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Family Literacy Programs

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Abstract

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FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Julie Van Meeteren

July 15, 2002

Family Literacy Programs

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Approved   Head, Department of
Curriculum and Instruction

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This study examined the effects of family literacy programs on increasing literacy behaviors in young children and adults. Benefits and various approaches of effective family literacy programs were discussed, as well as concerns associated with implementation, funding, and cultural and linguistic differences concerning these programs. Guiding principles were presented for family literacy instructors to facilitate literacy behaviors in young children and adults. Conclusions were drawn from reviewing the literature, and recommendations were made for the future implementation of family literacy programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The publication of the book entitled Family Literacy by Denny Taylor in 1983 coined the

term family literacy. The term gained popularity, and from this developed the first generation of

family literacy programs (Auerbach, 1995b). Planned interventions to promote family literacy

programs emerged in the mid-1980s, in large part, as a creative and economical response to

growing poverty and undereducation among women and children (Cuban & Hayes, 1996).

The growth of these programs was fueled by federal legislation, such as the Adult Education

Act, Head Start, library legislation, the Family Support Act, Title I, and the Even Start Family

Literacy Act. Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983) suggested more direct educational interventions in families, with parents

serving as educational resources for improving children's literacy and schooling.

Family literacy became a focus of federal legislation in 1991, with the creation of the

National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) under the National Literacy Act. NIFL supported public

policy to increase literacy by working with Congress, the executive branch, and leaders in

literacy education. Family literacy services are defined in federal law as having sufficient

intensity in terms of hours and duration to make sustainable changes in a family. Family

literacy services integrate all of the following activities: (a) interactive literacy activities

between parents and their children, (b) training parents regarding how to be the primary teacher

for their children and full partners in the education of their children, (c) parent literacy training

that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and (d) an age-appropriate education to prepare children

for success in school and life experiences (Research Policy News, 1999).

Two laws passed in 1998 that affect family literacy are the Reading Excellence Act and the Workforce Investment Act. The Reading Excellence Act provides for efforts to ensure children can read by the end of the third grade. Ten million dollars provide funding so states can plan and coordinate statewide initiatives to integrate existing federal, state, and local literacy resources. The law was passed for two major reasons: First, findings from scientifically based reading research have provided compelling guidance for improved reading practice. Second, national assessments have continued to show great need for improving reading instruction in many schools, especially high poverty schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1984-1994).

The Reading Excellence Act was authorized to carry out the following purposes:

1. To teach every child to read by the end of third grade.

2. To provide children in early childhood with the readiness skills and support they need to learn to read once they enter school.

3. To expand the number of high quality family literacy programs.

4. To provide early intervention to children who are at risk of being identified for special education inappropriately.

5. To base instruction, including tutoring, on scientifically-based reading research.

The Workforce Investment Act elevated family literacy programs to the level of adult basic education and English as a Second Language programs and requires states to submit five-year plans for adult education and family literacy services. As a result of the Workforce Investment Act, NIFL is now focusing attention on state efforts with an increasing emphasis on adult education. In addition, recent federal legislation requires states to design plans for adult education, early childhood, and family literacy (Research Policy News, 1999).

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) estimates that there are now over 1,000 family literacy programs across the United States and argues that it is the best long-term solution to America's poverty problem. According to representatives of the U.S. Department of Education, Even Start is the largest family literacy initiative in the United States. It is not only an important part of the U.S. education agenda for the 1990s, ". . . but perhaps the key to reaching U.S. educational goals" (McKee & Rhett, 1995, p. 166). According to an article by the Streets, (1995), not only has family literacy come to be seen as a state of the art approach to educational reform, but it can be said to have gained the status of a literacy campaign.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to survey the literature of family literacy programs to determine their effectiveness in increasing the literacy behaviors of young children and to develop guidelines for facilitating literacy programs. In order to achieve this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of family literacy behaviors?

2. What are the benefits of family literacy programs in improving literacy behaviors in young children and adults?

3. What are the concerns associated with family literacy programs?

4. What are the guidelines in facilitating literacy behaviors in young children and adults who participate in family literacy programs?

Need for the Study

In the United States, people are constantly debating about new approaches to a wide range of problems in our society. There is a common thread that weaves through these debates. Problems,

ranging from moving people off welfare, to ensuring that children are ready for school, to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and hopelessness, all share a common link. The common link is literacy (Schmidt, 1995). Why children succeed or fail in school is one of the most enduring questions for educational researchers. In the United States, we have not only blamed public schools for illiteracy, but we have also blamed families (Hall & Moats, 1999). In order to improve literacy behaviors, family literacy programs are needed.

