# Teaming Up for Literacy

## Examining Participants' Contributions to a Collaborative Family-Based Program

### Tracey Kumar

### Introduction

For decades the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2013) has reported a reading proficiency gap between White, middle-class students, and students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In an effort to equalize reading proficiency across demographics, educators have designed and implemented countless family literacy programs.

As Wasik and Hermann (2004) explain, *family literacy programs* are "interventions that enhance family members' literacy skills through an intergenerational focus" (p. 3). Family literacy programs incorporate a variety of components, including early childhood literacy, adult literacy, parenting education, and engagement in shared reading activities (Chance, 2010; Swick, 2009; Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). Through these and other components, family literacy programs strive to ameliorate the reading proficiency of ostensibly "at-risk" children and their parents (Auerbach, 1995; Elish-Piper, 2000; Gadsden, 2008).

In spite of their documented benefits (e.g., Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Stephenson, Parrila, & Georgiou, 2008), family literacy programs have been met with intense criticism. Critics claim that many family literacy programs are developed in a top-down fashion, with minimal input from participants or community members (Reyes & Torres, 2007). Often these programs focus on classroom-based literacy practices (Elish-Piper, 2000; Morrow, Paratore, Graber, Harrison, & Tracey, 1993; Kumar, 2014) and literacy practices linked to White, middle-class families (Auerbach, 1990; Kumar, 2014; Reyes & Torres, 2007).

As a result, these programs marginalize

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participants' preexisting literacy practices (Auerbach, 1994; Kumar, 2014; Reyes & Torres, 2007), colonize participants with mainstream Eurocentric practices (Reyes & Torres, 2007), and promote deficit views of families from diverse backgrounds (Gadsden, 2004; Taylor, 1993). These programs, often categorized as intervention prevention (Auerbach, 1995), rest on the belief that diverse families lack the skills and dispositions to support their children's literacy development (Auerbach, 1995; Gadsden, 2008).

To counter these deficit views many researchers have documented the rich literacy practices of diverse families (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Heath, 1982, 1983; Johnson, 2010; Lynch, 2009; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). For example, in a two-year ethnographic study Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found that low-income African-American parents not only engaged in reading and writing but also supported their children's literacy development by helping with homework, facilitating writing practice, and providing necessary materials.

More recently Johnson (2010) studied a multigenerational family of African-American descent and found that the family used literacy for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to managing financial responsibilities, keeping abreast of current events, and facilitating children's literacy growth. These and other studies challenge the assertion that diverse families are deficient in terms of their literacy practices.

Many family educators have designed programs that reflect the languages (Collier & Auerbach, 2011; Elias, Hay, Homel, Freiburg, Prothero, & Ernst, 2006; Machado-Casas, Sànchez, & Ek, 2014; Wessels, 2014), cultures (McNair, 2011; Soto Huerta & Riojas-Cortez, 2011) and everyday literacy practices (Ceprano & Bontempo, 2009/2010; Purcell-Gates, Lenters, McTa-

vish, & Anderson, 2014) of their participants. McNair (2011) developed a family literacy program which highlighted literature and themes from African-American culture. For that purpose McNair selected books with African-American characters and themes and hosted guest speakers of African-American descent.

Similarly Soto Huerta and Riojas-Cortez (2011) designed a family literacy workshop around Mexican-American families' knowledge of medicinal herbs. They used medicinal herbs as a theme and involved parents and children in relevant literacy-related activities.

In an effort to maximize the relevance of their programs many family educators have utilized participant input (Feiler, 2005; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Tett, 2000; Timmons et al., 2008; Toso et al., 2009). For example, Feiler (2005) describes a case study in which a teacher's aide conducted home visits to learn about a family's needs, goals, and daily routine. The teacher's aide collaborated with the family to design activities that not only fit into their existing routine but also reflected the child's interests.

Similarly Timmons, Walton, O'Keefe, and Wagner (2008) worked with families and elders from a Mi'kmaw community to identify their literacy-related needs and to select themes for ten culturally relevant literacy modules. They developed modules that not only addressed participants' literacy-related needs but also reflected their cultural heritage. At the conclusion of the program Timmons and colleagues revised the modules based on feedback from program participants.

