

2010

The Power of Family Literacy. G1985

Janet S. Hanna

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Kayla M. Hinrichs

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, khinrichs3@unl.edu

Carla J. Mahar

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, cmahar1@unl.edu

John Defrain

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jdefrain1@unl.edu

Tonia Renee Durden

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, tdurden2@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Hanna, Janet S.; Hinrichs, Kayla M.; Mahar, Carla J.; Defrain, John; and Durden, Tonia Renee, "The Power of Family Literacy. G1985" (2010). *Faculty Publications from CYFS*. 60.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cyfsfacpub/60>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Children, Youth, Families & Schools, Nebraska Center for Research on at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications from CYFS by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Power of Family Literacy

Adapted by Janet S. Hanna, Kayla M. Hinrichs and Carla J. Mahar, Extension Educators
and John D. DeFrain and Tonia R. Durden, Family Life Specialists

StoryQUEST's Vision: High-quality early relationships and experiences throughout their daily routines provide each infant and toddler with the tools and skills to build a strong foundation for future school readiness. Families, caregivers, and communities as a whole collaborate to enable all children to become highly competent in language and literacy. This series was developed as part of a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University.

Children exposed to reading and storytelling at home have greater success in school. Second in a series of nine, this NebGuide suggests language- and literacy-related activities.

Virtually all parents want their children to learn to read, write, and succeed in school, and are eager to provide any support necessary.

Family involvement in everyday language- and literacy-related activities has a significant impact on children's language development and acquisition of early literacy skills. Early language and literacy activities at home contribute to differences when children enter school.

Parental attitudes and activities convey messages about schooling, work, the joy of learning, and the value of education. Children who see literacy as a family value and learn early on that reading, writing, and communicating orally are pleasurable, important, and meaningful are more successful in school.

Research found that children who had fewer language experiences in their homes in the first years of life started school behind peers who had richer language experiences. This gap continued until age 9 when the study was concluded.

Family Activities That Prepare Young Children for School

- Talking and singing with children
- Reading books and other print and environmental materials with children
- Adults reading books and other print and environmental materials for their own enjoyment
- Accessing community resources, including libraries and museums, as a family
- Using reading and writing and oral storytelling in everyday activities

Parental Involvement

- Father involvement at home and school may be linked to higher literacy achievement of boys.
- Factors outside the home that contribute to challenges children experience in school include lack of access to social, political, and economic support for families in dealing with housing, health, and other social problems.
- Research shows that the more education the parent has, the greater their accessibility to quality educational resources for their child and the better the child tends to do in school.

How Families View Literacy

Numerous issues affect how families view and deal with literacy. Many factors impact families' willingness and ability to engage in literacy-related activities, such as reading to children or pursuing their own education. They include:

- their own reading ability
- their self-confidence
- daily economic struggles

Some families use literacy differently than it is used in the traditional school culture. For example, they may use storytelling or popular literacy activities such as TV viewing, cartoons, and video games rather than reading books, writing, and using educational materials.

Some families may view literacy as work rather than an activity to engage in for personal enjoyment and pleasure. They may focus on mechanical skills (e.g., letter naming, decoding) rather than engaging in playful communication or meaningful interactions around print and oral language. As a result, they may think literacy activities are inappropriate for infants and toddlers. Also, families may not see how literacy experiences are all around, beyond simply the words in a book.

Tips for Building a House of Literacy for All Families

Establish Trust. “If you tell me that the way my Momma raised me was wrong, I’m probably not going to listen to you. If I learn to trust you and find other things you tell me to be useful, I might just think about what you have to say about raising children.” (Mikulecky, 1996).

Develop Collaborative Relationships. Families and professionals should build collaborative partnerships based on explicit dialogue and collaboration that stress reciprocal understanding.

The family’s role:

- Share your thoughts, beliefs, and practices about language, literacy, and learning honestly.
- Talk about the role that literacy plays in their daily lives.
- Remember that children with disabilities are children first.
- Think about how the parent(s) could make a difference in a child’s success at school.
- Start by working just one new thing into what they already do each day.
- Identify mutual goals and specific practices to help reach these goals in the home, in socialization, and/or in child care.

The professional’s role:

- Reflect on your own thoughts, beliefs, and practices about literacy and learning.
- Listen to the family.
- Recognize your own thoughts, beliefs, and practices, and respect the families’ views — even if you disagree with them.
- Acknowledge, honor, and respect the family’s beliefs and practices.
- Honor the time it takes families to trust a new person in their lives.

- Build trust slowly and don’t demand a lot before everyone is ready.
- Talk about the role that literacy plays in the family’s daily lives.
- Consider the unique issues faced by families of children with disabilities and find ways to address language and literacy activities in that context.
- Share specific information with families about how they can make a difference in their child’s future school success.
- Make concrete suggestions that are compatible with what the family already does and with items already in the home that support children’s literacy development.
- Identify mutual goals and specific practices to reach these goals in the home, in socialization and/or in child care.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 2003-2004 StoryQUEST – Central Nebraska Community Services team.

References

- Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2009). *Child, family and community: Family centered early care and education* (5th ed.). Columbus: Pearson.
- Mikulecky, L. (1996). Family literacy: Parent and child interactions. *Family Literacy: Directions in Research and Implications for Practice*. (Retrieved February 7, 2003 from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamLit>)

This publication has been peer reviewed.

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

**Index: Families
Preschool**

Issued January 2010

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

© 2010, The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska on behalf of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension. All rights reserved.