Limitations

Family literacy program studies and topics were prominent in the 1980s, but focused on the relation of parent and school. Research studies in the 1990s began to shift and encompass research on a wider parameter of family literacy (Morrow, 2001). The shortcomings of this study involved the sources. Primary sources of information examined mainly adult family literacy programs. However, secondary sources were used to discuss parents and children because primary sources were not available. Many secondary sources that were used focused on related topics to family literacy programs. Some primary and secondary sources were not available. Not being able to get dissertations because of the cost was also a limitation. In addition, secondary sources such as interviews with parent-school liaisons, librarians, and Even Start staff had to be investigated and were time-consuming.

Most of the information for this study was found at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), to which I had access through their checkout system. Limitations involved the effort, time, and money that was needed to survey the literature. Another limitation at UNO involved locating, setting up, and reading U.S. documents on microfilm. Also, having access to the University of Northern Iowa's off-campus databases was extremely helpful, but was difficult to

access on weekends. Some information was obtained from Internet web sites, but limitations

involved credibility.

Definitions

In the literature reviewed for this study, there is a debate concerning definitions of family

literacy because of the diverse theoretical backgrounds of the practitioners and researchers.

Although the importance of literacy is universally accepted, there is no universal acceptance of a

common definition. For the purposes of clarity and understanding, literacy terms will be

defined in the following ways:

Booksharing: The interactions between children and adults as they share books together

(McGee & Richgels, 2000).

Environmental Print: Print that is encountered outside of books and is a part of everyday

living (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

Family: A term that means different things to different people. Families can be of diverse

styles and shapes. Families can have members of all ages, spanning generations. Families can

include one person or be single-parent, include several people that may or may not be related, be

with or without children, and can include those separated from others. A family can be a group

of people united by certain convictions or common characteristics, living under one roof, and

usually under one head (Gestwicki, 2000).

Family Literacy: "The different ways in which family members initiate and use literacy in

their daily lives" (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p. 124).

Family Literacy Services or Programs: A comprehensive approach to working with the whole family to improve basic skills, job skills, and life skills. Programs are usually based on the view that improving the parenting and basic literacy skills of adults will foster learning and literacy among their children at the same time (Morrow, 1995b; Nickse, 1990).

Language Minority Parents: Involves parents who speak a language other than English (Mulhern, Rodriguez-Brown, & Shanahan, 1994).

Literacy: "Involves the communication processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening with reading as the primary element. It is viewed as a continuum of knowledge and skills. Literacy abilities are developmental, multidimensional in purpose, sensitive to context, and depend on the participants' needs (Taylor, 1997, p. 83).

Modeling: Showing a person how to do a task with the expectation that the person will then emulate the model (Osborn & Lehr, 1998).

Multiple Literacies: "Literacy practices that differ from group to group within a society as well as from society to society" (Dickinson, 1994, p. 236).

Parent: "Refers to anyone fulfilling the responsibilities usually associated with a child or children over a sustained period of time" (Spodek & Saracho, 1993, p. 156).

Parent Education: "Refers to specific attempts to offer knowledge and support to parents in hopes of increasing parenting effectiveness" (Gestwicki, 2000, p. 313).

Family Literacy Practitioners: People who practice family literacy techniques (Searls, Mead, & Ward, 1985).

Prior Knowledge: The sum total of what an individual knows at any given time (Knuth & Jones, 1991).

Typology: The systematic classification of types (Laird, 1987, p. 467).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Characteristics of Family Literacy

Federal funding for family literacy programs has grown from $13.5 million in 1989 to more than $14.8 million in 1999 (Amstutz, 2000). With such a large monetary investment and inclusion in policies and legislative actions, a review of the literature on the characteristics and approaches to family literacy is warranted.

Many leading experts and researchers in the field have attempted to define family literacy according to its features and characteristics. Family literacy used to be thought of as parents reading aloud to their children at home. Recently, however, the understanding of the term family literacy embraces broader characteristics (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, Wilkinson, 1985; Morrow, 1995a). According to Teale (1986), literacy functioned not as isolated events, but rather as components of social activities in homes and communities. In addition, Morrow stated that literacy is a series of interactions that occur within communities of learners. These researchers have suggested that literacy has become a part of the lives of families of nearly every class, culture, and income.

