

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 836

CE 085 508

TITLE Perspectives on Family Literacy.

INSTITUTION Literacy Assistance Center, New York, NY.

PUB DATE 2003-00-00

NOTE 57p.; Produced with National Even Start Association and supported by the Altman Foundation. Published as the joint Fall 2003 issue of Literacy Harvest (Volume 10, Number 1) and Family Literacy Forum (Volume 2, Number 2). Some pages may not photocopy well due to lack of contrast.

AVAILABLE FROM For full text: <http://www.lacnyc.org/publications/Harvest/03Fall/harvestFall03.pdf>.

PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Educators; *Culturally Relevant Education; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Innovation; Family (Sociological Unit); *Family Literacy; Family School Relationship; Fathers; Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy Education; Motherless Family; Mothers; Parent Child Relationship; Parent Education; Parent Role; *Parents as Teachers; Partnerships in Education; *Theory Practice Relationship; Videotape Recordings

ABSTRACT

This joint publication of the journals of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) and the National Even Start Association (NESA) focuses on innovative practices and theory in family literacy education, offers an array of perspectives to members of the literacy community, and critically examines some assumptions about literacy in general, as well as the roles of specific family members within the family literacy framework. The articles are as follows: "From the Editors: Perspectives on Family Literacy" (Marguerite Lukes, Claudia M. Ullman); "Reflecting Culture in Reflective Practice: How Literacy Professionals Improve Family Outcomes by Learning Across Cultures" (Martha Kamber, Norma Tan); "Making Connections: Using Narrative and Journal Writing in a Holistic Literary Enhancement Program for Incarcerated Mothers" (Joan Ports); "Digital Family Stories: Using Video Projects to Improve Family Literacy" (Gloria Nudelman, Lua Hadar); "'The Good Mother': Exploring Mothering Discourses in Family Literacy Texts" (Suzanne Smythe, Janet Isserlis); "Involving Fathers in Family Literacy: Outcomes and Insights from the Fathers Reading Every Day Program" (Stephen Green); "Literacy for the Littlest: Sharing Books with Babies and Toddlers" (Laurie Danahy, Jennifer Olson); "Designer Literacy: Reading the Labels" (Elsa Auerbach). The document concludes with NESA and LAC announcements. All articles contain references and some contain figures and tables. (MO)

Literacy Harvest

Literacy Assistance Center

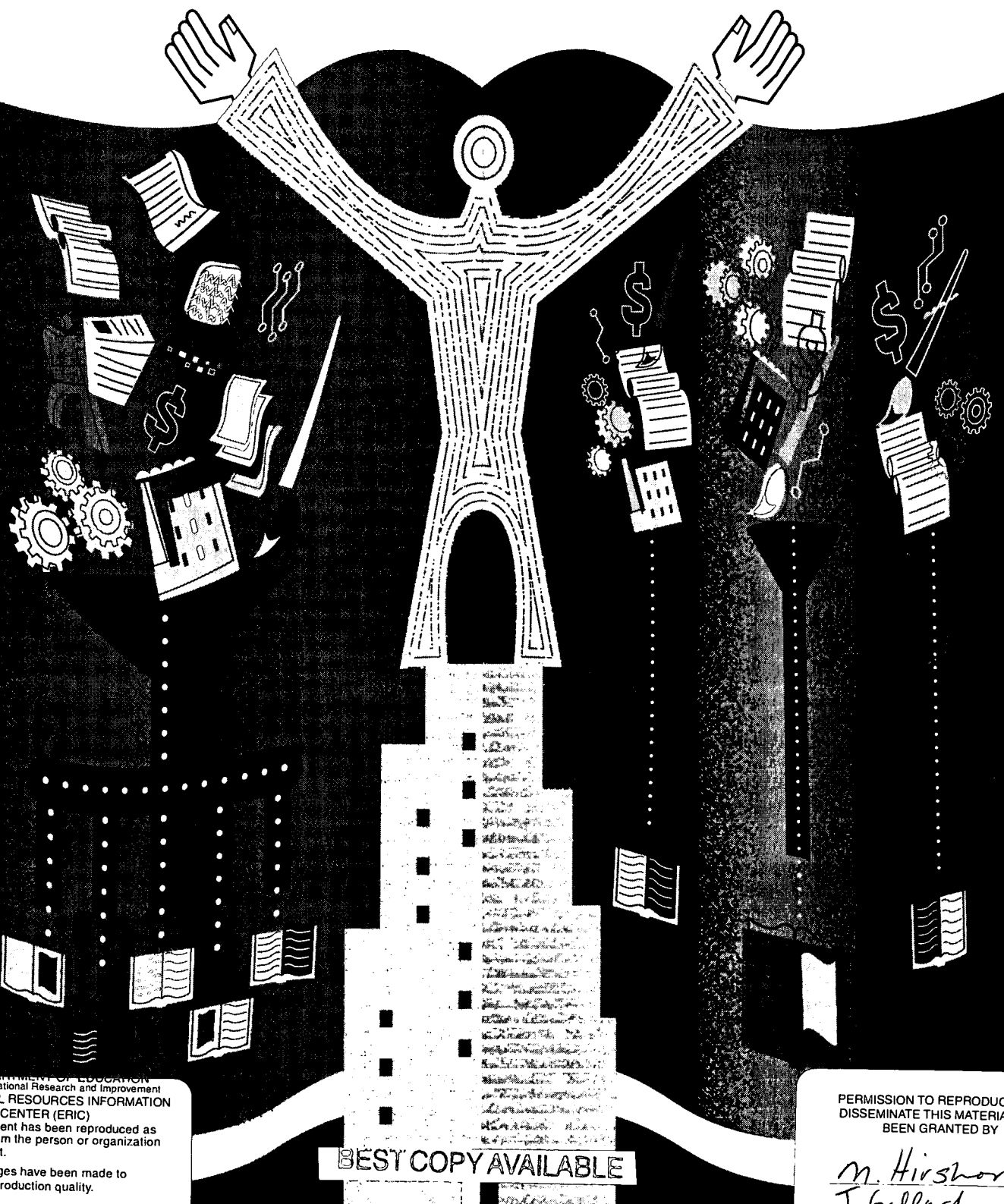
Volume 10 Number 1 Fall 2003

Family Literacy Forum

National Even Start Association

Volume 2 Number 2 Fall 2003

ED 480 836



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.



of view or opinions stated in this
ent do not necessarily represent
OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Hirshorn
J. Gallagher

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

About Family Literacy Forum

Family Literacy Forum is a national, peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the National Even Start Association. *Family Literacy Forum* is committed to bringing the voices, ideas, and experiences of individuals in the field to the forefront of discussions about the literacy development of families in home, community, and school-based settings. *Family Literacy Forum* accepts manuscripts that focus on practice, theory, and research in family literacy education. For subscription information, submission guidelines, or other editorial correspondence, contact Claudia M. Ullman, One Gracie Terrace, New York, NY 10028, or cullman2@nyc.rr.com.

About Literacy Harvest

Published since 1992, *Literacy Harvest* is an annual journal by and for literacy practitioners and researchers in New York City and beyond, highlighting research, trends, and exemplary practices in adult, family, and youth literacy education. Each issue is based on a single theme; past themes have included leadership, project-based learning, using technology to enhance instruction, and learning disabilities. For more information on *Literacy Harvest* or to obtain a free subscription, contact the LAC's communications unit at 212.803.3332 or publications@lacnyc.org.

Permission to Reprint: Reproduction of any portion of the text requires written permission from either *Family Literacy Forum* (cullman2@nyc.rr.com) or *Literacy Harvest* (publications@lacnyc.org or fax 212.785.3685).

Contents

From the Editors	3
Perspectives on Family Literacy	
Marguerite Lukes and Claudia M. Ullman	
Reflecting Culture in Reflective Practice	5
How Literacy Professionals Improve Family Outcomes by Learning Across Cultures	
Martha Kamber and Norma Tan	
Making Connections	12
Using Narrative and Journal Writing in a Holistic Literacy Enhancement Program for Incarcerated Mothers	
Joan Ports	
Digital Family Stories	19
Using Video Projects to Improve Family Literacy	
Gloria Nudelman and Lua Hadar	
"The Good Mother"	25
Exploring Mothering Discourses in Family Literacy Texts	
Suzanne Smythe and Janet Isserlis	
Involving Fathers in Family Literacy	34
Outcomes and Insights from the Fathers Reading Every Day Program	
Stephen Green	
Literacy for the Littlest	41
Sharing Books with Babies and Toddlers	
Laurie Danahy and Jennifer Olson	
Designer Literacy	46
Reading the Labels	
Elsa Auerbach	
NESA Announcements	51
LAC Announcements	52

Editors

Claudia M. Ullman for *Family Literacy Forum*

Marguerite Lukes and Jan Gallagher for *Literacy Harvest*

Editorial Assistants

Karen Griswold

JoAnne Steglitz

Jill Steinberg

Family Literacy Forum Editorial Advisory Board

Judy Calarco, Chautauqua County and

Buffalo West Even Start Programs, Buffalo, NY

M. Christine Dwyer, RMC Research, Portsmouth, NH

Denise Gasper, The Neway Center, Newaygo, MI

Sandra Howe, Kalamazoo Public Schools, Kalamazoo, MI

Charlotte Marchant, Learning Center for Educators and
Families, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY

Roberta Belding O'Connor (Ret.), Springfield College,
Springfield, MA

Don Seaman (Ret.), Texas Center for Adult Literacy and
Learning, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX

Lena O. Townsend, The Robert Bowne Foundation,
New York, NY

Literacy Harvest Editorial Board

Faigy Berkovich, Agudath Israel of America

Gayle Cooper, City University of New York

Decklan Fox, New York Public Library

Marguerite Lukes, Literacy Assistance Center

Sandra Parris, NYC Department of Education

Elyse Barbell Rudolph, Literacy Assistance Center

Sheila Ryan, Literacy Partners

Bona Soanes, Queens Borough Public Library

National Even Start Association Board of Directors

Scott Himelstein (Chairman/CEO), San Diego, CA

Sheryl Barnett, Sioux Falls, SD

Tom Conner, Bluffton, SC

Libby Culver, Durango, CO

Judy Devey, Prince Frederick, MD

Brad Everett, Pekin, IL

Denise Gasper, Newaygo, MI

Sue Henry, Albany, NY

Sandra Howe, Kalamazoo, MI

Paul Johnson, Denver, CO

Derek Link, Yuba City, CA

Nancy Ryan, Newport, RI

Patty Ball Thomas, Tallahassee, FL

Sallie Wilson, Sacramento, CA

LAC Board of Directors

Elizabeth Horton (Chair), National Council for
Research on Women

David C. Bloomfield, Brooklyn College School of Education

Suzanne C. Carothers, New York University

James Cooper, Cravath, Swaine & Moore

Elizabeth Fader, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

Gregory Farrell, Outward Bound U.S.A.

Matthew Goldstein*, City University of New York

John Hannan, Riverkeeper, Inc.

Michael Hirschhorn, Consultant

Joel I. Klein*, New York City Department of Education

Linda Lam, Ernst & Young LLP

Paul LeClerc*, New York Public Library

Christy Porter, Consultant

Karen M. Proctor, Scholastic, Inc.

Amina Rachman, United Federation of Teachers

Elyse Barbell Rudolph*, Literacy Assistance Center

Marian Schwarz, Adult Literacy Media Alliance

Kyu H. Scott, ABN AMRO Inc.

Paul Stanley, Courier Companies, Inc./Bookbinders'
Guild of New York

Jean Thomases, Consultant

*ex officio

The Literacy Assistance Center would like to thank the
Altman Foundation for supporting the publication of this
issue of *Literacy Harvest*.

From the Editors

Perspectives on Family Literacy

Marguerite Lukes and Claudia M. Ullman

George Eliot tells us that "Perspective . . . is a beautiful thing." For the artist, perspective creates a way of seeing, a way of depicting depth by ordering form in space. For the educator, perspective creates a way of knowing, a way of depicting depth of another sort—a depth of understanding that emerges when a range of experiences and points of view are placed next to each other.

Although the Literacy Assistance Center and the National Even Start Association have never before collaborated, the idea of working together seemed natural. We learned of each others' plans for a fall 2003 publication on innovative practices and theory in family literacy education when we were introduced by a mutual colleague in the New York City literacy community. After an initial phone call in which we spoke about the publication process and shared resources we believed could support the other's efforts, it became apparent that a joint publication would benefit from the expertise and differing perspectives of each of our organizations.

The LAC provides resources and professional development for adult, youth, and family literacy practitioners in New York State and beyond, with a focus on improving instructional practice for adults. NESA is a national organization of Even Start providers and professionals that seeks to strengthen and enhance the field of family literacy through professional development and legislative activities. Both organizations, with their different yet overlapping foci, have come together to explore issues that affect programs and practitioners working to support the literacy and self-sufficiency of children, parents, and families.

As educators, we are quick to stress the vital nature of collaboration and partnerships among diverse providers for the sake of reaching more clients in need, providing much-needed comprehensive support services, strengthening communities, and building on existing resources. Why not partner on the publication? It seemed to us an ideal opportunity to bring together our separate, but not dissimilar, groups of readers and contributors.

We know that perspective in the natural world is neither

neat nor clear. In the world of art, perspective often is created through contrast or juxtaposition. Similarly, we know that there is no neat or clear thinking about how family literacy programs are defined. As a result, organizations or individuals with differing approaches or philosophies often assume that their ideas will not fit together. Often they are simply unfamiliar with other ways of working.

Adult literacy practitioners working on literacy issues with adult learners who are parents see and can document concrete changes related to family literacy; yet the world of family literacy continues to be far removed from the world of adult literacy because adult education programs often lack a formal early childhood component. For parent leadership programs working with parents of very young and school-aged children, formal literacy education for adults is often a secondary priority. For Even Start providers working in accordance with federal statutes and within complex institutional partnerships, balancing the needs of children, parents, and school staff across areas of literacy, parent education, and child development can present unique challenges. Practitioners in all sectors of this broad and loosely woven field come from widely diverse backgrounds with disparate views, and they have much to offer our thinking about family literacy education.

The articles in this issue of *Family Literacy Forum/Literacy Harvest* explore a number of themes related to innovative program practices. In addition, this issue critically examines some assumptions about literacy in general as well as the roles of specific family members within the family literacy framework. We hope that the articles in this journal offer an array of perspectives that challenge members of the literacy community to look in new and fresh ways at their practice and assumptions.

In the first article, Martha Kamber and Norma Tan present a model of a family literacy program that works to strengthen reflective practice and services in order to bridge cultures for and with families in a linguistically and culturally diverse community. Next, Joan Ports presents a program model for

incarcerated mothers that connects writing to the participants' development as parents. Stephen Green discusses a program aimed at increasing the participation of fathers in traditionally female-dominated programs. In their article on mothering discourses, Suzanne Smythe and Janet Isserlis assert that traditional notions of "mothering" can be distorting and limiting not only for mothers, but also for children, fathers, families, and communities. Gloria Nudelman and Lua Hadar share a program that uses digital video as a tool for literacy development that is true to the spirit of adult learning—working collaboratively, using primary languages and cultures as resources, and engaging in meaningful, real-life activities to promote literacy, social understanding, and community. Elsa Auerbach reminds us

that "family literacy" can mean a myriad of things and that we must work hard to counter the bias that says that parents of children who do not demonstrate academic success are "uninterested," "unmotivated," and "deficient." Finally, Danahy and Olsen discuss the lives of young children and give concrete strategies for promoting literacy at the earliest stages of child development.

We hope that the coming together of practitioners and researchers from diverse theoretical and practical perspectives will spark dialogue; expand networks; build and strengthen ties; and ultimately provide ideas, resources, and information to strengthen literacy and support services for adults, children, and families.

Marguerite Lukes, Literacy Assistance Center
Claudia M. Ullman, National Even Start Association



Reflecting Culture in Reflective Practice

How Literacy Professionals Improve Family Outcomes by Learning across Cultures

Martha Kamber and Norma Tan

The Sunset Park Even Start Family Literacy Partnership provides intensive integrated educational and support services to immigrant families. This article describes the Partnership's unique efforts to develop a comprehensive program that guides families in a cross-cultural journey by engaging them in an authentic learning partnership with program staff who reflect their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Genesis

The Sunset Park community of Brooklyn, New York, is home to many immigrants who are low-wage earners, have limited proficiency in English, and are often linguistically isolated from existing community supports. With its steady demand for workers in factories, warehouses, and piers; its close proximity to Manhattan; and its transportation linkages, Sunset Park has been a haven for immigrants since the turn of the 19th century. Despite a significant erosion of its manufacturing base, the neighborhood remains a thriving industrial home to manufacturing, wholesale and distribution, retail, and service companies, which continue to provide employment opportunities for waves of immigrants.

Immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and other Latin American countries have moved into this community in increasing numbers. Newer immigration has changed the ethnic diversity of the area, and Sunset Park is now home to New York City's third Chinatown. Every street offers a blend of cultures as new ethnic communities grow up beside the old.

In response to the needs of many low-income immigrant families in the community, Sunset Park Adult and Family Education (SPAFA) of Lutheran Family Health Centers began providing ESOL classes to parents in the cafeteria of one of the largest public elementary schools in the area, PS 314. As the ESOL teacher and social worker developed relationships with the parents and their children, they began to identify gaps in services.

Participant parents expressed concern over their ability to prepare their children for educational success. They needed help navigating the public school system and were often fearful of talking to their children's teachers. In addition, many parents were overwhelmed with trying to survive in a new country. They struggled with poverty, social isolation, discrimination, housing, poor health, immigration barriers, and lack of formal education in their native countries. Given these multiple obstacles, parents were not spending much time talking, reading, or even playing with their children. Many families had few or no printed materials in the home and were not accustomed to sharing books, in any language, with their children. As a result, pre-kindergarten children started school with extremely limited vocabularies in their native language, little English, and almost no exposure to the written word. Many of these children never caught up and were at risk for later school failure. The parents were eager and enthusiastic but needed support and access to resources. Staff members realized early on that a small English class in the noisy, chaotic school cafeteria was barely beginning to meet the needs of participants' lives.

The Sunset Park Even Start Family Literacy Partnership grew out of attempts by SPAFA and New York City Community School District 20 to address the need for more intensive, comprehensive support and education for immigrant families. Both partners chose PS 314 as the program site based on past successful partnerships and the diverse population of the school.

The Even Start model focuses on working intensively with a relatively small number of families over several years. Sunset Park Even Start consistently enrolls 40 families each year, equally representing Asian and Latino cultures. All participating families live below the federal poverty level, all have low levels of literacy in their native countries (only one has a high school diploma), all have children under the age of five, and 25 percent have children with special needs. All are immigrants, with almost 50 percent having immigrated to the United States in the last two years.

Innovative Features

Staff and Families in an Authentic Learning Partnership

The program partners recognized that families' success hinges on the ability of the staff to engage with participants in an authentic learning partnership. Communication, mutual respect, and trust between staff and participants are crucial to achieving positive outcomes. As Kerka (1998) points out, "learning is most effective when situated in a context in which new knowledge and skills will be used and individuals construct meaning for themselves but within the context of interaction with others. Experts facilitate learning by modeling problem-solving strategies, guiding learners in approximating the strategies while learners articulate their thought processes." Our program builds on the determination, wisdom, and knowledge base of parents, as well as on their ambition for themselves and their children.

