

# FAMILY LITERACY



*Experiences from Africa  
and around the world*

*Edited by:  
Snoeks Desmond and Maren Elfert*

*UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning  
dvv international*

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The views expressed in these chapters are not necessarily those of the editors or publishers

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# Foreword

*Adama Ouane*

Family literacy is a form of intergenerational learning that is based on the fundamental connection and interaction between the education of children, young people and adults. To educate children it is of vital importance to involve the adults in the learning process. The education of children and of adults should not be treated as two separate fields as they are intertwined. The family – in its broader sense – builds the foundation for lifelong learning.

Family literacy as a field of specialization is still perceived as a concept emanating from the West as the term was coined in the USA, where family literacy programmes were first introduced in an organized and institutionalized way. These programmes vary in their focus, but all promote the literacy skills of parents and children and enhance the parents' competencies to support the education of their children. Family literacy programmes are well-established, not only in the USA, but also in Canada (as you will see in the Canadian chapter in this book) and the UK. However, intergenerational learning is rooted in many cultures and exists everywhere in the world, in the North as well as in the South. It is our firm conviction that family literacy as an educational approach is relevant and can be highly motivating for learners as it creates a tight and warm symbiosis around learning with mutual support. Research has shown that aside from the “direct” effects of these programmes they have considerable “indirect” effects such as strengthening self-confidence and an interest in education and learning. For many adults, family literacy is the entry point for a lifelong learning journey.

Africa is the priority region of UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). Another priority area is literacy. Addressing literacy challenges in Africa is high on our agenda. Although African literacy rates have doubled in the last two decades, they are still the lowest in the world. Africa has the largest number of countries with a literacy rate below 50%. Although investments have been made in primary education, these are unsatisfactory as they do not reach all children, and are not able to provide children with sustainable literacy skills. Adult education is neglected and often conceived in a way that does not reach the people. Finding new, innovative ways of promoting quality literacy is called for. Family literacy holds the potential to unleash new energies and creativity, foster better understanding and lead to a breakthrough. We are glad to publish this book as it will help to promote literacy by raising the understanding and awareness of family literacy in Africa. It shows that a variety of experiences with regard to this concept exist in this region and will help to bring the different stakeholders together, enter into dialogue and chart a new course of action. It will inform practitioners, policy-

makers and funders about a concept we believe is effective, even if often more expensive than “traditional” adult literacy programmes with however the added value of not only reaching children and adults but also resulting in more effective and sustainable programmes.

Experience shows that family literacy programmes are more flexible and better adapted to the learners’ needs. Family literacy programmes build a bridge between formal and non-formal education and are often more accessible for learners.

We see this book as a contribution to our efforts to promote literacy as a basic human right, especially in Africa. We would like to thank our partners, in particular Wolfgang Leumer from dvv international and Snoeks Desmond from the Family Literacy Project in South Africa, for offering us the opportunity to collaborate on this book.

*Adama Ouane is Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning*

# Introduction

*Snoeks Desmond and Maren Elfert*

The term “family literacy” can be used to refer to literacy practices within families as well as to describe an intergenerational educational programme with a focus on literacy. In this book both references will be used, with a focus on programmes. In the past 30 years many different forms of family literacy programmes have been developed, mostly in the United States of America or the United Kingdom where they target preschool and primary school children and their parents and are based in schools or community centres. Educational programmes with literacy components involving families are found in countries all over the world, but not always under the term “family literacy”. Also, in Africa, intergenerational learning is a familiar practice, but is less institutionalized and more community-oriented.

Family literacy does not only enhance literacy skills but also has wider effects. It can bring about changes in the school culture and in relationships within families. Evaluations have shown that family literacy increases the self-confidence of parents and often is the entry point for their re-engagement in education. Many parents continue with further education opportunities after participating in a family literacy programme. Some parents become “ambassadors” for family literacy programmes and help to recruit other parents for such programmes. Schools are often isolated and outside of the community instead of being a part of it, and family literacy can build a bridge between the community and the schools.

We first made contact with each other because Snoeks had heard about a project Maren was involved in – the European family literacy project called “QualiFLY” – and was interested to know more about it. She attended a meeting of this project and found it very interesting to learn about the practices of family literacy in different European countries. We had many discussions about the differences and similarities between family literacy in European countries and in Africa. This issue was one of the reasons why the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning organised the “North-South Exchange on Family Literacy” where we met again. The group that came together at that meeting came to the conclusion that there are not too many differences after all. The main motivation for adults around the world to participate in these programmes is that they want to support their children in their education. However, there are differences, of course. The biggest difference is that the literate environment is much more limited in Africa. There is much less access to resources and reading materials. As a literate environment is missing, (family) literacy programmes in Africa often have to set up community libraries and develop reading materials, such as the Family Literacy Project in South Africa, of which Snoeks Desmond was the Director for many years. Programmes are often more



basic in Africa, as some of the chapters in this book describe - for example, the chapter on the “Tostan” programme in Senegal by Molly Melching shows it is often advisable to start off with very basic things such as holding a pen. Also, programmes are rarely limited to literacy. In Africa, programmes aim to promote both literacy and life skills, such as citizenship, knowledge about health and environment etc. Although not referred to as family literacy, the “Tostan” programmes target both adults and teenagers and focus on issues that affect families, for example human rights and health. The programme begins by using traditional practices such as song, dance and storytelling to engage participants in discussion and practice of communication skills before introducing the teaching of literacy skills. They also pay attention to providing opportunities for using these skills in daily life.

We also discussed whether family literacy programmes impose (western) values on families that are foreign to them or could even harm them and whether we are taking away something from them by imposing a new practice. This issue is treated by Sandra Land in her chapter in this book. She documents how literacy practices in the home are often invisible to those outside the home who do not see how families relax and enjoy a range of literacy-based activities. Very literate families use their skills more casually than those who struggle with reading and writing.

Grandparents, especially grandmothers, have an important role to play in the education of their grandchildren as they pass on traditional languages and knowledge to their grandchildren. The chapter by Judi Aubel, Bridget Lombardo, Malang Sagna and Ferdinand Keny about the Grandmother Project in Senegal focuses on the grandmothers’ booklet used in schools and adult literacy groups. The booklet stimulates readers to find out more, engage in storytelling and discuss the importance of values and traditional practices. The chapter also addresses the importance of reading materials in local languages – a very important issue in many (family) literacy programmes.

Family Literacy is not yet on most policy agendas. As these programmes target children and adults at the same time, they fall between sectors, and this makes finding funding difficult. The case of Namibia is unique in Africa, as the government invested in family literacy on the basis of research outcomes that showed the strong correlation between the educational background of parents and the school success of children. The chapter on the pilot project in Namibia by Sinvula Kasokonya and Ivan Scheffers is an example of a family literacy programme that is linked to schools and which resulted in improved confidence in children and better links between teachers and parents.

The chapters in this book give an overview of the practice of intergenerational literacy learning in the African region. The chapters are very different from each other in many ways, but underlying every programme is a strong belief in the role

of parents. Many chapters show that the need for adult basic education is so strong that it becomes a focus of the programme even when this was not the original rationale. The chapter from Uganda by Ronald Ssentuuwa shows that a programme that aimed at building classrooms and training teachers by involving adults in the community soon led to requests for adult basic education. These groups use the Reflect approach and, as well as building literacy skills, are also discussing other issues, such as health, that affect their lives.

The chapter from Mali by Souleymane Kanté is about a World Education programme aimed at adults to support them in their literacy development and help them become more effective in community structures. As adults engage in this non-formal education, they become aware of and supportive of their children's formal educational needs.

Four chapters are from South Africa. The chapter on the Family Literacy Project by Snoeks Desmond tracks a project set up to address concerns about low levels of early literacy skills and shows how it expanded to include adult literacy teaching and a range of post-literacy activities where adults practise their skills, work with their children, and share information with neighbours.

The chapter by Kerry Dixon and Kelly Lewis describes a piece of research designed to find out how teachers and parents saw their roles in developing early literacy skills in children. The planned interviews, as well as unexpected reactions of some teachers, provide an interesting view of the need to align school and family approaches to literacy development especially where the language of teaching and learning is not the same as the home language.

The chapter by Lucy Thornton and Juliana Thornton shows how a simple and effective activity of making books has helped children and adults at home, in pre-schools and in other care situations.

We have included some family literacy experiences from outside Africa. We asked Farid Abu Gosh from the Palestinian communities, Maureen Sanders and Ruth Hayden from Canada, Sandro Spiteri from Malta and Vivien Bleakley from Australia to contribute to this volume, for good reasons: Farid Abu Gosh is Chairman of the Trust of Programs for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education, an NGO based in Israel that offers a variety of community and family services to the Palestinian communities. The chapter focuses on the Mother-to-Mother Training Programme, but also shows that in highly disadvantaged areas suffering from conflict, poverty and deprivation, it is not enough to offer literacy programmes; the programmes therefore touch on the broader social needs of the people living in such an environment.

The Canadian chapter focuses on the Centre for Family Literacy in Alberta, a unique institution that offers a range of services and has found favour from

families through to government. The chapter also contains descriptions of fun activities around literacy development for families that are underpinned by research and evaluation of their impact and how this has in turn led to support for the professional development of family literacy practitioners.

The chapter from Malta documents the outstanding and innovative work that has been done by the Foundation for Educational Services with regard to the development of different forms of family literacy programmes. Malta is a unique case as parental involvement is now integrated as a key principle in the National Minimal Curriculum. The chapter from Australia describes in depth three sessions aimed at encouraging parents to read to their children. This attention to detail allows others to replicate these sessions with a clear understanding of the reasons behind the activities.

We believe that intergenerational literacy interactions within the family and community are important for both adults and children and help develop their potential.

We decided to publish this book because we felt that it is high time to inform practitioners and programme developers, and also policy makers and funders of the relevance of family literacy in Africa. We wanted to show that this practice is known in the region – where the needs are overwhelming – and at the same time we want to offer encouragement in the hope that it will be taken up more systematically, and that more resources and funds will be invested in these programmes.

We would like to thank those who have inspired and supported our work and made this publication possible. Maren would like to thank in particular Greg Brooks, Ulrike Hanemann, Yvon Laberge, Carol Medel-Anonuevo, Adama Ouane and Gabriele Rabkin. Snoeks would like to thank Jenny Aitchison, Justin Ellis and Davine Thaw.

We both want to thank Wolfgang Leumer and his colleagues from dvv international for supporting and believing in this project. We would like to thank Jess Nicholson for the design and layout, and Cos Desmond for much of the editing. Especially, we would like to thank all authors who contributed to this book.

# *Family Literacy: Exploiting the synergy between formal and non-formal education in Mali*

*Souleymane Kanté*



## *Introduction*

The international NGO World Education arrived in Mali in March 1991, just as the country was opening its doors to multi-party democracy. Following a participatory needs analysis, World Education began offering adult literacy in the late 1990s as a way to support community engagement in education. “We could do a better job to improve the education of our children,” communities told us, “if we could read and write ourselves.” This led to the establishment of a non-formal adult basic education programme whose explicit goal was to strengthen formal education. From its inception, the programme has been framed as a tool for use by the broader community, not just parents but the entire “village” it takes to raise a child.

Our literacy programme in Mali, and by “our” I mean World Education, its Malian NGO partners and the communities we serve, was developed in response to requests from communities and has had intergenerational impacts.

The literacy component of World Education’s “Support for the Quality and Equity of Education” programme is a non-formal education effort that provides literacy classes for Parent Association, Mother Association and School Management committee members. It is an integral aspect of World Education’s work in education. The literacy programme strengthens the ability of these associations to function as sustainable community organizations and to have an impact upon educational access, quality, and equity in their communities. The individual literacy programme participants gain not only literacy and math skills but also vital content relevant to daily life, to educational quality and equity, and to the management of Parent Associations, Mother Association and School Management committees; they also experience a form of adult schooling, which sensitizes them to their children’s experiences and needs as students.

### *Methodology*

The methodology used by the programme is called *Sanmogoya*, which is taken from a Bambara term that means a person has given a good deal to his or her community. In 2007, 145 villages in Tamasheq, Sonrai and Bambara-speaking regions in Mali ran the programme.

The course is divided into two phases – basic literacy and post-literacy – and is taught by volunteer teachers drawn from the community. The Parent Association in each community manages the programme with training and support from the local NGOs.

The first phase, basic literacy, is a 250-hour course. Class size usually ranges from about 25 to 30 men and women. Communities are free to set their own schedules, but World Education recommends that they hold classes of about two hours, at least four times a week. Classes are usually held between January and June.

In the basic phase, each lesson starts with analysis, by class members working in small groups, of an illustration of a social problem such as lack of water, failure to follow through on a course of vaccinations, or child labour. Learners draw upon their own knowledge and experience to resolve the issue illustrated in the picture. A term salient to this discussion is set in the curriculum and is used as the transition to the literacy activities of the lesson. The course provides learners with plenty of time to practice emergent literacy and mathematics skills by using a combination of individual, small groups, and large group activities. Comprehension is stressed alongside decoding; foundational grammar points are taught explicitly.

The 100-hour post literacy phase introduces the roles and responsibilities of Grassroots Associations. The goal of this phase is to ensure that literacy and mathematics skills become fluent, and that learners have the knowledge and capacity to participate actively in their Associations. The materials include text and stories that lead learners to grapple with management issues and concepts related to educational quality, and they become acquainted with their Association's documents and accounting practices as they learn multiplication and division.

Working with World Education and the Ministry of Education, the NGOs and *Karamogo* (Teachers) themselves have participated in curriculum development and testing and revision of materials, and have provided in-service training and on-going support for *Karamogo*. They have also evaluated learners' literacy gains and explored learners' perceptions of the programme. Over 3 years of the current programme, 24,500 parents have been reached.

World Education's approach to family literacy is to put into practice theories of adult education and balanced reading and writing instruction while introducing content of importance to the learners in a way that enables them to solve problems related to their lives and sensitize them to their children's experiences and needs as students.

The overarching principles upon which the methodology and the programme are built are:

- The literacy approach must be based on sound theories of reading and writing.
- The *Karamogo* (teacher) training and literacy methodology must put into practice theories of adult education.
- The sectoral content must be introduced in a way that enables learners to come up with strategies to solve problems related to the education sector: a synergy is created between the non-formal literacy education and the formal sector.
- The programme must be managed and sustained at the community level.

At the beginning and end of each course, World Education gathers basic demographic data on learners and scores on pre- and post-tests. The evaluation tools for the basic level test literacy knowledge of letter and word recognition, sentence comprehension, letter and word formation, ability to write a simple sentence, number recognition, addition with and without carrying and subtraction with and without carrying.

The post literacy course evaluation tests reading comprehension and writing, and the four mathematical operations. Group discussions after each phase provide an indication of the impact of the information provided during the course. World Education uses all this data to strengthen the curriculum and training of *Karamogo*, as well as to provide learners with positive feedback.

My name is Yaye Coulibaly. I am 22 years old. I am married and the mother of two children. I completed Sanmogoya, World Education's basic literacy course. This year, I am a learner to further strengthen my competency. Frankly, I have learned a lot not only about daily life in my village, but also about the management activities of the APE and information on HIV/AIDS. I do not know how to thank the people who enabled me to acquire this information. I write and I read very well.

Thanks to the training, I am the one designated on the APE board to monitor attendance at school. My enrollment entries are made without mistakes and the attendance book is very well maintained.

I received 40 days of training in income generating activities by a rice cooperative. One of the criteria for being selected as "to be literate." I was trained to make starch.

I can say my life has changed thanks to literacy. I take care of my small family conscientiously. Everyone is in good health, and everything is clean inside and outside the house. My children do not yet go to school, however, I assist the children of my co-wife.

Now I am learning French. From time to time, I take the school book from our child who is in the 5th grade to try to understand what they are doing in the school.

*Karamogo* are supplied with laminated letter flash cards, a flip chart of problem-posing illustrations, and two oil lamps. The responsibility for providing the oil for the lamps rests with the communities.

## Infrastructure

World Education trains the NGO field workers during a two week<sup>1</sup> in-residence training. The NGO field workers train *Karamogo* during a two-week training. World Education provides a five-day in-service training after the end of each course for NGO field workers and their corresponding village teachers. NGO field workers provide in-service coaching and general support to *Karamogo* during visits at least once a month.

NGO field workers select a number of villages that have expressed interest in adding the literacy component to their work. Criteria for selection include need on the part of the Association members, and on the part of the wider community. The NGOs also consider the capacity of the Associations to take on and succeed at an additional task.

The NGO field workers present the Parent Associations that meet the criteria with an overview of the programme, including the idea that the Parent Association will be the manager of the programme (in contrast to literacy efforts that have sent in external *Karamogo* and been managed from afar). Working together, the NGO field worker and the Parent Association Board clarify the roles and responsibilities of the two organizations in the management of the programme. Once the community and the NGO agree, the NGO field worker shows the Parent Association Board members how to manage the literacy programme. Topics include criteria for selecting *Karamogo*, negotiating enrollment issues, and location needs.

Each community identifies two volunteer *Karamogo*, to ensure that, should one be unable to teach, the other can step in. Beyond that, communities develop their own policies: when and where classes are held, who attends (in all cases, Parent Association members are given preference), what happens when participants are absent,

<sup>1</sup> The time allotted to the training has varied between 8 and 12 days.

etc. At the same time, World Education recommends certain practices that have been shown to be beneficial to learning, for example, that classes be held at least four days a week, and for at least two hours a day. Given the weather and agricultural cycle, communities tend to hold classes between January and June, and take two years to complete the basic literacy, enrichment reading, post literacy cycle. Communities have been, as can be expected, creative in their management of the programme.

Once *Karamogos* are selected – ideally a man and a woman – the NGO field workers, working with the World Education literacy coordinator, train them in the activity-based teaching methodology. As the *Karamogos* initiate their classes, the NGO field worker or the World Education literacy coordinator tests each student to determine his or her literacy ability at the beginning of the course. During the running of the course, the NGO field worker visits monthly to support the *Karamogos* and help with any issues that may arise. The NGO field worker administers the same test to each learner at the end of the course and conducts an informal evaluation to find out what information the learners have learned and how they are using it. The NGO field worker also asks about the overall impact of the programme on the community. Additional training, designed jointly by World Education and its NGO partners, is offered to *Karamogos* each year.

The Parent Association evaluates the management of the programme during its bi-annual self-evaluation process. World Education and NGO partners use this information to design additional training. Special literacy classes for the treasurers and secretaries of the Parent Associations have been held as a result of these evaluations. These special classes focus on use of the calculator and accounting for the treasurers and note-taking for the secretaries.

