-dubuque.k12.ia.us
Dear Local Business,

On October 14, 2008, from 6-8 P.M., I will be hosting a family/community literacy night in the Drexler Middle School gym for both elementary and middle school students and families. This night is all about bringing our families and community together with the school in order to bridge that gap and give families some ideas of at home activities they can do with their children to further promote our mission of creating lifelong learners.

I am looking for volunteers to assist me in this effort. I will need donations of any kind that will go as prizes for students. Any item that can be spared or donations of money to buy books would be great. These donations will be used to make bags for students, which will be linked to literacy activities they can do at home. Anything we can get our hands on for this will be used and greatly appreciated!!!

This date is drawing near, so please let me know if you can help in any capacity by September 17. You can reach me by phone or email. Please help me in making this dream a reality that will encourage more enthusiasm and participation with our Western Dubuque families!

Sincerely,

Cassie Cate
Literature and Language Arts
Drexler Middle School
563-744-3371 (school)
563-588-8088 (home)
cassandra.cate@w-dubuque.k12.ia.us
APPENDIX C
LITERACY NIGHT ADVERTISEMENT POSTER AND FLYER
Literacy Night

What is it?? A night where families can come to get ideas of activities they can do at home besides turn the TV on.

When is it???? Tuesday, October 14 from 6-8 in the DMS Gym.

What else??? Tons of freebies!!! Come and get books, activities, and many other resources to use with your children. Also, there will be treats!!!

Some of the booths that will be available:

- Telegraph Herald News in Education
- Local County Conservation with information on free nature places to visit in Dubuque County
  - Usborne Books Representative
- Farley and Dyersville Public Libraries with info on their services
  - Cooking with kids
  - Disgusting science experiments
- How to discuss books with your kids ages 0-14
  - Early childhood activities
  - Literacy basket gift ideas
- Computer programs and websites worth using
  - And others!!!!
APPENDIX D
NEWSLETTER NOTE TO PARENTS
FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT

What Is It? A night where families can come to get ideas of activities they can do at home besides turn the TV on.

When Is It? Tuesday, October 14 from 6:00-8:00 pm in the Drexler Middle School Gym

What Else? Tons of freebies!! Come and get books, activities, and many other resources to use with your children. Also, there will be treats!!

Some of the booths that will be available:

- Telegraph Herald News in Education
- Local County Conservation with information on free nature places to visit in Dubuque County
- Usborne Books Representative
- Farley and Dyersville Public Libraries with info on their services
- Cooking with Kids
- Disgusting Science Experiments
- How to Discuss Books with your Kids ages 0-14
- Early Childhood Activities
- Literacy Basket Gift Ideas
- Computer Programs and Websites Worth Using
- And Others!!!
APPENDIX E
BROCHURE FROM COOKING WITH KIDS STATION
What does cooking teach???

Math Skills
- Counting
- Fractions
- Sorting
- Money
- Sequencing
- Weighing & Measuring
- Shapes & Colors
- Problem-solving

Reading Skills
- Vocabulary
- Reading Comprehension

Science Skills
- Food groups
- Making predictions
- Experimenting
- Five senses
- Property changes of food

Geography Skills
- Cultural Recipes
- Where food grows

Art Skills
- Creativity

Health Lessons
- How to eat healthy
- Good nutrition

Social Skills
- Responsibility
- Safety and cleanliness
- Working together
- Building self-esteem

Kitchen Safety
- Keep knives out of reach and sight of small children
- Teach children the stove is hot
- Make sure all handles on pots and pans are turned inward
- Try to cook all hot foods on back burners
- Teach children proper sanitation for food preparation
- Always clean items in contact with raw eggs or meat
- Don't put cooked food on a surface that had raw foods
- No licking spoons or fingers-sample when finished
- Keep appliances away from water
- Put ingredients back after using for easy clean-up
- Always supervise!

Ten Reasons to Teach Kids

Cooking Activities

1. Helps children to learn proper nutrition and healthy eating
2. Boosts their self-esteem
3. Creates family bonding time
4. Kids will be more apt to eat what they make
5. Teaches science, language, math, and creativity skills
6. Teaches life skills
7. Lets kids contribute to the family
8. Teaches teamwork
9. Teaches planning and making decisions
10. Practices creativity and imagination
Toddlers in the Kitchen

- Let them join in on the fun with plastic utensils and inexpensive pans
- Get a play kitchen set
- Teach them kitchen safety early
- Share good, homemade foods
- Eat as a family
- Teach cooking vocabulary
- Make healthy snacks accessible
- Talk about the five senses

Tasks for 3-6 Year Olds in the Kitchen

- Scrubbing veggies and fruits
- Washing the table
- Stirring dough
- Pouring ingredients
- Adding pre-measured ingredients
- Gathering ingredients
- Setting the table
- Greasing pans
- Peeling oranges and bananas
- Crushing chips, crackers, etc.