Family literacy programs view the family and community context as a positive, central resource for learning. Consequently, literacy becomes more relevant. Thus, literacy can be a tool for addressing issues that are authentic and important to the family. Authentic literacy events meld very easily with current activities in the home and community (Morrow, 1995a).

Heath (1983) found the nature, purpose, and uses of literacy materials can differ among cultural groups. He concluded that each community had distinct literate traditions. Some

families' homes contained an abundance of reading materials such as the following:
(a) magazines, (b) newspapers, (c) children's books, and (d) church-related materials. Other families emphasized listening passively and responding to right-answer questions, which reflected the community value on individual competence and an emphasis on meaning residing within the text. In other communities, literacy involved a process of social negotiation and was group oriented. As a result, talk was an integral part of literacy events, and authority was negotiated among community members. Thus, literacy activities were not the sole responsibility of one member, but rather, the whole group accepted this responsibility.

Taylor (1997) stated that there are several types and uses of literacy observed in family settings. Families use literacy in the following ways: (a) to check or confirm facts or beliefs; (b) to fulfill the educational requirements of schooling; (c) to function in the environment, such as read print on highways, at the grocery store, in airports, and in restaurants; (d) to fulfill their financial, historical, recreational, and news-related needs; (e) to gain information for meeting practical needs; (f) to deal with public agencies; (g) to schedule daily life; and (h) to advance their understanding of technology. Examples of possible family literacy events include cooking together, writing letters or thank you notes, creating shopping lists and menus, and engaging in conversation between members (Beatson, 2000).

Teale (1986) found that environmental print was relatively similar for all families, but availability and use of connected discourse, such as children's books, varied widely. The amount and type of adult materials also varied. In some homes, there were many newspapers and magazines; in other homes, few were evident. Religious materials and pamphlets were prevalent in some homes, but not in others. Some children had many more opportunities than others to

interact with literate persons; a number of the children read and wrote often; whereas, others rarely wrote. Teale concluded that home background does play a significant role in children's literacy development.

Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, and Daley (1998) found that different kinds of home literacy experiences appear to be related to different kinds of skills. Their study specifically found experiences that included informal interactions with print were associated with the development of oral language; whereas, direct experiences with formal print interactions were associated with the development of written language.

The level of education of parents also affects home literacy practices. Rodriguez-Brown and Mulhern (1993) found that highly educated Mexican immigrant parents were perceptive of children's educational needs and motivated them to read and write. Family literacy programs that focus on various adult learning activities create a second chance for parents to learn; in the long run, this will no doubt improve the home literacy environment and positively affect children's learning. Ada (1988) found family literacy programs in which parents and children read and learn together. These activities are effective in increasing the literacy level in families.

It is important to consider the expanding view of family literacy characteristics. Researchers are beginning to recognize the multifaceted aspects of family literacy. The concept of multiple literacies is relevant. Hollingsworth and Gallego (1996) defined multiple literacies as the contribution of various discourses, such as school literacy, community literacy, and personal literacy. The characteristics of multiple literacies involve different ways of knowing the following: (a) cultures, (b) texts, (c) discourses, and (d) experiences (Hollingsworth & Gallego, 1996). Crawford (1995) characterized multiple literacies as including oral stories; music; movement or dance; mathematics; and visual images such as pictures, drawings, and paintings.

While leading experts are defining multiple literacies in unique ways and continually redefining literacy in general, there is no doubt that the view of literacy is expanding and changing.

In 1991, the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association formed a Family Literacy Commission to study issues and initiatives in family literacy from a broad perspective. Much of the family literacy research up to this point focused primarily on the relationship of parents and the school. This commission encompassed in their research a wider parameter of family literacy and looked at how the family functioned within its culture and community, what types of family literacy events were occurring naturally, and also provided support for the literacy practices already in place in families (Braun, 1991).

Increased interest and awareness in the family member as educator has sparked many approaches to family literacy programs. Nickse (1990) offered a typology for classifying family literacy programs that have two dimensions: (a) type of program intervention (direct or indirect) and (b) type of participation (adults alone, children alone, or adults and children together).

According to Nickse (1990), the four basic program types are the following:

1. Direct Adults-Direct Children. This is a highly structured model that offers the most intensive formal literacy instruction for both adults and children and has a high degree of parent-child interaction. Examples of this type are Kentucky's Parent and Child Education (PACE) and the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Program.