The resources needed for the programme can be divided into three types: development related, training related and operational costs. Development related are those costs incurred in creating the materials and methods. World Education brought as many stakeholders as possible into the development cycle, which drove up costs but assured more lasting interest and ownership of the programme. Training costs involve preparing the NGO partners to work with the communities, the Parent Associations to manage the programme, and the *Karamogos* to teach the programme. Operational costs include supporting the NGOs to provide ongoing support for the programme, and the cost of materials. By creating class sets of books, materials costs are somewhat controlled. The communities work together to provide some compensation for the *Karamogos*. Despite the non-formal nature of this programme, the costs, in particular for training and for putting a book in each learner's hands, are about \$100 per learner.

### *Innovative features and impacts*

This programme is innovative along a number of dimensions. The teaching methodology, which pairs problem solving with literacy learning, was new to the



regions of Mali in which World Education introduced it. The idea that the Parent Association could manage the programme as the programme acted to strengthen grassroots' Association was innovative. Creating a literacy programme model that has the potential to be self sustaining was innovative. Many literacy programmes pay teachers, which means that the programme ends when the funding ends. This programme depends upon the contributions of the community and the management of the community. While some communities can not sustain the programme, others can and do.

One impact of increased literacy of members of Parent Association and Mothers of Students Associations is demonstrated by their ability to take meeting minutes, document planning, and provide transparent management. They are able to interact with government officials with more confidence; the role of leadership is shared among more people. Increased knowledge of education issues and organizational management for members of PSAs and MSAs has impacted their ability to set a course, provide vision, and manage issues. There is an increase in understanding, particularly by mothers, of the value of girls' education. In 2003 (when the current programme began), school enrolment for girls in our target communities was at 56.6%, and in 2006, it had increased to 65.1%. A related, yet unintended, outcome is the response from NON PSA and MSA members who greatly recognized the work of these organizations, which has increased their own involvement in their children's schooling, via homework monitoring. Enhanced by the shift to convergent pedagogy, where local languages are taught before French is introduced, parents can now read their children's notebooks instead of just noting that very little has been written where there should be more! Parents have come to understand what it means to go to school. After being in the literacy class, they now know that they need pencils to write with and time to study and now they know that their children need the same; they report purchasing school supplies and relieving school children of chores to give them time to study.

### *Lessons learned*

Learning to read is hard work, even if the materials and methods are dynamic. Sitting on hard benches in hot, dark rooms, peering at letters and numbers, taxes the motivation of even the most dedicated learner. So, what have we learned from this experience?

#### **Stronger belief in the value of education**

Many literacy class participants explained that belief in the value of education for children was initiated or deepened after discussions held in literacy classes: another example of the synergy between non- and formal education. Many parents now help their children with homework or plan to send all of their children, especially girls, to school in the future. "Rather than send my boy out to watch the

sheep,” explained one man, “I now send him to school.” In one instance, a young man provided literacy instruction to his younger siblings, who had not attended school but were too young to participate in the programme.



### **Increased confidence and mobility**

The programme has also had a strong impact on individuals. For many, becoming literate increased their confidence in daily life and in situations such as travelling. Several learners noted that they were less likely to get lost in other towns now that they were literate. One woman noted that she is now able to label her belongings when travelling, resulting in less loss.

Several participants had had previous experience with literacy programmes. They indicated a preference for the *Sanmogoya* method, in particular the use of illustrations to facilitate discussion to understand concepts.

### **Usually more men than women participate in the course**

A few communities have prioritized the participation of women. In a small number of communities, women are all but banned from the classes due to cultural constraints.

NGO partners and World Education are working on how to show more conservative communities the benefits of educating women. This includes a more thorough exploration of the positive impact of including women in classes during social negotiations with communities. Another strategy has been to test, with private funding, the use of women teachers teaching women-only classes. This has proved to be very successful and should be replicated.

### **Few women become literacy teachers, and those that do often drop out**

The project has had very few success stories in the realm of women *Karamogos*. A number of women were trained and even began teaching, but quit because of their husbands' displeasure. Our pilot “women teaching women” model showed us that women teachers are less likely to quit their posts if they are being trained by women in women-only groups, and teaching women rather than teaching mixed-

gender classes. Compensation for time spent teaching, organized by the participants also helps ensure the retention of women *Karamogos*.

### **Don't *Karamogo* (teachers) get tired of volunteering?**

For some *Karamogos*, the opportunity costs of volunteering, such as time not spent on economic activities, are too steep, and they resign after one cycle. Others pass the job on when other potential *Karamogos* are identified, but surprisingly few have resigned since the beginning of the programme. Being identified as literate, going outside the community for training, and being included in a field worker's visit seems to raise the stature of the *Karamogo* within the community. Some communities raise some funds for the *Karamogo* by charging literacy class participants a fee; others charge fines for unannounced absences as a way to raise some money for the *Karamogo*. Pitching in to help *Karamogo* with their farm work is another strategy used to provide some economic reward to them.

### *Conclusion*

Doing literacy in rural Mali, where the cost of paper and printing is prohibitive and electricity is non-existent, is difficult. It requires sustained investment in materials and training, none of which would be possible without the funding we have received from USAID. Enabling women in rural Mali to become literate can upset the social order; a decision to do so cannot be made lightly. Nonetheless, we have found it to be worthwhile.

Sustaining momentum in a project such as this is a common issue in grassroots development. It can, and should be addressed, in at least two ways. The first is via leadership development. One or two key community members who are committed to the ongoing success of the programme must be identified and nurtured. They will be champions for the programme, who will ensure that it lives on after external support, even if only in the form of motivating visits and training, has ended. Greater synergy between the non-formal and formal sectors is another way to ensure that the programme continues. Institutionalizing the programme via recognition from the Ministry of Education can help sustain it.

So...will you see parents and children in the literacy class in Mali? Perhaps, if the children were never enrolled in school and are attending adult literacy classes as teens or young adults. But not because the classes were designed for that purpose. Are there family literacy programmes in Mali? Yes, if one considers the overall goal of increased literacy on the part of both children and parents to be the definition of family literacy, then the World Education literacy programmes were created to increase family literacy and are having a substantial impact on family literacy.

## *Family Literacy in Namibia*

*Sinvula Kasokonya and Ivan Scheffers*

Before Namibia gained its independence, education was fragmented according to racial and ethnic lines, based on colonial apartheid laws. Education for the majority population was regarded as inferior compared to the education provided to the minority white population. As a result; many people did not have access to schooling, and there remains today a relatively high rate of adult illiteracy.

The post-independence Ministry of Education in Namibia set out to provide “Education for all” under the guiding principles of improving access, quality and equity. One of the initiatives to achieve this was the family literacy programme, fully funded by the Ministry and implemented and managed by the Directorate of Adult Education.

Before launching the family literacy programme, a study was conducted in a school in each of the thirteen regions. The aim of this study was to establish what school principals, teachers, children and their parents (caregivers) believed to be the ways in which parents support their children in the first year of primary school. A total of 229 children, 48 teachers, 13 principals and 89 parents were involved in the study. The main findings were: that principals and teachers experience a lack of confidence/shyness/fear, lack of parental support, lack of kindergarten/pre-school experience when children start school. The study also showed that principals and teachers expected children to read and write their names, speak in their mother tongue, hold a pencil, draw pictures or sing or tell stories when starting school. The study also revealed that parents do not help children to read or do homework, or ask them about schoolwork once they start school. Finally, the study indicated that children liked reading, writing, counting, singing and playing with friends at school (Kasokonya and Kutondokua 2005:94).

### *Implementing the family literacy programme*

The next step in the implementation of the family literacy programme was the training of family literacy promoters or facilitators. Thirteen people (one from each education region) were selected to attend the three-week long training conducted in Windhoek but with a South African consultant, Snoeks Desmond. On completion of the training, their target group was parents of learners in the year before grade one, and learners in the first year in school.

The training of these family literacy promoters was based on the Ministry of

Education document, “The First Teacher” and based on the skills and competencies that are expected from learners in the first year of school.

The main purpose of the training was to equip the promoters with an understanding of the importance of the role of the parents and caregivers in the development of early literacy skills in their children. This included early childhood development, story telling and reading, songs and music, child protection, children’s rights, HIV/AIDS and nutrition. In addition, sessions were designed to develop skills in facilitating groups and designing and writing session outlines.

The course facilitator was assisted at times by experts who were brought in to deliver sessions on specialized topics such as HIV/AIDS, child protection and nutrition.

Staff from the head office of the Ministry of Education attended the training in order to be able to facilitate future sessions necessary for the expansion of the programme if the pilot phase proved successful. This pilot phase ran from May – August 2004 and full implementation started in 2006. In 2007, five centres per region were presenting this family literacy programme, which now runs for the four months of the first trimester of the formal school calendar.

At the regional level, the family literacy programme is coordinated, organized and monitored by Regional Literacy Organizers who operate under the supervision of Regional Coordinators. At district level, the programme is supervised by District Education Officers who are accountable to the Regional Literacy Organizers. Head office staff members monitor the programme while it is in progress in order to quickly detect implementation problems, as well as to provide professional support. For evaluation purposes a standardized evaluation instrument is used in all the centres.

### *Achievements of the family literacy programme*

These have been significant and confirm the need for this programme to strengthen the relationship between the school and families.

- The relationship between parents and teacher has been strengthened, with Grade 1 teachers reporting that participating parents are more interested in what is happening in the classroom. They communicate by letter if there are issues they are not sure of.
- The relationship between parents and the school has been strengthened and, following the course, the parents show more interest in the activities of the school.
- Grade 1 teachers report an improved confidence in learners in topics like story telling, which is an important activity at this level. Parents tell children stories that the children then share in the classroom.

- Many of the activities done in the class are done at home again, because the Family Literacy Programme curriculum included activities from the Grade 1 syllabus. Grade 1 learners engage in many of the same activities both at home and at school, thus reinforcing learning.
- There has been an appeal from communities for the programme to be extended to more schools, especially areas where there are no pre-schools. These appeals could be the result of the perceived benefits of the programme.
- Certificates are awarded at the end of each course. For many of the parents participating in the course, this is encouraging and recognizes their achievements, which is all the more important as many of them are illiterate.
- Parents discovered dance and drama as a tool for communication of important issues. They found this both entertaining and valuable, and see it as a skill they can also use in other areas of their life, for example in church activities.
- Parents appreciated the knowledge and skills acquired in specialized topics - i.e. HIV/AIDS, nutrition, child protection - that they received during the family literacy programme.

## Challenges

There have, of course, been some challenges in the implementation of the programme:

- The table below shows that participation by males, compared to females, is very low. Also a significant number of participants dropped out, compared to the number enrolled. The figures for only nine of the thirteen regions were received at the time of going to print.

MALES ENROLLED	MALES COMPLETED	FEMALES ENROLLED	FEMALES COMPLETED	TOTAL
83	25	791	443	874

- Since the programme targets disadvantaged communities, many parents are unemployed and have to attend to agricultural activities for their daily survival, and this hampers regular attendance.
- If participating parents find jobs in other towns, they regard it as more important than attending the course and drop out to become migrant workers.
- The programme is fully reliant on government for provision of materials. Delays in the provision of materials often occur, and these understandably frustrate parents and the family literacy promoters.
- Some of the older members of the community still harbour the misconception that educating children is solely the task of the teachers, as they are being paid to do this.

- Monitoring visits have at times been hampered by unavailability of government transport, flooding, heavy rains (Northern regions) and dangerous gravel roads.
- The family literacy promoters receive an honorarium of ± N\$700.00 per month from the Namibian Government. As it is difficult to survive on this amount, if promoters are offered a better job they leave the programme. Some centres are left without the services of a promoter for long periods, because new appointees need to be trained before they can start facilitating a course.
- Promoters are often paid late due to technical problems in the salary system, or late submissions of appointments. This can be frustrating to both promoter and supervisor and may result in promoters seeking alternative employment.
- Cases were reported where principals did not welcome the programme at their schools, as it tasks them with extra responsibilities. In these cases, the matter is referred to the Regional Director of Education.
- Few men participate in this course and this is a common phenomenon in the education system. Men prefer to push women to the front when it comes to education of their children.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the challenges, the Family Literacy programme is welcomed by communities in all the regions. Not only by the participating parents, but also by the promoters who are pleased with the job opportunity provided by the programme.

Staff in the Directorate of Adult Education face the challenges mentioned earlier in this chapter and, for many of the solutions, are led by recommendations made by individual regions, although some of the issues still remain unresolved. The programme is relatively new and the Directorate of Adult Education takes every opportunity to learn from similar programmes elsewhere. For example, funding is being sought to find a solution to the low participation of men in the programme.

In view of the many achievements noted by schools and families, the Directorate remains committed to monitoring and strengthening the programme. The involvement of more stakeholders is being seriously considered; for example, partnerships with the Early Childhood Development Sector, as well as the sector in government dealing with Pre-Primary Schools who both wish to be included in Family Literacy Programme activities. With such a move more parents in the community can be reached, and a joint onslaught can be launched in the laying of good foundations in young children from which future learning can emanate.

*Reference:*

**Kasokonya, S.M. and Kutondokua S.N.** 2005. Family Literacy programme in Namibia: What ways a family literacy programme can assist parents and other care providers to support their children in the first years of primary school. In: *Bringing Literacy Home: Family literacy Conference Proceedings 2005*. Pages 94-117. Pietermaritzburg. University of KwaZulu-Natal.



## The Grandmother Project's experience in Senegal: Family literacy materials to promote intergenerational dialogue and learning

Judi Aubel, Bridget Lombardo, Malang Sagna, Ferdinand Keny



Illustration from the cover of  
*Le Rôle des Grand-Mères dans la Société Halpular*

### Background

There are few materials in the area of family literacy that explicitly promote intergenerational learning. With the purpose of strengthening dialogue and learning between the generations, such materials were produced in Senegal, for use both in schools and adult literacy classes, by the Grandmother Project (GMP), an international non-profit organisation. GMP's mission is twofold: to strengthen

inter-generational learning in developing countries; and to strengthen the capacity of grandmothers to promote the health, education and well-being of women and children in those settings. The GMP grew out of the observation that, in virtually all non-Western societies, senior women, or grandmothers, play a pivotal role in the education and development of children, families and communities.

In developing countries, the design of most education, literacy and other community programmes is strongly influenced by Western “models” and “approaches” that do not reflect local cultural values, roles and traditions. This tendency is frequently observed, for example, in literacy materials and programmes that: give limited recognition to the knowledge and experience of the elders; involve elders in a very limited way in discussions of topics on which they are knowledgeable; and project Western youth-focused values and roles that may be in conflict with more traditional value systems, in which youth are expected to respect and learn from older family and community members. GMP believes that one objective of literacy programmes should be to promote intergenerational relationships and learning, which are highly valued in non-Western societies in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

In an age of globalisation, significant changes are occurring in virtually all non-Western societies. A widely-observed phenomenon is the gradual loss of cultural identity and unique traditions. Another is the breakdown in communication between the generations. At school, children are often torn between the cultural values and roles upheld in their families and communities, on the one hand, and those conveyed in school settings, on the other.

In the growing body of literature on intergenerational learning programmes and research, there is considerable discussion of the impact of Western values on non-Western societies and the homogenisation, or “flattening of culture” (Roodin 2004, p. 218) associated with the invasion by foreign and so-called “modern” values. In the current global context, it seems appropriate that all educational programmes, and specifically literacy programmes, should seriously consider whether they are contributing to accelerating these trends or, conversely, to helping both younger and older community members to critically think about how best to integrate traditional and new values within their cultural contexts.

### *Intergenerational learning and the Grandmother Project*

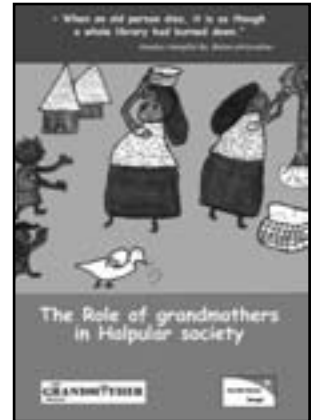
GMP's involvement in literacy programmes aims not only to strengthen the reading and problem-solving skills of both children and adults; it also seeks to promote intergenerational learning by increasing young people's understanding of cultural values and traditions, as well as their respect for the experience and knowledge of the elders in their communities.

*“Schools and television are contributing to the loss of cultural values. We must find a way to balance what is taught to children about Western and traditional values. The grandmother booklet is a positive contribution in this regard.”*

Pierre Ndiaye, Senegalese teacher

### Booklet on the role of Grandmothers

In an effort to raise awareness of the importance of cultural knowledge and values, GMP produced a booklet, entitled “The Role of Grandmothers in Halpular Society”, to highlight the vital role that grandmothers play in the lives of children and their families. It was developed for use in both primary schools and adult literacy classes in southern Senegal, where the predominant ethnic group is Halpular. The booklet and its dissemination to primary schools and adult literacy classes has served as a tool for teachers to bridge the gap between school and home by promoting discussion of cultural roles, values, and traditions. The use of this innovative material by teachers, during moral education classes, has helped to increase young people’s appreciation of their own cultural traditions and to strengthen their recognition of the valuable input of grandmothers and grandfathers into family and community life.



In Senegal, as elsewhere in Africa, passing on cultural traditions and moral values to children in the family is the role of the elders, particularly the grandmothers. The critical role played by the grandmothers is expressed in the following statement made by one of the teachers who has been using the booklet with his classes.

*“It is grandmothers who teach children important traditional values like generosity, patience, empathy and solidarity with other family members.”*

Amadou Cissé, Senegalese teacher

The development of the booklet was a result of collaboration between GMP and World Vision<sup>1</sup> and was undertaken based on three objectives:

- To produce a booklet on “The Role of Grandmothers in Halpular Culture” in both French (for schools) and Pulaar (for adult literacy classes);
- To organise a series of half-day meetings to introduce the booklet to 250 primary school teachers, literacy teachers, and other partner development organisations; and
- To distribute the booklets, and to develop a plan for follow-up of their utilisation in schools and literacy classes.

<sup>1</sup> Development of the grandmother booklet and training of teachers in its use was funded by the World Vision Area Development Program in Velingara, Senegal, under the directorship of Patrice Diatta.

The development and dissemination of the booklet was carried out in several phases. First, a rapid community study was conducted to collect information on the roles of grandmothers in Halpular communities. This was done through a series of group interviews with different categories of community members, young and old. Second, a drawing competition was organised with school children in order to collect a series of colourful drawings to illustrate each of the roles grandmothers play in the lives of children and families. Once the booklet was published, a series of workshops, with 250 teachers, was carried out to discuss alternative uses of this material with students, both within the classroom and in the wider community.