What to teach 7-11 Year Olds

- Reading recipes
- Reading labels
- What cooking tool do
- Microwave use
- Kitchen safety
- Writing shopping lists
- Menu planning

What to teach 12-15 Year Olds

- Knife safety
- Oven safety
- Planning and shopping for meals
- Using electric mixer, blender, and other appliances
APPENDIX F
BROCHURE FROM EARLY LITERACY STATION
Five For Families

These are 5 areas identified by researchers that can have a big influence on reading development in children.

1. Value Placed on Literacy
   - show an interest in reading and encourage them to read too!

2. Press for Achievement
   - set expectations for them to read and help them develop reading skills

3. Availability and Use of Reading Material
   - access to books, paper, writing materials, etc. helps promote more literacy experiences in your home.

4. Reading with Children
   - reading to your young child or listening to your older child read helps them become readers.

5. Opportunities for Verbal Interaction
   - having regular quality conversations with your child allows them to build their language and vocabulary skills which are important for later reading success!
   
(Start Early, Finish Strong: How to Help Every Child Become a Reader - July 1999)

Music and Literacy

Music is a great way to support your child’s literacy learning. Things your child can learn when listening to children’s music:

- Rhyming words
- Repetition of sounds or words
- Nursery Rhymes
- New Vocabulary
- Colors, numbers, shapes, and letters
- Social skills (like how to say “Hi,” solve a problem, or play with a friend)
- Body Awareness (where their head, shoulders, knees, toes and other body parts are)
- Finding and keeping a beat

The possibilities are endless! Music helps to make those connections in the brain while having fun. It also promotes physical movement so sing, dance, and have FUN!

Computer Corner

There are hundreds of sites for family fun and literacy! Here are just a couple resources for you and/or your child:

www.pbskids.org
www.Disneyfamily.com
www.FamilyFun.com
www.KDL.org/kids
Tips For Reading With Your Child:

1. Spend time with your children talking, telling stories and singing songs. These are fun and important activities that help children get ready for reading.

2. Read to and with your children every day. This shows that daily reading and spending time together is important.

3. Let your children help choose the books you read together. This will help keep your children's interest.

4. Find a comfortable place to read and sit close to your children. This helps create a special feeling at reading time.

5. Change your voice and the pace that you read to fit the story. This makes the story more interesting for your children.

6. After reading a book, talk about the story. Discussing the pictures and the main ideas in a book helps develop understanding.

7. Let your children see you reading books, newspapers, and magazines. This sets an example for children that you enjoy and value reading.

8. Take your children to the library regularly. Libraries are a wonderful place to find books and so much more.

(Information provided by Family Literacy Initiatives, 987 East Ivy Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55106)

Developmental stages of literacy...

Pre-Reader Stage:
- Plays with books as toys but doesn't yet understand that they contain stories.
- Has been exposed to books and enjoys hearing them, but doesn't yet comprehend that the pages contain words that correspond to a story.
- Is attracted to the bright colors and illustrations found in books, but doesn't understand that the pictures depict a story.
- Can't identify any words or letters on the pages.

Age 2-4 typically

Beginning Reader Stage:
- Needs pictures on each page to help tell the story.
- Has trouble answering questions about the story.
- Memorizes books & tries to read them again & again.
- Reads aloud without expression & doesn't stop for punctuation.
- Comes across an unknown word and is able to sound out the beginning, but then makes up the rest or skips over it.

Age 4-6 typically.

http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/0__which-reading-stage-is-your-child-in_64480.pc

Six Skills Your Child Needs
There are six skills that every child needs in order to become a successful reader: Print Awareness, Print Motivation, Phonological Awareness, Vocabulary Skills, Narrative Skills, and Letter Knowledge.