2. Indirect Adults-Indirect Children. This offers voluntary attendance, short-term commitment, and less formal learning through literacy enrichment. Generally, reading skills are not taught, although adults may receive literacy tutoring. An example of this type is the Carnegie Library's Read Together Program in Pittsburgh.

3. Direct Adults-Indirect Children. This offers adults literacy instruction, often in forms of

seminars or workshops. They may receive coaching on reading with their children and other activities that influence children's literacy. The Family Literacy Project in San Antonio, Texas, is an example of this type.

4. Indirect Adults-Direct Children. This offers in-school, preschool, or after-school programs to develop children's reading skills. Parents may be involved in workshops, reading rallies, or other events. An example of this type is Running Start offered in nine cities with cooperating Chrysler plants.

Family literacy programs may be offered in adult basic education (ABE) programs, libraries, preschools, elementary schools, workplaces, voluntary literacy agencies, and other community agencies (Nickse, 1990). Program staff may include family literacy program practitioners or instructors, early childhood experts, English as a second language (ESL) specialists, social workers, volunteers, and community liaisons. Other characteristics may include survival skills for immigrants, linkage to community services, and computer literacy. Family literacy programs are supported and operated by federal, state, local, and private organizations. In addition, programs can vary from one community to another and can be designed to meet the needs of individuals as well as needs of the family as a unit (Kerka, 1992).

Benefits of Family Literacy Programs

One of the most important benefits for families participating in family literacy programs is the long-term effects on children of shared book reading (Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler, & Smith, 1992). In sharing books, Dickinson (1994) suggested that children benefit when an adult guides them through questions, expansions, and sensitivity to their interests and abilities. Family literacy practitioners let parents know that they can use the content of books as opportunities for

discussion rather than tests of comprehension. Practitioners show parents alternatives to question-and-answer sessions. In discussions of text, children learn to perform mental operations on representations of ideas, objects, and events mediated by symbolic means (Toomey & Sloan, 1991). Practitioners model ways parents can sit with their children while reading and have an informed conversation with them. Also, practitioners can enable parents to transmit the enjoyment of reading to their children (Canizares, 1999).

Book sharing has the potential to teach many of the following concepts: vocabulary, rhyme, the meaning of print, the structure of stories and language, and sustained attention. Family literacy practitioners can capitalize on teachable moments, help clarify confusions, keep track of children's ideas, and suggest ideas for consideration. Book sharing can go beyond using opinions of classmates, teachers, practitioners, and parents and may include published critics (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Peterson & Eeds, 1991).

Many experts have observed that shared book reading affects later school performance. Parents reading aloud to their children is assumed to be a prerequisite for success in school (Edwards, 1991). Book reading is the parent-involvement activity most frequently requested by teachers (Vukelich, 1984), and parents need to understand that storybook reading is the cornerstone of reading instruction in the early grades (Edwards & Garcia, 1991).

A second benefit to children and their families who participate in literacy programs is the fact that parents who do not own books begin to buy their own, or increase their rate of checking out books from their local library (Edwards & Garcia, 1991). Children are not only given equal access to books, but they are exposed to working with mentors. Family literacy programs that partner with community-wide literacy efforts can leverage such resources as volunteers and donations from businesses or civic groups. Neighborhood businesses that donate funds for books

can also encourage their employees to read to children participating in family literacy programs. Families who receive gift books from literacy programs or schools are likely to view these places in a positive manner (Fawcett, Rasinski, & Linek, 1997).

A third benefit is that books are not the only literacy-related materials discussed in family literacy programs, for practitioners might point out that television viewing can serve as a tool for gaining information and can be a resource for children. This alternative is especially true for children whose parents lack financial resources to provide them with other experiences (Searls, Mead, & Ward, 1985). Other literacy materials presented to families include the use of comic books, magazines, poems, recipes, jokes, riddles, and reflective journals (Janes & Kermani, 2001).

A fourth benefit is practitioners can help parents value oral language--the importance of rich talk. They encourage parents to talk meaningfully with their children about a variety of things as well as how to ask their children to recall information. Blum, Koskinen, Tennant, Parker, Straub, and Curry (1995) found that when mothers and children read and talked about texts together, parents and school teachers reported an increase in confidence and independence in children's reading.