The literature on family literacy programs has amply demonstrated that participants can make valuable contributions to program design, implementation, and evaluation. However, written accounts of these programs tend to emphasize the process by which they were developed and the ways in which participants responded to program offerings. Few studies have

focused specifically on participants' contributions to such programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine participants' contributions to the design, implementation, and evaluation of a university-based family literacy program which served families from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. To achieve that aim this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are participants' expressed needs and concerns regarding family literacy?

2. What contributions do participants' make as they take part in family literacy workshops?

3. What is the nature of participants' evaluative feedback regarding the workshops and program?

### Conceptual Framework

This study of participants' contributions to a university-based family literacy program was informed by both *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992) and *multiple literacies* (Auerbach, 1995). Moll (1992) defines *funds of knowledge* as "the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that houses use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive" (p. 21). Moll and other researchers have used ethnographic methods to document the funds of knowledge found in diverse households and communities (Browning-Aiken, 2005; Gonzàlez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzàlez, 1992; Sandoval-Taylor, 2005).

To illustrate these concepts Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzàlez (1992) studied families in working-class Mexican-American communities and pinpointed funds of knowledge related to agriculture, economics, medicine, and numerous other areas. Researchers have also examined funds of knowledge which are specifically related to education (Hedges, 2011; Hedges et al., 2011; Larrotta & Serrano, 2011; Riojas-Cortez, 2001). For example, Larrotta and Serrano (2011) studied adults enrolled in an English language course and found that they possessed funds of knowledge such as personal experiences, inquiry skills, learning strategies, resilience, and motivation.

Consistent with funds of knowledge, the *multiple literacies* model (Auerbach, 1995) utilizes participants' literacy practices as the basis for program content and curricula (Auerbach, 1995; Gadsden, 2008). This model rests on the assumption that "whatever their literacy proficiency, participants bring with them *culture-specific literacy practices and ways of knowing*" (Auerbach, 1995, p. 651). However, since the literacy practices of diverse families often differ from those found in "mainstream" contexts, the model positions educators as learners rather than experts (Auerbach, 1995).

In that role educators learn about participants' existing literacy practices and incorporate those practices into the content and curricula of their programs (Auerbach, 1995). Additionally, the multiple literacies model also emphasizes the importance of selecting materials which reflect participants' languages and cultures (Auerbach, 1995). To achieve these aims educators often involve participants in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their programs (Auerbach, 1995).

The present study examined participants' contributions to the design, implementation, and evaluation of a university-based family literacy program. In keeping with the literature on funds of knowledge, I (the researcher) conceptualized participants as competent contributors, with expertise and experience related to education, literacy, child development, and numerous other areas.

As a way of integrating participants' expertise and experiences into the program the multiple literacies model of family literacy was utilized. To that end, the program was designed around participants' expressed needs and concerns by asking participants to play an active role in the implementation of workshops and by soliciting feedback from participants regarding all aspects of the program. Participants' contributions were viewed not only as a source of information regarding family literacy but also as important part of the program curricula.

### Methodology

#### *Context and Participants*

The family literacy program addressed through this study was developed alongside a university-based tutoring program. The program was housed in the college of education at a large Hispanic-serving institution in a major city in the Southwestern U.S. Furthermore, the tutoring program was carried out in an urban, working-class area in which the majority of residents are Hispanic or Latina/o.

More specifically the tutoring program sought to improve the reading and writing skills of children who were experiencing difficulty with academic literacy. In an effort to improve their reading and writing skills the children participated in hour-long, one-on-one tutoring sessions once a week for approximately 14 weeks. The sessions were facilitated by teacher candidates enrolled in an undergraduate literacy course, mentored by graduate students preparing to become literacy coaches, and supervised by literacy faculty from the college of education.

While the tutoring program had long offered academic support for children, as well as a field component for undergraduate and graduate students, services for parents had not previously been incorporated. For that reason I was asked to design and implement a series of family literacy workshops aimed at the parents of children enrolled in the tutoring program.

As a White doctoral student working with families from backgrounds different from my own, I was concerned about how those differences—particularly differences of race and class—would impact the dynamics of the program. Therefore it was important to build rapport with the parents, learn about their existing literacy practices, plan sessions around their expressed needs and interests, and utilize participant-centered instructional methods in order to facilitate active engagement.

