

Research for Teachers

February 2011



"This article is one of a series intended to help ETFO members become more aware of current research findings directly relevant to teaching in elementary schools."

3 SCHOOL-BASED FAMILY LITERACY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Janette Pelletier

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

It has long been known that what parents do in the home regarding language stimulation and literacy related activities can boost children's language abilities and school literacy. Recent evidence has shown the power of intervention programs to help parents support their children's developing literacy. The U.S. National Early Literacy Panel (2008) reports that literacy interventions with parents have medium to large effects on children's oral comprehension and cognitive abilities. Sénéchal's (2005) meta-review shows that family involvement, particularly parents helping their kindergarten to grade 3 children learn to read, has a moderate to large effect on children's reading performance.

Family literacy interventions come in a variety of forms ranging from home visiting to school-based programs that run over a course of weeks (Phillips, Hayden & Norris, 2006). Our own research shows that effective family literacy programs in the kindergarten years can be delivered in a variety of ways (Pelletier, Hipfner-Boucher & Doyle, 2010). One example of an effective strategy brings parents and children to school at lunchtime, after school, or in the evening for joint parent-child literacy learning, facilitated by primary teachers or early childhood educators. This intergenerational literacy focus is effective in producing both adult and child literacy benefits (Wasik, Dobbins & Herrmann, 2001). We employ the format of parent-only and child-only breakout groups in which one facilitator provides information about an aspect of children's early literacy development to parents while another facilitator engages children in literacy learning on the same topic. This is preceded and followed by shared family literacy time. The program has been tailored to families in the Chinese communities (Zhang, 2010). Another model brings family literacy programs to apartment buildings where families tend not to come into the school (Press, 2008). Across all these models there is an emphasis on supporting parents' in both oral and text-based activities. Oral language involves conversation in the home (Snow, 1993), paying attention to rare words and enhancing vocabulary (Biemiller, 2003; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001), talking about things not in the here and now, that is, using decontextualized language (Curenton, Craig & Flanagan, 2008) and letter-sound knowledge (Dickinson et al; 2003). Text-based language involves shared book reading and enjoyment, concepts of print (Rvachew & Savage, 2006), understanding story characters' motivations and intentions for higher-level reading comprehension (e.g., Pelletier & Astington, 2004), attention to environmental print (Evans &

Saint-Aubin, 2005), and making letter-sound connections in naturalistic ways (Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Although the effects of a single teacher or school working with parents on one or a few of these dimensions has received little attention in the research literature, partnering with parents to enrich literacy practice on any of these dimensions will be productive and will meet the needs of all parents to support the language and literacy development of their children. Mobilizing knowledge by sharing it with parents is more effective than just giving them activities to do at home.

Recommended Sources

- 1) Family literacy program guide: Pelletier, Hipfner-Boucher & Doyle (2010). See References.
- 2) Encyclopedia of Language and Literacy Development:
<http://www.literacyencyclopedia.ca/index.php?fa=home.show>.

Further Reading

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