A fifth benefit is that practitioners can build upon families' cultural knowledge and can broaden the possibilities for what counts as a valuable literacy experience (Kaste, 1999). They focus on families' backgrounds or prior knowledge and experiences to enhance understanding of text. It is through children's prior knowledge or experiences that the scope and depth of their comprehension increases. In addition, practitioners get feedback from families about how they use books, recipes, manuals, and instructions (Canizares, 1999).

(Padak & Rasinski, 1993). Numerous studies show that family involvement positively affects student achievement (Allen, 1999). Effective parent involvement happens when parents are equipped with the ability to learn with their children, and establish a cooperative and supportive relationship between school teachers and parents (Liu, 1996). In addition, families see positive growth in reading and writing outcomes for their children as well as psychological and emotional benefits (Goldsmith & Handel, 1989).

Not only do family literacy programs have the potential to benefit children, but parents can also benefit. This is why family literacy programs think of families as educational units. The most notable changes are the behaviors of participants. Parents attend family literacy programs far longer than many other adult education programs. This higher retention rate means more opportunities to learn (Padak & Rasinski, 1993). Parents participating in family literacy programs comment on the joys that reliving memories can bring, and children enjoy learning about the early years they could not remember. Also, parents benefit from the sharing of letters and stories of older family members (Kaste, 1999).

The immediate ability to act as a more effective literacy resource for their children creates a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment for parents. Those participants who are able to put literacy practices into place discover that they can contribute to their own literacy development. It is the experiences at home that allow parents to take ownership of literacy strategies and to develop perceptions of themselves as home educators. Workshops can motivate some parents to think of resuming their own education. Participating in family literacy programs can establish a strong motivation in adults whose prior experiences have not been satisfactory (Goldsmith & Handel, 1989). Family literacy programs provide individualized services for families with extremely limited literacy skills so that they can receive more intensive social and educational

extremely limited literacy skills so that they can receive more intensive social and educational training (Tice, 2000).

Family literacy program participants benefit by taking advantage of community resources, such as the public library, museums, and other community agencies. Benefits of family literacy programs can also extend to a wider audience. The program can spur participants to act as agents of change and become literacy resources for schools and the community. Developing parents' leadership is important if they are to move into decision-making roles in their communities. Such experiences are stepping stones to broader leadership activities (Auerbach, 1991b).

It is essential for families to work together, share ideas, network, and show their children that education is valued. Participants appreciate family literacy programs' informality and sociability as it respects families' opinions, and the opportunity to share experiences and responses through literature (Padak & Rasinski, 1993). Family literacy programs view families as people who are worthy of trust and support, and as subjects, not as objects to fix.

Concerns of Family Literacy Programs

One of many concerns of family literacy programs is the transmission of school-type literacy techniques in the home. Unfortunately, all too often, a common format used in family literacy programs is training parents to be teachers by having them incorporate reading and comprehension activities found in school. In the same respect, the kinds of literacy activities that are used in school may not be influencing literacy outside of the classroom (Auerbach, 1989). Morrow (1995a) observed that school success can be attributed to home literacy when home literacy events are directly related and authentic to the community, culture, and environment in which they are shared.

(e.g., parents applying reading strategies taught in family literacy programs). As for knowing whether transfer of learning has occurred, data need to be collected from parent surveys, from reports on home reading, and from observations (Goldsmith & Handel, 1989).

A critical aspect of initiating family literacy programs is developing a clear vision of what the program is about, who it will serve, and in what ways it will be delivered. Family literacy programs require careful attention to individual children and their families for an extended period. Learning individually is ideal, but the most efficient way of teaching is in groups. Programs may be unable to adapt to the individual needs of families, an issue made salient by the range of differences that can be found among families. Programs may not provide valuable and useful information for all families, nor respond to all participants' needs and interests. A program's curriculum, activities, and materials may not be culturally and linguistically relevant. Also, some families may be stressed and require sensitive handling, and levels of involvement may vary considerably.

The duration of family literacy programs is a concern. Some programs are known to run only during the summer months; consequently, programs are viewed as a quick fix and lack continuity from one year to the next (Richardson, Sacks, & Ayers, 1995). A longitudinal study of Even Start programs indicated that only 19, or approximately one fourth of the original Even Start programs funded in 1989, were still in existence ten years later (Brown, 1999).

Another concern is the sharing of topics such as child rearing, discipline, and household management, for parents may hold different views on these topics. In addition, parents' own views of their children's abilities and what they do in their homes may be very different than the family literacy practitioners' views.