### *The content of the booklet*

The booklet opens with a prologue describing the status of grandmothers in Senegalese society and contains eleven short chapters, each presenting one of the principle roles played by Halpular grandmothers in the community, namely:

- preserving and passing on cultural values and traditions to younger generations
- helping young mothers with child care
- participating in the education of preschool-age children within the family
- advising fathers concerning the well-being of women and children
- guiding young married women
- advising pregnant women
- promoting health and treating illnesses within the family
- coordinating housework
- managing household food resources
- protecting the home
- mediating in cases of conflict

Each chapter describes grandmothers' activities and practices relative to each role. Each chapter also includes proverbs that reflect the knowledge and experience of grandmothers and allow children to better understand the importance of these senior women in society. Open-ended questions are also incorporated to elicit dialogue and reflection among children about the specific role presented in the chapter.



The first chapter describes the role grandmothers play as guardians of cultural traditions and values, showing how grandmothers often teach these values through storytelling. Traditional stories teach children values such as dignity, honour,

truth, and respect for elders. Storytelling has existed for generations, however, grandmothers and other elders note that there is a tendency for this important tradition to disappear. A series of open-ended questions enables students to reflect on this traditional activity and its value in their lives and to discuss what can be done to preserve it.

The second chapter discusses how grandmothers share responsibility with young mothers for child care in the family. It is grandmothers who teach new mothers about all aspects of caring for children. The text and the discussion questions allow children to discuss the involvement of their own grandmothers in caring for them. A song of praise to the grandmothers is included, encouraging grandchildren to appreciate this vital role.

#### *Song of Praise to Grandmother*

Dear grandmother, dear grandmother  
How wonderful you are  
How wonderful you are  
Dear grandmother, dear grandmother,  
Your heart is big and full of compassion  
Dear grandmother, dear grandmother  
May God grant you a long life!

The chapter concludes with a proverb that celebrates and affirms the strong, loving attachment felt by grandmothers toward their grandchildren.

*"Your child is like milk but your grandchild is like cream."*

Halpular proverb

Children are asked to think about what this proverb means and to discuss what they can do to demonstrate their love for their grandmothers.

Another chapter discusses the important role of grandmothers in the education and development of young children in the family. In this chapter, it is explained that in many cases grandmothers have more time to spend with their grandchildren than do their own mothers, and that they often have more patience with them than their own parents do. A local proverb that illustrates the importance of the grandmothers' role is also included.

*"Grandmother's lessons are like a school that prepares you for life."*

Halpular proverb

Yet another chapter talks about the role of grandmothers as "advisors to fathers regarding the well-being of their wives and children". The text explains that, although men are the heads of families, much of the time they are in the fields or away from home. Advice on how husbands should treat their families is given by the ever-present grandmothers who observe the family's day-to-day goings-on.

A later chapter highlights the grandmother's role as a guide to young wives. The text explains that a newly-wed woman does not know the ways of her new family

and it is the grandmother who advises her. Many young women say that, thanks to the guidance they received from their mothers-in-law, they learned how to fit into their husband's family. A local proverb exemplifies the grandmother's role as a guide to a new wife. A follow-up question asks children to interpret the proverb and to discuss what their own mothers learned from their grandmothers.

*"A grandmother who is sitting on the ground can see further than a young woman who is way up in a tree."*

Halpular proverb

### *Use of the booklets in schools*

Each participating school set up a lending library system, with the booklets kept by the school directors. In all cases, the school directors and teachers agreed to incorporate the activities into their curriculum. While lamenting that there is very little time in the busy school calendar for extra activities, they did agree that these materials could be used during the time allotted for Moral Education.

In order to monitor use of the booklets in the schools, a follow-up system was agreed upon for the 2007–8 school year. As an incentive, the three schools that use the booklets the most creatively to stimulate intergenerational dialogue and learning will receive prizes at the end of the school year.

Some of the learning activities already carried out that were inspired by the "Grandmother Booklet" are:

- Storytelling by grandmothers in the classroom and discussion with children on the moral lessons of each story;
- The use of booklets as reading material for primary school students and for adults in literacy classes;



- Organising "storytelling evenings" in the community for families where grandmothers tell their favourite tales and others discuss their significance;
- Presentation of skits by children to community groups, based on different chapters in the booklet; and
- Creating collections of traditional stories and proverbs through interviews of grandparents by students.

## *Impact of the booklet*

The development of the booklet was met with enthusiasm by teachers, community members, and community development workers alike. Many declared that there was a definite need for such a booklet, given the fact that recognition of the roles played by grandmothers and grandfathers is diminishing. Community people asserted that, although schools are important, they do not teach moral and cultural values as grandmothers traditionally do through storytelling and other means. Community elders stated that the fact that children are spending much of their time at school, and less and less with their grandparents, contributes to the loss of cultural identity and values.

Various community members expressed their feelings about the benefits of this activity in terms of its contribution to intergenerational learning. One of the respected community elders, who is also very knowledgeable about Halpular culture, stated,

*“This initiative is very important. If we don’t do something fast, in twenty years we will find that our culture has been completely lost. And grandmothers are an important part of our culture.”*

Moussa Mballo, elder

Several of the teachers commented on the value of the booklet and its potential impact on the children in their classes.

*“The children of today don’t know their culture and schools don’t teach about culture. Children need to learn about the cultural and moral values of their society. This booklet is a great thing because it will help us to teach about culture and values in the classroom.”*

Moussa Touré, teacher

Another teacher talked about how the project has contributed to strengthening intergenerational relationships:

*“If children hear teachers talking about the importance of elders in our society, this can help bring children and elders closer together. In the past, we have never invited grandparents into the classroom. The booklet helps us see how we can do so.”*

Mariama Sabaly, teacher

During a follow-up visit to one of the schools, the local World Vision Coordinator, Patrice Diatta, expressed his feelings about the importance of this project to a

forum of grandparents, teachers and children:

*“This project has helped us to put our finger on something that we had forgotten in development programmes, our cultural roots. At school, children learn a lot about other places and other values but not from our own traditions and values. We have lost something very important and these activities that bring grandmothers together with children can give these young people a chance to learn from the grandmothers who have so much to share.”*

Patrice Diatta, World Vision Coordinator, Velingara

The consensus among all those involved in the activity is that this project has been advantageous in several ways. First, it has helped teachers promote the teaching of cultural knowledge and values. Second, it has encouraged elders to become involved in the schools and to reclaim their role as educators in the family and community. And third, it has strengthened communication between the generations.

Literacy programmes can play a crucial role in promoting local cultural traditions and can contribute to increasing awareness of, and respect for, the knowledge and experience of all members of the community. The innovative literacy materials produced in this project have served to strengthen the role of grandmothers in their role as transmitters of cultural values and traditions, to help safeguard positive cultural traditions and, at the same time, to reinforce intergenerational relationships and learning. Similar materials could be produced in other cultural settings to contribute to increasing literacy, strengthening cultural identity and reinforcing intergenerational understanding.

### *Acknowledgements*

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### *Reference*

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# *Intergenerational Learning in Senegal: the Tostan Experience*

*Molly Melching*

## *Introduction*

Aida Ndiaye just returned home from her literacy class. It had been her dream to learn how to read and write for many years so that she could be “educated”, and be able to access new opportunities for both herself and her family. She also hoped to be able to help her children more with their education. Every night they return home from school and ask her questions to which she has no answers. She sometimes has no idea what they are even talking about.

The difference in language is certainly a hindrance as she does not speak French and they are learning in that language, but even when her children ask questions about health or math in her own language, Wolof, she feels lost. She thought being in a literacy class would change all that. Unfortunately, despite her initial enthusiasm and efforts for learning, Aida does not want to continue participating in the literacy programme.

She has attended classes regularly for four weeks, sitting in a classroom, and studying her worksheet with all sorts of unfamiliar marks and lines. However, she still can't make sense out of all this writing and knows it will take her many months before she will be able to meaningfully use what she has learned. By the time her literacy class starts in the afternoon, she is already so tired from her daily chores of gathering wood, fetching water, cooking, and taking care of her large family that she finds it hard to concentrate.

Hunched behind a small pupil's desk for 2 hours each session, Aida is often anxious and restless, worrying about all the tasks she has waiting for her to do at home. “Oh well, I'll just come less and less and no one will notice. I'm just not smart enough and will never succeed in becoming literate”, she thinks to herself.

Aida's situation represents that of thousands of women across West Africa who often start literacy programmes with great hopes of a better future, only to drop out after a short period of time.

At the end of their experience, many emerge discouraged and disillusioned with their ability to become literate, as well as questioning whether literacy classes for adults are really as important as everyone says they are. They feel totally disconnected from a larger, outside world where such things seem to be essential.

## The Tostan approach to literacy

*“All the time, after class, we talk about Tostan. On our way to fetch water, or with the children, we talk about what we learn and the importance of this education. It helps us. It improves our minds. We now know our human rights and we always talk about them. We talk about how to improve our family and our work.”*

Nansa Darameh, Village Midwife and Tostan participant

Since its inception in 1991, Tostan, a non government organization based in Senegal, has been actively promoting a new model of basic education for rural African communities. In developing its programme, the Tostan pedagogical staff took into account that most literacy programmes have difficulty retaining women because they already have multiple responsibilities, ranging from family care to subsistence agricultural work. The burden of such immediate and pressing responsibilities leaves learners with little time for literacy classes and independent study. Not only do they have to compete with demands as wives, mothers, and domestic workers, but also with a lack of facilities such as adequate classrooms, lighting, comfortable chairs and tables, reading glasses and a general environment that is conducive to serious study. But more importantly, the content of the first months of these programmes often does not sufficiently attract new learners.

Many literacy programmes assume that active, task-oriented women will be able to learn to read, write and do math in approximately five months and continue the learning process on their own. However, many rural women have never attended school, have rarely seen writing in their environment, and have no experience in how reading, writing and math can be applied practically. Given these obstacles, Tostan realized that a successful programme for helping women to transform their lives meant rethinking traditional educational approaches to better respond to participants' needs, habits, lifestyle, and culture. Women needed to have a very strong reason to spend hours in a classroom. Tostan also felt that it was essential to create programme content and strategies to improve communication, understanding, and collaborative action for positive change.

To achieve these goals, Tostan decided to begin the educational process in a form that is familiar to all participants - the oral tradition. Recognizing that rural women and youth are indeed intelligent and have already successfully mastered multiple learning experiences before entering the classroom, Tostan first helps participants understand that learning involves much more than just reading and writing. By immediately presenting relevant educational sessions using participatory, familiar and engaging communication methods of song, stories, poetry, theatre and role play, Tostan encourages participants to discuss issues of critical importance in their everyday lives before tackling any reading, writing or basic mathematical

operations. Tostan realized that participants first need to go through this period of awareness raising, exchange, and debate to reinforce and give value to the life knowledge they have previously acquired. During this first phase, participants receive new information, discuss the information in relation to previous knowledge and practice, and then take action on issues related to their daily concerns in a way that engages everyone actively in the process. They quickly understand that knowledge can be used for practical actions to improve the well-being of both their family and community. With their new communication skills, the participants regularly share new information and ideas with their friends, relatives, children, and/or parents.

Recognizing that participants, particularly rural women and youth who have rigorous daily work schedules, need to be welcomed into a warm, inviting, and lively atmosphere, Tostan also transformed the learning environment. Facilitators arrange the seating of participants in a semi-circle so they can interact and talk with one another, stand up easily, dance, or do role play. This, along with a participatory and democratic teaching methodology, helps contribute to the women's self-confidence and motivation. Very few even think about dropping out. Suddenly education is perceived as liberating and empowering as participants become teachers, leaders and agents of change.

Initially, Tostan worked with adults in some villages and young people aged 12 to 18 in others; however this created real obstacles to collaborative social transformation. Adults were making important decisions to change social norms that involved the youth of the community who had not been through the same educational process. In other cases the children were learning information that their parents did not understand, thus they started blocking certain activities and expressing their concerns to Tostan. Thus, Tostan now always opens two classes in each community – one for adolescents and one for adults. In this way, youth who have never been to school or who have dropped out of school after a few years, benefit from human rights education and life-skills learning that prepares them for a more prosperous and fulfilling future and also connects them with their parents and a larger world beyond their own village. Together, they begin working with a common vision, vocabulary, and methodology to find solutions to family and community problems.

## *The Tostan Community Empowerment Programme*

### **A new literacy paradigm**

Over the last 17 years, the Tostan Community Empowerment Programme has evolved with significant input from participants and trainers. One difference between Tostan's literacy programme and others is that Tostan does not start out

immediately teaching literacy skills. This approach has several major advantages. The first is that there is a high retention rate and people tend to invite others to join the classes to participate in the lively discussions. Elder leaders of the village enjoy attending these discussions because they will not be asked to try to read and write. Their communication skills and experience are appreciated and valued by class members. The second advantage of the approach is the immediate and often life-saving results in the areas of hygiene, health, the environment, and the respect of human rights in general. Lastly, this approach leads to the programme being sustainable as new information is spread rapidly within the community as well as from village to village by the participants themselves. This has led to the emergence of women and youth as dynamic and confident educators and leaders of their community.

### **Summary of the Tostan programme**

Tostan's educational programme works outside the formal educational system and targets adults and adolescents primarily in rural areas who have had little or no access to literacy programmes or formal schooling. The Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) is carried out over a 30 month period and contains both a structured curriculum, as well as a set of practical applications that reinforce the sessions. Tostan places a strong emphasis on the development of critical thinking, as well as research skills and abilities, especially those that help rural participants to investigate issues in their own communities. Based on a foundation of democracy and human rights, the curriculum consists of two phases, each containing modules organized around a common theme. The programme is facilitated by trained agents who live in the community and teach the modules for two groups of 20 – 30 participants three times a week.

The first phase of the programme is called the *Kobi*, a Mandinka word meaning “to prepare the field for planting,” which consists of four modules: Democracy, Human Rights, and Responsibilities, Problem Solving, Health, and Hygiene. The *Kobi* lasts for 10 months and is composed of over 80 2-3 hour sessions that build upon one another. The sessions are discussed orally by the participants who are encouraged to actively engage in the lively discussions, small group work, and role play. As information is acquired, the role plays help participants to “rehearse” how they can discuss previously taboo subjects with their parents, children, husbands, and religious or traditional leaders. They try out communication strategies and are given immediate feedback from other class members, a practice that makes real discussions with family and community members, as well as local authorities, easier to hold when they leave the classroom setting.

The *Kobi* is the pre-requisite to the second phase of the CEP called the *Aawde*, a Fulani word meaning “to plant the seeds.” The *Aawde* phase introduces literacy and math lessons, as well as project management training. In the first part of the *Aawde*, participants are taught how to read and write in their own national

language. They receive books and practice writing various types of texts: letters, project proposals, reports, autobiographies, stories, poems, and songs. They also learn how to write numbers and perform basic math operations for practical application: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Each participant is given a calculator and all learn how to use this simple instrument for facilitating every day math needs. They also gain valuable management skills and learn how to create budgets, do feasibility studies and write financial reports. During the 18 month *Aawde* phase, participants are also provided with interactive workbooks that reinforce previously covered topics of the *Kobi*, as well as giving them the opportunity to improve their literacy level. The two workbooks are entitled *From Knowledge to Action*.

Tostan develops and prints its own unique teaching and learning materials in over 16 African national languages. Developed over the years with the collaboration of local and international pedagogical experts, Tostan staff, and hundreds of African villagers, these materials include participant books and facilitator guides for teaching the carefully thought out sessions using traditional African techniques such as song, dance, poetry, and story-telling.

### **Addressing the issue of motivation: beyond literacy**

Since Tostan works mostly with populations who have never been to school and who are proud of their oral traditions, literacy skills are not always seen as useful or relevant. It is also more difficult to motivate people to learn to read and write if there is no obvious personal gain. Hence, Tostan has realized the importance of giving learners an incentive and an outlet for their acquired skills. Since the Tostan approach possesses a wider variety of links to real-world, everyday activities, the CEP is able to retain learners for longer periods.

By starting the programme with discussions about the participants' aspirations for their community and their family which are then incorporated into the classes, participants become invested in the programme, and as a result, are less likely to drop out. Since the aspirations of participants almost always include a democratic society where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, Tostan starts its education programme with the *Kobi* modules on democracy, including the study of basic human rights and responsibilities. These sessions form the foundation for the rest of the Tostan CEP, during which participants review, debate, and put into practice these concepts.

By recognizing the family, and by extension, the community as an institution for education and learning, new values and beliefs can be transferred to younger generations, which are reinforced throughout their formative years. In holding concurrent classes for both adults and adolescents, it is ensured that the community as a whole is given the opportunity to make decisions based on the same knowledge and skills that they have acquired. The role of the community as

a learning place and a practice ground for values, rights, responsibilities, and democracy is central to bringing about changes both individually and within the wider society. Due to the importance attached to involving the family and community as a whole, Tostan always conducts the Community Empowerment Programme in national languages. Programmes designed to serve a community have a greater chance of success if they make use of the language or languages spoken by potential participants as they elicit a sense of allegiance and “ownership” from actual and potential participants. By designing the programme in national languages, using familiar elements of African culture, the programme easily reaches into the homes of the participants. In addition, Tostan has also been able to integrate other technologies, such as radio broadcasts for literacy, into its education programme. These are powerful and useful marketing tools that immediately draw others into the literacy programme.

The focus on family and community has also led Tostan to establish a Community Management Committee (CMC) in each village at the start of the Tostan educational programme. The function of the CMC is to facilitate learning, to coordinate activities, and to promote community development both during the programme and after its formal completion. Composed of 17 democratically elected members, the CMC is a mechanism for community action and institutionalizing community leadership. It is under the CMC that inter-generational meetings are held, allowing villagers of all age groups to gather and discuss their ideas, and which allows literacy to be passed on as a value. In addition to the CMC, Tostan participants commit to adopting another learner, either a family member, neighbour or friend. The lessons learnt during the Tostan classes are then presented to the adopted learner.

Over the last seven years, this community-led development approach has become even more effective through the outreach of participants to other communities. Such partnerships have created ever-widening networks for resource sharing and social action. Tostan refers to this process of reaching out to others to disseminate information as “organized diffusion.” In this “organized diffusion” model, participants “adopt” and share the lessons that they have learned with friends and family members and with the community at large. The community itself then “adopts” surrounding communities. This diffusion of knowledge and action has brought about a large consensus on the need to change some traditionally held norms and beliefs and has also helped to disseminate other new notions such as the importance of literacy to achieve goals for development.