Drawing on research in adult education, as well as past experience, the partners recognized the importance of role models in family persistence and successful outcomes. "Functioning as experts, mentors provide authentic, experiential learning opportunities as well as an intense interpersonal relationship through which social learning takes place" (Kerka, 1998). Our professional staff serve our families as guides, mentors, educators, and cultural interpreters.

This excerpt from a reflection by the adult education teacher illustrates one way in which she drew on parents' expertise to create a learning partnership:

When students appeared to be withdrawn or uninterested, I would sometimes make assumptions about their behaviors and their intentions. I'd wonder, is she shy? Is she just uncomfortable with her English? But then I'd see how differently they interact when with peers or when we are outside of the classroom setting. I wondered if my "teacher" role had something to do with it. Maybe they don't want to "undermine my authority"; they think it's rude and disrespectful to speak up or ask too many questions. I decided to do a "show and tell" month in class, so that the students could be the authority. I told two or three students to

bring something from their country every week, an object that we have never seen, that we are unfamiliar with. The rest of the class had to guess how and for what purpose the object is used. Of course, everyone who was not from that country suggested ridiculous theories that caused the students to erupt in laughter. Finally the student who brought in the object explained how the object is really used. Students realized that they had a lot to teach everyone. A new sense of trust and mutual respect grew out of it.

Staff as Cultural Interpreters

Introducing participant families to the norms of United States society serves a socializing function that is vital to families' future educational and economic prospects.

Sunset Park Even Start invites participating parents to consider alternative viewpoints on child development and parenting practices, but we also have a deep appreciation of cultural differences in parenting norms such as how children are disciplined, whether and how parents

discuss their children's accomplishments, how school leadership is expected to interact with children and parents, and what students are expected to learn in school. We use this appreciation to observe differences in values and expectations between home and adopted cultures and to facilitate parents' awareness of these differences.

The program partners felt it was crucial that staff not only represent the ethnic and linguistic communities represented in the program but also be qualified to provide culturally competent services. Experts refer to *cultural* or *intercultural competence* as "the need to develop an understanding and appreciation for cultures other than one's own," with the understanding that culture encompasses "a system of beliefs, customs, and behaviors shared by a group of individuals" (Imel, 1998). Cultural competence thus encompasses much more than linguistic understanding; it is also the ability to respect and appreciate both traditional norms and the complex assumptions that underlie these norms.

Our staff bring both relevant life experience and professional expertise to their roles. Several are immigrants from China

Families' success hinges on the ability of the staff to engage with participants in an authentic learning partnership.



and speak a number of Chinese dialects; several more are Spanish-speaking first-generation Americans. All staff members have experience in their component areas, which include early childhood education, adult education, family counseling, and family literacy. Virtually all have college degrees and three have master's degrees. One family partner—our name for a staff member who works in families' homes—was a former Even Start participant herself. Many of the Sunset Park Even Start staff know firsthand the difficulties immigrant families encounter and the sacrifices they make in realizing their dreams.

Immigrant parents are not only adjusting to their own transition but also attempting to usher their children into a new society. As immigrant children are socialized in two cultures, they often begin to question the contradictory messages they receive. Many parents struggle with how to address divergent cultural values and expectations in raising their children. They also confront dilemmas on parenting methods: How are we to raise children in this new culture? What values should we teach them? What can we preserve, and what should we do differently? They look to staff to help them explore and resolve these conflicts as well as to guide them as they take new risks. The staff—because of the backgrounds they share with participants and the self-reflective professional development described below—are well prepared to guide families through this cross-cultural passage. The traditional is not abandoned for the sake of assimilation, but rather, the two cultures are fluidly intertwined.

Reflective Staff Development

Reflective, participatory staff development is critical to supporting staff in their complex role. Training focuses on delivering educational and supportive services in a process that respects traditional beliefs while introducing new concepts, best practices, and research-based program development. Reflective practice provides the foundation for staff to explore internal conflicts, adopt new methodologies, and feel secure about bridging cultures.

One of the primary themes for staff development has been home-based literacy—a significant intervention for promoting children's emergent literacy skills, but one that has many different cultural implications. Most Even Start parents enter our program expecting that we, the "experts," will educate

their children. Their cultural perspective is that education occurs in school through formal instruction by teachers. The concept that the parent is the child's first and most influential teacher—a basic tenet of Even Start programs—is initially foreign to them.

This cultural difference presents challenges for family partners whose role is to bring intergenerational literacy activities into families' homes. Initially they found that parents had difficulty sharing literacy activities with their children; parents insisted that the family partner do the activities. Since some of the staff also shared parents' deep-seated cultural beliefs about formal education and the separate roles of teachers, parents, and children, they found it extremely difficult to challenge resistant parents to participate, especially since they were guests in the families' homes.

Staff therefore needed to become familiar with the evidence that informal home literacy activity between parents and children contributes to children's learning and achievement. (See, for example, Barton & Coley, 1992.) Through exposure to early childhood education research and best practices, as well as opportunities for self-reflection, staff examined their concerns about parents' traditional role expectations. Further training on emergent literacy provided staff with effective and creative tools to engage parents actively. Staff acquired materials in the parents' native languages and developed activities built on parents' areas of expertise and life experiences. They encouraged storytelling, a culturally accepted custom for intergenerational sharing, and created family photo albums. Parents shared their favorite recipes and prepared meals with their children. Staff also helped parents become comfortable in sharing books with their children in interactive exchanges that did not require high levels of literacy. One family partner described in a reflective evaluation how she encouraged parents to read with their children:

The parents are more likely to step out of their comfort zone for their children, and so I try to motivate the children to engage their mother within the privacy and security of their home. I often ask children, "Do you want your Mom to help you with the activity?" The children always respond enthusiastically. Then it is easier for me to gently encourage the parents to hold the book, read a line, or say something about a picture.

With the help of the family partners, parents began to realize how easily they could help their children by drawing on skills and experience in which they felt confident. Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) describe the effect of this process: "Through such communicative collaboration, staff and parents can challenge the 'traditional' view that expertise is neutral, independent, and 'external' to social relations, as it were. In its place, they can 'co-create' expertise as both the foundation and the outcome of social relations between them."

Staff immediately saw positive results from their efforts. On home visits they noted more printed materials in both languages. Several staff, on trips to the local library, spotted Even Start families borrowing books with their children. Parents reported that their children now looked forward to and requested bedtime stories. Over time, parents began to report that they felt proud of their new literacy skills and the commitment they were making to prepare their children for life in the United States. Staff members began to see firsthand how literacy serves as a tool for empowerment and self-realization.

Other themes for staff development have included parents' beliefs about participation in their children's school, parenting and discipline norms, and developmentally appropriate expectations for young children. Extensive staff development and reflection was essential to help staff accept a common approach in each area. For example, by providing language translation during parent-teacher conferences, we learned about the gap between parents' traditional expectations about their participation in their children's school as compared to the expectations of teachers and school administrators. Parents felt their role was to ensure that their children were respectful in school; they believed that a family's honor and reputation hinged on well-behaved children. They also felt that it would be disrespectful to question teachers about classroom curriculum and other academic concerns. In contrast, teachers complained to staff that parents were not interested in their children's academic achievement because they asked solely about behavior.

This experience, coupled with trainings facilitated by experienced representatives from Asian and Latino cultures, helped staff to understand that they needed to convince parents to be more proactive. Culturally sensitive strategies were designed to involve parents without causing them

discomfort. Mock parent-teacher conferences became part of the adult education curriculum. Even Start early childhood teachers set up parent-teacher conferences to help parents become more comfortable with the format, parents were encouraged to volunteer for trips and in their children's classrooms, teachers and administrators were invited to visit our program and introduce themselves to parents, and visits to pre-K classrooms were scheduled for children and their families in preparation for the following September.

Reflective Practice

The program's participation in a required Even Start local evaluation process created structured opportunities for staff to reflect on their professional learning and on the relationship between practice and family outcomes. Designed to complement the national Even Start reporting outcomes, the local evaluation both helps staff strengthen their professional knowledge and contributes to program development.

In designing the local evaluation, staff expressed interest in developing professional goals, in making connections between theory and practice, and in recognizing the relationship between their work and improved family outcomes. During the first year, staff wrote weekly reflections—some of which are excerpted in this article—describing how they identified specific themes they felt would help them improve their practice. The evaluator helped identify individual and program goals, which she used to develop a reflective tool in which staff could evaluate the progress of their learning. Some of the questions included:

- What ideas have I shared with other people to improve the program? What are we doing together to turn our ideas into actions that will make the program better?
- What outside resources have I explored that can help families learn? What outside resources have I explored that can help me learn?
- What teamwork activity did I participate in? What was my contribution? How did I help the team understand the problem, or take action? Did I lead or support the effort?

Many of the staff members' reflections focused on struggles that both staff and families experienced as they tried to balance valuable traditions with new cultural norms and



expectations. On more than one occasion, staff painfully reflected on the clashes between divergent cultures. One early example arose when we noticed several children with apparent developmental delays. The U.S. educational system encourages early intervention to prepare young children for school success. The families were skeptical about the benefits of these services, and staff also struggled with concerns—embedded in cultural beliefs—over the ways in which labeling children might expose them to later discrimination. A family partner's written reflection describes how staff development and reflective practice helped her deal with this issue:

I know that people like me from the same background feel that the special education system in China is so different than America. Lots of people think that children receiving special education are "retarded." It is a big challenge for parents to accept that their children could be evaluated for a special need. It was even difficult for me to accept before I took a course on special education. In the beginning, I felt it was difficult to bring up with parents because I didn't want to insult them. Now I feel I have more confidence to talk to them because I use what I have learned from school, trainings, and my personal experience to share with them.

In situations like this, the local evaluative process has allowed staff members to examine their role and to gather new information and resources. Drawing on individual inquiry and on ever-deepening collegial relationships, staff explored their traditional beliefs and assumptions. They also learned about previously unimagined options through collaboration with agencies that provide culturally competent services, such as the early intervention and play therapy programs of the Center for Child Development. In combination, the evaluative tool, relationships with community-based resources, and formal staff development on such areas as child development and early intervention have produced strategies for providing comprehensive services and, subsequently, for improving family outcomes.

*Staff expressed interest
in designing a
reflective process that
grew as they did.*

In our second year, having overcome many of the original obstacles, staff felt ready to deepen their reflective practice. They reported that the evaluative tool now felt constrictive and suggested a less structured approach. Staff also noted that they understood the program better and were ready for new professional challenges. Goals surfaced more readily in their weekly writings, and staff expressed interest in designing a reflective process that grew as they did. Cultural passage was still woven throughout their reflections, but now themes were fine-tuned to include such issues as father involvement, parent leadership in the school setting, or transitions for graduating families. Staff felt that their writing was no longer enough to help them sort through the complexities of their positions. They requested bi-weekly meetings that provided greater opportunity to reflect collectively, share perspectives, and draw on each other's expertise. They were also now able to observe the link between professional achievements and successful outcomes for families, as well as to see the need to continue to develop in tandem with our participants. The program coordinator outlined this process in one of her own reflections:

When we first started the reflective process, staff members were uncomfortable and they questioned what it was that we wanted from them. When asked, they stated that in their cultures a good professional was someone who did what was asked of them, basically followed orders. It was difficult to convince them that [the reflective process] was going to help them in their work with the families. To motivate them, we started meeting individually. These conversations reinforced the reflective process as a means of discussing challenges and successes and what we could do differently. I encouraged the staff to write down their thoughts from our meetings. The next step was encouraging staff to write down their reflections on their own. Through trial and error, it became apparent that dialogue was much more helpful. As we worked through it together (first as supervisor and staff member, then as a group), the staff found that taking the time to think about what we've done can really influence how we work, and what direction we want to take in the future.

Outcomes

Through professional development and self-reflective inquiry, Sunset Park Even Start staff have become more knowledgeable about the program and best practices in the field. They have gained confidence in their communication skills and in their ability to foster collaboration and outreach. They have learned to apply theory and best practice in assessing participants' needs, and they continue to develop programmatic responses to a wide range of complex social, educational, and economic issues affecting families.

Though Even Start families face many obstacles, the program model focuses on strengths, not deficits. Families are valued for the diverse experiences, resources, and knowledge they bring to the program. Participants share intimate issues such as parenting, their children's school, domestic violence, employment, health, housing, immigration, and other domains with staff. They are less apprehensive about seeking services from other community-based organizations because they trust us and the partnerships we form.

The adult education instructor wrote about the process of involving parents in program planning:

When we decided to do a program assessment with the parents, I didn't think they would go for it at first. It was the end of the year and we asked them to talk about what they liked, what they would change, what they wanted to see more or less of, what they thought was the most important thing they learned, etc. We got a lot of feedback. I guess by that time they were pretty comfortable with us. What surprised them I think was how quickly we incorporated their input into policy. When we came back with ways to accommodate their requests in daily programming, they told me for the first time how empowered they felt that someone was listening; that their ideas could be put into practice.

We are convinced that the relationships forged by staff with families—supported by professional development that acknowledges the cross-cultural dimensions of the work—account for the strong program outcomes we have observed. Participant retention has been high, and parents have made exceptional educational gains. Last year 97 percent of adult participants progressed to the next level in their English class.

Of those, 25 percent have graduated from ESOL to an adult literacy class. 100 percent of participants who indicated employment as a goal have since found jobs; many have also improved employment positions.

Teachers and administrators in the school report that Even Start parents are noticeably involved in their children's education and that, consequently, the families are more visible in the school community. Parents participate in their children's classrooms; they volunteer through the PTA and the school leadership team, show up for curriculum meetings, attend school trips, and communicate openly. Teachers note that students are more involved in their studies: They complete assignments on time, show improved reading scores, speak English more fluently, participate more comfortably in classroom activities, attend school at a higher rate, and state that they enjoy school more. Even Start children are also showing improvements on standardized test scores: 100 percent of pre-K through third-grade students are reading on grade level. Eighty-four percent of Even Start children have average or better attendance ratings, and 100 percent were promoted to the next grade.

Finally, participating families themselves note the profound impact the program has had on their lives. Parents state that they have acquired necessary skills, gained confidence, and learned to appreciate new customs. More importantly, their relationships with their children have grown as they embrace new approaches to parenting. They spend more time sharing books, conversing, and playing with their children, and they can make connections between these activities and their children's educational success. They are more confident in navigating their new community and have created a network of new friends among other participants. Perhaps most significantly, participants state that their journey has been accompanied by program staff who have guided them, reflecting en route, to discover the passages that link familiar and new terrains—a process they understand as essential to success in their new home.

Authors' note

The authors would like to thank Kathy Hopkins, Director of Community-Based Programs for Lutheran Family Health Centers, for her important contributions to this article.



References

Barton, P., & Coley, R. (1992). *America's smallest school: The family*. Princeton, NJ: Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service.

Hughes, P., & MacNaughton, G. (2001). Building equitable staff-parent communication in early childhood settings: An Australian case study. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 3 (2). Retrieved June 2, 2003, from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/hughes.html>.

Imel, S. (1998) Promoting intercultural understanding. ERIC Trends and Issues Alert. Retrieved June 2, 2003, from <http://www.ericacve.org/docgen.asp?tbl=tia&ID=120>.

Kerka, S. (1998). New perspectives on mentoring. ERIC Digest No. 194. Retrieved June 2, 2003, from <http://www.ericacve.org/docgen.asp?tbl=digests&ID=47>.

Martha Kamber, M.Ed., is the Director of Family Support Services for Lutheran Family Health Center's Community Based Programs. She has over twenty years of experience in the areas of public health, social work, education, and community development. For the past decade, she has devoted her efforts to creating programs that support New York City's immigrant families.

Norma Tan, Ph.D., is the principal of Cora Group, a consulting practice established in 1988 to help organizations meet new workplace challenges through learning systems that promote the capacity for change and innovation. She provides technical assistance in training, assessment, and evaluation to help clients strengthen their problem-solving capacity. She is also a faculty advisor for the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management of the Columbia University Graduate School of Business.

Making Connections

Using Narrative and Journal Writing in a Holistic Literacy Enhancement Program for Incarcerated Mothers

Joan Ports

Lena, a second-grader, expressed deep sadness to her grandmother, who has temporary custody of her. Lena's mother is in jail, and Lena misses her terribly. She misses having her mommy home with her, hearing her voice, and listening to bedtime stories each night. Having a mommy in prison is just not easy.

Sadly, this young child is not alone in having a mother who is incarcerated. According to U.S. Department of Justice (2000) statistics, the number of minor children with an imprisoned mother increased 98 percent between 1991 and 1999. State and federal prisons hold approximately 84,000 female inmates; county jails hold an additional 70,000 women, most of whom are mothers. Alarming, these numbers are doubling every seven to eight years (Schuler, 2002). Many of these women are imprisoned due to mandatory drug offense sentences (Independent Television Service, 2001) or economic crimes such as theft (Aid to Inmate Mothers, 2003).

A tremendous void is created in the lives of children when their mothers are incarcerated. Disapproval of other family members, transportation difficulties, and children's anxiety and fear of the prison setting may limit or prohibit children's contacts with their mothers (Kumpfer, 1993; Thompson & Harm, 1995; Pollack, 1998). As a result, various innovative projects have been created to assist mothers and children in making needed connections.

Literacy-based programs designed to increase parent-child communication are one of the mechanisms for helping mothers and children reestablish important ties. Examples of projects implemented by such programs include having inmate parents read to children through sight-and-sound teleconferencing; helping inmate parents to send books, personally recorded messages, and videotapes to children; and forwarding audio recordings of inmate parents reading stories to their children (Florida Department of Corrections, 1999; Indiana State Library, 2003).

In addition, holistic literacy programs, focusing on several facets of a person's life, have been established for incarcerated women. These programs combine literacy-based

approaches with life-skill development, health education, parenting, and/or personal self-development sessions, with the beneficial outcomes of both enhancing literacy and strengthening family bonds (Davis, 2000).

This article describes a holistic program for mothers in prison. The program used narrative—both written and oral—and journal writing to enhance the women's interest and development in literacy while simultaneously assisting them to make additional connections with their children and to develop as parents. Strengths and weaknesses of this project will be discussed as well as recommendations for those seeking to offer programs with a similar focus.

Making Crucial Connections

For ten weeks during the summer and fall of 2002, one morning each week, a holistic reading, discussion, and writing program for mothers in prison took place in a county prison in central Pennsylvania. Funding for the project was provided under the Reading Excellence Act through the Harrisburg (PA) School District. In addition to the goal of enhancing family literacy, issues and concerns pertaining to parenting were emphasized. Focus on the topic of "finding one's self" offered an important connection to the women's lives as mothers.

While the program incorporated some informational resources that discussed suggested parenting strategies, the reading and sharing of similar life experiences provided the foundation for the central activity of the group, which was the women's writing. Apps (1994) has referred to journal writing as "a valuing experience" (p. 94). The women's journal entries told their stories as women and as mothers; these entries assisted them to reflect on their past, present, and future lives and interactions with their children.

Grant funds were also used to purchase literature for the parents and the children. At the conclusion of the program, books about parenting and reflections on life and parenting were given to the women. Age-appropriate children's books were mailed to the homes of all of their children. Two booklets of the women's writings were produced. One was a collection of the

women's general thoughts and reflections; the other, written about their parenting experiences, contained letters, poems, and stories for their children. The women could keep these booklets and/or share them with their children; with the women's permission, the booklets also were given to prison officials and to a few educators who showed interest in the program.