An overemphasis on parent-child book sharing has received cause for concern among some researchers (Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Erickson, 1984) for they have raised the two serious issues of the ". . . blaming the victim syndrome" (Edwards, 1992, p.176), and the claim that the homes of poor, minority, and immigrant children are lacking in literacy. Anderson and Stokes (1984) observed that book reading is not the only way of becoming literate and that non-mainstream children participate in literacy experiences that are unrelated to books. They also admit that experiences with books are strongly considered in evaluating children's readiness for school and that non-mainstream children's lack of experiences with books could be a contributing source to poor school performance.

Padak and Rasinski (1993) stated that other challenges were the lack of the following: (a) training of family literacy program staff, (b) providing adequate staff, (c) coordinating with community agencies, (d) locating an available site, (e) funding of appropriate materials, (f) providing assessment procedures that are on-going and time-consuming, (g) attracting and keeping volunteers, (h) having a previous family literacy program model to follow, and (i) getting access to computers or a computer lab, to a library, and to other necessary community agencies. Other concerns were the diverse characteristics of parents; the differences of oral and written skills of staff and parents; the need for more recruitment and retention of parents, including provisions for transportation, meals, schedules, and childcare; the problem of program delivery; difficulty in establishing learning goals collaboratively; the short duration of some programs; and program quality (Thomas, 1995).

Several other factors can disrupt or prevent parents from assuming their role in a family literacy program. According to Swap (1993), barriers to involvement include difficult family circumstances, school norms that do not support partnerships, and limited resources.

Several demographic changes have altered the configuration of the family. Over the past few decades, there have been substantial increases in the proportion of mothers working outside the home, single parent families, and language minority children in the schools. These changes affect parents' abilities to be involved in their children's schooling in several ways. Working parents may have less time to attend and participate in programs. Financial constraints limit the resources families can provide for their children and may lead parents to work long hours.

Language minority parents' participation may be hindered by their limited proficiency in English or lack of familiarity with American culture. Moreover, immigrant parents often have had very limited educational opportunities themselves and are usually unfamiliar with education practices in the U.S. (Mulhern, Rodriguez-Brown, & Shanahan, 1994). Economic well-being is closely related to parent involvement, yet it is unrelated to the value parents place on education (Lareau, 1990). Therefore, family literacy programs play a critical role in reaching out to families to draw from them as resources for teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Developing Guidelines

Family literacy programs have the potential for improving the educational development

of adults and children. The time spent carefully planning the initial phases of these projects will

help ensure the success of these programs. Initiating these programs can be extremely

challenging. A set of guidelines is essential to implementation, but there is no single family

literacy model that fits all situations. No one model can be expected to meet multiple family

literacy needs. In addition, there are many definitions of family literacy which can affect the

nature of the guidelines for developing quality programs. There are several commonalities

among family literacy programs. The literature supported the following needs in regard to issues

of good practice: (a) collaboration among various institutions, (b) development of curriculum,

(c) accommodation of families' needs, and (d) evaluation of programs. These needs are met by

following guidelines:

1. Collaboration is a vital element in effective family literacy programs.

These programs foster coordination and long-term planning among various institutions of

federal, state, and local governments; public schools; communities; and businesses (Prete, 1990).

Reading is Fundamental (RIF), the Laubach Literacy Action, and the Barbara Bush Foundation

for Family Literacy are three examples of the family literacy movement for collaboration among

agencies. According to Prete, parents should be partners in the collaboration.

2. The curriculum must provide for informal literacy practices for a diverse set of families and communities.

By recognizing the rich cultural resources and practices that families and communities bring, family literacy programs can expand their conceptions of what elements contribute to successful programs (Packard, 2001). Programs should build on the strengths of parents and their culture and set literacy education in a meaningful cultural context. Instruction in parenting skills should be sensitive to cultural differences in child rearing and family dynamics. Program instruction should also recognize the existence of multiple literacies and literacy behaviors in the home and community, and integrate home and school literacy (Auerbach, 1989; Fingeret & Jurm, 1989; Isserlis, 1990; & Nickse, 1990). Other factors involved in the literacy curriculum are the following: (a) effective strategies affecting delivery of instruction, (b) topics, materials, activity choices, (c) time to enjoy text, and (d) time for parents and their children to do activities and homework together.

Children learn more effectively when they already know something about a content area and when concepts in that area are relevant to them and to their particular background or culture. When the curriculum links new information to the children's prior knowledge, it activates the children's interest and curiosity, and infuses instruction with a sense of purpose (Kujawa & Huske, 1995).

