

Family Literacy Reflections...

A quarterly publication of the Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy

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It's What Parents Do, Not What They Know, That Counts

Welcome to the first **Family Literacy Reflections**.

Our mandate is:

- To share well-researched information about family literacy.
- To feature current projects and resources developed by programs in the region.

Please tell us about project and resources that have worked well for you.

The theme for this newsletter is "*How Parents and Home Influence Early Literacy development*".



A literacy rich environment

Research helps to show that by themselves, social class or educational level of the parents do not dictate outcomes for children. Rather, the quality of interaction—including stimulating early literacy activities in the home environment—has the greatest influence.

This issue of *Reflections* features two research documents, one from the United Kingdom and one from Canada, that shed light on this theme.

Guess What?

Do you know what the single, most important learning tool is for a child?

(see next page for answer)

Parental Involvement in the Development of Children's Reading Skill:

A Five-Year Longitudinal Study

Monique Sénéchal and Jo-Anne LeFevre

The following is a summary of the study noted above, which was originally published in Child Development, March/April 2002.

The prerequisite skills needed for young children to learn to read include: phonological awareness, letter knowledge, print awareness, and language abilities. Where do children acquire these skills? Do different early literacy and language skill sets influence the reading abilities of children in Grade 1 and Grade 3? What is the influence of parental involvement in children learning to read? These are some of the questions that Sénéchal and LeFevre set out to answer with this longitudinal study. The study was first reported on in 1998, and the follow-up written in 2002.

Key points from the study include:

- Direct teaching by parents of emergent literacy skills, such as letter recognition and print awareness, is positively related to children's early literacy skills in Kindergarten and Grade 1.
- Children's overall exposure to books is related to the development of vocabulary and listening comprehension skill, which in turn impacts on Grade 3 reading achievement.

This study points out the different aspects of children's early literacy learning, how the acquisition of these features leads to reading competence in Grade 3, and highlights that this learning takes place during the early years. Family literacy practitioners can use this information to guide the development of programming which supports parents to directly teach letters and print knowledge in a fun way, and gain confidence in shared story-reading with their young children.

Deb Nesbitt-Munroe

Social/Behavioural and Cognitive Development at 3-4 years in Relation to Family Background: the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project

Institute of Education University of London

Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart

The EPPE project was a five-year longitudinal study consisting of 12 reports which together assessed the achievement and development of 3000 children between the ages of 3 and 7 years.

The report I have chosen reflects the theme of this newsletter. It looks at the extent to which parents' income, education and age affect children's self-confidence and willingness to cooperate in the school setting. The number of children in a family, the language spoken at home and the gender of the child as well as early health problems, such as speech delays, were all taken into consideration as was the previous childcare experience of each child.

The effect of the home environment itself was profound. Children whose parents encouraged them to play with children outside their home developed higher self-esteem and were more sociable. The degree of structure and routine affected children's ability to learn and willingness to conform. A higher quality home learning environment was the strongest influence on cognitive development, apart from age, of all the other factors.

This research shows that it is not social class or educational level of the parent alone that dictates outcomes for children. It is the quality of interaction, including stimulating early literacy activities in the home environment, that have the greatest influence.

This report shows that a stimulating home learning environment includes:

- parents who are loving and nurturing
- lots of verbal interaction between parent and child
- the establishment of routines
- playtime to learn how to socialize and handle emotions

The report states that it is what parents do that is more important than who parents are.

Anne Jackson

Why are Family Literacy programs so good?

Clearly, the benefits of an appropriate home life are wonderful, but what of the child from a home where these advantages are not available? This is where quality programs for parents and their young children can play a useful role. Even the parent who is doing a good job with pre-literacy development for their children often wants to learn more about how to help them get ready to read and write.

Enter the world of Family Literacy. Disadvantaged children in particular can benefit significantly from good quality pre-school family literacy programs that respond to the needs of children from different backgrounds. Children who attend such programs for a prolonged period of time have the most advantage in intellectual and social development when they start school.

Coming Events

Family Literacy: Programming that Works

CEFL Conference, June 1 & 2, 2006
Organized in partnership with Queen's University Faculty of Education. Our goal is to provide exemplary training opportunities for practitioners and others interested in family literacy. For more info, go to www.familyliteracyexpertise.org, and follow the link to conference

Libraries Build Communities

Canadian Library Association Conference
June 14 to 17, 2006 in Ottawa, Ontario
<http://www.cla.ca/conference/2006/index.html>

More Voices

56th Annual AECEO Conference
May 30 to June 3, 2006 in Toronto, Ontario
<http://www.cfc-efc.ca/aeceo/>

Answer from page 1: The human face. Faces teach language, emotion, imitation and turn-taking. Faces that are responsive to children teach far more than any game, toy or expensive equipment. *Susan Ramsay, Early Literacy Specialist, Hastings, Frontenac, L&A*