For more information see www.kdl.org/kids/go/pgr__six__skills

This pamphlet was put together by Mrs. Sheehy
Drexler Elementary Pre-Kindergarten teacher, for the use of sharing information with parents at the Family Literacy Night at Drexler.
APPENDIX G
LIST OF WEBSITES FROM TECHNOLOGY STATION
Educational Websites for Children and Families

http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/108.html
http://www.kidsknowit.com/
http://www.funbrain.com/
http://www.learn4good.com/kids/index.htm
http://www.apples4theteacher.com/
http://www.scholastic.com/kids/home.htm
http://www.brainpop.com/
http://www.ala.org/gwstemplate.cfm?section=greatwebsites&template=/cfapps/gws/default.cfm
http://www.loc.gov/literacy/
http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/interact-read.htm
http://www.justreadfamilies.org/kids/
www.starfall.com/
APPENDIX H
BROCHURE FROM INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
TECHNOLOGY STATION
Reading, Writing, and Technology

**New media, new literacies**

When you take your word-literacy quiz, do you picture a book? A magazine? A newspaper today, literacy means all these things—and more.

Our conception of literacy is rapidly changing. Advances in technology have provided us with word processors, e-mail, interactive websites, video games, podcasts, and chat.

These "new media" give us new ways to convey information. They also expand the definition of literate to include competence with down-to-earth ways of communicating that did not exist a few years ago.

Children today certainly need to know how to read books and write with pen and paper, but they also need to learn how to design and master new technologies. Many jobs now require workers to send and receive e-mail and use word-processing or information-packeting software.

As a parent or caregiver, you can help your child prepare for the literacy demands of tomorrow by seeking opportunities for you or her to become a producer user of the Internet and related technologies.

The Internet and critical thinking

Seeing the Internet is fun for kids. It also strengthens important literacy skills.

Children reading online rely on critical thinking and research strategies to find the information they need. For example, a simple Web search requires evidence to assess a list of suggested sites and then analyze Web content for relevance to the question at hand.

"The Internet is here to stay, so starting to develop their skills early gives children a good grounding in the skills they need their whole lives," says Dr. Lottie Hendriks of the University of Kentucky.

**Benefits of Internet reading**

Unlike a paper book, the Internet offers dynamic links, videos, audio, and links to different sites. There are many benefits to online reading:

- **Interactive sites** can match your child's learning styles, visual, auditory.
- **Weblogs** offer context clues and organic structures such as outlines, diagrams, and lists.
- **Discourse analysis of unvarnished data** can help emerging readers develop compensation skills.
- Exploring websites can make children practice what they will need later. According to Dr. Jane Case of the University of Rhode Island, the very nature of hyper-text, with information hidden underneath, complex links to make more information available than reading simply makes it ever in paper books.

Interactive learning

As your child browses online—for fun or research—here are some practical critical data points to help your young reader learn the strategies needed to locate even more complex and difficult online tasks.

- **Correspondence—encourage your child to express his or her ideas in e-mail to friends and family members. This provides excellent reading and writing practice in an informal, low-stress setting.

**A few great websites for parents**

- [Readernet.org](http://www.readernet.org/) offers free reading and language arts activities collected by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English; [www.readernet.org/beyondtheclassroom/](http://www.readernet.org/beyondtheclassroom/)
- [Readaloud.org](http://www.readaloud.org/) offers step-by-step tips for researching information online; [www.readaloud.org](http://www.readaloud.org/)
- [Kids.com](http://www.kids.com) lists kid-safe sites by [http://www.kids.com](http://www.kids.com)

**Tuned in to reading**

Television and movies have been around longer than the Internet and probably have a worse reputation as time-wasters. However, better family viewing habits can help improve literacy.

- Join your child when he or she is watching TV. Talk about what will happen on the show, discuss the show during commercials, and talk about the show after it’s over. These are basic strategies for developing comprehension.
- Find something in a show or movie that can serve as a springboard for reading. Borrow library books on the subject or do research online to fill out the story.
- Ask your child to make up a story for a good TV show. Help your child write it down and have him or her draw the pictures. Or ask an older child to write it down and then read it—or act it out—for the family.
- Encourage older children to read books that have been adapted as movies, then watch the film and compare the two versions.
- Keep an atlas and dictionary close to the TV to look up unfamiliar words or places mentioned.