Central to the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that have enabled Tostan participants to transform their communities are the unique literacy materials and pedagogy of the Tostan Community Empowerment Programme. The literacy portion of the CEP has been vital to the ability of Tostan to engage communities in their own languages and cultural traditions to bring about social transformation. Experience in the field has demonstrated that such community-led development can have long lasting effects on the well-being of participants and their

communities. In employing a holistic educational approach, Tostan is able to encourage participants to articulate the reasons behind former practices and interactions. By drawing on the information provided by such dialogue that elicits the future aspirations of the community, they are then able to identify and solve the problems within the community. When participants take such initiatives that they believe will help them to reach individual and community goals, these new actions are more likely to be sustainable and effective. For example, Tostan has supported participants in their endeavours to construct health huts for first aid treatment, build wells, as well as to conduct social-mobilization campaigns that include the organization of inter-village meetings and public declarations to abandon Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and child/forced marriage. To date, 2,996 communities have held 31 declarations to abandon these harmful practices. Tostan also helps communities establish their own public health initiatives, such as increasing vaccination rates and promoting family planning. Participants soon realize that literacy skills are critical for keeping records, writing reports and informing others of activities and services available.

Since the *Kobi* is a pre-requisite to the literacy portion of the CEP, literacy is taught within the context of human rights and health. As a result, the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the participants are changing while learning how to read and write. For example, the human right to an education is one of the first human rights taught in the CEP. In Senegal, the education of children cannot be assumed. Child labour is important to subsistence farmers. In addition, while adult women must take care of children and cooking, their daughters bear a parallel burden. Instead of going to school, their daughters assume domestic responsibilities, which include taking care of their younger siblings and household tasks, while mothers work in the fields or in the informal sector of the economy. Since it is also common for girls to be given away at an early age in marriage and bear children, there is even less incentive to give any priority to their education. Given these economic and cultural realities, it is through the discussion of human rights and responsibilities related to education that a change in the attitude of villagers is possible. One of the principal activities that the Community Management Committee in each village undertakes is to register students, particularly girls, for school. Communities that have completed the CEP regularly see a rise in the rate of enrollments at the local primary school. Most CMCs have also launched campaigns to register children at birth in their communities and help girls and boys who were never registered to obtain birth certificates, a requirement for school and obtaining an identity card or passport.

The Community Management Committee, composed of both adults and adolescents, is essential to the sustainability of the skills learnt in the CEP, especially literacy and mathematical skills. When community meetings are held to discuss issues affecting the community or to plan activities, ideas are written down, and the minutes of these meetings are recorded. This is an example of integrating literacy into the activities of the community, hence ensuring the

consistent use, and passing on of literacy skills to future generations. Other examples include projects overseen by Tostan's department of microcredit, which allows participants to use their newly gained literacy, mathematical, and small project management skills, in conjunction with improving their individual economic conditions as well as that of their community. In 2005, an evaluation was carried out by a technical team from the Senegalese Ministry of Education in 168 villages with 693 participants that had completed the Tostan CEP in the regions of Ziguinchor, Kolda, Tambacounda, and Matam. It was found that in 90.2 percent of the communities, income-generating activities (as encouraged by the programme) had been implemented. One center, Kabeumb in the Region of Ziguinchor, was extremely successful, as participants at this site were able to use their resources to purchase a millet grinder and to create a health center.

However, Tostan continually strives to create environments conducive to the learning, maintenance and improvement of literacy skills acquired during and after the CEP. New projects are underway in 2008. For example, Tostan is currently creating an interactive website for participants and facilitators to post their songs, stories, proverbs, theaters, and articles in national languages that can be shared with and commented on by other participants.

### *Achievements of the Tostan model*

*"Human rights can be protected. Child marriage can be prevented. Forced marriage and Female Genital Cutting can be stopped. Before we learned about Human Rights, men hit their wives, but after this education from Tostan, these beatings are now stopping, in our homes, in our society. Through this Tostan education, we have now really begun to understand that these things must stop. We now stand together, chatting, doing things together. We all come together like brothers and sisters. This is why I really appreciate this and am happy and hope that tomorrow will bring more of this education!"*

Sanneba Keita, Tostan class participant in Medina Koto, The Gambia

The Tostan Community Empowerment Programme has led to many results. Through the *Kobi*, participants begin to work through and solve important social issues, make positive changes, act with new confidence, pride, and the conviction that they are part of a larger social movement towards human dignity through respect of human rights and responsibilities. By promoting such issues as vaccination, pre and post natal consultation, family planning and birth registration, women's leadership and participation, as well as ending ethnic conflict, gender bias, caste discrimination, child/forced marriage and domestic violence, villagers become powerful human rights activists.



The villagers in this Tostan programme also made an historic breakthrough when they decided to abandon Female Genital Cutting, a practice that has persisted for generations and has led to incredible pain, suffering and death for millions of girls and women. Through their basic education programme, the women realize that they have a role in protecting the health of their daughters and gain the confidence to speak out about the issue for the first time and work with religious and traditional leaders to organize others in their community and intra-marrying group to abandon the practice as a united family. The adolescent classes have become particularly active, holding intergenerational meetings and sponsoring outreach campaigns in the areas where they live.

The methods and strategies Tostan uses for ending Female Genital Cutting are always respectful and sensitive to the people involved. Trying to force change through coercive action and condemnation has alienated people in the past and can be dangerous because it causes people to become defensive and to cling even more than before to their traditional beliefs. A law against FGC is only helpful after people have gone through a process of non-directive education and truly understand the risks involved in the practice.

The Public Declaration has become a central and crucial aspect of ending FGC and is catching on quickly. Tostan now believes that Senegal could be the first African country to totally abandon the practice of FGC.

The retention rates of Tostan's educational programme are generally high according to several evaluations conducted since 2000 in Senegal, often 90 percent or more. Tostan believes the rate is much higher than in other literacy classes because participants are motivated by the culturally relevant teaching techniques, visible community development gains related to class efforts, and by the content of the lessons themselves, which include democracy, human rights, in depth health sessions and feasibility studies – subjects which many have never discussed before.

To date, Tostan has had successful implementation experiences in Burkina Faso and the Sudan, as well as current programmes in Senegal, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, Mauritania, Djibouti, and Somalia.

The success of the Community Empowerment Programme in increasing literacy rates can be attributed to the integration of literacy skills into other programmes that directly affect and are relevant to the lives of the programme's participants. Village participants are skilled at creating and maintaining multifaceted social networks within and among communities, networks that are familial, religious, economic, and educational. These historically deep social connections are inter-generational, created through making shared decisions and responding to challenges. It is by embedding its educational practices in the social context of villagers' daily lives, that the Tostan Community Empowerment Programme has

been able to successfully promote literacy as a value to over 2,500 communities in Senegal, and in six other West and East African countries.

### *Conclusion*

Tostan's unique and holistic approach to literacy and non-formal education has warranted much success in Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea and other sub-Saharan African countries. The CEP was created with rural African communities in mind; it is implemented in local languages, respectful of individual cultures, inclusive of all ethnicities, classes, ages and sexes, and employs a method of communication and facilitation that is familiar, engaging, and participatory. The Tostan programme is in a constant state of evolution, adapting to the needs and preferences of participants, to their input and suggestions.

*"When the history of African development is written, it will be clear that a turning point involved the empowerment of women. Tostan has demonstrated that empowerment is contagious, accomplished person by person and spreading village by village. They are writing a story of inspiration, hard work, grass roots participation, tangible results, and a much brighter future."*

-William H. Foege, Chairman, Global Health Council

## *Family Literacy in a rural setting: The story of the Family Literacy Project*

*Snoeks Desmond*



### *Introduction*

Family literacy – the intergenerational sharing in reading and writing activities – happens in many homes in South Africa, but the more formal use of the term and programmes relating to it have only recently begun to emerge in this country. Early childhood development agencies in South Africa have incorporated the development of early literacy skills into their work for many years and adult literacy programmes are also widespread in the country. It is only in the last ten years, however, that people have been talking about ‘family literacy’ and only since 2000 that family literacy has been developed and gradually incorporated into the

work of both adult literacy and early childhood development practitioners. The South African Constitution spells out the right to basic adult education and the rights of children. However, despite plans and efforts of the government, there are not enough adult literacy programmes or pre-schools and crèches to realise these rights. The non-government sector remains one of the main providers in both sectors; family literacy is seen as an approach that can meet the literacy needs of both.

Family literacy work in South Africa is usually included as part of an existing programme within an organisation rather than as the sole aim of an organisation; though there are those who have dedicated their whole project to supporting family literacy. This chapter on the Family Literacy Project (FLP) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa describes one such family literacy programme.

Family literacy takes many forms but most programmes stem from a concern over low literacy attainment in young children. Research conducted all over South Africa in the late 1990s showed that early literacy skills were a cause for concern. Literacy scores were low and, even with interventions by national government, were not improving. These governmental interventions focused on providing training and support to some pre-schools and crèches, but did not seem to have a positive effect on literacy.

Some organisations and individuals in the early childhood sector became interested in providing more support to families, in the hope that this would be more effective than working only with pre-schools and crèches. The Family Literacy Project set out to pilot this approach.

### *The Family Literacy Project, KwaZulu-Natal*

*"It has helped me a lot that we learn as a family, I no longer have low confidence around people and I can help my children with their school work and read books that I borrow from the library to them. These books are very helpful because the children often have homework and they allow me to be able to help them easily because I have read the library books and because I can teach my children to write English.*

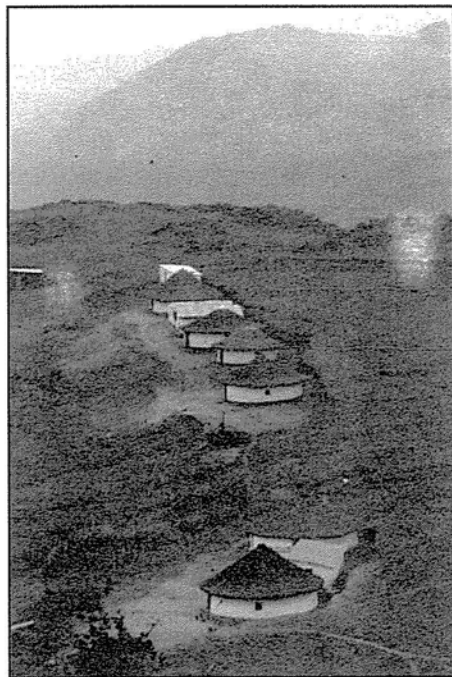
*It has been very helpful to study with the FLP because we have much more understanding in my family and with our neighbours, we are no longer uneasy around each other. Even the neighbour's children ask me for help with their school work because they have heard my children saying that their mother helps them with their homework."*

Sibongile Dlamini

In March 2000, the FLP pilot began and drew heavily from examples of projects in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom. The circumstances in these projects and the situation in South Africa are very different, so the approach had to be adapted to suit the needs of rural South African families.

The first FLP parent groups were set up for the parents of pre-school children in five remote, rural sites in KwaZulu-Natal. The people are very poor and the area has bad roads, and little electricity or running water. The pre-schools are community-run, with few toys or books for the children.

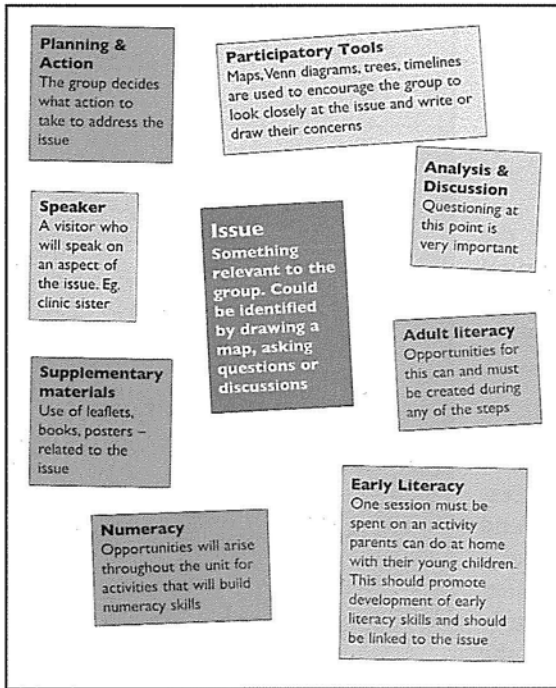
The sessions for the parents covered activities that could be done at home using natural resources, conversations and, where available, books and pictures. All the activities were aimed at young children and provided guidance to parents so that they could play more of a role in developing early literacy skills. Parents were eager to try out the activities even though many, for poverty-related reasons, had not completed formal school.



The parents were not sure that they could help their children develop early literacy skills if they themselves had low levels of literacy. Once they realised that children were already developing important skills in performing ordinary household tasks, they began to feel more confident. One example given was that when a mother walks to the river to fetch water she can tell her child where they will be going, on the way they talk about what they see, when they are back home they talk about where they have been and what they did. Here the child develops early literacy skills such as planning, vocabulary, recall, repetition and sequencing. Young children do not read or write but, as they learn to talk, parents can help them by encouraging conversation. The adults realised how important they were and became very enthusiastic about learning more about themselves and their children. It is their enthusiasm that has carried the project from its start in 2000, with many women still attending the twice-weekly sessions eight years later.

The women soon began asking the FLP to help them improve their own literacy skills. The five groups each chose a woman from their community to be their facilitator. These women were trained by FLP in a participatory facilitation method known as REFLECT<sup>1</sup>, and in adult and early literacy. By combining these three aspects, units of six or seven workshop sessions were developed. The units form the basis of the twice-weekly sessions, each of which lasts two hours.

1 "Reflect is a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people's critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. .... Based on ongoing processes of reflection and action, people empower themselves to work for a more just and equitable society." (EducationAction 2001:11)



A different topic is chosen for each of the units and these reflect the interests of the women, for example water, HIV/Aids, confidence building, children's rights and child protection.

The different parts of the unit are described below:

### i) Reflect tool and discussion

Participatory tools (activities) developed by Reflect are used to stimulate discussion, to give the women time to share what they already know about the topic, and to work towards solving problems.

The "tree" is a useful tool that the FLP uses to explore a range of topics such as household finances, what we want children to learn, or water-borne diseases. The trunk, branches and roots of a tree are drawn on a piece of paper. The leaves are pieces of paper on which the women have

written the effect or result relating to the topic. Other small pieces of paper are used by the women to draw or write down what causes, or what the input is, to the particular topic. For example, to explore household finances the "leaves" show the expenditure and the "roots" show where the money comes from: pensions, welfare grants, and wages. With such a graphic representation, to which everyone has contributed, the discussion flows freely as the facilitator leads people to probe more deeply into the issue.

Every session in the unit has a time for discussion and new information is provided by the facilitator. At the end of each unit the women are asked to decide on an "action point", something they feel they can achieve to help resolve problems discussed in the unit. For example, at the end of the unit on child protection the women all resolved to walk their children to pre-school, which was a change from the usual practice of letting them run to school on their own or with siblings.

### ii) Early literacy

Each unit includes at least one session on how adults can prepare children for reading and writing. This session will relate to the topic of the unit. The parents also keep journals where they paste, or draw a picture and then discuss this with their child. The adult writes down what the child says, showing the child how

important her words are and, at the same time, providing literacy practice for the adult. As one of the FLP group members says,

*"Studying with the FLP has helped me a lot with my child who had not yet started school. I used to find magazines that we cut out pictures from and stick them so she could look at them and tell me what she sees, and what is happening in the picture. This built her and made her intelligent because she was happy to go to school this year when she started. She had seen and knew that learning was fun and good, and she does like studying and reading because she borrows books from the library and participates in Child to Child. She is bright in school and you can tell that she started learning from a very young age. It is good for a child to learn at home before she starts school".*

Gladys Nzimande

### iii) Adult literacy

Each FLP group received a small box of books for children and for newly-literate adults; by the end of the first year most of the women had moved from functional literacy (completing forms, reading signs or instructions etc) to reading or looking at books with their children or when relaxing in the evenings.

*"When we are finished eating we take books and read and look at the pictures and do homework."*

Sibongile Zuma (Desmond 2004:14)

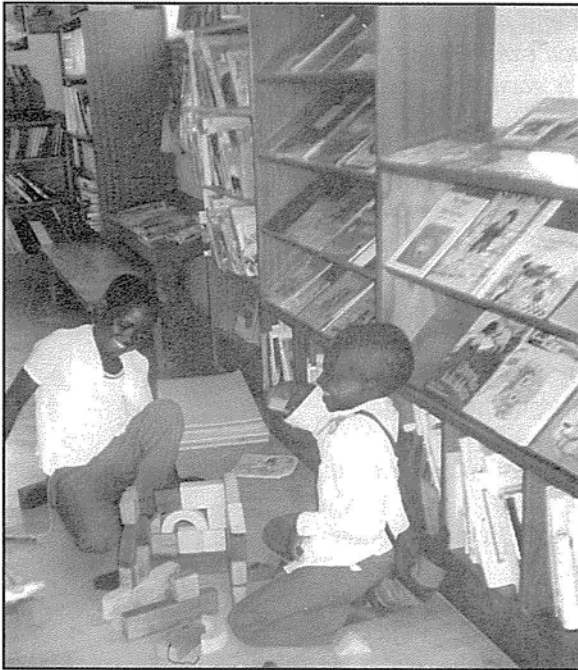
Once the women could read and write, the FLP introduced a range of activities to make use of these newly-acquired literacy skills. These activities include borrowing books from the project libraries, journal keeping with their children, writing or drawing notices for the community notice board, becoming penfriends with women in other groups and taking a more active role in the development of their areas by becoming members of local committees.

### *Home visiting*

The home visiting scheme established in 2003 was a result of FLP group members being eager to share their knowledge with neighbours. Many family literacy project members visit a neighbouring family at least twice a month. They take with them games to play with the children and books to share; they also talk to the adults about early childhood development and health. The women prepare for these visits by attending regular sessions where they learn more about the health messages of the international IMCI (Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses)

programme. They also attend workshops on activities they can do with young children. These home visits are recorded pictorially, or in words, in books that are kept by each woman.

In the most recent evaluation, those visited were asked to explain how they saw the scheme; one quote summed this up by stating, "I think they came to give us knowledge, because they know about many things, so they wish to visit and tell them, especially because we have children." (Kerry 2007:48)



### *Libraries*

The FLP has established three small community libraries in areas where no books were previously available. The remaining groups have boxes of books and keep the same records as the community libraries. Many of the facilitators say that the provision of books has been one of the most exciting developments in their communities. Adults enjoy books about their history or day to day issues that they can then discuss. Teenagers are learning how to use the resource books to complete school assignments and children enjoy the array of brightly coloured picture books.