Group Participants and Program Format

Twelve women participated in the reading, discussion, and writing group on a regular basis, which meant that they attended and participated in the program for five or more of the ten sessions. Most women did not participate in all of the sessions due to personal issues or choices, prison restrictions, or conflicting schedules with other prison programs. Of the 12 participants, seven were African-American, one was Latino-American, two were European-American, and two described themselves as biracial African-American and European-American. Their ages ranged from late teens to mid-fifties. All were parents, except one who attended the group to focus on her relationship with her younger brother. In addition to being parents, two of the women were also grandparents. All but one of the women came from working-class or low-income backgrounds. A few of the women had less than a high school education; many had recently completed their high school equivalency certification (GED) in prison.

The *National Adult Literacy Survey* defines literacy as encompassing a wide range of skills including the ability to interpret documents, numbers, and prose (Kerka, 1995). The group participants' exact skill levels in these areas were unknown; however, observations indicated that all of the women but one were able to read and write. Some women had below average skills, such as being able to read aloud, but not fluently and with frequent errors; others could read very well with few problems. The women's writing ability varied as well. Some women had frequent spelling and grammar errors, while others wrote with ease and with few mistakes. The one woman who could not read or write dictated what she wanted to convey in her journal, and one of the group facilitators wrote it for her.

Two educational professionals facilitated the group. I am a

female doctoral student in adult education and an instructor in higher education. My background is in parenting and early childhood education. I assisted a female university faculty member who has a doctoral degree in adult education and who has conducted writing groups with incarcerated women for approximately nine years.

The weekly sessions consisted mainly of the women voluntarily taking turns in reading aloud from the works of authors of similar race, class, gender, and/or experience. These works included Iyanla Vanzant's (1998) *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up* and Patrice Gaines's (1994) *Laughing in the Dark: From Colored Girl to Woman of Color—A Journey from Prison to Power*. After reading aloud, we discussed the connections between the authors' lives and the participants' lives. Vanzant and Gaines focus on many issues pertaining to

The women's journal entries told their stories as women and as mothers; these entries assisted them to reflect on their past, present, and future lives...

their own childhood experiences and how they were parented, as well as to their later experience of being parents themselves. In connection with these readings, the women voluntarily shared stories with the group about their own personal and parenting experiences. They then wrote reflectively in their journals about their insights, feelings,

and experiences based on these readings and group discussions. The women were also encouraged to write letters, poems, stories, or messages that they wanted to send to their children.

Materials used to discuss parenting beliefs and practices included quotes written by parents and published in *Never Too Busy for a Hug*, a book by Jean Fiumara (2000). Participants read a sampling of the quotes aloud and then discussed and wrote about the meaning these words had for them as parents. For example, the women read the following quote from Fiumara's book: "Do not miss the chance to spend quality time with your child. When asked by your child, 'Come play with me,' your answer should be . . . 'yes, I am coming.' Within reasonable limits of course" (2000, p. 61). This quotation invited group participants to discuss the importance of being fully present for, and attentive to the interests of, their children. Monique, who lost custody of her son after her incarceration, wrote the following response in her journal:

One year when he [my son] was five years old, and I was on speaking terms with my mom, she invited me over for Christmas. I spent the whole day with my son. Then suddenly he came out of his room with a game in his hand and asked me if I could play with him. Wow! Those were the best words I had ever heard in my life. I happily said, "Yes, I will play with you." The game was Chinese checkers. We had so much fun I cried tears of joy.

Another curriculum source was *Yardsticks* by Chip Wood (1997), which describes children's developmental milestones from ages four to fourteen. Participants read and talked about the traits their children were displaying in relation to what is typically appropriate for their ages. As a result of these discussions, they were at times reassured that many of their children's behaviors were common.

Other curriculum materials were extracted from the Internet, such as *Helping Young Children Deal with Anger* from Athealth.com (2002). We also used an additional resource, *Teaching Parents of Young Children* by Laura Wetzel (1996), to discuss such issues as communicating with children and problems of domestic abuse and child abuse.

Participants were given copies to keep of the books by Fiumara and Wood, as well as works by Vanzant and Gaines. They also received, for future reference, either *Smart Parenting: An Easy Approach to Raising Happy, Well-Adjusted Kids* by Peter Favaro (1995) or *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock and Steven Parker (1998).

So Many Times I Wanted to Speak My Mind: The Value of Storytelling

The reading and sharing of personal stories served as the main catalyst for the women's journal entries. Through narrative, people make meaning of their lives (Bruer, 1993; Ochberg, 1994). For women prisoners who have been marginalized in society, narrative can be a powerful tool for voicing their experiences of oppression and for learning more about themselves and their relationships with others. All of the women had encountered some form of oppression in their lives and struggled continuously with how to handle these negative experiences. For example, Monique candidly shared:

My main problem growing up was keeping my mouth

shut and speaking only when I was spoken to. So many times, many, many times I wanted to speak my mind. I grew up like a walking time bomb. There were also times that because of this I would lash out very violently and throw something of my mother's that was very valuable and end up breaking it. This type of anger grew within me as I grew older and I took it into relationships with boyfriends—especially after leaving a relationship of 4 years due to the most physical abuse and violence that a woman could ever endure. I realize that it's these kinds of issues I need to let go of, in order to grow in my recovery and to maintain a happy, healthy life.

Monique's words reflect Amstutz's (1999) idea that "women have used story telling and narratives as strategies for evoking repressed voices in an effort to recover and redefine their roles" (p. 28).

In this context, exploration of the women's identity and relationships with their children was paramount. As one mother said, "This program has helped me to express my feelings more openly about my relationship with my children. Most of the readings I've read have totally been about me, and now all I have to do is apply it." Thus, sharing through narrative provided an appropriate and challenging venue for the women to reflect on their individual and family experiences and to make connections with the experiences of others. This narrative approach also appeared to serve as a strong foundation for keeping the women's attention and interest in the program and group. As Brooks (2000) reminds us, the sharing of stories is "a time-honored way in which many women have first claimed their own voices" (p. 152).

Reflecting on the lives of authors that were similar to their own lives and reading those authors' accomplished stories helped the group participants reflect on the types of women and mothers they aspired to be. As one of the women shared at the end of the program, "I read a lot about women who remind me of me, and a lot of what they do helps me with dealing with myself."

The Power and Process of Journal Writing

Each day the women wrote about their reflections on the reading material and the discussions on identity development, as well as on parenting. At the end of the ten-week program, the women selected several of their works to be published in

two booklets that they titled *Our Children* and *Thoughts from Inside*. The culmination of their participation in the women's group was made concrete through these booklets.

The following excerpts from *Our Children* and *Thoughts from Inside* depict vivid examples from the women's journals of crucial aspects and powerful discoveries about mothering. Peterson and Jones (2001) describe writing as a way to "record . . . life stories and critical events, to solve problems, and [to enable] personal discovery and self-awareness" (p. 61). This is reflected in an early journal entry by Kelly, the mother of a four-year-old:

The most important thing I have learned about becoming a parent is that there is no room for selfishness. Being a good parent requires breaking free from the prison of self-absorption. Then my addiction to alcohol comes into play. The selfishness comes flooding back and I make less time with my daughter to make more time to feed my addiction. I am once again in prison literally and figuratively. If I would spend as much energy on my child as I do to get drunk I would be free to be the parent she deserves.

Faith, writing to her 19-year-old daughter, builds on Kerka's (1996) notion that journals and diaries "make thoughts visible and concrete, giving a way to interact with, elaborate on, and expand ideas" (p. 2):

I'm starting to feel the hurt, pain, and everything else that a mother feels when she neglects her flesh and blood! I go to God everyday and pray that he gives me the strength to help me to overcome these feelings, and move on to the next step. That step would be to be a better mother, and friend to you! Just know that I am your mother first, and friend second. I think the reason that we didn't get along was some of my fault! I thought of you as my baby girl, and I failed to see that you were becoming a young lady in your own right! I saw you as my own possession! And now I know that you have feelings, a mind, and you have needs of your own.

Journal writing provided participants with an opportunity to examine themselves by articulating their experiences as women and mothers.

Literacy Benefits

The process of writing by parents can have a powerful effect on family literacy. Goethel (1995) describes writing as a golden thread that "weaves throughout the fabric of learning" (p. 26). Goethel discusses the importance of encouraging writing within families who are at risk:

The parent who feels comfortable with written communication is the one whose children will recognize usefulness in writing. The parent who takes pride in writing ability is the one whose children will be motivated to learn to write. As writing is strengthened in all areas, the golden thread grows stronger and shines brighter—and families benefit (p. 26).

Since much of the incarcerated women's writing was later shared with their children, this golden thread of writing was passed through the woven cloth of the family with satisfaction and pride. This gift from parent to child, by its nature, can have a powerful impact on children's attitudes about writing as they experience the joys of their own parents' work.

Although no formal evaluation was conducted, the women's progress in literacy development was assessed through observation. Observation of their narrative and journal writing provided evidence of the women's increased interest in and dedication to reading, orally communicating, and writing. Because they enjoyed the authors' writing and seemed to feel more comfortable in the group each time we met, a majority of the women volunteered to read aloud more often as the weeks passed. Discussions were substantially enhanced by their contributions.

For many of the women, the journal writing experience, in particular, proved to be of great value. For example, Joyce, a mother of five and grandmother of 19 children, wrote only a few short reflective journal pieces consisting of two or three lines at the beginning of the program. By the end, she was writing and contributing numerous pages of letters to her children or poetry to her grandchildren to be included in the final booklets. Joyce exclaimed that she had "never written before like this in my life!" Joyce's work appeared to reflect her increased comfort with writing as she expanded her efforts and expressed herself in poetic form, a form she said she had never attempted before becoming involved in the

program. Similarly, Tamara, who is the mother of nine children, proudly stated, "It is amazing to me to look back on what I have written, and to realize that I was the one who really wrote all of that!" Tamara also began with just a few lines of writing and ended the program by writing several poems to her children.

Another exciting observation was that the women were highly interested in receiving reading and writing materials. They seemed hungry for the books and other written materials they received. They cherished the pocket folders given to them to hold their journal writings. They were always anxious to obtain enough lined paper for the writing they wanted to do between sessions.

Furthermore, they wanted to be reassured that their children would receive the age-appropriate books purchased for them. Among others, the titles included *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper (2002), *A Child's Book of Poems* by G. Fujikawa (2002), and *Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul* by Jack Canfield (1998).

Many of the women also stated that they had communicated with their children—in person, on the telephone, or through letters—about the books that were sent, their journal writings, and/or the program. We concluded from these observations that, in all respects, the women's interest in reading, oral communication, and writing appeared to be greatly enhanced as a result of this project.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Future Recommendations

In the prison environment, literacy development is enhanced by participatory programs in which "educators recognize and use learner strengths to help them shape their own learning" (Kerka, 1995, p. 3). At least three aspects of the program contributed to the women's high level of interest: the focus on personal and parenting developmental issues, the inclusion of literature relevant to the women's lives, and the opportunities for personal expression through journal writing. Because they were strongly engaged in the program, the participants displayed enthusiasm for the reading, discussion, and writing process.

By producing their own booklets at the end of the program, the women created two valuable collaborative works that were special and meaningful to them. Their excitement and pride in their writing sent a message about the value of writing to

their children. Another strategy used to enhance family literacy was the purchase and distribution of parenting resource books and children's literature.

Structures inherent in the prison setting created challenges for the program. Unforeseen and uncontrollable issues related to the prison environment, such as lock downs and limitations imposed upon the women by the staff, negatively affected the program's effectiveness. Limitation of the group sessions to 75 minutes provided insufficient time for group interaction. Sessions of at least 90 minutes' duration are recommended to those planning similar programs.

Another challenge was determining how the parenting resource books and children's literature would be selected for families. Due to time constraints, the facilitators chose the books, based on the ages of the children in each family. It would be advantageous if the women themselves could select books from suggested lists, which should include culturally relevant literature. Honoring parents' requests would have provided more autonomy in gaining access to what they needed, wanted, and thought would be best for them. A 90-minute time frame would have allowed more time to devote to this task during program sessions.

Restrictive circumstances that stemmed from the women's incarceration deterred assessment of how caretakers used materials sent to children to promote family literacy. We do not know whether or how caretakers, such as grandparents, foster parents, or custodial or noncustodial parents, incorporated the books into the children's lives. A follow-up procedure to assess this aspect of the program could involve either extending the women's writing to include letters to their children about the reading of the books or contacting the caretakers and children, by telephone or in person, to ask how the books were used in the home.

A final recommendation is to assess more accurately the women's literacy skills by collecting an initial writing sample in order to get a sense of the women's beginning levels and then assessing their writing through observation and analysis during the course of the program.

Conclusion

The power of this program lies in its ability to provide relevance and meaning to the women's lives in a socio-cultural context and to offer them an opportunity to make stronger connections

with their children. Being a mother in prison entails unique problems, challenges, and concerns. This type of program offers a holistic perspective, taking into consideration the many facets of inmates' lives—as individuals and as parents—and addressing their own literacy needs as well as those of their children. Family literacy is enhanced when the strength that writing experiences add to parents' lives is passed on to their children.

Learning is deepened when it is contextualized and focuses on learners' real life experiences and needs (Auerbach, Arnaud, Chandler, & Zambrano, 1998). As Paul (1991) suggests, learner motivation flourishes when topics are interesting and relevant to inmates. When the opportunity to read, discuss, and write about insights that relate to one's life is presented, interest soars and, consequently, literacy is enhanced. As one mother wrote on the final evaluation at the end of the program, "I learned how to put my life in words to make me feel better about me. And I learned how to put things into words, that I never thought I could."

Author's Note

The names of participants are pseudonyms.

Children's Books Cited

Canfield, J. (1998). *Chicken soup for the kid's soul: 101 stories of courage, hope and laughter*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.

Fujikawa, G. (2002). *A child's book of poems*. New York: Michael Friedman.

Piper, W. (2002). *The little engine that could*. New York: Platt & Munk.

References

Aid to Inmate Mothers. (2003). *Facts about mothers in prison*. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.inmatemoms.org/facts.htm>.

Apps, J. W. (1994). *Leadership for the emerging age: Transforming practice and continuing education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Amstutz, D. D. (1999). Adult learning: Moving toward more inclusive theories and practices. In T. C. Guy (Ed.), *Providing culturally relevant adult education: A challenge for the twenty-first century* (pp. 19–32). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 82. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Athealth.com. (2002). *Helping young children deal with anger*. Retrieved September 7, 2002, from <http://www.athealth.com/consumer/issues/childsanger.html>.

Auerbach, E., Arnaud, J., Chandler, C., & Zambrano, A. (1998). Building on community strengths: A model for training literacy instructors. In T. Smoke (Ed.), *Adult ESL: Politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community programs* (pp. 209–228). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Brooks, A. (2000). Transformation. In E. Hayes & D. D. Flannery (Eds.), *Women as learners: The significance of gender in adult learning* (pp. 139–153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bruer, J. T. (1993). *Schools for thought: A science of learning in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Davis, H. C. (2000). Educating the incarcerated female: A holistic approach. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.easternlincs.org/correctional-educ>.

Favaro, P. (1995). *Smart parenting: An easy approach to raising happy, well-adjusted kids*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.

Fiumara, J.M. (2000). *Never too busy for a hug*. Baltimore, MD: The Toolbox.

Florida Department of Corrections. (1999). Program to strengthen family ties. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/secretary/press/1999/familyties.html>.

Gaines, P. (1994). *Laughing in the dark: From colored girl to woman of color—A journey from prison to power*. New York: Doubleday.

Goethel, J. (1995, Nov./Dec.). Writing: The golden thread in family learning. *Adult Learning* 7, 26–27.

Independent Television Service. (2001). When the bough breaks. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.itvs.org/whentheboughbreaks/mothers.html>.

Indiana State Library. (2003). Indiana State Library launches Read-to-Me Literacy Program. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.statelib.lib.in.us/www/incb/icbreadtome.htm>

Kerka, S. (1995). Prison literacy programs. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education*, Columbus, OH: ERIC Digest No. 159. Retrieved February 20, 2003, from <http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed383859.html>.

Kerka, S. (1996). Journal writing and adult learning. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education*, Columbus, OH: ERIC Digest No. 174. Retrieved May 14, 2002, from <http://ericacve.org/docgen.asp?tbl=digest&ID=2>.

Kumpfer, K. (1993). *Strengthening America's families: Promising parenting strategies for delinquency prevention: User's guide*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

Ochberg, R. L. (1994). Life stories and storied lives. In A. Lieblich & J. Ruthellen (Eds.), *The narrative study of lives*. London: Sage.

Paul, M. (1991). *When words are bars*. Kitchener, ON: Core Literacy.

Peterson, E. A., & Jones, A. M. (2001). Women, journal writing, and the reflective process. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Promoting journal writing in adult education* (pp. 87-94). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 90. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pollack, J. M. (1998). *Counseling women in prison*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schuler, P. (2002, November 7). Researchers study incarcerated mothers. [Electronic version] *University of Chicago Chronicle*, 22(4).

Spock, B., & Parker, S. (1998). *Dr. Spock's baby and child care*. New York: Dutton.

Thompson, P. J., & Harm, N. J. (1995). Mothers in prison. *Pediatric Nursing*, 21(6), 552-555.

U.S. Department of Justice (2000). Almost 1.5 million minor children have a mother or father in prison. Retrieved January 25, 2003, from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/press/iptc.pr>.

Vanzant, I. (1998). *One day my soul just opened up*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Wetzel, L. (1996). *Teaching parents of young children: A curriculum in 12 sessions*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Wood, C. (1997). *Yardsticks: Children in the classroom ages 4-14—A resource for parents and teachers*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Joan Ports is a Lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education at Towson University, Towson, Maryland, where she teaches courses in parenting and child development. She is also a doctoral candidate in adult education at Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg. Her dissertation focuses on parent education and the participation of low-income parents in support programs.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Digital Family Stories

Using Video Projects to Improve Family Literacy

Gloria Nudelman and Lua Hadar

In the fall of 2002, Redwood City Even Start began a project to use digital video as a learning tool for our adult students. Digital video is an ideal vehicle for project-based learning. The medium is compelling, and the process of making a film naturally lends itself to group work and the division of labor. The technology involved is interesting, easy to learn, and fun to use, involving both digital camera work and computer editing. We hoped that the complexity of the film making process and the power of the product would be an incentive for the adults to push themselves to new levels; we knew that learners would be able to improve a wide variety of literacy skills as they worked on this project.

The authors of this article—Gloria Nudelman, coordinator of Redwood City Even Start, and Lua Hadar, an educator and artist who serves the student population at John Gill Elementary School—conceived and developed the digital video project in collaboration with Linda Martinez, coordinator of the Community Based Tutoring program at Cañada College, and with the Even Start staff.

Background: Redwood City Even Start

The Redwood City Even Start program began in 1998. We are now in our fifth year of actively serving families. The Even Start program is housed at John Gill Elementary School, in a middle-class neighborhood in Redwood City, which is an urban area in San Mateo County about half an hour south of San Francisco. A magnet school that focuses on the performing arts and technology, John Gill educates children from a mixed background of ethnicities and incomes.