**New opportunities to read and write**

Reading doesn’t just happen when your child holds a book. Used creatively with traditional reading materials, TV, the Internet, and other media can be a means to children’s quest for information and in boosting his or her reading and writing skills.
APPENDIX I
BROCHURES FROM INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
GENERAL LITERACY INFORMATION
Getting Your Child Ready to Read

Getting ready for literacy

Long before children start school, they are gaining the skills and understandings they will need to succeed in school and in life—skills that are a combination of fine and gross motor skills, the ability to recognize objects, signs, pictures, and sounds, and the ability to use language to communicate with others.

Encouraging your beginning reader

* Keep interesting materials around your home. Help your child start a collection of items or hardcover books.
* Help your child develop a vocabulary by pointing out interesting objects and parts of objects, like wheels, flowers, petals, and faces.
* Talk with your child as often as you can and listen to her or his conversations with others.
* Pay attention when your child talks to you, and respond whenever you can.
* Read aloud often, always, and everywhere.

Literacy in the environment

We all have particular ways of thinking about literacy:

- Some are more visual than verbal.
- Some prefer reading stories and poems.
- Some prefer interactive games.
- Some prefer storytelling.
- Some prefer reading alone.
- Some prefer reading with others.

A hunger for learning

Encourage your child’s hunger for learning and reading by providing a safe and inviting environment with lots of colors, shapes, sounds, and bell rings to explore. You can encourage your child’s hunger for learning by sharing the experience, giving names to the objects and sounds your child finds, and being enthusiastic about your child’s discoveries.

Introducing books

* Introduce books that are familiar to your child’s environment, including large, soft books and cloth books, to encourage your child’s hunger for books.

* Help your child become familiar with the shapes and sounds of words.

* Provide opportunities for your child to make up stories and songs.

* Provide opportunities for your child to make up stories and songs about their own experiences.
Supporting Your Beginning Reader

Venturing into new territories

"Choosing the correct book maters a lot," says Dr. Leslie Kamecki of Rutgers University and past president of the International Reading Association. Here are some suggestions for selecting good books for your preschooler:

- Go books with rhyme and books with claps, attractive illustrations and strong stories.
- Pick books on subjects your child is interested in. If the library has a zip to an aquarium, borrow a book on plants or aquatic life.
- Ask other parents, friends, and teachers to share favorite book titles with you.
- Check online for lists of award-winning books for children.
- The International Reading Association website (www.reading.org) features children's choices, a downloadable annual list of books chosen by young readers.
- Explore different genres with your child: storybooks, picture books, informational books, fairy tales, poetry, rhymes, stories, on-line, and more.

Beyond the Classroom

Learning how to read and write isn't just for the classroom. Parents and caregivers play an important role in supporting beginning readers. They can provide many opportunities for your child to read, write, speak, and listen that will support his or her classroom learning.

Any activity that spurs your child's imagination can become a great opportunity for literacy learning. Family discussions, trips to museums and historic sites, word games, and collaborative family projects such as family scrapbooking or storytelling are all great ways to supplement your child's growing literacy skills.

Reading aloud

Reading aloud together is another great way to build literacy. It provides an instant, lasting, and safe way for your child to practice his or her developing literacy skills. If you already have a time set aside for reading together each day, keep it up. Here are some ideas to keep in mind:

- Read aloud in your child's everyday day, and continue after your child learns to read.
- Answer your child's questions, even if they interrupt the story.
- Talk as you read. Ask questions like "What do you think will happen next?" "Why did this character do that?" and "What would you do?"
- Don't use books that are not interesting to your child.

Libraries and beyond

- The best place to journey through the written word is your local library. Take advantage of your library's reading programs, parent-child book groups, story hours, and resource materials.
- Get your child a library card at the earliest opportunity. This gives your child a feeling of ownership and responsibility. Help your child find books on subjects of interest.
- Never force a book. Recommend books for Deborah's first love of the university of tomatoes. Instead, give your child a choice among several books, especially those that a quick check of the bookshelves may have missed.
- In addition to choosing your library's book sales, yard sales, thrift stores, and bookstores for stories to add to your family's collection, children love having their own books. Use books as gifts for birthdays, holidays, rewards, and special occasions.

Finding more resources

Giving a new reader doesn't have to be overwhelming. That's why offers some great resources to help your child's literacy learning. Check out the international reading association's website at www.reading.org, or call this line:
- 1-800-533-6611
- "Learning beyond the classroom: www.reading.org/beyondthe/classroom/"
- Reading to fundamental: www.iris.org/parents/
- Reading/teachers: www.reading/teachers.org

Teachers, school administrators, and children's librarians are also ematic sources of advice.

