

Understanding the Importance of Family Literacy

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Literacy Development in Young Children

- Most children have literacy experiences as early as infancy. By age three, most children have participated in many literacy experiences (McGee & Richgels, 2012).
- Literacy opportunities at home help develop listening, oral language, and reading and writing skills (Santos, Fettig, Shaffer, 2012).
- Early experiences with books and print allow children to acquire concepts that will form a very strong literacy foundation (McGee & Richgels, 2012).
- Children grow up in many different contexts, with different effects on their literacy development (McGee & Richgels, 2012).

What is Family Literacy?

- A shared experience between family members in supporting literacy development.
- Family literacy is a lifelong learning for the entire family. Families learn best when they learn together (National Coalition for Literacy).
- An opportunity for parents to enhance and support their child's literacy development.



Why is Family Literacy Important?

- Children's achievement in school is dependent upon the support and encouragement of their families.
- Children who are exposed to home literacy experiences are more likely to be better in their literacy skills than children who are not exposed to such experiences (McGee & Richegels, 2012).
- Everything that adults do to support a child's language and literacy counts (Strickland, 2004).
- Most importantly, parents are a child's first "teacher." Their earliest experiences in their development are fostered by their parents and family members.

Why is family involvement important?

- Educators know that family involvement is very important to a child's success in school (Souto-Manning, 2010).
- “Barbara Rogoff’s has termed a type of social experience that seems most effective in stimulating children’s cognitive growth, *guided participation*. . . active involvement by children in culturally structured activities with the guidance, support, and challenge of companions who transmit a diverse array of knowledge and skills” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 20).
- “Children’s early language and literacy opportunities are embedded throughout the social and cultural contexts in which they live” (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009, p. 520).
- Researchers have emphasized that a child’s social-emotional and cognitive skills are interrelated and developed within responsive and caring environments (Santos, Fettig, Shaffer, 2012).

How Can We Support Family Literacy?

- Early Childhood Family Literacy Programs
- Home-School Connection
- Family Literacy at home.



Early Childhood Family Literacy Programs

- The purpose of literacy programs is to promote the emergence of literacy in children's lives and thus creating a strong foundation for school and life success.
- Focus on helping the entire family, a family-centered approach.
- Programs enhance the literacy skills of the entire family by providing the needed supports and resources.
- Comprehensive family literacy programs address important components: early childhood education, adult education and literacy, parenting education, parent and child interactive literacy activities, and needed family support services.

Family Literacy Program Study

- Antoinette Doyle and Jing Zhang conducted a study on a family literacy program. They examined the parents' motivation to participate, their expectations of the program, and their valuation of the program including their perceptions of change in themselves and/or their children.
 - Parents with preschool children were invited to participate in an eight week family literacy program.
 - The program used parent to parent interactions and facilitator support to increase children's literacy by enhancing parents' knowledge and strategies for fostering their children's literacy development.
 - Two programs were offered: a parent only model and parent-child model.
 - In the parent only model parents attended classes in the evening. Parents engaged in discussing their literacy experiences with their children. Were introduced to new strategies for helping their children. Were given books and activities to use with their children.
 - In the parent-child model, parents and children attended sessions together. All parents and the children participated in a read aloud story followed by songs and/or nursery rhymes. Participated in individual parent-facilitator sessions while child engaged in literacy activities. Afterwards parents engaged in literacy activities together.

Study Findings

- Parents in both programs were motivated by the common goal of supporting their children's literacy development.
- Parent came into the program assuming that the best learning experiences for their children comes from the “experts,” their child's teacher.
- Parents commented that sharing ideas and materials was very encouraging for them to continue the program. They felt valued in their participation of their child's development.
- Parents commented that the connection made between why home literacy practices were important and how to implement was significant in their learning.

Literacy Programs in the Community

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULIKma5F9hU&list=UUuphnmhSu3eMtc3986Jzb3Tg&index=6>



The Home-School Connection

Family Literacy Bags

- A letter of instruction explaining how to use the pack.
- A children's book relating to the designated learning objectives.
- A logbook that family members use to record what they did with their child.
- Open-ended discovery activities.
- A suitable backpack or container to help transport the contents home and back to school.



Why are Literacy Bags important?

- Literacy packs help families learn about their children's literacy skills development.
- They can help improve communication between schools and families and assist with children's learning at home.
- Families do not always know how to extend learning at home. Literacy packs provide parents with opportunity to extend learning at home.
- An interactive form of homework that involves a two-way communication with the family.

Family Literacy At Home

- Reading books and stories at home
 - Engage children in conversations about the story and the images. Point on letters, words, or symbols. Introduce the act of reading by turning the pages.
 - Link story themes and nonfiction content to children's experiences.
 - Read fiction and nonfiction book in family's home language.
- Make use of common print materials (for example, food labels, recipes and cookbooks, newspapers, magazines).
- Cooking and sharing a meal together. Families can read and follow a recipe together. As each step is carry out, parents can read and verbalize each step. Parents can introduce and practice new vocabulary around the dinner table.
- Running errands are excellent opportunities to teach literacy skills and foster social-emotional development. For example, a walk, bus or subway ride, a trip to the store.

Conclusion

- As educators we need to use family literacy to help families find their strengths that can help their children be successful in literacy, as well as their overall development.



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