The Even Start project serves low-income Latino families. The families live in crowded apartment buildings about a mile away from the school and have a very different lifestyle from that of the middle-class families who live in suburban houses surrounding the school. The average annual income of a Redwood City Even Start family is about \$22,000. In contrast, the median income in San Mateo County for a family of three in 2002 was \$77,500. The high cost of living in San Mateo County makes day-to-day survival a challenge for our Even Start families.

The Even Start program was initiated to address the enormous achievement gap that existed between children of high and low socioeconomic status. The difference in achievement was evident when the children began school. Middle-class children entered kindergarten with the requisite skills to be successful. Our low-income children entered kindergarten scoring well below age level on language tests, even when those tests were given in their home language of Spanish.

We chose family literacy as a strategy to address the needs of our low-income families for a variety of reasons. We believed that, by providing early childhood education, we could significantly affect children's cognitive and linguistic growth before they began elementary school. We also believed that, if we engaged parents as our partners in their children's education, we could affect literacy behaviors at home, which would in turn lead to greater school readiness for our students.

We reasoned that if children began kindergarten with the language and literacy skills needed to be successful, their chances of succeeding throughout the rest of the grades would increase tremendously. Our strategies have been paying off. Student scores on the annual achievement test mandated by California have consistently increased since 1998. (See Figure 1.) The increase for Hispanic children has been particularly dramatic. We attribute the rise in test scores to a number of factors. In addition to family literacy, there is a

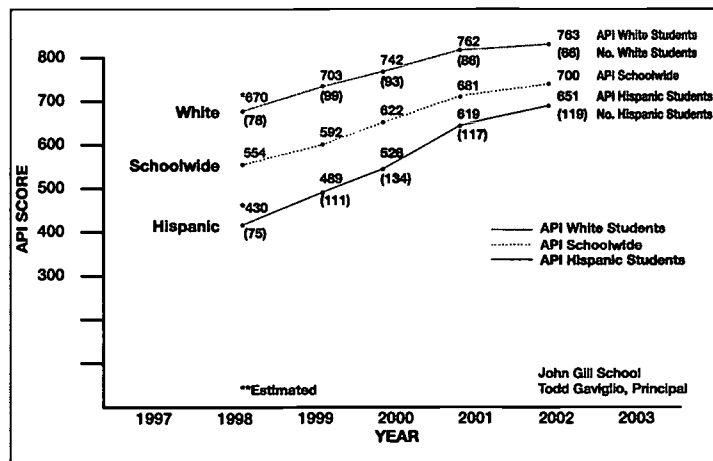


Figure 1. John Gill School API Scores/Subgroups 1998–2002

great emphasis on reading intervention and support during the primary grades. We have one full-time and three part-time reading teachers who give children additional support. The principal of the school, Todd Gaviglio, is a strong advocate of early literacy. Himself a dancer, he is also a champion of the arts. The performing arts magnet focus is infused throughout the curriculum at all grade levels. As a result, the school environment is lively and creative, while at the same time maintaining a strong academic focus.

Rationale for the Digital Video Project

We knew that project-based learning was an effective way of structuring learning based on our work in the performing arts with children. For example, three classes at John Gill School created an original show about ecology. The show, called "This Pretty Planet" after the Tom Chapin song, was presented on March 19, 2002. Collaborating with a guest artist musical director and composer, the students composed original songs on the water cycle, the life cycle, and different sources of energy. These songs were performed live and used as underscoring for student-produced animation and video that illustrated the scientific concepts, as did creative choreography developed by the students with their dance teacher. The children researched, wrote, created storyboards, videotaped, recorded, edited, rehearsed, and performed. The outcome was in-depth mastery of the subject and a high degree of commitment, collaboration, and enthusiasm.

We had seen the enthusiasm and excellence that project-based learning engendered in students. Why couldn't we try something similar with our Even Start adults? Both children and teachers at John Gill often use digital video technology in creating their projects. We decided to initiate a video project with our adult ESOL students as a way of engaging them in an undertaking that would have personal meaning while developing their English language skills at the same time. The focus of the project would be self and family. We thought that this personal focus would motivate the students as well as facilitate language growth, since English skills are best learned when they are taught in context (Kruidenier, 2002). What better context to use with adult students than the study of one's self and family?

We hoped that our project would open possibilities for growth in our parents that traditional ESOL workbook study

might not provide. We wanted the parents' English language study to be rich and multidimensional. Literacy in the 21st century is not simply the ability to decode words, although that skill is essential to the literate person. The literate person today must be able to retrieve information, analyze it, and reflect on its meaning. In the working world, the literate person must be able to do all of that plus communicate with and persuade others. When adults work together in project-based learning teams, they have the opportunity to develop a variety of skills that are important for living successful lives (Stein, 1995) and prepare them for employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

These skills are described by *Equipped for the Future*, the National Institute for Literacy's standards-based adult learning system reform initiative. *Equipped for the Future* defines the skills that adults need to be successful in the 21st century in their three main roles as worker, citizen, and family member. (See Figure 2.) The content standards fall into the following four main areas:

- Communication skills
- Decision-making skills



Figure 2. EFF Skills Wheel



- Interpersonal skills
- Lifelong learning skills

These standards define the skills and knowledge adults need in order to compete in a global society, to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and to help their children in school. When we began the digital video project, we were sure that it would help the Even Start participants develop skills across the range of EFF standards.

The buy-in of the ESOL instructors was crucial to the success of the project. Our English language instruction is delivered through a collaboration with Cañada College, our local junior college. Cañada's president, Rosa Perez, is a strong advocate for Even Start; she visits the project frequently to speak with the parents. Linda Martinez and Alessandra Costello, teachers in the community-based tutoring program at the college, were eager to try an innovative approach to learning in the ESOL classes. Much of the groundwork for the videos was laid in the writing that was done in the English classes. We feel very fortunate to have college teachers, all of whom have master's degrees in teaching English as a Second Language, as instructors for our Even Start adults.

Video Product Method

We used a six step process to create the videos.

Step One: Writing and Goal-setting

The ESOL teachers assigned writing projects to all Even Start participants early in the school year. To prepare for filming, adult learners wrote about the following topics and made their writing into an illustrated album:

- Who I am
- Who my family is, both immediate family and ancestors
- Where we came from
- My dreams and goals
- Even Start and its role in my journey

This writing was the seed material for the video. The participants wrote about their personal goals as part of the pre-production process. Writing and speaking their goals out loud helped to make them more real. As Berkenkotter (1982) points out, "The act of writing begets ideas which help refine goals and reshape plans" (p. 35).

Step Two: Group Formation

We divided the Even Start students into groups of three, four, or five. We made sure that in each group there was at least one potential project leader who would become the subject of the video.

One video was a biography of María, one of our most diligent students who had been in the program for four years. María, her husband, and her three daughters live in one room of a shared house. Her youngest daughter, now three, was born into our program. We are all very inspired by María's perseverance and her development as a student.

The second video was a discussion of child development and of Even Start's role in the families of the three group members. This group had a different, more complicated concept for the video. We were excited by their creative vision, even though it made the video more complex to produce.

The third video presented the family story of an Even Start student who is now attending college. Rosario has been a star student in the program. She credits Even Start with providing a springboard to advanced education and civic involvement. Rosario took part in leadership classes through a collaboration with the Peninsula Community Foundation in San Mateo. She co-wrote a grant, funded by the same foundation, to provide after-school art classes at our school. Rosario's long-term goal is to graduate from a university, with the aim of being a computer repair technician.

Step Three: Introduction to the Project and Its Technology

Step Three took place contemporaneously with Step Two. Full-group instruction covered an overview of the project, the making of a storyboard, the running of a video camera, and the use of the iMac video editing program. This brief introduction would be followed with deeper, more individualized and hands-on instruction as the project progressed.

Step Four: Choosing Roles

Students were introduced to, and chose, roles in their groups:

- The producer was the subject of the video and held the big picture/creative vision in her mind.
- The art director made the visual choices.
- The videographer ran the video camera.

- The editor worked with the instructor to edit the video.
- The director/production manager performed the all-important tasks of organization and record-keeping.

Each role requires a specific type of interest and personality, so the students chose their roles themselves. The only caveat was that the producer, who was also to be the subject of the video, had to be a second-year student in Even Start.

Step Five: Production

Groups worked with the instructor on a pull-out basis once a week by appointment—and then twice a week as the project neared completion. Each session lasted one-and-a-half to two hours. In this context, the following tasks were completed:

- Planning the concept and storyboarding, including scripting in English
- Writing cue cards
- Collecting visuals and planning shooting locations for video scenes
- Videotaping, whether in the “studio,” in the Even Start Center, or on location. Students also had to keep a record

- of each video “take” and identify those shots on the tape
- Selecting and adding underscoring music, when desired
- Editing on the computer and then exporting the final project back to the camera

Step Six: Assessment

We assessed the impact of the project in a debriefing group with students who had already completed the video project and students who were about to begin. All three video pieces were shown, and then questions were asked of the students who had already participated, with the idea of briefing the next group of participants. The assessment questions and some of the answers we received are shown in Table 1.

To the delight of the instructor, the participants’ assessment of the experience was very similar to her own.

Evaluation

This project requires the student production group to have good organization skills. Those who wish to replicate the project should not assume that the participants either individually or collectively, have appropriate organization

Question	Answers
What was the most difficult?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pronunciation of the language • Being on time • Communication
What was most valuable about the video-making process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning new things; using the video camera, editing on the computer • Having the opportunity to tell our stories • Getting to know one another better • Enjoying the companionship
What skills would you like to go deeper into?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More experience with the camera, computer, and technology
What advice would you like to give the next participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend class regularly and be on time • Plan and prepare through writing the plan • Organize and have fun

Table 1. Assessment Questions and Answers



skills—this is one of the educational outcomes of the project. Organization, which is both a study skill and a work skill, includes following up on tasks, writing, collecting materials, keeping to the schedule, keeping accurate records, keeping all materials together and available to the group, and organizing time and materials.

The project requires group members to communicate well with each other and show up for each other. Project facilitators should not assume that, because students know each other and study English together, they necessarily have good working group skills. These values need to be clarified and taught ahead of time. In retrospect, we think we should have done more small-group bonding before we began the project.

Outcomes

Since we are an Even Start family literacy project, we must always remember to keep our focus on the development of literacy. The question may arise, “Is video work really literacy?” The creation of a video developed almost the entire range of life skills that are defined by the *Equipped for the Future* initiative—the skills that workers, community members, and family members use in their daily lives. It makes sense that adult learners should engage in learning activities that closely mirror the literacy skills used in the real world, rather than being confined to paper-and-pencil activities. In the video project, participants needed to interact with the instructor and their team members, thus developing their communication and interpersonal skills. When they wrote the storyboard, they practiced planning and conveying ideas in writing, as well as decision-making and communication. They had to speak English clearly and use vocabulary appropriately so that their audience would understand them. They had to solve problems constantly: How will we get this shot? What visual will we use to illustrate this part of the story? What is feasible here? They constantly used information and communications technology in the videotaping and editing process; they reflected on and evaluated what they were doing during the taping. This is, indeed, literacy in the deepest sense of the word.

The end result was that the participants’ perception of themselves was transformed. They began the project timid and unsure; they ended it proud and confident. They discovered that their stories mattered and that they had the

ability to create an innovative product that conveyed their message. They came away from the project with the feeling of competency that comes of having conquered a once-intimidating technology. They also now have a video that they will treasure for years to come both as a permanent audiovisual record of themselves and their children at a certain stage in their life and as a record of their successful use of good English skills to communicate a story.

The audience for the video products has been other students, but the videos themselves are so good that they will be shown to a wider group. We are planning an open house to which we will invite school staff, our collaborators, and community members. Our “film festival” will be a festive event where the videos will be spotlighted, and where school and community members can dialogue with the parents.

From a program administrator’s view, videos have many additional uses. The videos are powerful informal assessment tools, a way of showing growth in students. It is remarkable to see the changes between the “before” and “after” video segments after a year of English study. Another use of the videos is as a publicity tool. We often show videos at our collaborator meetings; the audience appreciates their color and variety, the glimpse of real life they provide. We sometimes send videos to foundations, to the press, or to policymakers as a way of informing them about the value of Even Start.

From our experience with the children at John Gill School, we learned that creativity and high achievement go hand in hand. We are pleased to see that we can apply the same principles of project-based learning to our Even Start adults. Digital video technology is an ideal vehicle for creative self-expression, and allows the teaching of higher-level thinking skills and basic skills simultaneously.

We plan on continuing the video project next year. As we practice, our technology skills will become more refined, and our adult students will grow in boldness and sophistication as they continue to tell their stories. Now that the initial steps have been taken, a wide world of creative possibilities is opening up for our adult students. When learning is this meaningful and this enjoyable, everyone gains.

Authors' Note

The authors are happy to answer any questions regarding their project and would welcome the exchange of videos with other family literacy projects. Contact Gloria Nudelman at Gnudelman@rcsd.k12.ca.us or Lua Hadar at Lhadar@rcsd.k12.ca.us.

References

Berkenkotter, C. (1982). Writing and problem solving. In T. Fulwiler & A. Young (Eds.), *Language connections: Writing and reading across the curriculum* (p. 35). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction*. Partnership for Reading (National Institute for Literacy, National Institutes for Health and Human Development, U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Health and Human Development). Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corp.

Stein, S. (1995). *Equipped for the future: A customer-driven vision for adult literacy and lifelong learning*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 384 792).

U.S. Department of Labor, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. (1991). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000*. Washington, DC: Author. (EDRS No. ED 332 054).

Gloria Nudelman has worked in the field of education for twenty years. She began her career as a bilingual teacher in Salinas, California, where she taught farmworkers' children. She completed a master's degree in educational administration from Stanford University in 1994. Her interest in alternative forms of instruction led to an exploration of family literacy as an intervention for immigrant children. She has served as coordinator of the Redwood City Even Start family literacy project at John Gill School since its inception.

Lua Hadar has been the Performing Arts Specialist and program coordinator for John Gill Elementary School's arts-in-education program for the last seven years. She has taught and directed theatre in pre-K through adult programs on both coasts and abroad, producing over 50 original curriculum-centered productions created by youth and teachers. Lua holds a B.A. in Theatre and is a credentialed bilingual teacher, with an M.A. in Education from San Francisco State University.

"The Good Mother"

Exploring Mothering Discourses in Family Literacy Texts

Suzanne Smythe and Janet Isserlis

It was a real fight, and I do mean literally, getting my boys off to school. There were three pairs of socks, shoes, three clean shirts, three pairs of pants. "What is today? Gym? Brush your teeth, let me brush your hair. Wash your face yet?" In the back of my mind, I would hear the answers to the question, "Why can't Johnny read?"

Pat Guy, 2000

An idealized figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow on many actual mothers' lives.

Sara Ruddick, 2002

As literacy educators working in schools, community-based programs, and government organizations in both the United States and Canada, we increasingly encounter materials that promote family literacy programs and offer advice to parents about the important role they play in supporting their children's literacy development. Indeed, parents are increasingly referred to as their children's "first and most important educators," in the early years as models and supporters of literacy development, and later as involved parents during their children's formal schooling. When offering advice or establishing an argument, family literacy texts often employ the terms *parents* or *caregivers*. However, we feel these texts are actually directed toward mothers, and, more often than not, toward an "ideal" mother who stays at home to "teach" her children. According to these texts, if this "ideal" mother "needs" to work outside the home, it in no way interferes with her responsibilities as "teacher" inside the home.

In this article, we question the representations of "ideal" mothers in family literacy texts. In doing so, we hope to make space in research, practice, and policy for the everyday experiences of women like Pat Guy—women who strive to educate their children in the real world of competing responsibilities, conflicting aspirations, and unequal power relationships.

Our work as family literacy educators has led us to believe that institutions that promote family literacy policies and

programs, such as schools, government education departments, and welfare agencies, are shaped by *mothering discourses*: culturally bound beliefs and values that form society's definition of good mothers, normal families, and, by extension, appropriate literacy and parenting practices in the home.

Our understanding of *discourse* is shaped by the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault argued that language is not neutral. It does not merely describe the natural world. Rather, it constructs, regulates, and controls knowledge about the world. This happens through discourses: patterns of language that can be recognized within and across texts by the recurring use of certain words, statements, and terms. One hallmark of a discourse is that it represents what people in a particular field believe to be common sense, such as "parents are their children's first and most important educators" or "literacy begins at home." For Foucault, discourses are therefore political—they affirm some interests and world-views and marginalize others. Indeed, Luke (2002) pointed out that a central feature of discourses is that "they govern what can be said, thought and done within a field" (p. 2). The ways in which family literacy texts govern or regulate what can be said, thought, and done with and among mothers is an important theme in this article. Another important theme, though, is how mothers and educators can—and often do—counter mothering discourses.

We identify three related *mothering discourses* in family literacy policies and programs. The first is the discourse of the normal family based on Smith's 1993 concept of the "Standard North American Family" (SNAF). The second is the discourse of *mothering as pedagogy*. The third is the discourse of *maternal responsibility*. Below, we describe each discourse and analyze family literacy texts that represent them. These texts emphasize two strong threads of family literacy: parental involvement in schooling and the support of early literacy development in homes. We conclude our paper by reflecting on the implications of mothering discourse for the work of literacy educators and by suggesting ways to question and counter these discourses.

The Normal Family

The first mothering discourse, the normal family, is based on Smith's (1993) concept of the "Standard North American Family" (SNAF). Smith likens SNAF to a genetic code—it infiltrates and shapes the ways in which individuals and communities act and understand their world to the extent that these actions and beliefs seem normal, natural, and thus, invisible. SNAF privileges the two-parent, heterosexual, nuclear family, where women occupy the domestic sphere of child raising and men occupy the public sphere of work outside the home. SNAF is in operation when we speak of *single mothers*, *working mothers*, *lone fathers*, *alternative families*, or *at-risk families* because it compares family structures to idealized notions of the "normal" family. The normal family makes possible literacy practices that are deemed essential to school readiness such as bedtime storybook reading, help with homework, "quality conversation" between parent and child, parental involvement in school, and so on. SNAF underlies and shapes two other mothering discourses, mothering as pedagogy and maternal responsibility.

Mothering as Pedagogy

The mothering as pedagogy discourse positions parents—and, most often, mothers—as their child's "first and most important teacher." The term "teacher" conflates nurturing roles that are often assigned to women with didactic roles instructing children in skills and behaviors that are believed to be necessary to do well in school. The mothering as pedagogy discourse is evident when the terms *mother* and *parent* are used interchangeably in advice to parents or descriptions of research, when illustrations or photos that accompany texts depict family literacy as a woman reading to children in cozy domestic environments, and when advice for supporting children's literacy are framed as everyday tasks that are actually extensions of women's work in the home. The following is an example from a family literacy text:

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. And you don't need to be the best reader to help her. Your time and interest and the pleasure you share while reading together are what counts.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2000, p. 5).

