

Family Literacy Reflections...

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If What Parents Say Matters, How Do We Make Programs Work For Them?

In this issue we feature:

- Research into what parents prefer in terms of support and information
- Research into the perspective of parents who attended a family literacy program
- A current family literacy resource developed by Project READ

Our theme is, “What parents want in programming”. Many family literacy practitioners wrestle with the problem of attracting and retaining parents in their programs. Do we really take time to consider what parents want, or do we simply offer programs that we think will appeal to them?



Young parents are often isolated and away from family. Research tells us that they get most of their abstract information from friends and family, so the most vital part of a program has to include time for sharing. To design programs that truly appeal, it is essential to consult parents on what it is they would like professional advice on. *Reflections* brings two research documents to your attention that may help you make good planning decisions.

Guess What?

Do you know what Einstein suggested to increase the intelligence of a child?
(See next page for answer.)

Parents' Experiences of a Family Literacy Programme

(Journal of Early Childhood Research, Volume 4, 2006, Sage Publications)

Peter Hannon, Anne Morgan and Cathy Nutbrown

This article looks at the experience and viewpoint of parents who took part in a family literacy program. It was written using data collected for a large family literacy research project. The authors looked at parents' enrolment rates, levels of parent participation in the program, attrition, parents' views of the program and its outcomes, and changes in family literacy practices at home as a result of the program.

The project had five main components: home visits, provision of literacy resources, centre-based activities, special events and postal communications. An optional adult education component was developed to address parents' educational interests and to encourage parents to further their education. Practitioners created practical family literacy programming by using a framework developed in 1995 by Peter Hannon in England.

Parents were selected randomly and asked to join the program. Take up rates were very high. Reasons for this could be attributed to many causes, including that:

- the program was based in the school their children were later to attend;
- they did not stigmatize parents in any way, or limit enrolment to under-educated or low literacy parents;
- they did not make the adult education component of the program compulsory; and
- they were flexible and met the needs of individual family circumstances by using a home visiting approach

The aims of the project were: to value what parents were already doing; broaden parents' awareness of early literacy development; provide parents with more ideas for promoting their children's development; and to develop an increased awareness about what parents want. The research results show that this project was successful in these goals.

Deb Nesbitt-Munroe

Producing and Delivering Parent Information Resources

Arnold Cragg, Sarah Dickens, Cheryl Taylor, Clem Henricson and Gill Keep

This research evolved out of growing concern that information produced for parents was probably not being read widely enough. The researchers looked for any common concerns among all parents, while asking questions about the cultural and socio-economic appropriateness of materials.

Although the focus of this research mainly relates to the dissemination of health and behavioural information, it is clear that regardless of the topic, parents are suffering from paper overload, much of which goes straight into the garbage. Despite this, parents say that there are gaps in information addressing their concerns.

The research concludes that several factors should be taken into consideration when producing resources for parents:

- There is resistance to learning about issues from written text unless it deals with concrete topics, such as illness.
- Most parents get their information on more emotive issues from family and friends.
- Parents will accept information from media sources if they relate to the families depicted.

Parental concerns include nutrition, child development, behavioural issues, loneliness, discipline issues, feeling tied down, and how to entertain their children all day. Furthermore, there is confusion about where to seek help for these and other issues. All of these could be addressed in family literacy programs.

Parents are seeking information that is concise and relevant, but many prefer to have it explained personally by a friend or professional. One way to overcome this to a degree is to be sure that any leaflets are written in clear language.

In the final appendix, there is a useful “information plan” with five points to consider:

- do research to find out if the piece is original;
- assess the demand;
- choose the audience;
- select the best tool; and
- consider how the message will be heard.

Anne Jackson

Literacy is a Family Affair!

Project READ have developed this excellent manual with attention paid to clarity. It was written based on the philosophy that the “ability to read and write does not simply happen, it is nurtured” and that even for parents with low literacy skills and no prior experience of emergent literacy, it is possible to teach them how to help their children get ready to learn. It shows how to set up and deliver family literacy workshops aimed at helping adults create a literacy-rich environment for their children.

It has an easy to use lay-out that includes information about how children learn, plans for workshop delivery and support for the early school years. It is packed full of extra family literacy information. For more information, visit: www.projectread.ca

Centre for Family Literacy

<http://www.familit.ca/index.html>

The Centre for Family Literacy provides programming for families, and training for practitioners and volunteers. They also develop best practice family literacy research projects. Their work focuses on helping families in Alberta. On this site look for: current and past programming information, training opportunities and research.

Practitioners’ Task Force on Family Literacy

<http://www.floridatechnet.org/famliteracy/index.html>

The Practitioners’ Task Force on Family Literacy is authorized by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, and funded through a State Leadership grant. On this site you will find: research, lesson plans, and other information, all related to the four elements of family literacy.

The Basic Skills Agency (U.K.)

www.basic-skills.co.uk

The Basic Skills Agency is a not-for-profit organization that specializes in all aspects of literacy. Once you access their site, select a category (family literacy) and you will be able to access all kinds of current information, research, resources and much more. Contact them to receive their newsletter. They describe their organization as, “...a national ideas and innovation organization, focusing on finding practice worth sharing, and disseminating it effectively.”

Answer: Read fairy tales. They inspire both imagination and problem-solving. Imagination and problem-solving are the basis for every brilliant scientific discovery or theory ever made.

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