#### *Procedures*

The initial focus was to build rapport with parents. A first step was to engage the parents in conversations regarding topics such as pets, vacations, and television preferences. Inquiries were also made regarding their children and the concerns that brought them to the program. Parents were told that I had been asked to lead a series of workshops, to collect information regarding their needs and concerns, and to use that information to generate titles and descriptions for four workshops (See Table 1).

Then a sign-up sheet was created for each workshop and parents were invited to register. A handout which was intended to serve as a starting point for discussion was developed for each workshop. For that purpose I used knowledge that I had gained from informal discussions with the parents, and from my own experience working with diverse families.

The body of literature on culturally relevant literacy practices was also reviewed. I met with a faculty member who had expertise in elementary literacy instruction and working with diverse populations. Additionally, once participants had shared their own ideas and insights regarding each of the workshop topics, the handouts

were revised to include that new information.

The workshops were held on four consecutive Mondays while children were engaged in their individual tutoring sessions. Each workshop began with an overview of the ideas and resources listed on the handout. The parents were asked to discuss their experiences with those ideas and resources, and/or to share other ideas and resources that had proved helpful in supporting their child's literacy development. The parents were also invited to raise questions or concerns and to support each other by sharing their own experiences and funds of knowledge.

While this approached failed miserably during the first workshop, as parents had little to say about technology, it proved successful during the remaining workshops. Parents seemed eager to share their experiences, raise questions and concerns, and provide advice to other group members. At the end of each workshop written feedback was solicited regarding elements that parents found helpful and those that they felt were in need of revision.

### Participants

Participants in this study were parents of children enrolled in the university-based tutoring program. While I use the term *parent* to refer to any family member responsible for a child's well-being, such as grandparents, step-parents, and other caregivers, all of the participants self-identified as parents to their respective child(ren). Of the nine parents who participated in the family literacy program, six formally agreed to take part in the study by signing and returning an informed consent document. Therefore contributions from the remaining three parents were excluded from the data set.

Among the six study participants there were three females (50%) and three males (50%) with ages ranging from the late twenties to mid-forties. The racial and ethnic makeup of the group was 50% Hispanic or Latina/o, 33.3% Caucasian or European-American, and 16.7% African-American. While all of the participants were fluent in English, at least one of the participants was bilingual, with demonstrated proficiency in Spanish. Finally, one participant in the study reported previous enrollment in a self-contained special education classroom, and another reported receiving special education services.

### Data Collection

Data collection for this study occurred over several weeks as I worked with participants to design, implement, and evaluate the family literacy program. The data set addressed participants' literacy-related concerns, their contributions to the family literacy workshops, and their feedback on each of the four workshops. Prior to developing the workshops data regarding parents' literacy-related concerns was collected. For that purpose a form with a header and numbered blanks was created and photocopied for distribution to parents.

Parents were approached individually and asked if they would be willing to share their literacy-related concerns. Once they had agreed they were given a copy of the form and asked to list each concern on a separate line. I responded to questions that they had about the task, and informed them that I would return in a few minutes to collect the form. A total of 17 literacy-related concerns were listed by the six study participants. Additional concerns listed by the parents who did not provide informed consent were used to make decisions about workshop content; however, they are not addressed in the findings section of this manuscript.

To facilitate active engagement in each of the four workshops questions were posed such as: (1) Which of these ideas and resources have you used?; (2) What other ideas or resources have you used to support your child's literacy development?; (3) What, in particular, would you like to know about [this topic]?; and (4) What experiences could you share as a means of addressing this question or concern? Participants' responses were recorded on a form designed specifically for each workshop.

At the conclusion of each workshop a narrative was developed which addressed elements such as meeting logistics, tone, and engagement and participants were asked to provide written feedback. They were asked to comment on elements that they found helpful and those that they found unhelpful. It was also recommended that participants maintain anonymity by omitting their names.

In addition, informal, follow-up discussions were conducted with two of the six participants to inquire about the use of ideas and resources that had been addressed during the workshops and what benefits, if any, they had noted. Participants' responses were recorded to create a detailed narrative of the discussion.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to identify themes regarding participants' literacy-related concerns, workshop participation, and evaluative feedback. According to Krippendorff (2004) content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). In qualitative research, such as the present study, content analysis requires a theoretical framework, guiding questions, data sources and sampling methods, a unit of analysis, and a coding scheme (White & Marsh, 2006).