This excerpt is from "Helping Your Child Become a Reader," one of a series of four parent advice manuals produced by the U.S. Department of Education as part of its No Child Left Behind initiative. This resource, for parents of children under six, consists of a list of over 30 recommended literacy and language activities—designed to promote reading skills and schooling success—involving a parent and a child. The discourses of the normal family and mothering as pedagogy are intertwined and reinforced throughout the text. The accompanying illustrations feature a woman and child. This suggests the audience for the text is mothers. Each of the illustrations features a mother and a young child reading a book. The impression, one of happiness and physical and emotional intimacy, suggests that there is a link between early literacy development and mother-child bonding. Recommendations for integrating literacy and language activities into "everyday routines," such as setting the table and decorating cookies, suggest that literacy is regarded as an extension of domestic work in the home—the vast majority of which, in North America, is undertaken by mothers. Implicit in this text are assumptions that a parent stays at home with a young child during the day, that none of the activities take any extra time or require resources, and that there are no other children in the home in need of care.

Recommended literacy practices in this text emphasize phonemic awareness, school readiness tasks, and oral language activities associated with cultural practices found in mainstream schools. "Chatting with children" is presented as an instructional activity with "teaching goals," rather than as a social and cultural practice embedded in everyday relationships. In these and other texts that offer family literacy advice, the regulatory message is that if parents follow the instructions and activities carefully, their children should become readers who will enjoy both academic and social success. The responsibility is thus placed on the parent/mother who, in order to ensure this success, must follow the advice. The texts barely acknowledge the importance of access to quality preschools for children's learning or the social and cultural practices in schools that emphasize certain linguistic practices over others. They also fail to mention that many families already engage in a wide variety of literacy and language practices in their homes and communities, a fact that has been supported in numerous studies (see, for

example, Auerbach, 1989; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Taylor, 1983; among others).

The content of family literacy advice texts from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canadian government institutions are strikingly similar. This suggests not only that many family literacy texts are generated from the same research studies and institutions, but that their terminology and common-sense assumptions are recycled and reused with little attention to context, culture, or target audience.

ABC Canada's Family Literacy Day promotional brochure for 2002 suggests that women are responsible not only for their own children's literacy development, but for the literacy and learning of all children. The central image in this brochure is a woman sitting on a couch surrounded by four children, one of whom is a baby on her lap. She reads to a baby and to a little girl who is looking over her shoulder. A boy on roller skates reads while sipping a drink. A dog and teddy are also pictured reading. Perhaps in an attempt to be racially inclusive, the boy is black, though the mother and the other children look white.

No father or male adult role model is pictured in the poster, suggesting that the advice is directed to mothers—and mothers who have a lot of time at that. Pieces of advice are scattered around the central image: "Visit the library every week," "make sure your children see you reading," "book time to read with your children everyday," "help them become good readers and learners," and, in keeping with the link of literacy to women's work in the home, "following recipes and making shopping lists are great ways for children to learn new words and do some creative thinking while enjoying family time." The recent concern with adolescent literacy is reflected in advice such as "keep teens reading" and "give [teens] books, newspaper articles and magazines about things that interest them." Even though the woman in the image obviously has a young baby, the message is that she should take on adolescent literacy issues as well.

Mothers' pedagogical tasks also extend to the schools. Parenting components in Even Start and other comprehensive family literacy programs emphasize how parents can support their children's schooling. These policies and programs are

presented as politically and gender neutral, assuming that families do or should have the time, resources, and desire to be involved in their children's school. U.S. government

No father or male adult role model is pictured in the poster, suggesting that the advice is directed to mothers—and mothers who have a lot of time at that.

policies around parent involvement in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 appear to empower parents with the right to be involved in their children's school. But implied in the act, and in the policies and parenting materials that accompany it, is the assumption that parents will carry out pedagogical work in the home. Indeed, the act seems to view parents as para-

professionals who "work with educators to improve the achievement of their children" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 34). In the section of the act entitled "Building Capacity of Involvement," schools are directed to enlist the work of parents in ensuring their children's success through "how to" information sessions:

- (1) [Schools] shall provide assistance to parents . . . in understanding such topics as the State's academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, State and local academic assessments, the requirements of this part, and how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children. [and]
- (2) shall provide materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their children's achievement, such as literacy training and using technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement.

There is a silence in this policy about who is meant to participate in the school "training," to monitor children at home, and "to improve their children's achievement." Standing (1999), Smith (1998), and Dudley-Marling (2001) suggested that these often demanding and time-consuming responsibilities will be left to mothers who are already likely to be juggling multiple roles and family/work conflicts. Such conflicts are acknowledged in parental involvement policies—but they are not presented as an excuse not to participate, as the following text suggests:

Although some working and single parents may be unable to contribute to schools because of work commitments and time constraints, educators are discovering many additional ways that parents can help students and their schools. Some of these ways are dependent upon the school's desire to involve parents. To effect change, parents must find time to participate in their children's education while schools must provide the supports necessary for them to be involved. The resulting partnerships between parents and teachers will increase student achievement and promote better cooperation between home and school. Together these efforts will connect families and schools to help children succeed in school and in their future (Nathan, 1996).

Maternal Responsibility

Here we find a third mothering discourse, maternal responsibility, which is also implied in the No Child Left Behind Act. If women are natural teachers, they are also naturally responsible for the educational outcomes of their children. This is reinforced in the doctrines of personal responsibility that underlie the parental involvement policies in No Child Left Behind, as well as in other texts and advice that link children's literacy and schooling success to mothering. Mem Fox, a well-known children's author and advocate for family literacy, tells parents that if children have not been read to regularly by the time they start school, it may be already "too late" for those children: "It's as scary as that" (p. 13). The regulatory effect of this statement for parents can be overwhelming: "if you don't take the advice we give you, your child will fail—and it will be your fault." Indeed, the flip side of responsibility is blame.

Dudley-Marling (2001) interviewed women whose children were doing poorly in school and argued that "within the dominant patriarchal discourse, a child's success in school is proof of woman's success as a mother, while a child's problems in school demonstrate a mothers' deficiencies" (p. 192). He found that many women internalized blame for their children's difficulties: "I do feel like it was my fault" (p. 191), "I think that I failed somewhere" (p. 192).

The discourse of maternal responsibility and blame in family literacy texts runs much deeper than parental

involvement in schools. They also include women's responsibility to be well educated, so they do not pass on school failure to their children. In a speech in Vancouver, BC, on the occasion of Family Literacy Day 2002, guest speaker Sharon Darling, head of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) in the U.S., stated, "the strongest indicator of a child's success in school is the education level of the parent—especially the mother." Pamphlets and promotional materials from the NCFL's "The Power of Family Literacy" (2002) campaign contain photographs and images that reinforce this message. In these texts, family literacy is a mother—usually a black or Hispanic mother—who, with six children, will somehow return to school and get a well-paying job that will keep her and her family off welfare. Promotional materials explaining the "power" of family literacy claim, "It's about Sara who takes all six of her children to the front door one day and points to the mailbox. She tells them to look at that mailbox. She says there will never be another welfare check in that mailbox, because she is going to school right beside them" (NCFL, 2002). Family literacy programs, according to this text, help women like Sara become good, responsible mothers. But what they don't reveal—and what we want to know—is how Sara manages to raise six children on her own, what her actual life is like. As Auerbach (1995) and others have noted, when constructing imagined or ideal models of family life and literacy practices, these mothering discourses render real families, and, in particular, non-SNAF families, as deficient and thus in need of intervention and preventative measures to help them better approximate the ideal.

A Historical Perspective on Mothering Discourses

One way to recognize and counter mothering discourses is to see them from a historical perspective. Findings by researchers who have studied advice to mothers over the course of the 20th century lead us to believe that family literacy may not be the "innovation" or "new discovery" it is often believed to be. Rather, family literacy can be seen as a continuation of the mothering discourses that have always shaped women's relationship with governments.

Feminist historians have shown that during times of rapid social and economic change, the competency of mothers has been a concern for the government of the day. Arnup (1996)

analyzed child-raising advice to women from the 1900s to the 1960s. She noticed how the advice shifted as values, economic circumstances, and demographics changed over time. For example, in Canada during the early 1900s, women relied on social and family networks and grassroots movements for child-raising advice. But later, as the medical profession became organized and governments grew concerned about raising "proper" Canadians in an era of nation building, this informal approach was frowned upon. Using women's magazines, well-baby clinics, and parent education materials, medical professionals, psychologists, and other "experts" began to offer child-raising advice. Some of this advice, such as toilet training babies at three months old, might seem odd today; however, it fit in with the values of the day, which were cleanliness, regularity, routine, and discipline. In contrast to the assumption that mothering advice reflects "natural" behavior and the latest in scientific research, Arnup showed that advice to mothers, and motherhood itself, is "a socially constructed and changing phenomenon" (Arnup, 1996, p. 10).

Another family historian, Cynthia Comacchio, explored in detail Canada's early 20th century maternal education campaigns that promoted safe births. The campaign was an effort to "modernize" motherhood; medical professionals in particular believed that folk wisdom and inadequate parenting skills and knowledge were to blame for the high infant and child mortality rates in Canada at that time. Comacchio called this campaign the rise of "scientific motherhood." She showed how, as the medical profession enlisted mothers as para-professionals, assistants to doctors, nurses, and other experts to promote children's healthy development, mothering was increasingly seen as a technical, scientific activity. Rather than address the socio-economic conditions that contributed to infant and child mortality, this campaign focused on maternal education as the key form of intervention.

Gleason (1999) studied the influences of psychology on post-war Canadian families. She suggested that psychology's preoccupation with the development of "normal" personalities in children could be traced to wider political and economic concerns of the 1950s. She wrote:

Family literacy can be seen as a continuation of the mothering discourses that have always shaped women's relationship with governments.

Threats to the solidarity of the family were said to be everywhere: mothers' paid employment, marriage breakdown, divorce, and juvenile delinquency. Concern about these threats, whether based on perception or scientific fact, in turn fuelled a more general anxiety over the threat of Russian communism and atomic annihilation at the height of the Cold War (Gleason, 1999, p. 7).

Gleason shows that psychologists characterized female-headed families, Mennonite families, African-Canadian families, and First Nations families as "outside the norm" of the traditional Canadian family because they lacked a patriarchal structure in the form of a "head of the household," women worked outside the home, families practiced shared parenting, and so on. For example, in their analysis of 150 years of child-raising advice to women in the United States, Ehrenreich and English (1978) argued that at the turn of the century advice was shaped by values of the Romantic era—the importance of love, intimacy, nurturance, and caring in opposition to "the anarchy of the marketplace" (p. 314). The responsibility for meeting these human needs was left to

women. In the 1960s, with the rise of feminism, women began to critique expert advice. They "held the scientific theories up to their own experience—and the 'facts' went up in smoke as myths" (p. 315). Recent books that explore shifting views of children and child-raising confirm the view that rather than representing the latest scientific facts,

child-raising advice can be linked to economic and social trends. Ann Hulbert, in her new book *Raising America: Experts, Parents and a Century of Advice about Children* (2003) observed that "it wasn't firm data that drove child raising expertise but changing social concerns that seemed to dictate its swerves and emphases" (Cohen, 2003, p. A15).

These historical perspectives on advice to mothers allow us to view current family literacy policies and practices in a new light—for example, the practice of focusing on the education of mothers in order to address concerns about the competency of their children rather than addressing the social and economic conditions in which they live. Targeting "at-risk"

or “non-traditional” children for testing and educational interventions, as well as enlisting mothers as “para-professionals” (teachers in the home), are also trends that continue today and can be found in family literacy policies and programs.

A question that the above research raises is, what are the social and economic contexts that shape more recent family literacy advice? In 2001, Dudley-Marling suggested that in the North American environment of major funding cuts for early childhood education and public schools, women’s work is enlisted to shore up the gap in services and instruction. Mace (1998) commented on the implications that the often-cited IALS studies (International Adult Literacy Survey), which link literacy to economic productivity in “the new knowledge economy,” would have for mothers:

The evidence of a literacy “problem” in industrialized countries with mass schooling systems has revealed that schools cannot alone meet this need. Families must be recruited to do their bit too. This is where the spotlight falls on the mother. She it is who must ensure that the young child arrives at school ready for school literacy, and preferably already literate (p. 5).

Experiences of Everyday Life and Women’s Literacy Education that Counter Family Literacy Discourses

Alternative perspectives on the link between mothering and children’s literacy are rarely displayed in family literacy advice, programs, or promotional materials. As many ethnographic studies have suggested, “literacy is more than mum” (Barton, 1994). These studies have documented a broad view of literacy as social and cultural practices embedded in family life rather than as narrow “teaching” activities involving a mother and her child. The vital role of siblings, grandparents, and other family members in literacy is also very important, as Gregory and Williams (2000) have shown. Literacy in homes is much richer and more complex than literacy at school, so orienting children to school literacy at home may actually diminish their skills (Bloome, 2002).

Feminist research and the experience of literacy educators have shown that the desire of women to achieve literacy transcends social and economic goals. For example, Horsman

(1990) documented how women struggled for space in their family lives and classrooms to use literacy in ways that transported them beyond “the everyday” and their roles and responsibilities as mothers, wives, and workers. In her provocative article, “Literacy as Threat/Desire” (1993), Rockhill showed the often violent conflicts women experience when their families, employers, and husbands oppose the shifting power dynamics in their relationships. The shift occurs when a wife and mother connects with other women, grows more confident, and finds a voice for herself through literacy. Cuban and Hayes (1996) discussed how women preferred to use their time in family literacy programs to learn computer skills and spend time with other adults, rather than in PACT (Parent and Child Together) time.

Mace (1998), in her historical study of the relationships between mothering and literacy in Britain, suggested that for generations, women who had little time to achieve literacy themselves nevertheless raised literate children. They did this without being involved in their children’s schools and often without reading to their children every day. The linkage of literacy levels of mothers and parental involvement in schools with children’s academic success seems to be a recent phenomenon. If this is so, an important project for educators and researchers is to reflect on current socio-economic conditions that might inspire this linkage.

Countering Mothering Discourses: Some Ideas for Practitioners

We are not suggesting that mothers should not be concerned with their children’s learning or that they should not engage in “teaching” activities at home that they find enjoyable and rewarding. But we do feel that raising questions about mothering discourses in family literacy texts can make room for talking about the actual lives of mothers, fathers, and families. Critical examinations of the images of families offered in family literacy texts and the expectations of schools can help parents move beyond guilt to deeper conversations about what it means to be a parent and a family.

Specifically, some questions practitioners can ask themselves include: Do mothering discourses limit opportunities for women’s education beyond their roles as parents? Does our teaching reinforce mothering discourses, or provide women and men with opportunities to question, reflect upon, and

perhaps resist images of the "ideal" mother and parent? Are we, as literacy educators, contributing to a shift toward making parents—and mothers in particular—responsible for their children's educational achievement, in a context of unequal distribution of social resources?

We can open up a discussion with learners about family literacy texts by asking whether the advice learners receive for supporting their children's learning is realistic, about who does the homework supervision and "teaching" in the home, and about their experiences. In looking at images of mothering on posters and promotional materials, we can ask: Is this what literacy looks like in our homes? What else could it look like? Is reading with our children always easy and happy; does it always feel natural? How else is literacy part of our children's lives? What does it mean to be involved in our children's schooling?

Perhaps in creating family literacy texts based on the actual experiences of mothers and families, the field of family literacy can map a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the best approaches to supporting literacy in families and schools.

Authors' Notes

This article has been substantially revised from our previous article (2002), "Regulating Women and Families: Mothering Discourses and Family Literacy Texts," published in *English Quarterly* 34 (see References for complete citation). Both authors would like to thank reviewers of the previous version for their insightful comments and suggestions. Suzanne Smythe would like to thank the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Scholarship Programme for support for this research.

References

ABC Canada (2002). *Family Literacy Day is January 27*. Retrieved March 24, 2003, from http://www.abc-canada.org/family_literacy_day/fld_2002_poster.asp

Arnup, K. (1996). *Education for motherhood: Advice for mothers in twentieth century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Auerbach, E. (1995). Deconstructing the discourse of strength in family literacy. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 27, 643–662.

Barton, D. (1994). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bloome, D., Katz, L., Wilson-Keenan, J., & Solsken, J. (2000, January/February). Interpellations of family/community and classroom literacy practices. *Journal of Educational Research*, 93(3), 155–164.

Cohen, P. (2003, April 5). Visions and revisions of child-raising experts. *The New York Times*, pp. A15, A17.

Comacchio, C. (2001). Saving mothers and babies: Motherhood, medicine, and the modern state, 1900–1945. In S. Cook, L. McLean, and K. O'Rourke (Eds.), *Framing our past: Canadian women's history in the twentieth century* (pp. 139–148). Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.

Cuban, S., & Hayes, E. (1996). Women in family literacy programs: A gendered perspective. In P. Sissel (Ed.), *A community-based approach to literacy programs: Taking learners' lives into account* (pp. 5–17). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Ehrenreich, B., & English, D. (1978). *For her own good: 150 years of the experts' advice to women*. New York: Doubleday.

Guy, P. (2000). The note. *Journal of Ordinary Thought*, 10(6), 24–26.

Dudley-Marling, C. (2001). School trouble: A mother's burden. *Gender and Education*, 13(2), 183–197.

Fox, M. (2001). *Reading magic: Why reading aloud to our children will change their lives forever*. New York: Harcourt Trade Publishers.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Pantheon.

- Gleason, M. (1999). *Normalizing the ideal: Psychology, schooling and the family in postwar Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gregory, E., & Williams, A. (2000). *City literacies: Learning to read across generations and cultures*. New York: Routledge.
- Hull, G., & Schultz, K. (2002). *School's out: Bridging out of school literacies with classroom practice*. New York: Columbia Teachers College.
- Hulbert, A. (2003). *Raising America: Experts, parents and a century of advice about children*. Chicago: Knopf.
- Horsman, J. (1990). *Something in my mind besides the everyday*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Luke, A. (2001). An introduction to critical discourse analysis. In Saha, L. (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia for the Sociology of Education*. Elsevier Science Ltd.
Retrieved April 24, 2003, from <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/ed270/Luke/SAHA6.html>
- Mace, J. (1998). *Playing with time: Mothers and the meanings of literacy*. London: UCL Press Limited.
- Nakagawa, K. (2000). Unthreading the ties that bind: Questioning the discourse of parental involvement. *Educational Policy*, 14(4), 443–472.
- Nathan, J. (1996). *Critical issue: Supporting ways parents and families can become involved in schools*. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved March 6, 2003, from <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa100.htm>
- National Center for Family Literacy (2002). The power of family literacy. Retrieved March 6, 2003, from <http://www.famlit.org/inform/power.html>
- Nickse, R. (1990). *Family and intergenerational literacy programs: An update of the noises of literacy*. Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education, The Ohio State University Center on Education and Training for Employment. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED327736).
- OECD, & Statistics Canada. (1996). *Literacy, economy and society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey*. Toronto: Statistics Canada.
- Pitt, K. (2000). Family literacy: A pedagogy for the future? In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 108–124). London: Routledge.
- Rockhill, K. (1991). Literacy as threat/desire: Longing to be somebody. In J. Gaskell & A. McLaren (Eds.), *Women and Education* 2nd Edition (pp. 333–351). Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited.
- Ruddick, S. (2001). Talking about mothers. In M. Davey (Ed.), *Mother reader: Essential writings on motherhood* (pp. 187–198). New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Smith, D. (1993). The standard North American family. *Journal of Family Issues*, 14(1), 50–66.
- Smythe, S., & Isserlis, J. (2002). Regulating women and families: Mothering discourses and family literacy texts. In Anderson, J., Kendrick, M., Rogers, T., & Pirhbi-Ellich, F. (2002). [guest editors], Special Edition on Critical Issues in Family, Community, and School Literacies. *English Quarterly*, 34(3–4), 28–36.
- Standing, K. (1999). Lone mothers' involvement in their children's schooling: Towards a new typology of maternal involvement. *Gender and Education*, 2(1), 57–72.
- Taylor, D. (1983). *Family literacy: Young children learning to read and write*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Taylor, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Many families, many literacies: An international declaration of principles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

United States Department of Education. (2000). *Helping your child become a reader*. Retrieved September 20, 2002, from <http://www.npin.org/library/2000/n00494/activities.html#abc>

United States Government. (2001). *No Child Left Behind*. Act (PL 107-110). Retrieved March 10, 2003, from <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/pg2.html#sec1118>

Janet Isserlis, Project Director, Literacy Resources/Rhode Island, has worked with adult learners and educators in the U.S. and Canada since 1980. She is co-author of *Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective* (CCLOW, 1996). A 1999–2000 NIFL Fellow, she has worked on issues of violence and learning; that work is available at <http://www.brown.edu/lrri/screen.html>.