*"Here it shows how children feel when they are at the library – that the library is the best thing in the community. They come straight from school to the library."*

Zimbili Dlamini (Frow 2007:29)

### *Groups for children*

The FLP runs groups for children from the local primary schools. These are for fun and to build and support a love of reading and books. The children enjoy listening to stories, then writing and drawing about them. The session topics are at times the same as those covered in the adult and teenage groups. In this way, FLP hopes to provide opportunities for families to discuss at home the issues raised in the groups.



## *Publications*

In the early days of the project, it became clear that there were few books for rural woman, and few written in plain language. FLP staff decided to produce their own set of books. They now have books in Zulu (the local language) and English on parenting, HIV/Aids, stories of early childhood, setting up a community library, as well as four story books for young children.

## *Sharing information*

Many of the FLP donors began to ask how the experiences of the project could be shared more widely. While project staff wanted to keep the number of groups small, to ensure quality and adequate support, they too wanted to share their excitement and knowledge with others. Three ways of doing this have emerged. The first is a course that FLP staff run for other organisations to introduce family literacy to them. It is a short course aimed at parents. Once this has been completed, the organisation can decide how best to take family literacy further in their own work. The second way of sharing has been to run meetings in four of the nine provinces in South Africa. These meetings bring people together so that they can hear about different approaches to family literacy and build provincial networks. The third way of sharing was to write journal articles and to speak at conferences, both within South Africa and internationally.

## *Conclusion*

Many conventional adult literacy groups experience the problem of low attendance and drop out. It is interesting that this is not a very common problem in any of the FLP groups, with women joining and remaining members for several years. One reason could be that the FLP answers a need within parents to see their children have a better start in life than they had.

The Family Literacy Project approach has been to work directly with adults on their own (although babies and toddlers come along with their mothers to sessions) and through them reach the children.

There are different ways family literacy is being implemented in South Africa, all driven by concerns that young children need more support at home to develop the skills that make literacy a pleasure and not a difficulty. Those projects that work closely with families report that both the adults and the children benefit from the entertaining and educational activities that are suggested. The family literacy approach in South Africa also stresses the importance of respecting parents and acknowledges that they are the first and most important educators of children.

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# *Parents, teachers and early literacy: The perceptions of parents and teachers of the roles they should play in developing children's early literacy*

*Kerryn Dixon and Kelly Lewis*

## *Introduction*

This chapter is based on research undertaken at two Gauteng primary schools to investigate the perceptions South African educators and parents have about the roles each should play in developing children's early literacy. Hannon (1995) has pointed out that since the early 1980s there has been a shift towards thinking about literacy in the home and places an emphasis on the role parents play in the teaching of literacy. This shift in thinking is reflected in the South African National Curriculum which describes the approach taken to literacy as a 'balanced' one. Part of employing a balanced approach is the acknowledgement of the importance of home literacy practices and that classrooms should celebrate and build on this knowledge (DoE 2002).

That said, the massive curriculum changes experienced in moving from a teacher-centred apartheid-era curriculum to an outcomes based learner-centred one, has not been smooth. The complexity of the curriculum, uneven levels of training, limited materials and resources and problems with implementation (Vally 2003), have meant that teachers have struggled to understand a highly sophisticated curriculum and adapt to it. The result is the inevitable gap between policy and practice where an acknowledgement of the value of families' literacy practices is not a key priority for many teachers.

One of the indicators of school success revealed in studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America is the need for strong home-school relationships (Munn 1993). Fostering strong, positive, working relationships requires an understanding on the part of all participants of the value of practices in the home. With the national systemic literacy and numeracy evaluations revealing poor levels of performance across the country, many academics are beginning to refer to a literacy crisis in this country. Within this context this research sought to understand how parents and educators perceived their own roles and the roles of each other in developing children's literacy. As a first step in understanding what strong home-school relationships can look like, it seems important to establish what these roles are seen to be and how they are currently played out.

The following section of this chapter deals with literature relevant to the study. It continues by discussing the methodology employed in the study and interrogating the challenges faced during the data collection. This is followed by a discussion of three key findings: understandings of literacy, the power of school practices, and attitudes embedded in assumptions about English as medium of instruction.

### *A socio-cultural approach to literacy*

This study locates itself within a socio-cultural paradigm which sees literacy as a social act. Research from this perspective shows a variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts; that meanings and practices are contested; that the technical and cognitive aspects of reading and writing are encapsulated in cultural structures of power; literacy and orality can be studied together in contexts; and that there are many different types of literacy.

In many ways Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) classic work researching literacy practices of families in two communities in the Carolinas typifies the above points. The family literacy practices of the working class communities of Trackton and Roadville demonstrate how cultural, and in Roadville's case, religious practices impact on school literacy practices. Many of these family practices are contested and misinterpreted in the school as they do not conform to dominant middle class practices. Heath's telling example of "Show and Tell" lessons bring the tensions to light where the 'literal' truth-telling practices of Roadville parents enabled children to perform such a task, but limited their ability to tell imaginative stories. In contrast, the creative linguistic play of Trackton's children meant "Show And Tell" was interpreted as an imaginative exercise rather than a descriptive one – and their 'stories' were considered inappropriate.

This example highlights the point Barton and Hamilton (2000) make that literacy practices are influenced by institutions and power relationships, with some literacy practices more dominant than others. The issue of power embedded in institutions is an important one when considering home-school relationships. Street (2001:8) makes this point clear when he argues that

*[t]he ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially the new learners and their positions in relations of power (our emphasis).*

In many schools what counts as literacy is what Gee (2001:531) refers to as 'middle-class mainstream'. The discourses, or socially accepted ways of thinking, speaking and acting that identifies one as part of a social network (2001:537), around literacy are in fact gatekeepers. This is because schools fail to take the

literacy practices of a range of communities into account, and they do not help non-mainstream students acquire these dominant discourses. Thus many children experience a conflict between their home literacy practices and the different literacy demands placed on them by schools where there is little mediation or understanding of their family and community practices.

Additionally, despite research showing that children can generate complex meanings about their social worlds through drawing, writing and performing (Dyson 1993, 1995, 2001), meaning-making is very often limited by narrow conceptions of literacy in schools (Kendrick and McKay 2004).

### *Emergent literacy*

Research around emergent literacy shows that literacy learning begins long before formal instruction commences. From birth, children observe family members using print for various reasons and often mimic reading and writing. Purcell-Gates notes that “the emergent literacy framework indicates that children will learn about the nature and forms of written language according to those functions they see print fulfilling in their lives” (2001:416). In literate societies children should learn important concepts about the written word before they enter school. Although children may grow up in a literate society their families and communities may not be highly literate, and thus their knowledge of literacy may be limited. Purcell-Gates’s research of an illiterate urban American family illustrates how assumptions made about the symbolic functions of print, and decoding environmental print do not hold with this family. Their illiteracy created a large amount of frustration and tension for the mother who had informed the school she could not read. The school continued to send written work home and penalise her son for incomplete or incorrect work.

A similar case can be made for South African children whose parents may be classified as illiterate or semi-literate after having received minimal and/or poor schooling.<sup>1</sup> An added complexity is that of language where the medium of instruction is not the mother tongue of the parents. There is a distinct desire on the part of many African parents to educate their children in English (De Klerk 2002, Kamwangamalu 2003, Mda 2004). This is despite the Language in Education Policy which promotes the value of mother tongue instruction, particularly in the early years of schooling (DoE 1997). This means that the issue of language has to be carefully considered when thinking about establishing viable home-school relationships.

Home-school relations need themselves to be read in ways that take socio-cultural practices into account. This means an awareness of the dominance of the institution of the school and the power relations that ensue between parents and teachers around what counts as literacy. In addition, issues around parents’ levels

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<sup>1</sup> These terms are highly controversial and as Prinsloo and Breier’s (1996) SoUL project (social uses of literacy) indicates there are many different types of literacy and what can be considered to be sophisticated literate practices in highly disadvantaged communities. In this chapter we use these terms in relation to school literacy where parents are able to understand written communication sent to them by schools.

of education and language proficiency also need to be considered when thinking about the roles parents and teachers can play in developing children's early literacy.

## *Methodology*

Two private schools in Gauteng were chosen as research sites. The reason was twofold: due to the higher fees that private schooling requires it could be argued that the quality of education children receive is of a higher standard than government schooling. Thus parents may be more involved with the school. Secondly these particular schools were chosen because of the contacts one of the writers had in organising access to them. The first school, Addison Primary is a Catholic co-educational school. Although a whites-only school during apartheid, the demographics of the school have changed. Due to its location in the centre of Johannesburg it now draws mainly working to middle-class black children from Soweto, Hillbrow and Yeoville. English is the medium of instruction. Most of the teachers at the school are experienced and have taught at the school for a number of years.

The second school is Bath Primary, an Anglican co-educational school located on the eastern side of Johannesburg. The students are mainly middle class, English speaking children who are drawn from the surrounding suburbs, some of which are relatively affluent. As with Addison Primary most of the teachers at Bath are experienced white females.

As the focus of this research was to explore perceptions of research participants, a qualitative approach was used. Semi-structured interviews were the primary tool through which data was collected. Research participants included the following individuals: principals, Foundation Phase head of departments, Foundation Phase teachers, a parent from the school governing body (SGB) and parents with children in the Foundation Phase. The entire data set was meant to comprise 22 interviews, 11 from each site: 2 principals, 2 heads of department, 8 teachers, 2 school governing body members and 8 parents. All eleven of the planned interviews were conducted at Bath Primary but only seven of the eleven planned interviews were conducted at Addison. The four missing interviews were those with Addison parents. At the beginning of the research schools consented to provide us with access to parents they felt would agree to be interviewed.

Interviews with staff were conducted at Addison first. While these took place, information sheets and consent forms were drawn up asking for interested parents to provide their contact details so that an interview could be set up at a place and time convenient to them. These forms were given to Foundation Phase teachers to give to children and the researcher arranged to return to collect them. No parents' names were proffered. Numerous follow up calls were made to the school. Initially

the school informed the researcher that if responses were received she would be informed. Teachers who had seemed keen to provide assistance became more hesitant and uncomfortable. The school actively discouraged meetings with parents on or outside the school premises. They stated that most parents worked full-time and did not fetch their children, thus it was not possible to set up meeting times. This seems unlikely. It was felt that due to the strong discouragement about talking to parents before or after school, it would be unethical to pursue such an avenue. After conducting staff interviews with little discernable resistance the attitude of 'the school' grew to complete resistance where calls, visits and emails which were initially attended to promptly, were met with silence.

### *Interrogating an incomplete data set*

While this turn of events results in a skewed data set and results that are clearly not generalisable, this barring of access to four parents is in itself worth questioning. One possible concern the school could have had is that many parents who were not mother tongue speakers of English may have been unable to converse with an English interviewer even though arrangements had been made for translation if this was necessary. This would have been a valid concern and the issue of language as a hindrance to building relationships will be discussed later.

An obvious answer to the lack of access could be attributed to the conduct of the researcher who may have unintentionally offended someone at the school. If this was indeed the case the inability to address this issue on the part of the school is problematic. This raises the issue of communication and the fostering of relationships. From an ethical point of view the school had the right to withdraw from the research at any time and the data collected would not be used. Although clearly stipulated, this right was not exercised. If a researcher who is interested in how parents and teachers view their roles as literacy facilitators as a means of understanding home-school relationships meets with opposition, what are the consequences if parents show dissent?

A likely point is that a deliberate decision was made to deny the researcher access to parents. Staff and the SGB member had been interviewed to ensure that the researcher's line of questioning was clear. If this was a deliberate decision, then what kind of information could parents have that the school did not want the researcher to have access to? If this is indeed the case, the institutional power of the school comes through very clearly in how information is controlled. If a school, deliberately or not, controls access to consenting adults, then the power relations between the home and school are unbalanced. It also implies that by silencing such voices the 'nature of literacy being learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants' (Street 2001:8) is the school's version of what constitutes literacy and home practices have little value. Moreover, parental involvement which Addison purports to encourage appears to be on their terms.

Although not a full data set, interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. There were several key themes, three of which will be discussed in the following sections.

### *Limited understandings of literacy*

When teachers were asked how they would define literacy, two responses were given. One was the overly broad explanation repeating the outcomes covered in the curriculum — listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Literacy, in the words of the Head of Department from Addison is considered to be ‘the basics...reading, writing, and arithmetic’. When asked for further elaboration, Addison and Bath teachers described themselves as ‘old fashioned’ and used formal drilling and reading schemes as a basis for their pedagogy. The Addison principal commented,

*People seem to assume that if you're teaching in what was an old fashioned way, or a way that we've been teaching for many years that it's not acceptable in the new curriculum. And in fact it's acceptable, so we've held onto phonics.*

In fact the curriculum requires a much broader view of literacy in which phonics is to be integrated into practice that includes wide reading and writing for specific purposes (DoE 2002:10). A worrying trend emerges in relation to materials used for literacy when literacy is seen to be a set of skills taught in mechanistic ways. The Bath Head of Department revealed:

*You can't buy reading books that ..... um, we're still using these very old scruffy books because you can't get reading books that teach the skills.*

In a well resourced school this reliance on old resources reflects a dominant and unchanging mindset. Millard (2006:234) sums this up when she points to the fact that while children are becoming multimodally literate, schools' practices remain stubbornly print-based and do not enable children to ‘make productive use of their prior experiences and understanding’.

It is also not surprising that if teachers have narrow views of literacy, these are shared by parents. Many parents have also been educated in a system in which school literacy is valued and have little sense of the value of their own non-school literacy practices. Literacy, for most parents revolved around listening to their children read. For one Bath parent it also involved encouraging a love of reading. Parents were compliant in following school procedures: ‘They give you flash cards with words on, which you then show your child by sight or you do it the phonetic way’ (Bath Parent). Writing, drawing and other means of expression and meaning-making were completely silenced.



While there is a relative match in the narrow way literacy is conceptualised there does seem to be a mismatch of teacher expectations of parents' roles. Teachers expect parents to expose children to a variety of situations and draw attention to environmental print even though these experiences do not then seem to be taken up in the classroom:

*They need to expose them to lots of different situations so that their vocabulary is enriched and their life experiences make them interesting.*

(Addison teacher)

*Incorporating other things into the child's life world, things that are interesting to them.*

(Bath Teacher)

*You know the signs at the shops and things like that...talk about things and make them aware of their surroundings.*

(Bath teacher)

### *Dominance of the school discourse around literacy*

The above points raise the issue of power relations and entrenched dominant attitudes about literacy. Parents are in fact disempowered as the teachers position themselves as authorities. The language used by the teachers reflects this unequal relationship:

*You set the boundaries and expect them to be done.*

(Addison teacher)

*Literacy is often reinforced at home and if it is reinforced wrong then that's when your problems start. So you have got to actually lay the ground rules from the beginning and say, 'you are going to do it this way or not at all type of thing'.*

(Addison teacher)

The lexical choices are telling – parents have to work within the confines of non-negotiated boundaries, which are 'set' and they are 'expected' to conform. A clear binary is established between the right and wrong way to teach literacy. The right way is the school way and parents are expected to conform to (ground) rules. The unequivocal demand "you are going to do it this way or not at all" does not brook dissent and in doing so does not allow space for an understanding of important literacy practices in families and communities. In many ways this authoritarian discourse undermines the power of parents and reduces them to the position of disempowered children. Contrary to research findings demonstrating benefits,

parents are in no way encouraged to play important and valuable roles in the home with regards to developing children's literacy.

Parents themselves expressed compliance and seem to have internalised this lesser position:

*You should not interfere much from a parent point of view.*

(SGB member Addison)

*Whatever is sent home I do, I do what they do. I just do extra work they're doing in school.*

(Bath Parent)

It seems clear that the open channels of communication schools feel they foster, in fact silence individuals. Hannon's (1995:149) concept of the 'deep structure of communication' is useful here. On the surface, home-school communication may seem to encourage parental involvement (open door polices, parents evenings) but what is communicated at a deeper level is more powerful, and in conflict with the surface message. When parents are told they are important in developing children's literacy but are explicitly told what to do, parents may register on a deeper level that they are not that important.

This point is emphasised by two comments made by the SGB member at Addison. He recognises the need for alternative means of meaning-making to be present in schools as a way of engaging children. This is particularly pertinent at Addison where children are no longer white and middle class like the teachers. He argued,

*I mentioned poetry and African literature, as well as folk stories. People's grandmothers and grandfathers used to tell us those stories without even glancing at the book. So as soon as they encourage those kinds of subjects to come on board the kids will learn much more...with an open mind and understand exactly what happened and what it happening, because our students are going down the drain if we do not encourage it... African culture must come back again. We allow the other arts and cultures to come in so that they know we are different, we are diverse, but we are one human being going forward.*

(SGB member)

But despite this understanding of how to expand children and the curriculum, the SGB member has internalised the dominant discourse of the school because

*You should not interfere much from a parent point of view.*

(SGB member Addison)

### *Hiding prejudice behind English*

Hannon's (1995) point about communication is made more complex when one considers parents literacy levels and language proficiency. It is clear that teachers expect parents to be involved with children's schoolwork. Interviews revealed that parents are aware of this expectation and try to meet it. But, these expectations may not be met because parents cannot understand what teachers want. Interviews from Addison showed that many parents do not speak English. Once again parents are placed in an untenable position:

*Parents say we can only speak Zulu at home, you say fine, but you chose to send them here. Therefore we need your input as well.*

(Head of Department Bath)

Like the mother in Purcell-Gate's (2001) study, it is impossible for parents to meet these expectations if they cannot decode the message. Underlying this statement are also entrenched attitudes about the value of English. There is no evidence that the school has attempted to communicate with parents other than by using written or spoken English.