All data were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document, placing each piece of data on a separate line. Although each literacy-related concern was treated as a

| **TABLE 1** | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Workshop Titles and Descriptions* | | |
| Workshop 1 | Tech Savvy: Using Computer & Internet Resources to Develop Literacy Skills | We will explore computer-related games and other resources that support literacy development. |
| Workshop 2 | Motivation & Confidence: Helping Kids Find Enjoyment and Success in Literacy Activities | We will discuss ways to make learning fun, encourage kids to practice new skills, and help them develop greater confidence in their abilities. |
| Workshop 3 | More Than Just Reading: Supporting Various Types of Literacy | We will discuss different types of literacy, such as reading, writing, and speaking, and explore strategies for helping kids develop their skills (e.g., questioning, read-alouds, tutoring, etc.) |
| Workshop 4 | PL101: Getting the Most out of Your Public Library | We will discover how to select appropriate (audio) books, use the website to easily locate, hold, and schedule pick-ups, and find out about other exciting activities at the library. |

separate piece of data, the sentence served as the unit of analysis for the remaining data sources. As Gee (2011) suggests, "any clause that stands as a complete sentence by itself" (p. 203) was placed on a separate line. After dividing the data it was read through several times in order to begin assigning codes. Codes and their definitions were recorded in a codebook (Neuendorff, 2011) and grouped into themes related to each research question. Constant comparisons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were also used to ensure that the codes were applied consistently across the data set.

Additionally several strategies were used which were aimed at enhancing the credibility of the study. One such strategy was "prolonged time in the field" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192) since my interactions with participants were not limited to situations involving data collection. As noted above, unscheduled time was used to engage participants in informal conversations around a variety of topics, learn about their literacy-related concerns, and observe their children as they took part in the one-on-one tutoring sessions. Doing this allowed me to gain a better understanding of their concerns and their contributions to the program.

Creswell (2009) explains, "the more experience that a researcher has with participants in their actual setting, the more accurate or valid will be the findings" (p. 192). Apart from prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing and multiple sources of data were used as strategies for enhancing the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2009).

## Findings

### Literacy-Related Concerns

The first question addressed by this study was "What are participants' expressed needs and concerns with respect to family literacy?" Analysis of participants' literacy-related concerns yielded three themes, including *supporting literacy development* (*n* = 7), *locating and using literacy-related resources* (*n* = 7), and *fostering motivation and confidence* (*n* = 3).

**Supporting literacy development**. Through their written responses participants expressed concerns regarding various aspects of instruction and assessment. Of the seven concerns included in this theme, three pertained to home-based literacy instruction ("learning different teaching methods"). Specifically, participants expressed an interest in learning about practices that support reading comprehension ("questions after a story") and literacy-related skills ("phonics and spelling").

Two of the seven concerns addressed the efficacy of instructional practices. To illustrate, participants made inquiries regarding the effectiveness of tutoring ("Effectiveness of tutoring—is it?") and read-alouds ("Can a child become better by reading aloud?"). Finally, the remaining two concerns focused on literacy-related assessment. In particular, participants expressed a desire to learn more about standardized testing ("how to read the TPR test") and the diagnosis of literacy-related difficulties ("perhaps learn to identify if someone may have a learning disability or dyslexia").

**Locating and using literacy-related resources**. Participants also reported concerns about locating and using literacy-related resources. Of the seven concerns included in this theme three pertained to book selection. Two of those concerns focused on traditional print texts (e.g., "what books should we pick out from the library?") while one focused on print text alternatives ("library audio books"). In addition, three of the seven concerns highlighted Internet-based resources.

Participants expressed a desire to locate games ("reading games online") and reading-related websites (e.g., "helpful websites for reading"). A remaining concern addressed the benefits of technology. One participant expressed an interest in learning about the benefits of using a computer ("computer and how it can help").

**Fostering motivation and confidence**. While the first two themes addressed literacy-related practices and resources, the third theme addressed concerns pertaining to motivation and confidence. Of the three concerns included in this theme, two focused on helping children see reading as a form of entertainment (e.g., "how to get them to read for fun") while the remaining concern focused on ways to promote novelty-seeking behavior with regards to reading ("how to get my sons and daughter to read new stuff"). These concerns suggest that participants value reading and hope that their children will come to value reading as well.