- Encourage your child to write after reading. For example, ask your child to describe his or her favorite part or to imagine a different ending for the book.
- Have your child inset the story in his or her own worlds.
- After finishing the book, talk with your child about what he or she read, and invite him or her to reread parts of the story with you.

Some old stories

Sometimes parents get frustrated when children want to read the same stories over and over again. However, this is normal and important. Keep your child's literacy honeymoon story reading. As many toys that children were once entertained by the story and have the day they will be able to read on their own.

Here are some tips for encouraging your child's early interest in reading:
- Reading to read is challenging. Encourage all of your child's efforts and praise his or her accomplishments.
- Explore the sounds that make up words. Ask questions like "What sounds do you hear in the word library?" and "What letter sounds the word library?"
- When your child gets stuck on a word, resist the urge to provide the answer immediately. Instead, encourage your child to look at the picture or get close to the rest of the sentence and then try to fit in a word that makes sense.
- Cheer your child on as he or she attempts to read new words and unfamiliar stories. Each word your child reads is a step further in the journey of literacy.

Supporting your beginning reader is one in a series of new resources recommended to parents and caregivers to help them support their children's reading development. Each copy may be downloaded free for the Association's website, www.reading.org, bulk copies made available online or by special order at 702-793.

text by Ann Alise

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The mission of the International Reading Association is to promote reading by continuously advancing the quality of literacy instruction and research worldwide. Our goals are to:
- Improve the professional development of reading educators
- Advocate for research, policy, and practices that support the best interests of all readers and reading professionals
- Expand and strengthen national and international alliances with a wide range of organizations
- Encourage and support research to promote informed decisions about reading practice and policy
- Foster leadership in literacy issues around the world

www.reading.org
What Kids Really Want to Read

Know your child

Thousands of
new children's
books—long and
short, poetry and
prose, biographical
and fictional—are
published
every year. With the
great variety
available, how can a
parent or
teacher select just the
right book to
capture a child's
timely interest?

Even if you are not familiar with children's books, you
know more about your child than anyone else.
You have the best possible chance to find a good fit.

A boy who dislikes reading may become persuaded
in a book about his favorite animal. A girl who rarely
reads books may discover a series that makes
her feel as if she's found new friends. Showing your
child's interests helps you to select when a book is
"just right."

Don't worry if you can't find the perfect book right
away. Make a list of your child's interests and then
visit the library, if possible. Select books you've also
recommended, because enthusiasm is contagious,
says Dr. Deborah Weisen of the University of
Tennessee.

If you and your child aren't enjoying a book you've
selected, don't be afraid to try something else.

Babies and toddlers

At this age, the experience of reading together
matters as much as the actual book. Babies enjoy
simple picture books without loss of clashing on the
page. Those that offer bright colors, sounds, and
textures work very well.

Older children

Third- or fourth-graders usually develop
personal preferences. Unfortunately, some may be
developing a preference not to read.

Readers who love books are
boring, but you can often
find books that spark their
deepsest interests. "If your
child likes basketball,
help him pick a great
basketball book,"
Wroten says.

"Always offer
several choices
to give your child
some control."

Consider
graphic novels
(comics), topical
magazines, funny
books, mysteries,
and stories about
wild animals or
scary people. Don't worry
whether a particular book is
"appropriate" reading material.
The important thing is that your child is
reading something he or she wants to read.

As your child shows more interest and patience,
move on to short, simple stories. Teachers enjoy
reproducers, as well as stories based on
familiar songs (child Macdonald) or set in
familiar places (the grocery store, the park).

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are beginning to understand that
other people do things differently than they do. As your child
asks questions and exhibits curiosity, turn to books
to help him or her make sense of the world.

For example, a child who lives in the city can enjoy
a book about a barn or on board a ship. Books are
way to go new places, and preschoolers are
ready to set out.

Preschoolers also enjoy
- stories about kids' own age
- nonfiction books
- stories about animals
- repetition of sounds, words, or phrases in a story
- stories with funny-sounding words
- books with pictures that tell the story, even
  without the words

Early graders

Some children learn to read very young. Even if
your child can read alone, Wroten advises that you
spend some time each day reading aloud to him or
her. As you're reading, ask questions about the
story. Talk about what might happen next, and draw
connections to your child's life.