For many black parents sending their children to an English-medium school is a way of providing them with a better quality education and a language of power. The insistence on English in the schools, and distaste for any forms of code switching where 'you can't mix up too many languages because not one language is used properly' (Head of Department Addison) means that once again facilitating an understanding of general expectations between schools and parents is negated. Thus building partnerships where family literacy practices are understood and celebrated in the classroom is silenced not only through powerful discourses but also through the choice of language. This is succinctly summed up by Addison's Head of Department:

*Home culture, it really has got to be done at home.*

(HOD Addison)

### *Conclusion and recommendations*

This chapter has discussed research conducted at two schools that looked at teachers and parental expectations of their roles in developing children's early literacy. It has shown that although the role of parents has been highlighted in national and international research as important in developing early literacy; the opposite seems true in current education practices. Although strong home-school relations are an indicator of school success, these relations are not being fostered. The findings of this research show that schools wield a large amount of power over

parents, and that discourses around school literacy silence alternative home literacy practices. These school literacy practices are in themselves problematic because they are very narrow and do not take cultural knowledge or multimodal practices into account. Parents seem overwhelmed by the authoritarian discourses and are unable to challenge what they are 'told' to do. They are also possibly further silenced by the power of English in which they are expected to communicate.

It seems that a large number of recommendations arise from this research. These would deal with more intensive training of teachers about alternative ways of understanding and teaching literacy. It seems important that teachers learn to deal productively with diversity in classrooms. Parents also require information about how they can help children acquire dominant school discourses around literacy. At the same time an appreciation of home and community literacy practices needs fostering. The question of finding productive ways to communicate with parents needs further research. This chapter ends with an obvious but overlooked recommendation. Maybe it is time schools asked parents about their expectations rather than assume they know what they are.

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*Whose family literacy?: Is there a "right" kind of family literacy that is exclusively middle class and Eurocentric?*

*Sandra Land*



In an educators' workshop run by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Adult Education a few years ago, a video clip was shown of a mother reading to her child. The workshop was about what you can do with discs in computers, but this two minute clip showed the mother and child cuddled up on a couch, reading a book and laughing together. As soon as the clip was finished, one of the teachers leapt up and said "Now I understand! Now I know what you people mean when you say I should read to my children!" She was jubilant. It was one of those moments of general revelation. For her, the mystery about what people meant when they said she should read to her child, and how people could be enthusiastic about reading to their children had disappeared in a single amazing instant. Centre for Adult Education staff were stunned by her dramatic communication of what should have been obvious - that literacy practices taken for granted in comfortably literate families are often completely invisible to people outside a reading culture.

The reason for this invisibility is not that people who engage in a wide range of literacy practices in their home do so secretly or want to prevent other people discovering these practices or adopting them. On the contrary, people who love reading to their children usually urge everyone else they know to do the same thing, and keep suggesting "must read" children's books. The reason for the invisibility of the literacy-related activities is that people generally tend to read (to themselves or to their children), or play Scrabble with them, or do crosswords, or play board games when there are no visitors in the house, and they are relaxing and engaging in these activities. As a result, these practices remain invisible and unknown to people outside the house and outside a reading culture.

These very practices are key to children's pleasure and confidence in using books, libraries, computers, the internet and other sources of information, and, not surprisingly, success in education. This success and confidence are usually exactly what people with low literacy levels, and who have few habitual family literacy practices, say that they want more than anything for their children, as evidenced in a study that surveyed approximately 100 educationally-deprived South African adults (Land, 2001). Yet the practices that lead to these skills and confidence remain opaque to most South Africans.

There is substantial research that shows a strong and direct correlation between literacy practices in the home and children's performance at school. Examples are studies by Clark, Cochran-Smith, Morrow and Teale, (Morrow, 1995) Chomsky, Laosa, Anderson et al, and Teale and Sulzby, (Sokhulu, 2005). Jean Paratore (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002, pp 49 - 53) quotes a large number of studies that indicate that parents' reading to children, and exposing them to other literacy-related activities in the home, is central in facilitating the development of children's literacy-related skills.

Habits and practices that make up the kinds of family literacy that appear to complement and support the literacy skills demanded in schools are things like buying and reading newspapers and books, reading to children, reading and talking about the newspaper and its contents, keeping documents such as invoices and receipts or records of family history, communicating with people by email, SMS or old-fashioned letters, playing games like Scrabble, doing crosswords, reading the Bible or other religious texts, keeping diaries, writing shopping lists, marking dates on calendars, or reminders on a notice board, keeping lists of telephone numbers and writing down telephone messages for household members, encouraging tiny children to scribble and write or, just as valuably, to pretend to write, and so on. Often literacy practices in homes overlap with other activities, such as cooking from written recipes, or sewing or knitting from patterns, or trying to make sense of the complicated instructions for installing complicated electronic equipment like a DVD player, or getting a computer printer to work.

Whatever the level of literacy skills of its members, each family has its own unique family literacy patterns, even if those practices are very limited. As a rule, people in families with the most highly developed literacy skills appear to take them for granted, and use them in the most casual ways. People who are comfortable scribbling notes to one another even if they have to use the back of an envelope, who like to curl up in a chair with a cup of coffee and a novel, and encourage their children to play with their pens and paper (or computers) are likely to have a tertiary education, an extensive collection of books and very high literacy skills. Conversely, people in families with very limited literacy skills, especially those whose personal level of literacy skills is low, tend to take literacy skills very seriously. They are likely to regard any reading they do as a formal activity, which they undertake sitting up straight at a table. They write formal, laboriously-written letters to one another, and would probably be so horrified if they discovered their children playing with the family's pens and papers that they might punish them.

Not surprisingly, children who come from households in which literacy skills are used casually and playfully, and who are expected to join in with this play as soon as they can pretend to read and write, tend to develop sophisticated literacy skills early and usually reach a much higher level of literacy than children who are not engaged in literacy play at home. Play is one of the most powerful and overlooked ways of learning. When they go to school, children who have played freely with crayons and pencils and paper, and whose parents have read them hundreds (or thousands) of stories have an enormous advantage over those whose parents do not read to them, and who are introduced to pencils and paper at school. The affective quality and frequency of family reading and writing activities is a dependable predictor of children's future academic performance, and children for whom literacy related activities are familiar and associated with fun, affection and affirmation are likely to read willingly and easily and, predictably, tend to achieve well at all levels of education. Conversely, children for whom literacy-related activities are unfamiliar, or associated with tedium, or with performance testing and adult irritation or even ridicule and punishment, are unlikely to read willingly; few who start reading in these circumstances achieve well at school or beyond.

Also, the depth of engagement with the meaning of what is read is crucial. A style of parent-child reading that engages with underlying or hidden meanings, and encourages questioning and humour while reading, rather than simply getting at the surface meaning, is likely to result in more highly developed reading skills (Lancy and Bergin, 1992).

Staff at the Centre for Adult Education were well aware of the value of family literacy, so the reaction of the teacher in the UKZN educators' workshop, who joyfully discovered just what people mean when they talk of reading to children, made it clear to us that, as a centre specialising in literacy and basic education,



we should be paying more attention to family literacy, and parents' understanding of it.

In direct response to this teacher's reaction, the Centre held a conference on family literacy and produced a family literacy video. The video is aimed at people not integrated into a reading culture, who think of literacy and reading only in the context of schooling or homework, and for whom the idea of family literacy is parents getting their children to practise the reading skills they learn at school, and making sure that all their mistakes are identified and corrected. It was designed to make explicit the kind of family literacy practices that are common in the homes of children who arrive at school well prepared to meet the demands made on them there. It was unscripted and shows unrehearsed interaction in the homes of eight Pietermaritzburg families. It aimed to demonstrate and explain a range of family literacy practices, and to show the pleasure that can be found in reading and writing, and using literacy skills for different purposes and in different ways in the context of a family home. The highlight of the video for us is the spontaneous action of an eight-month-old child whose parents had already spent many hours showing her picture books, reading her nursery rhymes and so on. Put on the floor a couple of metres away from a pile of colourful books, and left to herself, she crawls eagerly to the books, grabs one and manages to get it open and look inside. This draws gasps of astonishment from nearly everyone who sees the video.

The video was first shown in 2005, at a conference on a family literacy, and has since been shown at various times in different contexts, but mainly to education students at UKZN. Most people who see the video respond very positively to it; a Western Cape education official, visibly moved after seeing it, told me that it had shown him how to be a better father. Although a few of our students remain unimpressed, many express their earnest intention to start to read to their own children that very day, often asking to borrow the Centre's easy-to-read books in English and Zulu so that they waste no time. Some even appear to actually carry out these intentions and keep up the practice.

However, the video has attracted some criticism too. From the New Literacy Studies view of literacy, which stresses that all forms and uses of reading and writing in all cultures and groups should be equally acknowledged, the content of the video can be seen as particularly middle class, and (although three of the families in the video are black), possibly Eurocentric.

Taking this point, it is useful to consider the kinds of literacy practices that characterise South African families who are not middle class, and whether it would have been useful to include a wider range of families and their literacy practices in the video.

Two studies carried out at UKZN (or its predecessor the University of Natal) have

explored literacy practices among people who could be considered relatively disadvantaged, and not middle class. One was my own MA thesis, in which I attempted to discover what differences Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes made in people's lives, by comparing the self-reports of educationally deprived adults who attended ABE classes with those of adults who were similarly educationally deprived but who did not attend classes. All the participants in this study worked as manual workers. The other study was the M Ed dissertation of a student who explored the literacy practices of a group of ten women living in a rural area outside Pietermaritzburg, who participated in community adult basic education classes and in an income-generation project.

In the first study, with regard to their perceptions of their own literacy skill, all of the adult learners described themselves as able to read Zulu easily; about two thirds of them said they could read some English. All the non-learners said they could count cash, but 15% said that they could not read or write any texts at all; 15% said they could write their names and read some numbers, while about a quarter said they could read some Zulu but no English. A little less than half of the group said they could read a little Zulu and English. Those who had learnt to read and write had done so during a short period at school many years before, or informally, such as by watching children do homework, or asking friends for help in reading forms and advertisements.

Approximately two thirds of the adult learners and one third of the non-learners said they habitually read some print material in both English and Zulu; some of each group said they read some Zulu, and one third of the non-learners said they never read anything at all. All the non-learners said that they read no books at all, but some said they read accounts, racing form, traffic signs and school notices. Some said that, although they could not read, they liked to look at pictures. A very few said that they could use telephone directories, and some had no idea of what a telephone directory was.

More than half of both groups said they kept used school books in their homes. One of the non-learners, who had only three years of schooling, said that he still had his old school slate, which he has kept for more than thirty years, through several moves of place of residence. Almost half of the adult learners, and one third of the non-learners, reported keeping magazines; all participants said they kept Bibles or books they got from church, and newspapers. Bona magazine was popular among both groups. In approximately one third of the households of both groups, some family members read books or newspapers. A minority in both groups said that nobody in their homes read anything.

Almost half of the adult learners, and more than a third of the non-learners, said that they wrote letters. Many of the adult learners and a few non-learners used a pen at work, and to record financial transactions or amounts. Some of the adult learners said that they filled in competition forms. Two men, who had described

the extent of their literate competence as the ability to read numerals but not words, said that they regularly filled in betting forms for horse races without needing help. Some of the non-learners said they used a pen only for 'making a cross' as a signature, and showed their sadness that they were unable to sign their names. 97.5% of the adult learners, and two thirds of the non-learners, reported keeping records such as receipts. Although most who said they kept records could read, a number who could not read at all reported careful record keeping. Most said that they kept papers in a box or briefcase, or in plastic bags or envelopes, or glued, scrapbook style, into a book or in bulldog clips in a cupboard or drawer. One described how he locks his papers in his gun safe, with his revolver! Many participants expressed pride in the complexity and extent of their record keeping. Some of those who kept their papers in a plastic bag were eager to say how full the plastic bag was, or how long they had been collecting papers. One man, with minimal literacy skill, claimed to have papers from 1958. Some explained that it was important to be able to produce receipts to show policemen who go to poorer sections of Pietermaritzburg townships to look for stolen goods. If no receipts are produced, things that seem new are sometimes assumed to be stolen, and confiscated.

A quarter of the adult learners, and 10% of non-learners, were confident that they would cope with reading any written communication they received. Some who were not so confident said that they would seek help from their children, or 'just anybody'. It would not have been surprising if they had felt threatened by their children's superior literacy skills, but it seems that they accept that their children's literacy skills surpass their own and do not conceal this. Adult learners were more likely to seek help from a trusted adult, indicating that they were more likely to be cautious in this regard.

Close to half of both groups said that they had had direct contact with their children's teachers, often because of children's poor performance or bad behaviour. Almost all those from either group, who could read, said they read school reports themselves; nearly all those who could not read asked someone to read the reports to them.

80% of each group said that stories, (mainly traditional stories) were told to children in their households, with a grandmother the most likely story teller. Enjoyment of family story telling was strongly expressed by all. Reading stories is far less common; in more than half of both groups, neither parents nor caregivers read to children. Where the children are read to, the reader is most likely the mother, or an older sibling, but this appeared to include giving help with homework.

With regard to awareness of news, three quarters of the adult learners, and less than a quarter of the non-learners, said that they had heard of the death of a local

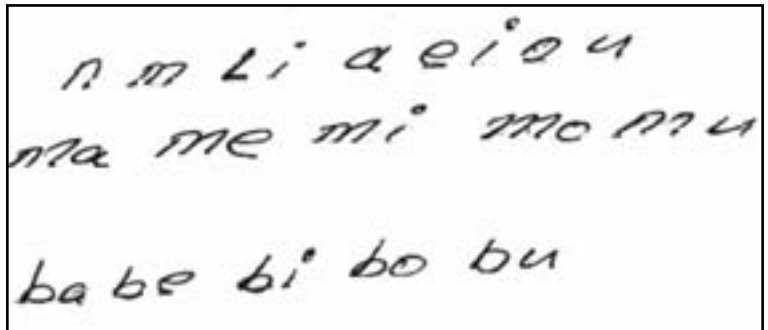
warlord from more than one news medium. Most of the non-learners heard the news from the radio.

The other UKZN study was done by an M Ed student, Themba Sokhulu. This examined the literacy practices and attitudes to literacy of ten women and their families in a rural area about an hour's drive from Pietermaritzburg. His study found that only two of the women told traditional stories to their children and that none read to them. When stories were told, children were questioned on the content of the story after they had heard it. Children who fall asleep during story telling are woken up to hear it, so that they do not miss the lesson it may contain.

In relation to their engagement with their children's schooling, most of the ten women in Sokhulu's study said that they did not help their children with homework. Some thought that they should have no responsibility for their children's homework, since their mothers had not helped them when they were at school, and that teachers were paid to teach their children. A few of the women did their homework from adult classes with their children, helping each other where they could. The descriptions of those who were helped by their children with homework indicated that help was given and received in a relaxed way, and even pointed to some friendly competition between them with English vocabulary, for example. One woman explained that she helps the children with less than five years of schooling, but cannot help the others; if they need assistance she asks her ABET teacher or her neighbours for help.

In his description of one of the mothers in his study helping her daughter, who says she is "struggling with vowels and syllables with homework", Sokhulu describes how the mother "inspects" her daughter's exercise book and addresses mistakes during homework time. His description continues, "she uses the oldest most traditional literacy teaching methods. She started off the session by randomly writing letters, moved to vowels, and then to ... ma, me, mi, and so on".

A sample of the mother's handwriting, used to help her child with homework





Mother and child engaged in a homework session

The picture Sokhulu took of this family engaged in a homework session, together with the sample of the mother's handwriting, shows a number of interesting things. One is that, laudably, in spite of her own relatively low level of literacy skill this mother feels confident that she can help her daughter. Less happily, she does so using her own interpretation of the syllabic, synthetic approach to teaching literacy. It is likely that she remembers this approach from her own five years of schooling,

although she may have experienced it in adult literacy classes as well<sup>1</sup>. Another feature, perhaps the most striking of the photograph, is the attitude of the child. She sits alone on her side of the table, her expression and raised shoulders suggesting that she is focussed on what her mother is showing her with uncertainty and discomfort. One feels that this child is unlikely to look back on these hours as among the most enjoyable of her childhood. Given the way children have traditionally been taught in African schools, it is very likely that along with learning something about the syllabic method of teaching reading and writing, this mother has internalised an idea that reading with children is a process of drilling, then getting the learner to perform, pointing out and censuring errors as she does so.

The photograph also shows that the family has the resources to furnish their house comfortably (the father is a truck driver). The furniture shown suggests a home of relative comfort and style, one that is better equipped than the homes of many rural KwaZulu-Natal families. The home is clean and comfortable; this child has adequate, appropriate space to do her homework, she is well nourished, and does not suffer the hardships of inadequate shelter suffered by so many South African children living in far poorer circumstances.

As already noted, there is naturally a wide range of literacy practices in homes at all socio-economic and educational levels. Nevertheless, both the above studies point to marked general differences between family literacy practices in the homes of socio-economically disadvantaged and educationally deprived South Africans and family literacy practices in advantaged or "middle class" homes.

The most obvious differences have to do with levels of literacy skill, with the amount of money available to spend on books and literacy resources, with the

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<sup>1</sup> It is not unusual for adults to attend (and need) literacy classes in spite of having completed a number of years at school as children. If they have not used literacy skills gained as children, the skills have usually been forgotten, and it is not uncommon to hear an adult learner talking of "waking up" her reading and writing skills in adult basic education classes

degree of familiarity with paper and electronic print material, and with access to various sources of information and knowledge of how all these things can be used and enjoyed. Yet there are a great many more differences, some more subtle than these that are readily apparent.

A comparison of research carried out by Desmond, (2001), Mikulecky, (1995), and Sokhulu, (2005) shows parallels between poorly-educated Hispanic mothers in USA and poorly-educated mothers from Black low-income families in South Africa. In engaging with their children and texts, mothers from both cultures emphasise letter naming and sound-letter correspondence, favouring explicit instruction, drilling, and checking on children's recall of surface content only. Mothers who do not have well-developed literacy skills and who do not habitually read and enjoy books themselves, tend to be scant with praise when they engage their children with books. These times are more sessions of learning and performance testing than play: mothers seem to feel compelled to check on whether the child has listened to and remembered what was read or heard, whether they recognise previously encountered symbols, and whether they have absorbed the moral of a story. In this situation, the child experiences reading with parents as an anxious time and not a time of relaxation, affection and shared fun. In contrast, highly literate parents unconsciously use particular strategies very early in a child's language and literacy development to stimulate and guide the child's engagement with text. In these strategies, parents affirm and extend a child's recognition of a word or illustration, perhaps by praising a child's pointing and noting something – a dog, say, and immediately supplying adjectives to describe the dog, thus deepening the opportunity to extend language and literacy skills as they do, but with the emphasis squarely on enjoyment, and without testing to see whether learning has occurred.

