

FAMILY LITERACY

ISSUES AND PROMISING PRACTICES

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Research

Findings are based on observation of over 40 family literacy programs across the US and 7 years of technical assistance with programs serving language minority families along the US Mexican border

Approach

Research activities included a national study on adult ESL, site visits and observations, interviews with parents and staff, and review of research on intergenerational literacy for immigrants and refugees.

Typical Components of Family Literacy in the US

1. Parent basic skills development
2. Early childhood education
3. Parent and children together
4. Parent education

FAMILY LITERACY

Issues and Promising Practices

Early Childhood Education

Issue: Doesn't explicitly focus on cognitive and linguistic development of bilingual children

Promising Practices:

- Bridging the gap between home language and school language through family portfolios
- Additive rather than subtractive dual language perspective
- Heavy focus on vocabulary in context

Basic Skills for Parents

Issue: Literacy development overshadows language development

Promising Practices:

- Focus on effective F2F communication skills
- Introducing “big ideas”
- Family talk time
- Technology Integration

Parents and Children Together

Issue

- Second language acquisition for parents takes significant time and requires intense engagement

Promising Practices

- Blended learning models (F2F and independent learning with new media)

Parent Education

Focus on positive child rearing

Issue: Cultural mismatch: Who knows best?

Promising Practices:

- Focus on how children learn and thrive, rather than culture specific behaviours
- Strategies for negotiating the system
- Conflict management for families

What Works?

Culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate outreach

- a. Ethnic media
- b. Taking advantage of “cultural brokers”
- c. Word of mouth

What Works?

Comprehensive assessment

- a. Proficiency in the target language
- b. Educational levels of the parent
- c. Home language environment
- d. Socio-economic circumstances

(scale measuring from “in crisis” to “thriving”)

What Works?

Face to face communication rather than endless distribution of written documents (even when translated)

What Works?

- Literacy and parent education as part of a larger family support model
- Recognizing the contribution of all family members, including fathers and elders

What Works?

Facilitated Parent Councils focused on advocacy to help the school system be more responsive to immigrant and refugee parents

What Works?

Access to skills that parents see as important and that help them look smart in the eyes of others

- Multi-media projects
- Certificate Training (e.g., teacher aides)

Lessons Learned

Programs need to be high quality (not every program works)

- a. Trained bilingual and culturally competent staff
- b. Case management
- c. Program negotiates between parent interests and school interests
- d. Flexible model

WELCOME PARENTS

Video as Parent Engagement Tool

http://www.nyc.gov/html/weareny/html/episodes/welcome_parents.shtml

LET'S TALK

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