Suzanne Smythe is a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia. Her research explores historical and feminist perspectives on literacy advice to mothers. She has a strong interest in gender and literacy, stemming from her work in Canada and South Africa and as a mother who receives no end of literacy advice! Recent publications include a study of literacy and community development in Nunavut with Kim Crockatt.

Involving Fathers in Family Literacy

Outcomes and Insights from the Fathers Reading Every Day Program

Stephen Green

The evidence, both scientific and anecdotal, is clear: if we support fathers in their quest to become more involved with their families, if we give them the tools to do so, everyone—women, children, and men themselves—will benefit greatly.

(Parke & Brott, 1999, p. xiv).

Three decades of research have established a clear link between parental involvement and children's academic performance (Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994). High levels of parental involvement are associated with higher student grades and test scores, better attendance, higher rates of homework completion, more positive student attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education. Because of these positive outcomes, many researchers, educators, and practitioners are devoting more time and attention to developing strategies that will result in greater parental participation in children's formal and informal education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

For years, little was known about the specific influence fathers, father figures, and male caregivers have on children's development. (Please note that throughout this article the word *father* includes fathers, father-figures, and other significant male caregivers.) A growing body of research has led to an awareness of the important contributions these men can make to children's lives (Lamb, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Parke, 1996). Children who grow up with actively involved and nurturing fathers reap numerous benefits, including better school performance, increased self-esteem, healthier relationships with peers, healthier sex-role development, and access to greater financial resources (Lamb, 1997; Mosely & Thompson, 1995; Nord et al., 1997; Radin, 1986, 1994; Snarey, 1993; Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995).

Academic performance is an important area in which fathers can have a potentially powerful impact on their children's lives (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Nord et al., 1997). In a recent study, researchers discovered that when

fathers took an active role in their children's education by attending school meetings, volunteering at school, or helping children with homework, children were more likely to receive As, participate in extracurricular activities, and enjoy school. The children were also less likely to repeat a grade (Nord et al., 1997).

While increased paternal participation has been shown to benefit children's education, surveys indicate that fathers often are not involved in this aspect of their children's lives (National Center for Fathering, 1999; Nord et al., 1997). In a random survey conducted with 894 men and women across the nation, researchers discovered that 42.5 percent of fathers never read to their children and less than half (40.9 percent) knew the name of their child's teacher (National Center for Fathering, 1999). This apparent lack of involvement has prompted researchers and practitioners in early childhood and adult education to initiate programs specifically designed to recruit and sustain father involvement (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Lamb, & Boller, 1999; Fagan, 2000; Fagan & Iglesias, 1999; Levine, Murphy, & Wilson, 1998; Turbiville, Umbarger, & Guthrie, 2000).

Data gathered from program evaluations indicate varying levels of success. Fagan and Iglesias (1999) discovered that when traditional parental involvement activities were adapted specifically for fathers of pre-school-aged children, fathers' overall involvement increased, which led to improvements in their children's mathematics readiness scores. Other studies, however, reveal that fathers tend not to be very involved in their children's early childhood programs. Even in programs that have implemented male involvement initiatives, practitioners and researchers report that many fathers are reluctant to participate in program activities (Fagan, 1999; Levine et al., 1998). Possible barriers to involvement include teacher and staff attitudes toward father involvement, mothers' attitudes toward father involvement, societal views concerning male involvement in child care, family/cultural beliefs, educational level, poverty, irregular work schedules, and fathers' lack of knowledge about how to become involved

(Levine et al., 1998; Fagan & Iglesias, 1999).

The Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) program was developed with these challenges in mind; it grows from a body of research that indicates that parents who read with their children on a regular basis tend to raise children who are superior readers and who perform better in school. While reading may not be a pursuit in which an overwhelming number of fathers regularly participate, it is a time-tested activity that has the potential to strengthen the emotional bonds between fathers and children, as well as helping both to enhance their intellectual development. This article presents a general introduction to the FRED program, a description of a recent FRED pilot project, and a discussion of practical lessons learned that may benefit family literacy professionals.

FRED Program Overview

Developed by Texas Cooperative Extension, an educational agency affiliated with the Texas A&M University System, FRED is a program designed to encourage fathers, grandfathers, and other positive male role models to read to their children on a daily basis. The program aims to increase father involvement in children's literacy development and to improve the quality of father-child relationships. FRED is based on the belief that for children to reach their greatest academic potential, parents must be actively involved in all aspects of their children's education and development. FRED is compatible with the theoretical and practical underpinnings of many family literacy programs, which often include a focus on education for children and adults, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between parents and their children (Logan, Peyton, Read, McMaster, & Botkins, 2002).

The intended audience for the FRED program is fathers of young children enrolled in a variety of early childhood programs and elementary schools. FRED can be implemented in collaboration with Even Start, Head Start, Early Head Start, public libraries, school libraries, elementary schools, childcare centers, and faith-based programs. Involvement of the public library in some capacity is highly encouraged because it enables fathers to sign up for a library card, familiarizes them with the library, and provides fathers and children with access to books without having to buy them. In addition, many libraries have children's books in several languages.

Program Structure

FRED is a four-week program that encourages fathers to read daily to their children in an environment of their own choosing. FRED was developed as a short-term program that allows fathers enough time to familiarize themselves with reading to children as well as a realistic opportunity to complete the program. Results from the pilot sites indicate that the four-week duration is sufficient for maintaining father involvement while encouraging greater participation in subsequent programs offered through early childhood agencies and school districts.

The program is structured so that participants read 15 minutes a day for the first two weeks and 30 minutes a day for the remaining two weeks. In a reading log provided to all participants at the beginning of the program, fathers are asked to keep a daily record of the amount of time they spend reading with their children and the number of books that they read. While the program focuses on daily reading activities, FRED is based on research that supports the assumption that parents and their children benefit equally from the interaction and discourse that occur during and after reading times (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Neuman, 1996; Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995).

FRED was designed primarily as a self-guided program. Fathers and/or father figures choose the books to read with their children as well as the time and location of the reading activities. The men and children are encouraged to select books together. In order to facilitate this process, participant materials include suggested book lists and tips on reading aloud to children. After an initial information and sign-up session, face-to-face meetings between participants and facilitators are deliberately kept to a minimum in order to accommodate fathers' schedules and allow fathers to choose when, where, and what to read. Two important face-to-face events, however, are scheduled during the program.

The first event, which fathers and children attend together, serves as an introduction to FRED and an opportunity for fathers to register for the program and receive program materials. This meeting includes a 30-minute presentation on the importance of parental involvement in children's literacy development with an emphasis on the unique role that fathers and male caregivers play in the lives of their children. The facilitator's guide includes the research-based presentation. Fathers who choose to sign up for the program then fill out a

pre-survey and receive the materials they will need to complete the program.

The first meeting can be held in a variety of locations; however, facilitators are encouraged to hold the meeting in an educational facility familiar to fathers and their children, such as an Even Start center, Head Start center, elementary school, or public library. During the first meeting, the facilitating organization elicits the help of its staff members to organize and plan activities for fathers and their children to engage in together. These activities can take place before or after the presentation. The facilitating organization is encouraged to provide activities and supervision for the children while the adults listen to the formal presentation.

The second face-to-face event occurs at the end of the four-week program and serves as an opportunity for families to celebrate having completed the program. Participants in FRED along with other family members are invited to attend the final event. Fathers and their children share their experiences, including what type of books they read, what books they would recommend to others, and how the program affected their relationships. Each father-child pair receives a certificate of completion recognizing their participation in the program. Participants turn in their reading logs at this event. A written exit survey allows participants to reflect on the reading process and determines the impact of the program on the fathers' literacy activities and their relationships with their children.

Program Materials

FRED program materials are divided into two categories: materials for FRED facilitators and materials for program participants. Facilitators receive the FRED Leader's Guide, which include an introduction to the program and strategies for implementation. These materials are available on CD-ROM and in electronic format so that facilitators can include their contact information as well as the time, date, and location of all face-to-face meetings.

Materials for program participants have been specifically designed to appeal to both fathers and their children. To develop these materials, FRED hired an artist to depict men and children of various ages and racial/ethnic backgrounds engaged in reading activities together. These materials, which are also available in Spanish, are rich in color and visually appealing.

Participants who sign up for the program with their children receive a 15-page *Father's Guide*. This booklet contains a welcome and introduction to the FRED program, research-based information on why fathers should read to their children, practical tips on reading aloud to children, two recommended booklists, and the reading log. Tips for reading aloud to children were drawn from a variety of sources including Trelease's 1995 book *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and Cullinan's 1992 book *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*. FRED encourages facilitators to model effective reading strategies for participants during the sign-up event.

The suggested reading lists include recommended reading from the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Education Association (NEA). Directed primarily at young readers, the ALA list contains suggested books for children birth through age five. This list can be found on the web at www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforFamily/booklist.html. The NEA list is based on an online survey conducted in 1999, which asked teachers to identify the top 100 children's books of all time. The NEA's booklist is divided according to title, author, and suggested age range. This list can also be found on the web at www.nea.org/readacross/resources/catalist.html. The purpose of the recommended reading lists is not to dictate what participants and their children read, but to offer them a wide range of choices based on popular titles and age-appropriate reading material.

Program Evaluation

Outcomes related to the program are assessed using a nine-item self-report questionnaire (excluding demographic items) developed specifically for the project. The questionnaire, administered upon entry into and completion of the program, measures fathers' reading practices with the child, level of father involvement in the child's education, amount and quality of time typically spent together, and quality of the father-child relationship. The post-survey also asks participants to indicate whether they agree or disagree with a number of items related to the program: for instance, improved the quality of time I spend with my child; the program led to improvements in my child's vocabulary. The survey also asks two open-ended questions concerning participants' perceptions of the program: What, if anything, did the FRED program do for you and your children? What did you like most about the

program? This information is used in conjunction with the reading log to determine if significant changes have occurred during participation in the program.

Early Findings of the FRED Pilot Project

In 2002, the FRED program was piloted in a project involving fathers of children enrolled in early childhood education programs such as Even Start and Head Start and in elementary schools in nine Texas counties. Facilitators included Family and Consumer Sciences County Extension agents; Even Start program specialists; Head Start parental involvement coordinators; and elementary school teachers, librarians, and counselors. Approximately 200 fathers and their children attended the initial information sessions, completed written pre-surveys, and received program materials. Of those who signed up to participate, 123 fathers completed the program for a completion rate of roughly 60 percent. In addition, over 200 children and other family members participated in the final events.

Although there are limitations in the data, preliminary results from the pilot project are encouraging. When asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements related to the FRED program, fathers noted the following:

- 50.4 percent (62 out of 123) fathers reported that FRED “got me reading to my child every day.”
- 63.4 percent (78 out of 123) fathers reported that FRED “increased the time I spent with my child.”
- 62.6 percent (77 out of 123) fathers reported that FRED “improved the quality of the time I spent with my child.”
- 60.2 percent (74 out of 123) fathers reported that FRED “increased my satisfaction level as a parent.”
- 63.4 percent (78 out of 123) fathers reported that FRED “improved my relationship with my child.”

Despite the positive findings that emerged from the pilot project, larger and more carefully controlled studies are needed to assess the program’s effectiveness. In future efforts to evaluate the program, it would be helpful to randomly select a larger sample of fathers from the general population and randomly assign them to experimental conditions to create treatment and control groups. Doing so would strengthen the ability to make greater generalizations concerning the positive

effects of the program. In future evaluation efforts, it would also be helpful to collect data from other participants, such as children, mothers, and teachers. These individuals could provide an additional perspective on the benefits that they see from fathers and children participating in the program.

While nearly 60 percent of men who signed up for the FRED completed the four-week program, approximately 40 percent did not. In future program efforts, more attention needs to be devoted to reducing sample attrition. Subsequent evaluation studies might compare those who complete the program with those who do not, looking specifically at such demographic characteristics as income, race, and educational level. It would also be helpful to contact participants to find out why they chose not to complete the program. Efforts could then be aimed at retaining a larger percentage of participants at risk for not completing.

Finally, it is important to note that participants in the pilot project differ somewhat from the typical family literacy population. For example, only 13.2 percent reported having a household income of less than \$20,000, and only 12.5 percent reported having less than a high school diploma. Over 78 percent of those who completed the program were married. These demographic characteristics are not generally reflective of the educational or income levels of adults who participate in family literacy programs; therefore, caution must be exercised when attempting to generalize to such programs.

Implications for Family Literacy Practitioners

Findings from the FRED pilot project and other studies point to the fact that children benefit when their fathers become more involved in their education. As noted earlier, research seems to indicate that fathers are not very involved in their children’s formal education, nor are they particularly involved in their children’s reading-related activities (National Center for Fathering, 1999; Nord et al., 1997). Early childhood and adult education practitioners who work with family literacy programs have an excellent opportunity to contribute to father involvement efforts. Following is a summary of some of the lessons learned from the FRED project that may assist family literacy professionals in their efforts to encourage fathers’ participation.

Fathers and Children Enjoy the Structure of the FRED Program

In open-ended responses, fathers often commented on the benefits of having a structure to guide them through the program. They particularly liked the idea of having set times to read with their children. They also found the reading log to be a valuable tool to keep them on task during the four-week period. As one father wrote, "It was a very organized way for me to set aside time for my child." Another father noted, "The structure helped ensure more consistency day to day."

Participating in FRED Can Improve the Literacy Skills of Fathers and Their Children

Research clearly reveals the benefits of reading for children; however, reading children's literature can also benefit adults. Several fathers noted that, by participating in the FRED program, they improved their own literacy skills, as illustrated in the following comment: "The FRED program helped us learn to read." This was particularly true for fathers who had less formal education and for Hispanic/Latino fathers who struggled with the English language.

Literacy Activities Can Strengthen the Bond Between Fathers and Their Children

The pilot project demonstrates that literacy activities can strengthen parent-child relationships. Participants reported increases in the amount of time they spent with their children as well as improvements in the quality of that time. One father noted, "Participating in the FRED program improved the bond between me and my child." Another wrote, "Although we spend a lot of time together, it sometimes revolves around my schedule. 'FRED' time was all for them. It brought us closer together because I would always have to stop what I was doing just for them."

Fathers Will Participate in Family Literacy Programs and FRED Provides a Segue into More In-Depth Family Literacy Programs

As indicated by the completion rate of approximately 60 percent, fathers are willing to participate in family literacy programs such as FRED. One of the strengths of the FRED program is that it is geared specifically toward fathers. For example, all materials have been specifically designed to

appeal to fathers. Another strength, which likely increased its success, is the program's collaborative structure: fathers and children participate in all literacy activities together, which is a hallmark of many family literacy programs.

FRED is a four-week program that encourages fathers to take a more active role in their children's early literacy development; however, it can also encourage fathers to enter into more in-depth programs that may help them develop their own literacy, parenting, and job skills.

FRED Can Easily Be Integrated into Existing Family Literacy Programs

Logan et al. (2002) state, "Family literacy offers a flexible and comprehensive educational approach, making it an ideal umbrella for collaboration among agencies at the state and local levels to draw on the experience of individuals in child and adult education, health, and labor." FRED lends itself well to collaboration among various agencies. Extension educators, Even Start and Head Start teachers, librarians, elementary school teachers, and counselors can work together to replicate or adapt the FRED program for a variety of settings. FRED is compatible with the goals and objectives of many family literacy programs and can be integrated into those existing programs with little effort.

Conclusion

Parental involvement is critical to children's academic success. The entire family benefits when fathers share in the responsibility of educating their children. FRED was developed to encourage greater father involvement in children's education, with a particular emphasis on early literacy development. While further evaluation of this program is needed, preliminary results from the pilot project indicate that the program has the potential to improve fathers' involvement in their children's education and strengthen the emotional bonds they have with their children.

References

Baker, L., Scher, D., & Mackler, K. (1997). Home and family influences on motivations for reading. *Educational Psychologist*, 32, 69-82.



- Bus, A.G., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., & Pellegrini, A.D. (1995). Joint book reading makes for success in learning to read: A meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy. *Review of Educational Research*, 65, 1–21.
- Cabrera, N.J., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., Lamb, M.E., & Boller, K. (1999). *Measuring father involvement in the Early Head Start evaluation: A multidimensional conceptualization*. Paper presented at the National Conference on Health Statistics, Washington, DC.
- Cullinan, B.E. (1992). *Read to me: Raising children who love to read*. New York: Scholastic.
- Fagan, J. (1999). *Predictors of father and father figure involvement in pre-kindergarten Head Start*. National Center on Fathers and Families, University of Pennsylvania.
- Fagan, J. (2000). Head Start fathers' daily hassles and involvement with their children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 21, 329–346.
- Fagan, J., & Iglesias, A. (1999). Father involvement program effects on fathers, father figures, and their Head Start children: A quasi-experimental study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14, 243–269.
- Grolnick, W., & Slowiaczek, M. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: A multidimensional conceptualization and motivational model. *Child Development*, 65, 237–252.
- Henderson, A. (1987). *The evidence continues to grow: Parent involvement improves student achievement*. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.
- Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.
- Lamb, M. (1997). The development of father-infant relationships. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 104–120). New York: Wiley.
- Levine, J.A., Murphy, D.T., & Wilson, S. (1998). *Getting men involved: Strategies for early childhood programs*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Logan, B., Peyton, T., Read, C., McMaster, J., & Botkins, R. (2002). *Family literacy: A strategy for educational improvement*. Issue Brief, NGA Center for Best Practices, Education Policy Studies Division. [online serial] Retrieved May 21, 2003, from <http://www.famlit.org/announcements/ngabrief110802.pdf>
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R.D., & Lamb, M.E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1173–1191.
- Mosley, J., & Thompson, E. (1995). Fathering behavior and child outcomes: The role of race and poverty. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy* (pp. 148–165). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Center for Fathering (1999). *Fathers' involvement in their children's learning*. [webpage] Retrieved May 21, 2003, from <http://www.fathers.com/research/involvement.html>
- Neuman, S.B. (1996). Children engaging in storybook reading: The influence of access to print resources, opportunity, and parental interaction. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 11, 495–513.
- Nord, C.W., Brimhall, D., & West, J. (1997). *Fathers' involvement in their children's schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C.
- Parke, R.D. (1996). *Fatherhood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Parke, R.D. & Brott, A.A. (1999). *Throwaway dads: The myths and barriers that keep men from being the fathers they want to be*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Radin, N. (1986). The influence of fathers upon sons and daughters and implications for school social work. *Social Work in Education*, 8, 77–91.