Overall, it appears that the kind of practices observed among mothers without highly developed literacy skills relate to their association of literacy with formal education, and to the strong desire of these women for their children to do well at school, which they associate with gaining access to a good standard of living. A commonly-expressed and painful sentiment among participants in the study cited above on educationally deprived adults was "Angifuni ukuthi abantwana bami bafana nami" (I don't want my children to be like me) (Land, 2001). It is especially ironic that many of these committed parents, who spend time on helping their children with school work, see reading for fun as wasting time and lazy. One of my 2007 B Ed Hons students, a teacher, said that she didn't have time to read to her children because after school they had to wash their socks. I suggested that if she bought two pairs of socks for each child: they could wash socks on alternate days. It was obvious, however, that she could not countenance such frivolousness as reading for fun when there was serious work to be done. It is clear that her efforts are unlikely to be nearly as effective as those of parents with a more playful attitude.

In view of the descriptions of the practices described above and of what parents say and demonstrate about what they desire for their children, it does seem reasonable to use a video encouraging family literacy to show the kinds of practices that have the best chance of resulting in what parents desire, even if these typify one culture, or what is often called "school literacy". Also, although it would be easily possible to show the practices that typify people without highly-developed literacy skills in such a video, it would be difficult to avoid giving the impression of a painful direct comparison between lesser and greater norms. As an analogy, it would be possible to show weak structures alongside solidly-built houses in a video on effective housing, but if the point was simply not to be exclusive it would not be very useful, especially if at least some of the strategies for building effectively could be adopted without major expense or effort.

In South Africa, now fourteen years after the end of apartheid's deliberately legislated unequal education for different races, disparities in educational standards reached by South African children persist, largely along racial lines. This is obviously partly due to socio-economic differences that also persist, as many black South African families simply do not have money to spend on books and print material. However, there are attitudinal factors at play here, since even high-earning and well-educated African families are unlikely to buy many books. My African colleagues at the university assure me that, on their priority lists, books are way below items like a flat screen TV. Also, few black families are in the habit of borrowing books regularly from libraries, which tend to be regarded by disadvantaged Black South Africans as places to study rather than sources of free books. Sokhulu, whose research is quoted above, and who has acted as a research assistant in a number of UKZN research projects, believes that since story reading has never been part of African culture, it is uncommon even among well-educated and high-income families. (Sokhulu is an exception to this rule and enjoys reading to his young daughters).

Interesting information in relation to attitudes to reading and literacy among socio-economically disadvantaged South Africans was yielded by another UKZN project, in which researchers visited projects funded by the Rockefeller Brothers fund to discover what lessons could be learned from them and shared with other development workers (Lyster, 2005). One of the projects was a partnership between UNISA's Children's Literature Research Unit and Project Literacy, which aimed to combine adult basic education classes with training participants in reading to their children and supporting their school readiness. Among challenges faced were the scarcity of easy to read children's books in African languages, and poorly translated books, unfamiliarity with the concept of library use, and participants' fear that books would be damaged in their homes. However, more telling for the purposes of this chapter is that the research revealed a perception among some participants that reading is antisocial, and that participants were unwilling to believe in a link between reading story books and achieving well at school. Researchers concluded that it is difficult to introduce traditionally

unfamiliar literacy practices into family and school systems, even if they are simple and of benefit. Most disappointingly, in terms of reading development, children in this study tended to actually regress when they reached school, because they encountered little development of higher order reading (as opposed to superficial reading) in their schools.

It can easily be argued that one should not try to introduce unfamiliar practices into other cultures, even with the best intentions. The cry of "We were only trying to help..." has echoed around all kinds of socially-engineered disasters for centuries and it does seem intuitively right not to interfere with other cultures. On the other hand, people might value an introduction to practices that support the development of literacy skills they desire for themselves and their children. Also, if we believe that it is desirable to redress race-based damaging differences in South Africa, perhaps it is justifiable and desirably transparent to at least offer a wide-open window on practices that characterise the more advantaged groups in the country.

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## *"Let's Make Books" - Implementation in East and Southern Africa*

*Lucy Thornton and Juliana Thornton*

Most children in Southern Africa do not have books in their homes; even if their families could afford to buy books, there are few available in African languages.

An early childhood development agency, Woz'obona, has worked for many years training pre-school teachers and providing methods of equipping classrooms with interesting, but low-cost, materials. The agency found that many of the pre-school teachers who attended the training needed a lot of support to be able to help young children develop their early literacy skills.

To respond to these challenges, Woz'obona developed a "Let's Make Books" programme as part of its early childhood development teacher-training package. Underlying the programme was the belief that children need to draw and talk about their situations and feelings, and that, in many cases, the attitudes of adults (parents and teachers) need to be changed.

The "Let's Make Books" approach is simplicity itself: children draw; they draw what they are thinking about and what they are imagining. Why not use this creative drawing as the basis for reading and writing? The magic words, "Tell me about your picture", are used to encourage the child to tell the story of her picture. Then, with the permission of the child to write the story, the adult writes it in the child's words. This makes it easier for the child to "read" the story; it also helps the child develop letter/sound awareness. Whole language and phonics are inextricably linked to motivate the child to read and write and provide the maximum support and encouragement to the child during the process. The whole programme is based on a "writing to read" approach to children's literacy development.

Many early literacy programmes rest on the availability of a large number of children's books, including basal reading series, in classrooms or homes. Woz'obona encourages the use of real books; the poor communities, in which it works, however, simply cannot afford large libraries for children. The ability of children to generate and share their own reading materials, in the context of a structured literacy curriculum, becomes the basis of their ability to learn to read effectively. The result of the "Let's Make Books" programme is a constructive and balanced literacy experience for young children.

Ga Masemola is a small town in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Resources are scarce, but the community recognises the need for a good education and they have come up with a way of involving pre-schoolers in their own learning. Paulina Mphati teaches at the Lekgolane Mphepeleng pre-school. Her students are just discovering the world around them and they need a lot of visual stimulation to help them develop their creativity.

Today Paulina's students will be helping her to stock the school library. The children draw pictures, and Paulina asks them to tell her about them. Their pictures are usually about a good experience they have had, or about a member of their family. Because the children can't write the story themselves, Paulina does it for them, but makes sure that each story is written the way the child tells it. Paulina reads the stories back to the children to make sure that it is in the child's own words. The children enjoy each other's stories and get to show off their own story-telling skills as well. Nonki, one of Paulina's learners, 'reads' her story about a person who is clapping hands and singing because they have a new suit. The class is enthralled.

When school is finished, Paulina walks Nonki home. Nonki has taken her new book home with her to show her mother. By reading to her mother Nonki is sharing her skills with her.

The next day, Nonki returns her book to the school and enjoys the other home-made books in the school library. The young authors' books are proudly displayed on the library table. The children can borrow each other's books and take them home to read to their families, just like any library. Each of these children has written and illustrated several books, creating a very special school library, filled with their own very special stories. With just a few basic materials, children everywhere can make their own books.

*(Script of video from Sharing our Voices: Community information projects in Southern Africa, a film by the World Library Partnership, made possible by the Ford Foundation)*

In 2002, it became clear that this approach should go far beyond the training of early childhood development teachers and that it should be used with teachers at all levels, as well as parents and families. Four of the initiatives that grew from this "Let's Make Books" are described below, and show how it has been used in different contexts and countries.

## *Family Maths Science Literacy and Life Skills*

This programme has its basis in the University of Berkeley Family Maths programme in the United States of America. COUNT, an agency that does mathematics training and materials, after participating in a Family Maths training programme, decided to adapt the American model for South African circumstances, and to add science to it. Literacy was added, using Let's Make Books, with adaptations to make it appropriate for use with families. Twenty South African non-governmental agencies participated in an FMSL Training of Trainers programme. A file of activities has been printed for use in the agencies taking part in this pilot project. These pilot agencies have used the programme in many ways and, since the pilot, other organisations and institutions have been trained and assisted to adapt and modify the programme to suit their unique circumstances. Life skills have recently been added to the content.

In the Training of Trainers FMSLL Course, participants who wish to become FMSL facilitators are trained in how to facilitate a range of activities, and how to plan, monitor and evaluate workshops. In the actual FMSLL workshops run with families, children, their parents/guardians/siblings, and often teachers, are invited to attend the FMSLL workshops. Activities are introduced and parents and children are encouraged to explore the materials available. The facilitator shows the parents and children how to do the activities and models good interaction between parents and children. Parents and children then do the activities together; if there are difficulties, the facilitators gently intervene. When the activity is completed, the facilitator encourages both children and parents to evaluate what they have done. Facilitators explain how the activities can be done, and even extended, at home. Follow-up workshops build upon parent experiences. It is intended that teachers, who at first are participants in the workshops, will become facilitators, so that they can continue to offer FMSLL every year when their new group of children and parents enter their classrooms.

The FMSLL model highlights the important role that family and community support plays in young children's learning. At the same time, by participating in the FMSLL workshops with their children, adults (including teachers) with low literacy, numeracy, and scientific life skills and knowledge, are able to explore and to access such skills and knowledge in a non-threatening, interactive and enjoyable way.

The FMSLL curriculum spans activities for children aged 4 to 15. The activities, while not aiming to replace the school curriculum or formal approaches to teaching children and adults literacy or numeracy skills, can be linked to more formal programmes in terms of content covered, and methodology and mediation strategies advocated, particularly as these have been designed against the demands of the South African Revised National Curriculum Statements.

For the young child or school-going learner, the FMSLL programme builds links between informal learning in the home or community and the more formal learning that might happen in an early childhood development centre or school. Direct links can be made between the activities experienced at a workshop and the universal core skills and knowledge that both children and adults need.

### *The NOAH Project*

Noah is a South African NGO, conceptualised at the end of 2000 in response to the realisation that South Africa faced an "epidemic" of orphans as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Noah works at forming community-based models of orphan care through which motivated individuals are guided to set up their own community 'Ark'; a network of support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). An Ark consists of a committee of elected community leaders who oversee the activities of a group of unpaid volunteers who provide a number of services to OVC in the community.

The "home visit" is one of the services that can be delivered by a volunteer and is used by a number of organisations in the HIV/AIDS field, often for home-based carers delivering medical and palliative care to sick patients who can no longer leave their homes. The home visit is also being increasingly used by orphan care organisations as a way to assess and support children, both emotionally and educationally, in the home situation.

In the context of Noah, the home visit provides a unique opportunity for volunteers to interact with children and their families together. However, ongoing monitoring of the service showed that many volunteers were not comfortable with interacting, or did not understand how to interact with children; thus the opportunity for psychosocial support and educational development during the visit was lost. In order to address this gap, Noah partnered with Woz'obona to roll out the "Let's Make Books" training for approximately 50 volunteers in four Pilot Arks in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. This was the first time the method had been implemented within the HIV/AIDS context with orphaned and vulnerable children.

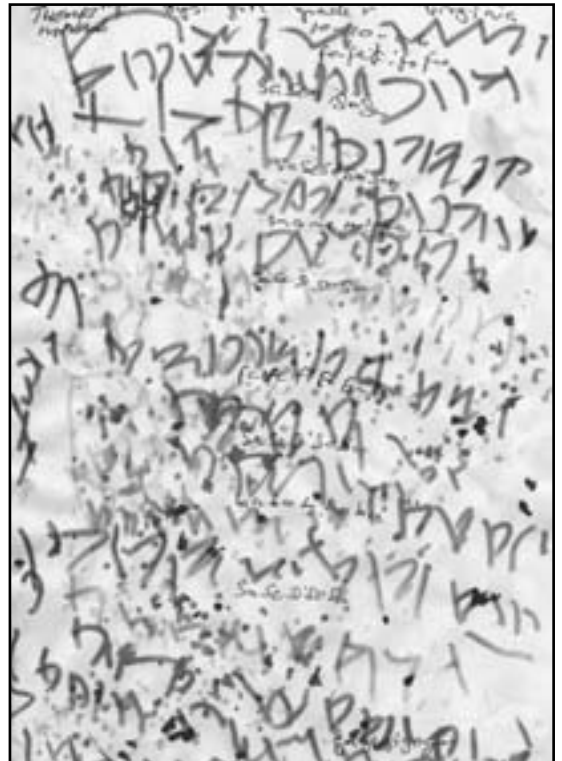
The "Let's Make Books" method proved to be extremely useful for delivering psychosocial support in a resource-limited setting. The drawing itself serves as a non-traumatic way to identify any sources of stress or abuse in the child's life. Children will often draw things that they may not usually talk about openly. The method also has implications for "Memory Boxes", where sick parents and children work together for succession planning and to preserve family memories inside the boxes. If a child's parent is sick or dying the drawings may also serve as a way for the child to preserve his or her memories of the parent. For older children the method can be extended to journalising,

so that the child either prepares a journal entry before the visit or works together with the volunteer during the visit. The method improves self-confidence and self-esteem for all ages because the child is taken seriously and their words are written exactly as they have spoken them. For children who have rarely been spoken to, or even listened to, by an adult this can be a very exciting experience. Most importantly, perhaps, the drawing and story provide a medium through which the volunteer and child can easily and respectfully communicate.

After the pilots, some of the most common comments from volunteers was that the method significantly improved their ability to interact with the children and improved the levels of trust between volunteer and child. Volunteers found that children were suddenly able to open up to them about a whole range of issues, which allowed the volunteer to gain a fuller picture of the issues in the child's life. This outcome occurred for a number of reasons, not the least being that the method is child-centred and child-focused; the child is an active participant in the activity rather than being a "subject" who is "assessed" or taught. In addition, the child feels acknowledged and respected because not only is an adult listening quite carefully to them, but the adult is actually writing down what the child is saying.

The drawing on the right represents a classic example of a relatively young child learning how to write. The child is probably practising a writing lesson learned in preschool and has attempted to write a string of symbols, that she translated as sounds "ga ge gi go gu" or "ma me mi mo mu" and so forth. In other cases, a child will draw objects and the volunteer will then write the name of the objects as the child explains the picture – allowing the child to link the picture of the object with the sound of the word and then with the written word, as the volunteer writes it.

In the majority of cases however, given Noah's target population, the pictures drawn represent in some way a child's experience of death and dying. In the drawing on the next page, the eight-year-old child has drawn on the left side of the paper, things that she enjoys or that make her happy and the volunteer has written her comments, "Ngithanda ukubhala nokufunda" (I like to





read and write). On the right side of the picture we see the things that distress her. In this case, it is immediately apparent to the volunteer that this child has been, and still is, distressed over the death of her mother (represented by a simple drawing of a coffin). She has explained that her mother has gone away and that she still remembers her mother - "Umama wayesebhokisini. Ngiyamkhumbula umama" (Mother is in the coffin. I remember Mother) and finally, "Angeke esabuya" (She (her mother) will never return). In this case, the child is obviously

attempting to come to terms with the death of her mother, and possibly interpreting how this has been explained to her by other adults. The volunteer can immediately recognise the need for bereavement counselling and start to take steps to address this need.

The method proved to be extremely effective in integrating volunteers into the household context and in introducing literacy into family activities. The training was low-cost and implementation required only pencils and paper before volunteers could act as effective literacy facilitators within households. Extensions of the method can include sharing the drawings and stories of the children among the children themselves, in a peer education model, or involving the parents more actively in the drawing and writing in a family literacy model.

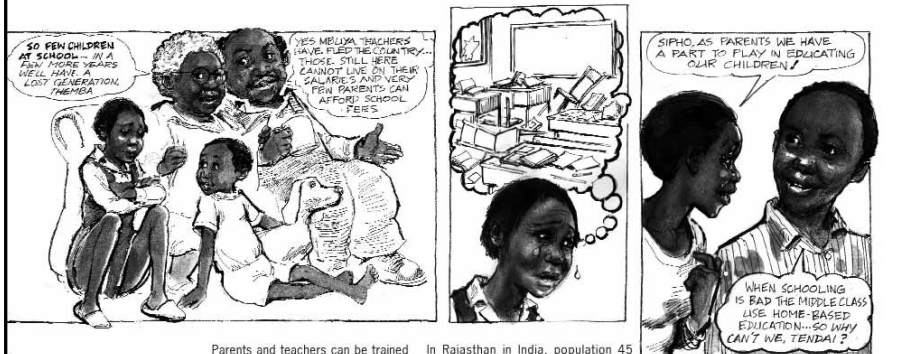
### *The Zimbabwean Newspaper*

Collaboration between Dr. Norman Reynolds, a development economist, Len Sak, a cartoonist, and *The Zimbabwean* newspaper resulted in a series of cartoons called "Our Common Future". The common future referred to South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the cartoons covered a number of rights-based topics, including economic rights and children's rights. The cartoons are educational and engaging, and they enjoyed a wide readership. The authors received positive responses from a broad range of people in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. A further collaboration between Woz'obona and Dr. Reynolds resulted in a series of the cartoons that demonstrated how families can engage in educational "play" with their children. Some examples are included here with permission from *The Zimbabwean*.

# OUR COMMON FUTURE

It Takes A Village To Raise a Child

No:14



Child Rights, that is monthly budgets registered Community Trusts, enable citizens to collectively reduce and feed, care for and educate all their children. This approach enables parents and communities to seek local solutions to the school crisis in Zimbabwe.

Parents and teachers can be trained to use the storey telling and the active exploration of all children to rebuild education upon strong family and community foundations - this at least cost. It achieves maximum adult and child interaction, educates both, and does so with shared fun and mutual liking.

In Rajasthan in India, population 45 million, an education movement replaced village teachers with trained parents who each taught a particular topic backed by skilled professionals. This worked so well that it led to a long strike by 40,000 teachers to stop the parent as teacher method. Government did not back down.

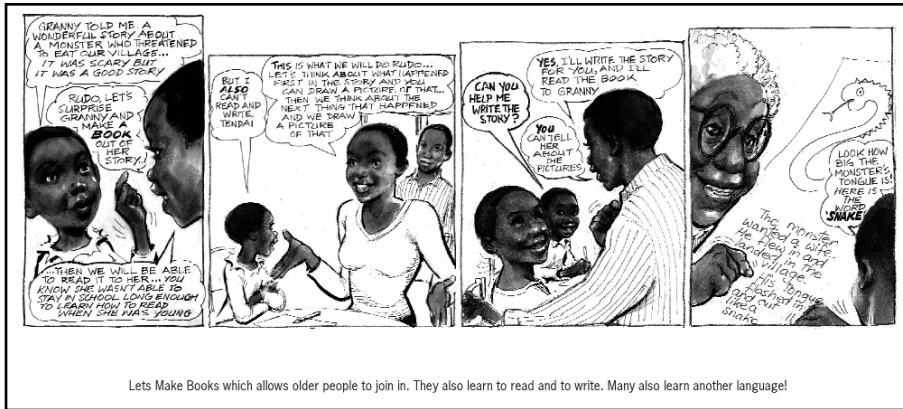
In South Africa, Family Maths, Science, Literacy and Life Skills (FMSLL) introduces these subjects to children and adults through play and joyous exploration within family and community.