3. Family literacy programs should recognize the needs, skills, and concerns of parents and children.

Getting to know families and supporting what the parents are already doing is important. If parents are their children's most important teachers, then efforts to enhance both the parents' and children's learning is important, as well as including them as partners in the learning process. Auerbach (1995a) stated that it is a false assumption that literacy learning is transmitted one way

from parent to child. In fact, a " ... two-way support system characterizes the literacy interactions

of many families" (p. 17).

Programs that seek to develop the literacy skills of families may need to assist parents with

their own needs. Practitioners may need to help parents recognize their own strengths and help

them plan and set learning goals for themselves. Parents may need the chance to develop social,

academic, or employability skills in a supportive and empowering atmosphere in which they can

begin to approach their own potential and be good role models for their children.

Family literacy programs may choose to focus on certain types of families such as the

hard-to-reach or the ready-to-learn parents. These distinctions have implications for being

guidelines for programs. It is important to provide non-threatening, meaningful experiences for

the parents and children involved. Over time, parents will become aware that their participation

in the program is beneficial in many ways. In order to ensure that parents understand that this

training is relevant to their own needs, practitioners can spend time demonstrating how the

techniques apply to their own learning (Dickinson, 1994). Furthermore, providing concrete,

flexible, personalized activities develops a sense of partnership in curriculum. Also, program

administrators need to decide when and how often families should be involved. Staff

characteristics are important in developing relationships between practitioners and parents.

4. Multiple literacies must be considered in meeting the evaluations of family literacy
programs.

Evaluation and assessment strategies take into account literacy contexts of families.

This provides a rich source of information, appreciation, and respect for multiple cultures and

perspectives.

Family literacy programs should focus on developing guidelines for conducting evaluations that will determine how they have succeeded, or fallen short of their goals. Program evaluation should use the broad definition of literacy that guides program design and uses informal techniques to evaluate. Many family literacy programs have attempted evaluation designs involving control groups. This commitment to assessing effectiveness has been a hallmark of family literacy programs since their inception (Dickinson, 1994).

Assessing and evaluating needs should involve the following strategies: (a) family feedback; (b) flexible goals and objectives; (c) various methods of gathering data such as interviews, questionnaires, checklists, skill inventories, surveys, observations, anecdotal records, field notes, family portfolios, family stories, displays of families' work, presentations; and (d) a family literacy handbook. Once families complete programs, there should be some form of certificate for completion of the program.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to survey the literature on family literacy programs to determine their effectiveness in increasing children's emerging literacy behaviors and to present guidelines for using family literacy programs for literacy development. The paper addressed four questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What are the characteristics of family literacy programs?

One of the characteristics of a family literacy program is that it embraces a broad definition of family literacy. Taylor (1997) stated there was great variability in the types and uses of literacy events across homes. She supported the view that families use print for many purposes as part of their daily lives.

A second characteristic of family literacy programs is that home background plays an important role in children's literacy development. Teale's (1986) research supported the belief that there was a strong link between the child's home environment and the acquisition of literacy development. Rodriguez-Brown and Mulhern (1993) found that the level of the parent's education also affects home literacy practices.

A third characteristic suggests family literacy programs attribute themselves as being related to the community, culture, and environment. Taylor's (1997) findings underscored the problem of viewing literacy as simply book reading and school curriculum. It has become increasingly evident that literacy is a part of the lives of families in nearly every class, culture, and income.

A fourth characteristic recognizes that family literacy is influenced greatly by the concept of multiple literacies. Hollingsworth and Gallego (1996) defined multiple literacies to include school, community, and personal literacy.

A fifth characteristic categorizes programs into types based on intervention and participation. According to Nickse (1990), family literacy programs can vary from being highly structured to providing indirect services to adults.

2. What are the benefits of family literacy programs in improving literacy behaviors in young children?

The primary benefits of family literacy programs begin at home. When families are involved in their children's literacy development, the children will become more successful in school. Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler, and Smith (1992) stated that one of the major benefits was the long-term effects of shared book reading on children. Children benefit when guided through questions, discussions, and expansions based upon their interests and abilities. Book sharing can contribute to teaching such concepts as vocabulary, rhyme, print meaning, story and language structure, and attention.

Shanahan, Mulhern, and Rodriguez-Brown (1995) stated that family literacy programs benefit parents as well as children. Parents and children are brought closer together when participating in family literacy programs, thus intensifying the bond between them. Parents are empowered to take ownership of their children's literacy development and view themselves as home educators. In addition, families can benefit from taking advantage of community resources.