Radin, N. (1994). Primary-caregiving fathers in intact families. In A.E. Gottfried & A.W. Gottfried (Eds.), *Redefining families: implications for children's development* (pp. 55–97). New York: Plenum.

Snarey, J. (1993). *How fathers care for the next generation: A four-decade study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Trelease, J. (1995). *The read aloud handbook* (4th Ed.). New York: Penguin Books.

Turbiville, V.P., Umbarger, G.T., & Guthrie, A.C. (2000). Fathers' involvement in programs for young children. *Young Children*, 55, 74–79.

Yogman, M.W., Kindlon, D., & Earls, F.J. (1995). Father involvement and cognitive behavioral outcomes of preterm infants. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 34, 58–66.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1998). *Parent involvement in children's education: Efforts by public elementary schools*. Washington, DC.

Stephen Green, Ph.D., serves as Assistant Professor and Extension Child Development Specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension, an educational organization affiliated with the Texas A&M University System. He conducts workshops and delivers presentations at the state and national levels on a variety of child and family life issues. A central focus of his work is the unique contributions that fathers bring to the parenting role.

Literacy for the Littlest

Sharing Books with Babies and Toddlers

Laurie Danahy and Jennifer Olson

Reading aloud is one of the most effective ways for families to motivate and support their children's engagement in literacy. In *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, the editors state, "... adult-child shared book reading that stimulates verbal interaction can enhance language (especially vocabulary) development and knowledge about concepts of print" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 319). Brain development research also indicates that shared book experiences provide multiple opportunities for families to support literacy. In her report on the implications of brain development research for Even Start programs, Mary Ellin Logue found that "in terms of developing literacy skills, nothing is more important than regular, daily experiences of face-to-face interactions—being read to, talked to, listened to, touched and comforted" (Logue, 2000, p. 2). Young children often develop a sense of security from physical contact and nearness, the sound of a person's heart and breathing, and the familiar rhythms of speech. Shared reading experiences tap into these comfort patterns to let children know they are loved. When families and caregivers read aloud with babies and toddlers, they help create positive memories associated with literacy.

Experts frequently recommend that a child be read to for at least 20–30 minutes a day. Finding a single block of time for reading during a family's busy day can be difficult. To support family reading time, we need to look for ways to make sharing books a joyful habit, not a guilt-ridden burden. Just as we don't expect children to take all their nourishment at one meal, babies and toddlers don't need to get their dose of reading all in one serving. Prescriptions are adjusted to the age and weight of the child; reading experiences also should be adjusted to the needs and interests of children and families.

This article will explore a range of shared reading possibilities for families with the very littlest literacy learners: babies and toddlers. The information and suggestions are divided into sections based on *what children can do* rather than on their chronological age. While tracking children's progress is important, using age as the primary guide for

instruction and interaction may constrict what people do with a particular child. The intent of this article is to help families and practitioners find positive, fun, appropriate ways to read aloud, regardless of whether the child being read to is advanced, delayed, or typical in development. Family literacy practitioners can share these strategies with the families they work with in order to encourage them to share books with their youngest children. All babies and toddlers deserve the opportunity to enjoy books with their loved ones.

Families should be encouraged to use the language they are most comfortable with as they try out different reading activities. The greater a child's exposure to words and books, the better their literacy preparation—regardless of the language used.

Reading Right from the Start: Practically New Babies

It is never too early to share books with children. Talking and reading aloud to a baby before birth can familiarize the baby with the voices of his or her own family. Only hours old, newborns will turn their heads towards the voices of their mothers, fathers, or others who have had intensive verbal contact with the mother during her pregnancy. This recognition of familiar voices can be a powerful force for family bonding.

Reading aloud to a newborn continues the welcoming introduction of the baby to the voices of family and friends. New babies often are comforted by the soft, even tones and soothing rhythm of being read to. If this is not the first child, holding the newborn while cuddling and reading with siblings can be a pleasant way to strengthen a sense of togetherness. The older children get the nurturing they need while the newborn is drawn into the family circle.

Hints for reading with newborns

- An expressive voice can capture a baby's attention. Babies also seem to be soothed by singsong rhythms, which is why nursery rhymes have been so popular throughout the ages.

- People who are just learning to read can practice with the least critical audience they will ever have. Babies don't care if someone stumbles over a word or two. Adults also can talk about pictures or make up their own stories to go along with a wordless book.
- Prenatal and newborn babies aren't picky about what people read to them. Readers can choose anything they themselves find interesting to read aloud.
- Some of the best prenatal read-aloud materials are texts that make a pregnant mom smile, laugh, or feel relaxed.
- When reading to newborns, pausing frequently to smile, make eye contact, or talk with the baby can increase a baby's involvement and engagement.
- New mothers can read something either aloud or to themselves while they're nursing. Paperbacks and magazines are easier to manage with one hand than bulkier books.
- Very young babies enjoy looking at books with simple shapes and patterns in primary colors or black and white. Photographs or drawings of people's faces are also favorites. In addition to traditional baby books, babies may enjoy homemade books with photographs or magazines with pictures of people.
- Parents do not have to take all the responsibility for reading to the baby. Encourage brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors to get into the act.

Reading to a Willing Audience: Babies Who Stay Put

Young babies usually go through a stage where they pretty much "stay put"—they're not yet moving around under their own power. While they may not be mobile, they are growing and learning. They strengthen their ability to focus their eyes at various distances, learn to control their head and body movements, and develop muscle tone and strength. They are active listeners, turning their heads to find the source of voices and other sounds. They experiment with making sounds of pleasure and practice imitating sounds they hear in adult and sibling conversations. They begin to use specific forms of communication including distinctive cries, cooing, and babbling.

Shared reading experiences help babies develop in all these areas. Books and pictures stimulate them to use their eyes. Being held in loving arms during a story provides secure physical support as they learn to master their movements.

The sound of spoken words increases their awareness of language. Reading together becomes a reassuring experience that strengthens associations between books and being cherished. Furthermore, at a time when babies aren't yet venturing into the world on their own, books help their families bring the world to them.

Hints for reading with babies who stay put

- Babies who are fussy and need to be rocked or cuddled may calm down even more if someone reads aloud to them. What's being read isn't important; even football scores or the classified ads can be read in a soothing voice.
- A front pack that supports the baby close to a family member's chest can free the reader's hands to hold a book and turn pages. Reading aloud thus becomes a bit easier, especially if other siblings are involved.
- Even though many baby items are colored pink and light blue, younger babies are often more attracted to bright, clear colors or strong contrasts. Offer books with bold designs, pictures, or photographs.
- Babies are especially drawn to pictures of faces, particularly those of other babies and children. Family and women's magazines often have advertisements or article illustrations that show people of all ages. Readers can point to facial features in the pictures and then to the same features on themselves or the baby.
- Babies who are developing the muscles used to turn and lift their heads need supervised "tummy time" when they can lie on their stomachs. Propping up board books either in front of or beside the babies gives them something interesting to look at when they move their heads to a new position.
- As babies begin to sit up, they enjoy holding, looking at, and even chewing on books designed with them in mind. Encourage their exploration by giving them sturdy cardboard, plastic, or cloth books that are made of safe, nontoxic materials and that can't be chewed into chokeable pieces.
- Babies enjoy looking at books with pictures of familiar objects and activities—things they can see, handle, or experience "for real" in their daily lives. Books about toys, pets, and household items are often popular.
- Other children fascinate babies. Families can recruit older siblings or neighbor children to show pictures and tell or read stories to babies.

Reading Reaches Out: Crawpers, Crawlers, and Cruisers

As babies learn to turn over and sit up, their whole perspective on the world changes. They move their heads and use their eyes to look around their environment with more purpose and control. In a sitting position, their hands are free to grasp, release, and manipulate things. Their world widens further when they discover that wiggling, stretching, and scooting gets them to new places and additional objects. When they learn to crawl and then to pull themselves to a standing position and cruise around by holding on for support, babies become truly active explorers.

During this same period, babies' social and cognitive horizons also expand. They experiment with a range of sounds and facial expressions and no longer have to rely on crying as a major method of expressing themselves. They build connections between spoken words and the names of people, objects, or actions. They recognize and seek out family members and friends—and are often wary of strangers. While much of their thinking and many of their actions are based on what they see, hear, or need at the moment, they also become aware that people and objects exist even when they're not actually present. Babies remember and respond to familiar routines such as bath-story-song (probably the same song, night after night) before going to bed. They learn to trust people and their environment when they experience consistent care and predictable patterns in their daily lives.

Once again, shared reading complements the developmental surges that take place among these wiggly little explorers. They can focus on pictures of various sizes, shapes, and colors. They can look where someone points and start pointing to things themselves. They can respond to the facial expressions they see and react to changes in the tone of voice of their reading partners. They can find, reach for, and hold favorite books. They can even start learning to turn the pages of sturdy books.

Long before they can actually say words, babies are learning to understand words. Books and picture albums provide a perfect opportunity for an adult to point out and name people, things, and actions. Some babies will even enjoy looking for the real objects or imitating the actions that they see in books. If children learn that sharing books is a regular part of their day, not only will they have the security of knowing that someone regularly makes time for them, but they will also be well on their way to a lifetime habit of reading.

Hints for reading with creepers, crawlers, and cruisers

- Now that babies can move about on their own, they may not want to sit still for a whole story or even a whole page. Short, frequent exposure to books, even just a page or two at a time, may be more successful than trying to read a whole book in one sitting.
- Match the type and pace of the reading activity to the babies' interests and needs. Sometimes pointing to and naming things may be more popular than following an actual story. At other times the process of turning the pages may be the whole focus. If babies are cranky or tired, cuddle up with a book that can be read in a soft, calm, singsong pattern.
- Help babies make connections between what they see in books and objects in the real world. For example, the reader can point to a picture of a shoe, saying, "There's a shoe," and then look around the room and ask, "Do we have some shoes? Where are our shoes?" The reader can then point to some real shoes and say, "There they are!" Family members can play this game with all sorts of household objects; soon the babies will be helping with the finding and pointing.
- Some babies' favorite books are family picture albums. Creating such an album can be an especially meaningful adult literacy project. Simple, sturdy books with one or two family members per page are easiest to use with babies. Pictures of friends or relatives—even those who do not live nearby—can help build and support strong relationships.
- If babies are prone to tearing pages, put away the books with lightweight paper pages for a while. Offer books made of durable nontoxic materials: cardboard, plastic, laminated paper, or cloth. When ready to try paper pages again, the family can start with old magazines or advertising inserts. Babies can practice turning these pages gently and carefully, but it won't be a disaster if they do rip a page.
- Look for special times when reading together can become part of the daily routine. While bedtime stories are a common tradition, bedtime doesn't have to be the only time families regularly share books. Naptime stories, waking-up stories, bath-time stories, maybe even stories for dessert are just some of the possibilities. The busy family can also read on the bus, in the car, and while waiting in line. When possible, families should have one or two times when babies can count on books being available.

Reading on the Run: Toddlers Take Off

Toddlers don't usually toddle for long—they take off! This is a period of dramatic development in many different areas. Toddlers begin by walking without help; before long they're dancing, climbing, jumping, running, and twirling. Their hand skills continue to improve and they're ready to explore (with supervision) how crayons and markers work. They like filling up and dumping out various kinds of containers. They discover the possibilities of building with blocks and putting together simple puzzles.

Because they love to make things happen, toddlers often experiment with relationships between cause and effect. They try something out (such as unloading all the pans from a kitchen cupboard), consider the results, and are off to the next discovery. This same curiosity applies to learning about relationships with other people. They try out different behaviors and observe the reactions of people around them. Their primary intent is not to irritate people, but rather to learn—very directly—how the world operates. The so-called “terrible twos” are much easier to navigate when children's efforts are viewed as research into what does and doesn't work, rather than as deliberate attempts to annoy. Adults can help by providing physically and emotionally safe environments for toddlers to discover the positive and negative consequences of their actions.

Reading together plays right into toddlers' thirst for knowledge. When toddlers point a stubby little finger at a picture and demand “What dat?” they are making a direct request for information. The patient readers who answer these questions again and again help toddlers build the vocabulary they need to become speakers, readers, and writers. As their understanding and experience grows, the kinds of questions toddlers ask will expand. Asking and answering questions about the story and pictures may be more interesting for some toddlers than hearing the story read straight through.

Shared reading experiences give toddlers access not just to words, but also to ideas. Books help toddlers begin to understand and categorize their world. They can learn that cows say *moo* and cats say *meow*. They find out that cars, bikes, scooters, and roller skates all have wheels. Just as toddlers like to see what happens when they try things out themselves, they will also be interested in the cause-and-

effect events in picture books. They might laugh when they see a picture of someone being tickled, sway back and forth when the story tells about music and dancing, or say “Oh-oh!” when they see a picture of spilled milk. Finally, during this hectic period of development, reading together can provide a welcome break in busy days—a soothing oasis of time when both toddlers and their families can slow down and catch their breaths before heading off to the next adventure.

Hints for reading with toddlers

- Follow the toddlers' interests and leads. Let them help choose what books to read or look at. Have books available that deal with animals, objects, or events that they are familiar with and enjoy. Toddler's attention spans vary! Don't prolong the reading experience if a toddler is too restless or is just not interested.
- Be flexible. Sometimes it works to read the whole story, especially if there are only a few words or sentences on the page. At other times it's better to focus just on the pictures. Some toddlers like to cuddle up with the reader. Others might want to stand up or move about. Holding a stuffed animal or a small toy helps some toddlers focus their attention.
- Choose interesting and comfortable places to read. Try reading in chairs, on the couch, on the floor, in bed, or in the bathroom. Reading outside can also be an adventure for toddlers. Families can take an old blanket or some pillows outside for a read-aloud picnic.
- Encourage toddlers to talk about what they see in books and magazines and on signs and posters. Comment on the things that might interest them. Wonder out loud about what something is or what will happen next. Pause frequently to give toddlers opportunities to respond, make comments, or ask questions.
- Continue to help toddlers make connections between what they see in books and what they see in the real world. Make comments such as, “Look, here are some blueberries just like the ones Sal picked in the book we read yesterday.”
- Keep small baskets, bags, or boxes of books and magazines handy in the kitchen, the living room, bedrooms, the car, and other places where toddlers regularly spend time. The books are then readily available for toddlers to look at either on their own or with a reader. The more places



children find books, the better.

- Start introducing toddlers to the other things people read. Show them recipes on the backs of food boxes. Spread out the sheet of instructions for assembling a new toy or household item. Point out street, store, and safety signs.

Putting It All Together

Babies and toddlers are keen observers of their family, home, and community. Right from the start, the people who love and care for them need to demonstrate that reading is a valuable, enjoyable skill. The best possible way to do this is by setting a good example. Family literacy practitioners support literacy learning when they encourage families to:

- Read to their babies and toddlers
- Let their babies and toddlers see them reading for practical purposes or for pleasure
- Point out letters and words to their babies and toddlers, in a playful manner, whenever possible

In *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, the authors state: "Children of all ages love the intimacy of reading with an adult, either one-on-one or with only a few other children. Teachers and caregivers should seek out daily opportunities to read with every child. And since regular reading at home is a potent force in promoting children's literacy, any actions . . . [that] encourage parent's reading with children can reap substantial long-term benefits" (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000, p. 29). It's never too early to encourage the habit of reading. By helping families discover the joys of sharing books with babies and toddlers, family literacy practitioners can support and sustain a lifelong pattern of literacy learning.

Authors' Note

This article is based on material prepared by the authors for *Sharing Literacy*, a training module developed for Idaho's State Department of Education Even Start program, and for *Early Literacy: A Collaborative Approach*, supported by IDEAs That Work, U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, Grant #324R000015, and by the BEST Project, Center on Disabilities and Human Development, University of Idaho.

The authors wish to acknowledge the support and feedback of Valerie Aker, Even Start Family Literacy Program Coordinator, Idaho State Department of Education, and Lenea Pierzchanowski, BEST Project Research Assistant/Curriculum Specialist. For further information about the *Sharing Literacy* or *Early Literacy* training modules, please contact the authors at ldanahy@uidaho.edu.

References

Danahy, L. & Olson, J. (2001). *Early literacy: A collaborative approach*. Moscow, ID: BEST Project, CDHD.

Idaho's State Department of Education. (2002). *Sharing literacy: A module for Idaho's Even Start programs*. Boise, ID: Idaho's State Department of Education.

Logue, M.E. (2000). *Implications of brain development research for Even Start family literacy programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Neuman, S.B., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Laurie Danahy, M.S., has worked in the early childhood field for over 25 years as a teacher, researcher, writer, trainer, and curriculum specialist. She currently develops materials and provides training through various grant projects focused on meeting the diverse needs of young children and their families.

Jennifer Olson, Ph.D., has been a faculty member at the University of Idaho for 15 years, teaching courses in early childhood special education and teamwork. She directs numerous federal and state projects and has published widely on the topic of team development and the efficacy of inservice training.

Designer Literacy

Reading the Labels

Elsa Auerbach

Family literacy is the new “designer” literacy (like designer jeans): It is seen as a state-of-the-art way of connecting parents and children by promoting the literacy development of both. The term “family literacy” conjures up images of parents and children snuggling up with a good book in front of a fireplace; it is promoted as a way of helping kids do better in school while at the same time providing parents with the skills to climb out of poverty. The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) says that family literacy is the best long-term solution to America’s poverty problem, better even than school reform for “tackling under-education and all the related social and economic problems” (Darling, 1992: 1). According to a 1996 NCFL document, the long-term benefits of family literacy will include higher income, healthier families, better use of community resources, reduction in school failure, and the reduction in need for social services. Family literacy is being tied to welfare reform as a step in the process of economic self-sufficiency.

So how could anyone look at family literacy critically? I think it is exactly because family literacy and its advocates promise so much that we need to examine it carefully before jumping on the bandwagon. We need to be critical precisely because family literacy is one of the few educational reform initiatives that is *gaining* rather than *losing* momentum as we approach the next millennium. The fact that so many advocates use the same terminology—the enticing discourse of empowering parents, respecting cultural diversity, and building on family strengths—makes the challenge even greater for practitioners. This common discourse masks fundamental underlying differences between approaches which are based on different assumptions as well as having different implications for practice. In this article, I’ll briefly outline what I see as the three main tendencies in current family literacy programming so that practitioners can better understand the differences and locate

themselves in relation to them. I call these three tendencies *the intervention prevention approach* to family literacy, *the multiple literacies approach*, and *the social change approach*.

The Intervention Prevention Approach

The dominant model today is the intervention-prevention model. The intervention-prevention approach rests on the assumption that without parental support, schools can’t carry out their work. The stated objective of the NCFL is “to break the intergenerational cycle of undereducation and poverty, one family at a time, by changing the ‘messages’

communicated in the home...” (Darling & Hayes, 1996) This, of course, presupposes that existing messages are flawed. In this analysis, the problem is framed in terms of inadequate parental literacy support; the assumption is that there’s a given body of knowledge about what constitutes “good” literacy and parenting practices, which experts have identified and which needs to be transmitted to undereducated parents.