### Contributions to Family Literacy Workshops

The second question addressed by this study was "What contributions do participants make as they take part in family literacy workshops?" Analysis of relevant data sources yielded three themes, including *handling school-based concerns* (*n* = 32), *promoting home literacy engagement* (*n* = 20), and *accessing and using literacy-related resources* (*n* = 19).

**Handling school-based concerns**. During the family literacy workshops participants discussed concerns that originated in the school setting and necessitated communication between themselves and school personnel. For example, one participant recounted how she worked to establish open communication with the teacher and other school personnel in order to address her son's school-related difficulties. As she explained:

> My son was having a lot of problems at school. I contacted the school 54 times. First, I tried to get in touch with the teacher. The teacher didn't respond. Then, I contacted the principal. I called the school. I also went to the school lots of times. I kept a list of all the times I tried to get in touch with the school. I finally called the superintendent. I got my son the help he needed.

As this excerpt illustrates, participants not only identified their school-related concerns (e.g., "My son was having a lot of problems at school.") but also described the steps that they took to address those concerns (e.g., "I tried to get in touch with the teacher."). In doing so participants reported both favorable outcomes (e.g., "I got my son the help he needed.") and unfavorable outcomes (e.g., "The teacher didn't respond.").

In response to unfavorable outcomes such as non-response from a teacher, participants proffered a variety of explanations (e.g., "teachers don't really care about the kids."). Finally, drawing on their own experiences, participants advised other members of the group on how to handle school-based concerns. In doing so participants emphasized elements such as documentation ("Keep a list of all the times you try to contact them.") and persistence ("Keep trying to contact the school").

**Promoting home literacy engagement**. In addition to the handling of school-based concerns participants also discussed means of promoting home literacy engagement. Most notably participants shared the strategies that they used to engage their children in home-based reading and writing. These strategies made use of family relationships ("Have kids read to other kids."), children's interests ("Ask kids to write about the things they like."),

and extracurricular activities ("Connect literacy to an activity that they are already motivated to do"). Apart from these strategies participants also shared steps that they took to address concerns about their child's literacy engagement.

For example, one participant explained how she used modeling to address her son's unwillingness to write:

> My son didn't want to write. I wrote a paragraph, and I told him to watch. Then, I told him to write one just like I did. [He] really likes nature, so I told him to write about a squirrel outside. He seemed to like writing about that.

As illustrated by this excerpt, participants provided a rationale for selecting a particular course of action (e.g., "[He] really likes nature") and indicated whether or not that course of action proved successful (e.g., "He seemed to like writing about that").

**Accessing and using literacy-related resources**. Participants contributed knowledge and insights pertaining to literacy-related resources. They discussed a variety of resources, including books, videos, and websites. In the process participants highlighted specific websites (e.g., "One site is www.professorgarfield.com") and literary genres that had been omitted from the workshop handouts ("a list of scary stories").

Participants also stated their rationales for selecting and using particular resources. Participants' rationales centered on children's interests (e.g., "[He] was interested in the Chik-Fil-A website, because he likes to eat there"), and the educational value of the resource (e.g., "They were educational videos").

Participants discussed strategies for selecting literacy-related resources. One participant recommended that parents have their children take responsibility for checking out library books:

> Parents can get kids their own library card. I got my son a library card, so he could check out books by himself. He really liked it because he got to feel like an adult. Kids like to feel like adults.

As this excerpt demonstrates, participants not only identified the strategy (e.g., "Parents can get kids their own library card"), but also provided a rationale for using the strategy (e.g., "Kids like to feel like adults.")

*Evaluative Feedback*

The third question addressed by this study was "What is the nature of participants' evaluative feedback regarding the family literacy workshops and the program as a whole?" Analysis of participant feedback led to the identification of three themes. Among those themes were *responses to individual workshops* ($n = 21$), *testimonials for strategies and resources* ($n = 9$), and *comments regarding program logistics* ($n = 5$).

