



New Family Literacy Handbook Integrates Overlapping Fields

FPG Snapshot

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THE EMERGING FIELD OF FAMILY LITERACY, which cuts across early childhood education, early literacy development, parent education, adult education, and parent-child literacy interactions, now has a comprehensive volume that pulls together and integrates its many interacting components.

Edited by Dr. Barbara Wasik of the FPG Child Development Institute, *The Handbook of Family Literacy* provides scholars, students, policymakers and practitioners (both inside and outside the field) with a valuable snapshot of its current boundaries and rapidly growing content. With contributions from experts in each of its component fields, the 704-page handbook provides an up-to-date picture of existing family literacy programs, of the research and theories that guide these programs, of current issues, and of likely future directions.

Key features

SCOPE

Whereas many books deal with various components of this broad field, this handbook profiles and integrates the field's overlapping component areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Information essential to the development of curriculum and instructional strategies is integrated throughout the book. Practical guidance is offered in such diverse and intersecting areas as early literacy, the role of literature and storybook reading in literacy learning, adult learning needs and strategies, and professional development.

CULTURAL AND FAMILY INFLUENCES

The book examines cultural and family influences on literacy practices and provides effective ways of responding to family diversity including the needs of bilingual and immigrant participants

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Program recommendations cover such distinct topics as integrating the curriculum, enriching early childhood classrooms, enhancing parent-child literacy interactions, and coordinating with other agencies.

ASSESSMENT

To promote future research and evaluation, attention has been focused on ways of assessing children, adults, the educational setting, and implementation strategies.

This book is aimed at professionals (directors and staff) and graduate students in family literacy, early childhood education, child development, parenting, and adult education, as well as researchers and policymakers in child development and family literacy.

The Handbook of Family Literacy (ISBN: 0-8058-4307-8) is published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 10 Industrial Ave., Mahwah, NJ 07430-2262. 800-9-BOOKS-9. <www.erlbaum.com/> The book is also available through book retailers such as Amazon.com.

Emerging issues, challenges

Family literacy programs have been ambitiously designed to address complex issues of adult and child literacy, parenting, and life-course outcomes for adults. They are inherently more complex than stand-alone programs.

GROWING IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN THE US

Because they serve low-literacy and low-income families, many of whom are immigrants, family literacy programs have a larger share of English-language learners than many other education programs.

Immigrant traditions and beliefs are not always congruent with the U.S. educational system. How these programs make adaptations and prepare staff to be sensitive to these differences can affect programs' success in serving immigrant families effectively.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION FOR MANY FAMILIES

Learning more about what makes it possible for families to participate and stay engaged will help tailor necessary social supports. Thus, family needs and characteristics must be an integral part of program enrollment decisions.

Programs have a large mission. They are still grappling with determining the best structures, curricula, and teaching strategies to help multi-generational family members in a learning environment.

NEED FOR BROAD-BASED EVALUATION THAT INCLUDES PROGRAMMATIC AND SYSTEMIC FACTORS THAT AFFECT OUTCOMES

Providing the four most often-linked components—early childhood, adult, and parent education, as well as parent-child literacy interaction time—is not enough by itself to produce strong outcomes. Staff and researchers must work together to see that content and instruction strategies help language and literacy acquisition. Also, they need to evaluate how other program features affect outcomes, including enrollment, engagement, duration of participation, responsiveness to family needs, and relationships with parents and children.

NEED FOR INTEGRATED APPROACH TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

These programs have many of the right ingredients to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families. But some features are not as strong as they need to be, including literacy instruction and the use of literacy-rich environments.

Evidence also suggests that many programs are not sufficiently intense, and many participants do not stay involved long enough. Though many theories provide support for the existing four-component model, to advance the field, strong empirical data is needed on this model's effectiveness and changes that might be needed to provide significant outcomes for children and adults.

As local and state programs continually examine their efforts, as high-quality professional development becomes increasingly common, and as researchers and evaluators tackle the major questions identified in this handbook, the field will move to a better understanding of the role

family literacy programs play within the wider range of services for families and children.

MUCH NEEDS TO BE DONE

As these programs have expanded, it has become clear which features appear fundamental for positive outcomes. Much, however, still needs to be done to determine effective program procedures and match them with families. Even when procedures that work are identified, it is not always known how to bring about change on a large scale.

Thus, the future offers many challenges. Meeting those challenges will increase educational and social opportunities for the families served and increase the knowledge base across a broad array of educational concerns. ■

*This Snapshot is based on **The Handbook of Family Literacy** edited by Dr. Barbara Wasik of the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill. The book was published in 2004 by Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates of Mahwah, NJ.*

OTHER FPG CONTRIBUTORS in addition to Dr. Barbara Wasik, to *The Handbook of Family Literacy* are Dr. Donna Bryant, Dr. Joe Sparling, Dr. Lynn Vernon-Feagans, and Dr. Gloria Harbin.



Snapshots are summaries of research articles, books and other publications by researchers at the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill. Permission is granted to reprint this article if you acknowledge FPG and the editor of the book on which this Snapshot is based. For more information, call the FPG Publications Office at 919-966-4221 or email <FPGpublications@unc.edu>



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