Children in early grades learn from picture books,
but they can handle more text. For the books you read
together, look for complex stories and advanced
character development.

If your child isn't reading independently yet or
needs help, speak with his or her teacher, who may
have ideas about how to deal with the situation.

Brooke the easy reader section at your local
library, you'll find books with simple vocabulary that build
confidence, designed for children struggling to read.
Don't worry if your child focuses on reading books
labeled for lower grades, Wroten recommends.

Once your child gains confidence, he or she will
gradually move on to more challenging books.

For parents

If your child can't
taike out
materials
from the
library,
consider
dois, on
rather than
and
and
usually
parents
of
alike,
"appropriate"
reading
material.
The
important
thing
is
that
your
child
is
reading
something
he
or
she
wants
to
read.

Getting some guidance

The International Reading Association provides
annual lists of favorite children's books chosen by
children's children, young adults (young
adults' choices), and teachers (teachers' choices).
You can download them free at the Association's

Other great web resources include
- Association for Library Service to Children: www.alsc.org/resources/resbooks共创kets.com
- National Council for the Social Studies:
  www.socialstudies.org/resources/assessments
- National Council of Teachers of English:
  www.ncte.org/teacher/leadership
- National Education Association:
  www.nea.org/readcrossresources/teachers.html
- Parent's Choice Foundation:
  www.parentschoice.org

International Reading Association
1900 N. Moulton Road, P.O. Box 875
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0875
www.reading.org

For more info, contact
Mary Ann Bills
International Reading Association
1900 N. Moulton Road
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0875
APPENDIX J
BROCHURE FROM GENERAL LITERACY INFORMATION STATION
Questioning Techniques

- Don't Interrogate! Push reading for enjoyment at home.
- Have your child draw pictures about what they have read and caption them. Older children can put captions on post-it notes and place them next to the real pictures in the story.
- Help to make real world connections by asking if they can relate to this text. Ask how they would have reacted to the situation, how they are like/dislike a certain character, what new information they learned, and what lessons they learned.
- Have a chart for rating books your family enjoys. Tell them they must be able to defend their opinions!
- Write the letters of the alphabet on note cards or post-its; randomly choose a few, and ask your child to think of something from the story associated with that letter.
- 1-2-3-4---Listen now, I'll tell you more! 1-Tell the main idea of the story. 2-Tell about a main character. 3-Describe a problem or huge event. 4-Share a favorite part.
- Create some "I wonder" questions before reading based on titles and pictures. After reading some, add more questions while also stopping to answer those already posed.

Set Limits on TV Time

Poor health and grades have both been linked to the average 22-28 hours American children spend watching TV a week. Here’s how you can make a change in your home:

- Make TV time and studying time equal.
- Give alternatives to TV:
  - Magazines
  - Books
  - Games
  - Exercise
- Make TV time “family time” by watching programs together and discussing afterwards.

Information from Amy Wancho and Linda Hoyt

Supporting your Elementary and Middle School Reader

Information found in February 2008 issue of “Parents Still Make the Difference”
Supporting Your Elementary School Reader

- Stay involved in what your child is learning in school and get involved.
- Show the importance of reading and writing in real life by doing these activities as a family.
- Take trips to the library as a family; don't forget to check out books for yourself! Modeling is key!!!
- Find materials for your child to read based on his/her interests.
- Give the gift of reading and writing.
- Read together even after they can read alone.
- Make art supplies available.
- Help your child find a purpose in reading through your everyday activities.
- Provide everyday reading and writing activities, such as:
  - Cooking
  - Reading the newspaper together
  - Planning vacations/trips
  - Leaving notes for one another
  - Keeping memory books together
  - Encouraging journaling

***Information provided by the International Reading Association

Supporting Your Middle School Reader

- Find your child's strengths and build on them.
- Participate in school activities.
- Give the gift of reading and writing.
- Encourage trips to the library and the use of the Internet for useful information.
- Talk about current events with your teen.
- Share the importance of education.
- Allow your teen to pick his/her reading material.
- Be a role model by reading yourself.
- Take your child to movies after they read the books.
- Recommend more mature books that you can use to discuss difficult issues with your teen.
- Keep lots of reading materials around the house.
- Give experiences to your teen by taking them to museums, attractions, etc. (Don't forget to stop by the gift shop for a book on the place you visited!)