**Responses to individual workshops**. In their written feedback participants commented on both the content of the workshops and the ways in which the content was delivered. Most notably, participants provided feedback regarding strategies that were addressed during the workshops. Some participants highlighted specific strategies that they found helpful (e.g., "Example—writing about a favorite TV show"), while others made general comments about the strategies (e.g., "The suggestions for helping my child are very good").

Participants also provided feedback on resources that were addressed through the workshops. While most of these remarks were general in nature (e.g., "I learn a lot of good site [sic] for my little girl"), one highlighted a specific website ("I really liked the homework help resource"). Apart from resources and strategies, participants provided feedback on workshop delivery.

Participants noted the interactive nature of the workshops ("What was helpful—talking about different motivators") and the contributions of other participants ("The feedback of all the parents regarding their child was very helpful"). Other types of feedback included general comments regarding the workshops ("Otherwise, everything is good and OK") and suggestions for improving workshop materials ("There are other types of books that should be added to the list").

**Testimonials for strategies and resources**. In addition to comments regarding workshop content and delivery, participants also provided testimonials for strategies and resources that were discussed during the workshops.

> I was worried about how to do a project. My son had a project on the Solar System. We used that homework help site. It gave us over 400 articles on the topic. Now, I know he can do research for his school projects.

As this excerpt demonstrates, participants identified a resource or strategy that they used (e.g., "We used the homework help site") and described the outcome of using that particular resource or strategy ("It gave us over 400 articles on the topic"). Participants also described the concern or situation that had prompted them to use the resource or strategy ("My son had a project to do on the Solar System"). Thus while testimonials were not a prominent aspect of participant feedback they demonstrate that some of the resources and strategies which were addressed in the family literacy workshops proved beneficial to participants and children.

**Comments regarding program logistics**. In their evaluative feedback participants also commented on program logistics. Although evidence for this theme is rather scant, it is important because it illuminates aspects of the family literacy program that proved problematic. Several participants noted that they had difficulty finding the lab where the technology workshop was held (e.g., "We had a hard time finding the computer lab"). One of the participants indicated that she had missed the technology workshop as a result ("I didn't know where to go").

Apart from the location of the lab one participant commented on the amount of time allotted for the technology workshop ("I wish we could stay here for two hours instead of one") and another noted that the lack of childcare was problematic ("I can't come because I have my daughter"). These findings suggest that I should have been more diligent in addressing logistical aspects of the program.

### Discussion

Data analysis revealed that participants made substantial contributions to the design, implementation, and evaluation of the family literacy program. During the design phase of the program participants shared numerous concerns regarding literacy and the literacy development of their children. Participants noted concerns around motivation and confidence, home literacy activities, and literacy-related resources. By sharing these concerns participants helped to select the focal topics for four family literacy workshops.

Participants contributed not only to the design of the program but also to its implementation. In doing so participants shared experiences and funds-of-knowledge regarding home-school partnerships, literacy-related resources, and home-based literacy activities. Finally during the evaluation phase of the program participants provided both positive and constructive feedback. Participants commented on

workshop content and delivery, activities and resources that proved beneficial, and problems related to logistical aspects of the program.

### Participants' Literacy Practices and Funds of Knowledge

The findings from this study suggest that participants use a variety of strategies and resources to engage their children in home-based literacy activities. These findings support the notion that families from diverse backgrounds engage in a wide variety of literacy practices, and do so for a wide variety of purposes (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Heath, 1982, 1983; Johnson, 2010; Lynch, 2009; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Studies have also found that the literacy practices of diverse families differ from those found in classrooms and in White, middle-class households (Heath, 1982, 1983; Mui & Anderson, 2008). In the present study participants reported using school-like literacy practices, including modeling and writing prompts, and literacy practices which are associated with diverse families, such as child-child book reading (Mui & Anderson, 2008). The findings of this study not only align with but also differ from findings of studies on diverse families' literacy practices.

The findings from this study also suggest that participants possess vast funds of knowledge regarding education. For example, participants not only discussed resources and strategies for promoting home-based literacy activities but also shared guidelines for navigating home-school partnerships and advocating for children within the school setting. These findings corroborate results from research on the funds of knowledge found in diverse homes and communities.