3. What are the concerns associated with family literacy programs?

Although, researchers have pointed out numerous benefits, family literacy programs are not without problems. Programs may practice different types and forms of literacy incongruent with those practiced at home. Despite the fact that literacy activities are present in one form or another in most homes, particular events that some parents share with their children may have little influence on programs or school success. Research studies revealed progress or school success can be achieved when literacy events are directly related to the families' culture, community, and environment.

Other concerns mentioned in this study were the following: (a) the parents' inabilities to transfer learning to their children, (b) the program's choice of goals for each family, (c) who will be served in programs, (d) the methods and delivery of instruction, (e) the range of abilities and language differences among families, (f) the length and duration of programs, (g) the sharing of mutual topics of interest, and (h) the overemphasis of book sharing techniques for parents. Padik and Rasinski (1993) stated other concerns facing family literacy programs dealt with the diversities of program staff, parents, and communities.

Swap (1993) wrote that there are several barriers to family involvement in literacy programs. These barriers are the following: (a) difficult family circumstances, (b) no support for partnerships, (c) limited resources, (d) lack of communication for establishing home-school relationships, (e) the increased number of mothers working outside of the home, (f) single-parent families, and (g) English as a Second Language (ESL) families.

4. What are the guidelines in facilitating literacy behaviors in young children who

   participate in family literacy programs?

This study determined that family literacy programs need a set of guidelines to follow to

achieve success in facilitating literacy development in children. The first step is to foster

coordination and long-term planning among various community agencies. Establishing and

nurturing connections within family literacy programs is the key to collaboration. Next,

practitioners should observe the informal literacy practices of diverse families and communities

to discover their strengths in developing curriculum. Program instruction should also focus on

the existence and integration of multiple literacies in the home and community. In addition to

recognizing multiple literacies, practitioners should also consider the following variables:

(a) strategies for delivering instruction; (b) activity choices, materials, and topics; (c) time

for parents and their children to do activities together; and (d) families' prior knowledge.

Family literacy programs should recognize the needs, skills, and concerns of families.

Supporting what families are already doing for their children's literacy development is

important, as well as including parents as partners in the learning process. Practitioners may need

to help parents recognize their own needs by empowering them to achieve at their own level and

to serve as good role models for their children. Finally, evaluation and assessment strategies

provide a source of information and respect for multiple literacies.

Conclusions

The following conclusions about family literacy programs were drawn from this study:

1. Family literacy programs can play a crucial role in providing literacy development for

   children as well as adults.

2. Family literacy programs can deepen relationships between parents, children, staff, and community agencies.

3. Family literacy programs can alleviate isolation among the network of providers, which in turn is likely to improve service delivery to participants.

4. The emphasis on individual and family growth supports the idea that participants should be encouraged to examine what they already bring to family literacy programs. This approach is a new standard which recognizes the importance of success as a motivating force.

5. Family literacy program goals would not be expected to occur spontaneously or be produced by some other means, other than through the program.

6. Family literacy highlights the struggle between adults and children over the changes and meaning of education.

Recommendations

The implications of family literacy programs suggest the following recommendations for program improvement:

1. Family literacy programs should establish goals that are theoretically and philosophically consistent with home literacy practices.

2. Family literacy programs should provide literacy learning activities that are relevant, process-oriented, authentic, and functional to families.

3. Family literacy programs should include evaluation or assessment strategies that are useful for the following purposes: (a) developing programs, (b) determining the extent to which goals have been achieved, and (c) assisting families in their educational quests.

4. Comprehensive literature reviews and research-based studies should be shared with school personnel in order to advocate for children's participation in family literacy programs.

5. Further experimental studies need to be conducted concerning participants in family literacy programs in order to answer the following questions:

(a) What are the effects of gender on children's literacy development?

(b) What are the long-term effects of the types of programs on children's literacy development?

(c) What are the community and school-level factors that predict which schools choose to implement which types of family literacy programs?

(d) How do family literacy practices interact with other reform efforts to change children's performance?

(e) What factors would lead schools that have adopted family literacy programs to drop them?

(f) What are the effects of using children's background or prior knowledge in determining how information is gathered and presented?

(g) What is the relationship between children's increase in standardized test scores, attendance in school, and participation in home-school activities and their enrollment in family literacy programs?

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