*** Information provided by the International Reading Association and the November 2008 Issue of "Parents Still Make the Difference"
APPENDIX K
HANDOUT FROM WRITING/JOURNALING STATION
Instill a Love for Writing in your Child

- Give your child experiences to write about, such as family outings, holiday celebrations, your heritage.
- Make a special place for your child to write; find a special chair or light to set a stage for creative thoughts.
- Encourage your child to write often and read what they have written if they wish to share. Give thoughtful praise and feedback.
- Do not focus on your child's grammar; instead, focus on the content of their writing. If these are bothering your child, help them to compose on the computer.
- Give gifts of writing, such as journals/diaries, fancy pens, desk lamps, stationary or note cards, or books by their favorite author.
- Teach your children to write thank you notes and letters of gratitude to others.
- Have your children write to request travel books, free samples, and special offers companies or state agencies offer to the public.
- Visit book signings and books clubs to expose them to reading and writing.
- Write to your child! It is important to model, so leave notes, write lists, and share other writing you do.

Information provided by National Council of Teachers of English
APPENDIX L
BROCHURE FROM INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION
WRITING/JOURNALING STATION
Getting involved

Most parents know that reading to children is important, but many pay little attention to their children's early attempts at writing. In fact, reading and writing go hand in hand. When children practice writing a letter or word, they recognize that letter or word when they see it somewhere else.

But writing does not start with real letters or words. It begins earlier when, playing with a crayon or pencil, your toddler first connects marks made on paper with an idea in his or her mind, even if the marks are just scribbles that can't be read.

At this stage you can actively encourage an interest in writing, showing how to hold a pencil or shape a letter. Talk about the word or story your child is writing. Make clear that writing is a skill worth learning, and that gives your child a new way to express what he or she is thinking and feeling, and that you take the process seriously.

Writing milestones

Here are a few milestones to recognize as you encourage and support your child's early writing:

- Around the age of 2, children begin to play with crayons, markers, and pencils.
- After that, they start drawing things. The pictures might not be clear, but your son or daughter can describe them to you as houses, a dog, a family, a flower.
- Children gradually learn to see language as isolated shapes in a row or letters. They become aware of the different shapes that make up printed words.

Internet resources

Find cool ideas and great story starters geared for outstanding children's literacy skills:

- ReadWriteThink.org: www.readwritethink.org
- Storyteller: www.storyteller.com
- Chaboo: Meddybumps Young Writers Workshop: www.meddybumps.com/youngwriters.html
- Reading is Fundamental: www.readingisfundamental.org/advice/engagement/maps
- Sometimes having a pen and pad can get a child interested in reading and writing. Pen pads are available through safe sites for free or for a small fee:
  - studentcenterexchange: www.studentcenterexchange.org
  - kids.com: www.kids.com/friends/friends.html
  - eReader Global Community: www.epals.com
  - WorldPenPals: www.worldpenpals.net
  - Circle of Friends: Penpal club members.

If your child enjoys writing stories, submit one to an online magazine written for and by children:
- kidspace: www.kidspace.org
- StoneSoup: www.stonesoup.com
- Young Writer: www.young-writer.co.uk

- Your 3- or 4-year-old will start "writing" by making linear scribbles that include some recognizable letters. These scribbles are a form of expression. "Remember to accept and affirm children's attempts to write, even if what they produce doesn't look like adult writing," recommends Dr. Renée Castrogiovanni of Louisiana State University and coauthor of Writing in Preschool: A Guide to Classroom Meaning and Meets.

- Urge your child to read what he or her picture or writing says, advises Lari Zamblin Holg, an educational consultant in Racine, Ontario, and author of Remarkable Milestones for Teaching Beginning Writing. "As his signs, oral language development is even more critical than the ability to use letters and sounds."

Activities for preschoolers

Stimulate your child's curiosity with these activities:

- Read alphabet books together, then make your own, help your child trace the shape of each letter upper case to lower, if he or she has trouble, draw the letter on another piece of paper, describing each movement of the pencil.

- Diagonal lines, as in F or b, are critical for children. Try placing dots for your child to connect, or after reading a story together, ask your child to retell or her favorite part or imagine a different ending, using his or her own words while you write them down. Then bind the pages with staples or ribbon to make a book.

- Help your child keep a journal of what books he or she reads, include the book title, author, what your child liked or didn't, and a simple rating system (make it fun with stars or stickers).

- Inspire your child with a story starter, such as, "If you thought it would be fun to be an astronaut..."