Specifically with respect to education, researchers have identified funds of knowledge such as personal experiences, learning strategies (Larrotta & Serrano, 2011), and language and communication (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). By sharing guidelines for navigating home-school partnerships and advocating for children and discussing resources and strategies for home-literacy engagement, the participants in this study not only illuminated their funds of knowledge related to education but also corroborated findings from previous research on diverse families' funds of knowledge.

The findings of this study suggest a strong relationship between the funds of knowledge shared by participants during the workshops and the literacy-related concerns expressed by participants during the design phase of the program. To illustrate, participants expressed an interest in learning about literacy-related resources and home-based literacy activities.

During the implementation phase of the program participants shared literacy-related resources and described strategies that they had used to facilitate home-based literacy engagement. Participants addressed concerns that had been identified by others during the design phase of the program. The findings of this study suggest that as a group, participants possess the funds of knowledge necessary to address the literacy-related concerns of other participants.

While the findings of this study suggest that participants have vast funds of knowledge regarding education, the findings also suggest that technology may be an area of need for many of the participants in this study. Participants' technology-related contributions are poorly represented within the data set.

When asked to share experiences and ideas pertaining to technology, participants had very little to say. Instead of playing an active role, as in the other three workshops, participants appeared to want me to discuss the resources listed on the workshop handout and then assist them in accessing and using those resources. One possible explanation for the lack of technology-related contributions is the digital divide, as families from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have reliable Internet access than White, middle- and upper-middle-class families (Talukdar & Gauri, 2011).

### Family Educators' Roles and Responsibilities

The findings from this study also provide important insights regarding family educators' roles and responsibilities. Over the course of this program I occupied several roles, including learner-investigator, instructor, facilitator, and participant-observer. During the design phase of the program I acted as a learner-investigator, collecting and analyzing data in order to gain a clear understanding of participants' needs. During the implementation phase my role varied considerably.

During three of the workshops I began as a facilitator and shifted to participant-observer when the participants began leading discussions and sharing their experiences and funds of knowledge. During the technology workshop I began as a facilitator and shifted to instructor when it became apparent that participants had less experience with that particular topic. The findings of this study suggest that family educators must remain flexible and vary their role according to the context and the needs of the participants.

The findings of this study also suggest that family educators must strive to maximize the convenience of program offerings. Two important oversights were noted by participants with respect to logistics.

First, half of the participants noted that they had difficulty finding the computer lab in which the technology workshop was held. Given that the lab was located on third floor of a nearby building, this finding is not surprising; nonetheless, it points to the importance of holding workshops in a location that is both convenient and easy to find.

Second, one of the participants indicated that she could not attend workshop three due of the lack of child care. This comment is important not only because it highlights an obstacle encountered by one of the participants, but also because it offers a possible explanation regarding the lack of attendance by other parents whose children were enrolled in the tutoring program.

### Conclusion

This study examined participants' contributions to a university-based family literacy program which served parents from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The findings of this study suggest that participants engage their children in a variety of home literacy activities, utilizing both school-like and "non-mainstream" literacy practices. The findings also suggest that participants have vast funds of knowledge regarding education, particularly with respect to home-school partnerships, and literacy-related resources and activities.

As a result, participants were able to use their funds of knowledge to address concerns identified by others during the design phase of the program. However, despite their funds of knowledge regarding education technology appeared to be an area of need for many participants in this study.

Since participants may have extensive knowledge regarding one topic, but little about another, family educators should remain flexible and vary their role according to the context and needs of the participants. Family educators must also

strive to remove obstacles to participation, particularly those which are likely to have a differential effect on families from diverse backgrounds.

Despite the increasing diversity of the U.S. population educators remain predominantly White and middle-class. Now more than ever educators must work with families whose backgrounds are different from their own. It is crucial that family educators recognize the experiences and funds of knowledge of the families with whom they work: too often diverse families' experiences and funds of knowledge are ignored, while those deriving from "mainstream" sources are lauded and embraced.

Family educators must also utilize a collaborative approach to program design, implementation, and evaluation. Family educators must design their programs around participants' needs, invite participants to play an active role in program implementation, and use participants' feedback to facilitate important program changes. By employing a collaborative approach to family literacy and recognizing participants' experiences and funds of knowledge family educators can devise programs which not only meet participants' needs but also represent partnerships between educators and the families they serve.

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