In terms of programming, there are two extremes in this model: On one end of the

spectrum are what I would call “bullet” programs which feature single-practice solutions such as training parents to read stories to their children or having schools send books home in brightly colored backpacks. Most of these programs are premised on the notion that it is necessary to find ways of extending school reading experiences into the home. On the other end of the spectrum are programs that advocate a comprehensive model with four components: preschool for children, adult literacy classes for parents, parenting classes for parents, and structured parent-child interaction times.

In 1994, a group of literacy researchers, scholars, and practitioners from around the world met and drafted an International Declaration of Principles on Family Literacy, which critiqued this model. The declaration and supporting documents have since been published in a book edited by

We need to be critical precisely because family literacy is one of the few educational reform initiatives that is gaining rather than losing momentum as we approach the next millennium.



Denny Taylor (who coined the term *family literacy*) called *Many Families, Many Literacies*. These scholars argue that the intervention model completely overlooks the many studies that show that culturally diverse families already go to great lengths to support their children but are constrained by systemic factors. The declaration argues that structural and pedagogical problems, more than family literacy practices, impede children's literacy development and that parenting classes alone will not equalize outcomes.

A second critique of the intervention programs is that they may actually undermine existing culture-specific literacy practices. For example, bullet programs which focus on only one kind of literacy event—usually story-reading—may ignore oral forms of literacy preparation and other positive practices such as storytelling or reading from religious texts. There is a body of research that suggests that the nurturing of existing cultural and linguistic resources is a critical basis, not only for enhancing cultural identity, but for supporting academic achievement.

A third argument is that aside from being based on faulty assumptions about parents' values, practices, and strategies for dealing with complex challenges, these programs are based on questionable ethical assumptions. Put bluntly, they claim to know how families should live their lives. Even programs that invoke the "strengths" rhetoric often use this rhetoric as a pretext for intervening in the internal workings of family life. They teach parenting skills based on a middle-class model of how to discipline children, talk to them, watch TV with them, and play with them.

The authors of *Many Families, Many Literacies* and others say that the most disturbing aspect of the intervention model is that it justifies putting responsibility for broad social problems on families' shoulders. The NCFL goes so far as to suggest that unless parents change their messages to children, the problems of education, poverty, unemployment, crime, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy cannot be solved. This view discounts structural inequalities and attributes success or failure to the efforts of individuals, which usually means—guess who—the mothers.

The Multiple Literacies Approach

The second tendency, which I call the multiple literacies approach, uses the same terms that are used in the intervention prevention model (such as *cultural sensitivity* and

empowerment) but is based on completely different assumptions and goals. Where the intervention model defines the problem as flawed home literacy practices, the multiple literacies perspective defines the problem as a mismatch between culturally variable home literacy practices and school literacies. It sees the solution as investigating and validating students' multiple literacies and cultural resources in order to shape schooling. Its goal is cultural affirmation rather than cultural assimilation.

The basic assumption of the multiple literacies perspective is that, whatever their literacy proficiency, learners bring with them culture-specific literacy practices and ways of knowing; it posits that regardless of their educational background, the households of poor and language minority families are rich with knowledge that may often go unrecognized and untapped by educators. According to this view, the starting point for teaching must be a stance of inquiry: The first task of educators is to listen to students, to find out about their lives and cultural contexts, and to make room for their literacy practices in teaching. There are a number of ways that programs implement this principle. In some cases, teachers are trained as ethnographers to investigate home and community literacy practices for the purpose of informing instruction; for example, Luis Moll and his colleagues have developed a framework in which teachers research the households of their students in order to uncover what he calls the "funds of knowledge" that can then inform curricula. In other cases, learners participate in the research themselves as co-investigators of literacy practices, values, or beliefs.

Another program feature in this approach is the incorporation of culturally familiar genres and content into the curriculum. Genres such as folktales, fables, and proverbs are used as texts. Themes related to the heritage culture are explored; a project for Mexican-American parents, for example, included units on plants (including herbal medicines and cotton harvesting) that drew on the learners' agricultural background. Students share stories, reading and writing about childhood memories or the experiences, trials, and triumphs of coming to a new culture. Rather than focusing on helping with homework, classes focus on affirming participants' histories and valuing their voices.

Some programs also incorporate culturally familiar pedagogical practices; in the project that I worked with,

some of the classes opened with a prayer and included dictation exercises at the students' insistence. This approach also emphasizes promoting first language literacy as a vehicle for cultural maintenance. Students in a Hmong project in California, for example, wanted to learn to read and write in Hmong in order to preserve their first language and pass it on to their children (Kang, Keuhn, & Herrell, 1996). Finally, this model often promotes hiring teachers who come from the same cultural backgrounds as the learners because they are likely to be familiar with the learners' cultures, languages, and literacy practices.

The Social Change Approach

The third perspective, the social change approach, encompasses all of the principles of the multiple-literacies tendency but goes beyond them, emphasizing issues of power as well as culture. Like the other approaches, it uses the discourse of strengths and empowerment, but differs in terms

of its assumptions and goals. The central assumption of this perspective is that problems of marginalized people originate in a complex interaction of political, social, and economic factors rather than in family inadequacies or differences between home and school cultures. Since it is the conditions created by institutional and structural forces that shape access to literacy acquisition, the goals in a social change view focus more on changing the institutions and addressing the conditions that give rise to poverty than on changing families. This view means seeing children's literacy acquisition as shaped by many forces, only one of which is parental input. Of course this model is nothing new: it's really applying a Freirean approach, which argues that the acquisition of literacy in itself does not lead to empowerment or solve economic problems but that literacy must be linked to a critical understanding of the social context and move toward action to challenge oppressive conditions.

This perspective asks that family literacy programs start

Comparing Perspectives on Family Literacy

Intervention Prevention <i>The problem:</i> Inadequate home values and practices <i>The solution:</i> Intervention to change values, behaviors, and literacy practices <i>Features:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote cultural assimilation into mainstream literacy, schooling, and parenting practices/behaviors • Teach parents mainstream values and behaviors • Focus on single practice model • Teach English literacy • Economic salvation (individual and national) 	Multiple Literacies <i>The problem:</i> Cultural mismatch <i>The solution:</i> Cultural affirmation, diversification of literacy practices <i>Features:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume a stance of inquiry • Investigate culture-specific literacy practices and ways of knowing • Integrate culturally familiar genres and content • Incorporate culturally familiar pedagogical practices • Negotiate issues of cultural difference • Maintain first language • Train and hire teachers from the learners' communities 	Social Change <i>The problem:</i> Systemic, structural inequities; imbalance in power relationships <i>The solution:</i> Work toward transforming institutions and social conditions <i>Features:</i> Include features of multiple literacies model as well as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on issues of power • Foster participant control • Incorporate dialogue as pedagogical process • Incorporate critical social issues as content • Strategize for action and social change
---	--	---



not with a schooling agenda, but with a family and community agenda. It starts with what's important to parents, families, and communities, so that literacy can be used to address the struggles of their everyday lives. This means beginning with questions, not solutions. Questions might include: What are the compelling issues in parents' own lives and the lives of their communities? What are families already doing and what do they want to do with literacy? What are parents' concerns or discomforts about their children's schooling? What are the organizational forms that exist or might exist in the communities from which participants can draw strength in addressing their concerns?

Another feature in this model relates to the issue of participant control. This aspect of the model is concerned with such questions as: Who decides a program is necessary and gets it going? Who gets to name the issues, choose the themes, determine the goals? Who decides what counts as progress? Who speaks for the project? How are the teachers chosen? In some cases, these programs are initiated by parents themselves in order to address needs they have identified. In others, learners are involved in decision-making roles through student councils that participate in curriculum, hiring, and administrative decisions.

A third feature of the social change perspective is the notion of dialogue as a key pedagogical process. In place of skills training or the transfer of information from experts to learners, this model stresses an exchange among peers; participants share their experiences in order to gain a critical understanding of their social nature. In some cases, this dialogue takes the form of storytelling (Arrastía, 1995). Often, content is drawn from critical social issues in participants' lives. For example, parents in a family literacy program in Los Angeles that began the week after the "L.A. riots" used the classes to explore their fears and concerns; they then wrote about their experiences and published a book for local distribution (Orellana, 1996). Other projects used reading and writing to explore issues related to education, neighborhoods, childrearing, schools, jobs, and immigration.

A final important feature of this perspective is the goal of action for social change. Once participants have an increased understanding of the social nature of problems they are confronting (for example, that their children's problems in schools may be the result of institutional practices), they may

work together to challenge the institutions or change the conditions that impede literacy acquisition. Actions can take many forms, from advocating for a particular kind of literacy program to publishing a book on tenants rights for the wider community. One of the most common forms of action is that participants become engaged in advocacy related to their children's schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). The Right Question Project in Boston trains parents become advocates for themselves and their children.

So What?

The point of this analysis is not to put programs into boxes and throw stones at them. The categories really are constructs; they represent a way of thinking about things, not visible, cast-in-stone realities. Actually, programs probably fall along a continuum, and many programs have features of more than one model. For example, one Massachusetts family literacy program director argues that the three paradigms represented developmental stages in the evolution of her project.

So what are the implications of this analysis for practitioners? I think the first point is that it's important to look beyond surface rhetoric and really interrogate the ideological basis for any family literacy model. This is a question of what's the cart and what's the horse: Too often we only look at underlying assumptions as an afterthought.

Secondly, I think that we need to consider some of the claims for family literacy critically, being clear about what it can and can't do. I see family literacy as one piece of a much bigger puzzle. We in the U.S. are incredibly good at commodifying and packaging all kinds of things. I think that family literacy is now being literally marketed as a solution to problems which are monumental and complex; we need to be extremely careful about accepting all the wonderful promises of family literacy at face value.

In line with this, I think a key lesson from much of the ethnographic research is that the models that work best are those that are rooted in the specific contexts and conditions of participants' lives. This means, on the one hand, investigating the rich cultural forms that already exist, and, on the other, connecting literacy education to the ongoing struggles that people are engaged in. It does not mean imposing a pre-determined one-size-fits-all model.

This leads to a fourth point, which is a structural one. One

of the lessons of the adult education research is that programs are most effective when they are connected to the ongoing activities of participants' lives. This means broadening the definition of what counts as family literacy, moving beyond a narrow focus on parent-child interactions. Structurally, it may mean connecting literacy work to the struggles for women's equality within families, communities, and workplaces. It may mean connecting with struggles for better health care or tenants' rights. And it may mean connecting programming to community-based or women's organizations, rather than just to day-care centers or schools.

My hope is that the categories I've outlined, even if they are constructs, serve the function of helping people to think about the underlying assumptions of their own work and to ask questions about it. These questions might include:

- What's it for? What's its aim?
- Is it designed to change families to become more like mainstream families?
- Or is it designed to affirm what families already do and extend their existing repertoire of strategies?
- Or is it designed to challenge structures that marginalize them and give them a greater voice in shaping their lives and their children's lives?
- Who decides on the content and goals?
- To what extent does it build in investigation of existing practices? To what extent does it take into account what's already going on in families and communities in terms of both their strengths and their concerns?
- Does it address contextual issues in parents' lives, their struggles for survival and a better life? Does it connect to ongoing struggles for change?

Finally we need to look directly to participants and ask what can we learn from them and how we can insure that they lead the way.

References

- Arrastía, M. (1995). Our stories to transform them: A source of authentic literacy. In G. Weinstein-Shr and E. Quintero (Eds.), *Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect generations*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, Inc.
- Darling, S. (1992). *Family literacy: The need and the promise*. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).
- Darling, S. & Hayes, A. (1996). *The power of family literacy: A summary of research findings*. Louisville, KY: NCFL.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1991). Involving parents in the schools: A process of empowerment. *American Journal of Education*, 100 (1).
- Kang, H-W., Keuhn, P., & Herrell, A. (1996). The Hmong Literacy Project: Parents working to preserve the past and ensure the future. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students. Special Issue*.

Note

This article was reprinted with permission from *Bright Ideas*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Spring 1998), published by SABES/World Education of Boston.

Elsa Auerbach is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts–Boston where she teaches courses on ESOL and teacher preparation. She was Coordinator of the UMass–Boston English Family Literacy Project in the late 1980s.



NESA Announcements

A Celebration of Even Start

The 9th Annual National Even Start Association Conference

October 18-22, 2003 in San Diego

For registration materials or additional information, visit the NESA website at www.evenstart.org, or call NESA at 800.977.3731. The deadline for registration is October 3, 2003. For hotel information contact the Town & Country Resort and Convention Center at 800.772.8527 or www.towncountry.com.

Keynote Speakers

Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary, and founder of Operation Respect, presents a call to action in a mini-concert format. Peter's Don't Laugh at Me project plays a prominent role nationwide to address disrespect, ridicule, and bullying. Through his music, Peter encourages teachers, parents, youth, and youth workers to collaborate and teach the value of respect and help build caring and responsible communities.

Rita Pierson, Ed.D., is an educator and licensed professional counselor whose roles have included elementary regular and special education teacher, junior high school teacher, counselor, assistant principal, director, and testing coordinator. Rita has developed and implemented a school/community involvement program for a large urban elementary school. She also has organized and trained an in-school crisis team for students in need of immediate intervention. An experienced consultant, Rita has presented numerous workshops for aha! Process, Inc. since 1997.

Congressman Patrick Kennedy, invited.

Pre-conference sessions will include:

October 18

- Jean Feldman: A Focus on Early Childhood Education
- Chris Dwyer: A Focus on the Parenting Education Profile/Even Start
- Judy Banfield and Kristi Myatt: A Focus on Integrating Family Literacy Components
- Arthur Langer: A Focus on Adult Education

October 19

- Laura Bercovitz: Even Start and School-Aged Children
- Tanya Wilkins: Working with Adults with Special Learning Characteristics
- Claudia M. Ullman: Family Literacy Forum Writing Retreat
- Scott Himelstein, Derek Link, and Drew Schlossberg: Building Financial Capacity for Your Even Start Program
- New Even Start Grantee Orientation

NESA Academy

NESA Academies provide opportunities for in-depth study. Past academies have included *Literacy Begins at Birth* with Peter Mangione, Diane Trister-Dodge, and Janet Dean; *Research Implications for Even Start Practice: Strategies for Developing Successful Readers* with Craig Ramey and Douglas Powell; *Research Implications for Even Start Practice: Strategies for Developing Successful Writers* with Judy Schickendanz and Claudia M. Ullman.

For more information about the 2004 NESA Academy, contact NESA at 800.977.3731 or visit the NESA website at www.evenstart.org.

LAC Announcements

Family Literacy Initiative

The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) has embarked on a groundbreaking initiative aimed at strengthening family literacy services. This journal is one part of that initiative, funded in part by the Altman Foundation.

Family Literacy Survey and Directory

The LAC is conducting a comprehensive survey of New York City family literacy programs. The result will be a searchable, interactive web-based database at www.lacnyc.org/familylit, as well as a print resource guide. These products will enable social service and literacy professionals to refer prospective students and volunteers to appropriate and accessible classes. By publicizing the survey findings, the LAC will highlight the broad range of programs that provide literacy and other educational services to parents, children, and families. These findings will also enable funders and policymakers to allocate money and other resources where they are most needed.

New York City family literacy programs that would like to be included in the directory should contact familylit@lacnyc.org or 212.803.3344.

Research on Best Practices

The next phase of the LAC's family literacy initiative is a research project that will examine NYC family literacy programs and identify exemplary practices. Case studies of best practices will be disseminated widely, increasing the rigor and prominence of family literacy instruction. Public seminars, workshops, and other professional development activities will encourage adoption of programs based on exemplary practices identified in the research.

Health Literacy Resource Center

In partnership with the City of New York and various foundations and corporations, the LAC is forming a new Health Literacy Resource Center. The HLRC will offer extensive resources and professional development to the adult and family literacy community. The HLRC will foster partnerships between health providers and literacy programs to enhance the ability of low-income New Yorkers to:

- Understand and use information that can help improve their family's health
- Communicate more effectively with their health care providers
- Access free or low-cost health care
- Minimize the effect of health issues on employment
- Access current health information using media and technology

For information, please visit our website at www.lacnyc.org or contact Elyse Barbell Rudolph, Executive Director, at elyser@lacnyc.org or 212.803.3351.

About the National Even Start Association

The National Even Start Association (NESA) provides a national voice and vision for Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships. NESA professional development activities include: *Family Literacy Forum*, a semi-annual journal of family literacy education; an annual conference; academies providing in-depth study of particular areas of literacy education; an orientation for new Even Start grantees; and notification of events and legislation affecting Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships. NESA legislative activities include: monitoring legislation affecting Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships at the federal and state levels; advising Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships regarding the potential impact of legislation; providing advocacy training to Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships; providing input to Congress and the Senate on Even Start legislation and reauthorization; and the introduction of HR5036 (with Congresswoman Susan Davis) to appropriate funding to implement national training and technical assistance opportunities for local programs. For further information, please call NESA at 800.977.3731 or visit the NESA website at www.evenstart.org.

About the LAC

The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) is the hub of training and resources for adult literacy educators throughout New York City. Each year the LAC provides professional development and technical assistance for the staff of more than 500 adult literacy, ESOL, GED, union education, family literacy, workforce development, and after-school programs serving more than 100,000 youth and adults. Other services include a student and program data analysis system, a free hotline providing multilingual referral services for adults and youth seeking education and training programs in New York State, a library of print and multimedia resources, and a computer lab. The LAC serves as liaison among a variety of literacy providers based in libraries, community colleges, public schools, human resource agencies, union education programs, and community-based organizations; it in turn links those organizations to city, state, and federal policymakers. In addition to its annual journal, the LAC publishes a newsletter, directories, and reports, all of which, along with a host of other literacy resources, are available online at www.lacnyc.org.

Family Literacy Forum Call for Papers

Family Literacy Forum is a national, peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the National Even Start Association. *Family Literacy Forum* is committed to bringing the voices, ideas, and experiences of individuals in the field to the forefront of discussions about the literacy development of families in home, community, and school-based settings.

Family Literacy Forum accepts manuscripts that focus on practice, theory, and research in family literacy education. We welcome manuscripts that discuss the following: practical approaches related to working with families and literacy; personal essays, reflections or opinion pieces related to family literacy; research and evaluation related to family literacy program development; and issues of assessment and standards in the field. Manuscripts for the next issue are due January 8, 2004. For submission guidelines and other editorial correspondence, contact Claudia M. Ullman, Editor, One Gracie Terrace, New York, NY 10028, or email cullman2@nyc.rr.com.

Literacy Harvest Call for Papers

Published by the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), *Literacy Harvest* is an annual theme-based journal by and for practitioners and researchers in adult, youth, and family literacy.

The LAC solicits articles for the September 2004 issue. The theme of this issue is health literacy in adult, youth, and family literacy education. We particularly welcome research-based articles on theory, practice, or theory into practice in the area of health literacy. Descriptions of innovative health literacy practice with demonstrable positive outcomes are also appropriate.

Manuscripts are due May 1, 2004. For submission guidelines or other editorial queries, contact Jan Gallagher, Editor, Literacy Assistance Center, 32 Broadway, 10th floor, New York, NY 10004, telephone 212.803.3332, or email jang@lacnyc.org.



32 Broadway
Tenth Floor
New York
NY 10004

Literacy Assistance Center

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X

This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").