It's possible to do lots of educational activities with children without spending money. When schools are in a poor state, teachers absent and families poor, this is important. It builds upon the inter-play between child and adult, bringing mutual interest and respect between generations.

It shows the immediate interaction between story telling, drawing, writing and then reading. Many of the activities you can do are great fun and will build your relationship with your child and create lovely memories for your family. Let's use reading and writing as an example today. Each drawing with the story written on the page is a book.

If an A3 page is used, it can be folded into a four page book and stapled. Children and adults can "Make Books", building a classroom or family or community library. Or an Orphan's Memory Box. Not only small children, but all those students left behind or who never had the chance to become literate can quickly learn to read and to write.



Lets Make Books which allows older people to join in. They also learn to read and to write. Many also learn another language!



## Kenya

"Let's Make Books" was presented at the University of Swaziland in 2005 at the International Reading Association Conference. The presentation was attended by professors from Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. Talks between them and Woz'obona resulted in a visit to South Africa by staff from KU, in 2006, to see "Let's Make Books" in action in pre-schools. In 2007, Woz'obona was invited to offer a four-day workshop in Nairobi. The first two days were for the professors/teacher-trainers who were training and mentoring master teachers throughout Kenya. One of their activities was making books in their mother-tongue, an activity which one might think would be inappropriate for experts at that level. The reasons for including this activity were:

- The need to change attitudes toward mother tongue and home-made books
- First-hand knowledge and appreciation of the range of skills needed to make books
- Sharing the books to see how creative and educational the books can be
- Reflecting on and discussing how it feels to make a book
- Discussing the advantages of the activity of book-making and sharing, and how it contributes to our goal of making reading and writing fun, educational, and an activity worth sharing with our families, libraries and communities.

The second half of the workshop involved working directly with the master teachers, again giving them the opportunity to make and share home-made books. The professors participated in this section as well. Master teachers from throughout the country participated; part of the workshop was about how they would train other teachers in their schools, what challenges they might encounter, and how they would overcome them.

"Let's Make Books" is a small part of a much larger programme to improve literacy teaching in Kenya, but we would argue that it is an important one because it

- Celebrates diversity by honouring and recording mother-tongue stories
- Motivates children and adults to want to read
- Is a low-cost way to create libraries that can be shared throughout communities
- Allows for and even encourages multilingualism.

## *Conclusion*

Published books for children in mother-tongue languages are at this point in time a luxury which most countries in Africa cannot afford. Providing families and teachers with the knowledge, skills, tools and values they need in order to promote reading and writing would be a more sustainable solution, and would reap benefits for everyone involved.

## *Non-formal education - a path to family literacy: Experiences from Uganda*

Ronald Ssentuuwa

It is important to understand the value of education for both adults and children. As result of the need to improve access to education in hard-to-reach communities in Uganda, Save the Children worked with the projects it supports to create access to education for these communities. This is the story of how a programmeme helped to improve family literacy and provided access to basic education for primary schools; thus inspiring adults to request and then attend an adult education class. This demonstrates the synergy that has been fostered within families.

In early 1999, at the request of the Government of Uganda, the non government agency, Save the Children began work to support Universal Primary Education in hard-to-reach communities in the Nakasongola District in Uganda. This project known as CHANCE is Child centered community-based education and targets severely disadvantaged groups in districts of central Uganda, by establishing and providing support to non-formal education centers. Communities in hard-to-reach areas, communities that are migratory or war-affected as well as communities with limited resources have all benefited from CHANCE schools. Specifically designed for the Uganda context, the CHANCE model provides innovative, low-cost, high quality education to disadvantaged groups of children by building on Save the Children's extensive experience in community mobilization. CHANCE schools are based on the principle that the education system should fit the needs of the children and not the other way around. Therefore, CHANCE schools have small class sizes which utilize child-centered, participatory teaching and operate on flexible hours adapted to the needs of children and families' daily work schedules. The school year is also flexible and is based on each community's calendar of migratory patterns or busy seasons. A shorter school day enables children to continue to fulfill their economic or domestic responsibilities while attending classes that will prepare them for a transition to the formal education system.

Local communities have responded to the CHANCE project with great enthusiasm and have partnered with Save the Children in the establishment, construction and management of schools, each one of which serves about 40 children. Save the Children provides training, ongoing technical and material support to teachers while building the capacity of volunteer School Management Committees to manage and administer their school and facilitate parental and community involvement in school matters. By partnering with communities to build schools and select and train teachers, Save the Children empowers these communities to educate both present and future generations of children.

Since the beginning of CHANCE projects, parents had been constantly requesting a literacy programme for themselves, so with support from USAID, adult literacy training was introduced in 2001. Forty teachers were trained in the Reflect methodology and 943 community members enrolled to participate in the programme, which has strong links to the CHANCE project. For example, since many of the participants are parents with children in CHANCE schools, the adult literacy participants are parents with children in CHANCE schools and have sessions with their children

### *REFLECT facilitator's trainings*



Family literacy in Lwakataba Nakasongola district, central Uganda

For many generations, the community of Lwakataba missed out on the chance to receive an education. It is an extremely hard-to-reach community and in past generations it was not only the distance to schools but also the school fees that kept children out of the classrooms. "There was also a lack of awareness of the importance of education," says John Bagire, chairman of the school committee, father of five, and a member of the adult literacy circle. But now, with adults getting their first chance at an

education, the attitude in the entire community is changing. Parents are inspired to learn as they see their children learning. And parents "want their children to go as far as possible. Maybe to university if it's possible."

With a chalkboard set-up under the shade of a tree, parents and care-givers gather twice a week to practice reading and writing. The facilitator is a member of the local community who received training to become the adult literacy facilitator. However the literacy circle is more than a place to practice reading, writing and math. "The literacy circle has also united people," says John Bagire. It is not just a place to learn but a place to share concerns about the community and to come together to address these concerns. The community has also learnt more about sanitation and hygiene, management and prevention of malaria, HIV/AIDS awareness, teamwork building and agriculture and nutrition. They are hoping to mobilize more members and to build more classrooms so that even more community members will have the chance to learn.

In Lwakataba, parents and children alike are benefiting from the adult literacy circle. Parents are gaining first hand knowledge of the difference an education can

make and are encouraging their children to go to school. The literacy circle also gives adult members of the community a chance to come together to discuss community issues. The Reflect approach used in the group has enabled the adults to examine local concerns and find ways to help solve problems within the community. (For more on Reflect: [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org))

### *Families becoming literate in Kayisolo*

In the village of Kayisolo in Nakasongola District, the adult literacy circle also provides members of the community with much more than the chance to learn how to read and write. When members come together to practice their reading and writing skills, they also discuss important community issues and learn life skills that affect their well-being and the well-being of their children.



Adults during the Reflect classes in their communities

When the literacy circle was first developed in 1997, youth and adults learned basic literacy and numeracy skills. “In 2004, when Save the Children came, we started to use our group meetings for more than just learning to read and write,” explains Luyiga Margaret, the group’s chairperson, “now we address community issues when we come together.” They have learned about agriculture and nutrition, they have developed a health outreach programme, they have learned important facts about sanitation and hygiene and they have established a mothers group and have devoted sessions to discussing the community school and children’s affairs.

While each lesson is important and each issue of concern to the community, perhaps the biggest difference for community members has come from the lessons on nutrition and agriculture. After learning best agricultural practices, the chairperson and others in the group worked together to establish a teaching garden where members can learn to



Women attending an adult literacy class

grow pineapple, cassava, peanuts, greens, bananas, sweet potatoes and other fruits and vegetables. As a community they have tasked each member with growing a specific item. After the harvest, each member brings their item to the circle. Working together they have all the things they need for a balanced and nutritious diet for themselves and for their children.

Nearly every member of the Kayisolo adult literacy circle has passed the government's standard literacy test. But they continue to come twice a week to literacy meetings. They read to their children, hold reading competitions, and use their literacy skills to continue to learn more about ways to address community problems and needs and find solutions to these.

The path to family literacy in Uganda has been a long one, since the time of colonialism. However some communities still do not benefit from the literacy activities, especially those that are more formal and thus less attractive to the elderly and older children. But with the participatory approaches of non governmental organizations like Save the Children, parents and children who had missed out on developing literacy skills have had a chance to gain family literacy skills through non formal education systems as described in this story.

## *Early Literacy - Focus on Success (ELFS) programme: An Australian experience*

*Vivien Bleakley*

As I write this, it is the first day of Children's Week, and it is the first time I have seen reading advertised on the television as an activity that parents can do with their children. While I think this is a wonderful idea, it presupposes that parents know how and what to read with their children to extend their love of reading. I know from first-hand experience that this is not always the case.

### *My introduction to family literacy*

My introduction to family literacy was when I was asked to help run a community family literacy programme for a year. I knew nothing very much about family literacy but, as a firm believer in lifelong learning and a passionate reader and advocate of reading with children from birth, I agreed. The programme offered help with academic skills. But, while the women often wanted input into how to handle their children's behaviour problems, discussion about these issues was not allowed. This was of concern to me, as I felt that, if we met their life needs, they might be happier to talk to us and become involved in their own learning.

It was this community course that really brought to the surface an awareness of what I had been observing in the kindergarten where I worked, with children who threw books rather than read them and parents preferring to chat with staff rather than read with their children, even when specifically asked. Kindergarten is a stand alone educational year before formal schooling starts. In one particular session during the community course, the parents were asked to read with their children and they just didn't understand how to do this. Staff and other parents were asked to leave the room as the participants were embarrassed to read in front of us. Parents stood their child next to them, took a book from the pile, without choosing it to suit the child or their interests, opened it up flat on the table and read from there. Not one parent included their child in the story, no togetherness, no cuddling, no attention, no showing them the pictures or asking them about the story, no different voices or intonation - nothing that made the story exciting or interesting.

The book was closed as soon as it was finished; every parent did virtually the same. I was amazed. It brought home the fact that parents do not automatically know how to read with their children; it is not innate or natural but a learned practice (Chall, Jacobs & Baldwin 1990). From then on, I read to the children for some part of every session, in the hope that my demonstration would encourage

parents to follow my example and put the children onto their laps, or sit next to them in an informal manner. One child particularly loved this and the parent explained that her child kept her coming to the sessions as she loved me reading to her. Reading extended to the whole family, as the child badgered her father to read to her; eventually this led to the whole family joining the library and enjoying books. With this small success, I began research into developing my own literacy programme to help parents understand the literacy needs of their children, as the model that I had been involved with was not my ideal. My interpretation of family literacy meant incorporating parents and children together in an exploration and discovery of how children gain literacy skills, while really cementing and extending those of the parents.

The focus of the programme I wanted to develop was to lift parents' awareness of how children become literate, as mine had been lifted. So, before conducting a needs survey within the kindergarten, I researched what was meant by the term 'family literacy'. Was there a course already out there that I would be happy to promote? My search was limited to the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, as this was where the bulk of information on family literacy came from at the time of my research.

Nickse (1993), the main exponent of family literacy in the USA at this time, divided the available family literacy programmes in that country into four categories, 1) Parent/child/family/intergenerational, 2) Adult/child, 3) Adult alone and 4) Child alone, and defined 'family' as relating to family members, and 'intergenerational' as serving members not related to each other. The programmes all concentrated on the "trickle down effect", aimed at lifting the skills of low-literacy groups to aid first world countries to keep their edge in the global market place. The community course was one of these. Auerbach (1992) called these programmes 'deficit' programmes, as they are school-based programmes with the focus on the teacher; instead, she offers the 'participatory' or benefit models that are home-based and focus on the learner.

The UK mainly followed the school-based models. One USA programme, helping teenage mothers make books for their children while they themselves are learning, and a UK school programme that promoted school children reading to their multicultural parents to help them learn to read in English, were two programmes I thought worthwhile, but not what I was looking for. Australian programmes are mostly intergenerational in schools and libraries, with schools teaching parents and libraries the children. One programme sent books home from kindergarten, supposedly to be read by parents to the children each week. I know from personal experience that this would only address parents who already read to their children, as library books sent home by my kindergarten were often not returned for weeks or not read with the children. None of these programmes, however, was what I was looking for, as they only addressed parents from a low-literacy background rather than all parents; so I developed my own.



## *The Early Learning/Literacy Focus on Success Programme*

After researching, reading articles, phoning various practitioners and conducting a needs survey of the kindergarten parents, the Early Literacy Focus on Success programme came into being in 1996. This three week course was free and run without any government money. Permission was obtained from the kindergarten committee to use the kindergarten free of charge and some course materials were photocopied within the kindergarten, but the book written by me, providing parents with information, and the bulk of the course materials were printed and donated by a printing company. A sponsor like this was important, as it not only made the programme doable and not a financial burden, but also because the course materials looked professional. Parents need to feel confident about the information they are receiving and in the person delivering the programme.

Usually the ELFS programme was of three weeks duration on a week night, though Saturday afternoons were tried in order to cater for everyone. Children were welcome; a primary school teacher provided child care, transport was even provided for people without cars, but this was not successful. Parents surveyed said that they preferred to spend their weekends with their families. Mothers also said they wanted to concentrate on learning rather than on the needs of their children. Fathers were a bit shell-shocked by the amount of information they had to absorb. Each session started at seven o'clock so that there was no interruption of the family routine. Finishing time was officially 9pm, but it was the parents who often prolonged the session, asking questions or wanting some advice privately about older children and their reading habits or lack of them.

Kindergarten in Australia is for 3-5 year-olds who attend for up to 12 hours each week. There is a teacher and an assistant to educate the 30 pupils each morning or afternoon. The programme is based around learning through play. While having a pool of 160 parents and some extra carers, I limited the session numbers to between ten and twelve participants. These were mostly women but I tried to include as many fathers as possible. Fathers, arriving home just wanting to relax, liked to leave this type of course to the women but I really tried to get to know fathers when they came to pick up their children, or when they were rostered to help with the children, so that they felt comfortable when I approached them about coming along, stressing the needs of the child and the need for sons to see their father reading. I emphasized that the highest level of reading expected was that of children's books. I also found that talking to their wives aided attendance. They did the pushing. Mothers often booked their husbands in after doing the course so they had the same knowledge to draw on. Plenty of information about the need for fathers to read with their children was also sent home in newsletters.

A limit of 12 parents in each group allowed for an informal delivery. The three parts of ELFS were, 'Why read with your children?', 'How to read with your

children' and 'Choosing books for your child'. ELFS was not a static learning environment, with parents passively listening, but experiential, hands-on and fun - following the maxim of a Chinese philosopher

*"I hear and I forget,  
I see and I remember,  
I do and I learn".*

(cited in Jolles 1993)

The sessions catered for all learning styles - visual, audio, kinaesthetic (with videos), demonstrations, games, questions and answers - with plenty of time for discussions, as these are an essential ingredient of the learning process. As Boud 1989:42 affirms, 'Learning must involve the whole person not just the intellect'. So, after the activities, a discussion with parents about what happened, how they felt, what they believed and how they behaved will take place to link past with present experiences.

### *Outline of ELFS programme*

After the room was set up, participants arrived and a meet-and-greet session took place. This happened at every workshop.

#### **Workshop 1: Why read to your children? Learning is caught not taught.**

An icebreaker started the proceedings. A card with a picture of either a fairy tale or a nursery rhyme was pinned to every participant's back; they then moved around the room asking each other questions to find out which fairy tale or nursery rhyme they had on their back.

Part of the Jungle Book video was used to show the 'bare necessities of life' and to introduce parents to the concept of learning through modelling.

A group discussion ensued, with a parent writing up answers on a flip chart about what participants saw as the bare necessities of life and how reading and literacy fitted in to the equation.

The parents were then put into small groups to do an unfamiliar jigsaw puzzle, while being harassed by me. Questions of how this felt and whether it impeded their learning followed.

Then parents were given a sheet on which to write the names of all the advertisements spread out on the tables.

A picture of a building in progress, with just the frame, was shown to stress the

need for a sound and strong foundation for literacy.

### **Workshop 2: How to read to children.**

Meet-and-greet, then parents sat in a circle, which included Sarah, a Holly Hobby-type doll, who sat on a small chair as part of the circle.

Parents discussed what they remembered from the previous week such as reading more themselves, really observing their child while they are playing or incorporating them into household routines. Everyone was given a chance to speak but could pass if they wanted to.

Then I read a story to Sarah, in a very fast monotone voice, leaving her sitting on the chair and ignoring her, and with no changes to my behaviour. The same story was read again; this time Sarah sat on my lap but I overcompensated, using a syrupy voice, telling her to sit still, stop wriggling, do not touch, listen, do not interrupt.

A video was then played of a father and son together reading the same book. Father cuddles the son, acts out the story as he reads with lots of laughter, changes voice, plenty of interaction, includes son by letting him read, turn the pages asking for prediction and extending the story.

A discussion followed about which was best and why. Questions about how this made the child feel and what were the skills he had learnt followed.

A speech pathologist, who was also a remedial reading teacher, spoke to the parents about the importance of extending children's language, listening and talking from an early age and the impact this had on literacy skills in later school life. He illustrated his points and used anecdotal stories to add weight to his information.

His point was demonstrated, and reinforced, with a game where parents divided into pairs: one partner verbally described how to accomplish an everyday task such as putting on a sock, folding a nappy, or peeling an apple; the other was asked to suspend prior knowledge and attempt to follow the directions exactly. Both had a turn. This showed our lack of verbal skills and the need for prior knowledge and props to complete our task.

After a discussion about the need for books to be accessible, handouts on the session were provided and a scrapbook given to parents for their child to write, draw, and use for collages or photographs, so that they could make their own book. Parents were asked to write underneath the pictures, if the child wanted them to, and to talk to them about what they had done.

### **Workshop 3: What to read with your children. There's a right book for every child and a right child for every book.**

After the meet-and-greet, parents showed their children's work and told the group about the experience for the child and themselves.

A demonstration of the many different ways to tell a story, other than reading books, included puppets, tapes, felt-boards, catalogues, photograph albums, pictures cut from magazines that were in pockets for the children to choose from, home-made books and even travel brochures.

A story that was thought to appeal to them was read. They were then asked about whether or not they liked the book and why.

A whole group discussion followed with headings on a flip-chart. Parents were encouraged to say what they thought would make a good children's book. Differences, audience, content, illustrations, interest were all discussed.

As each category was discussed, a book showing the corresponding details was shown and often read to parents. For example, *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 1968) was shown to illustrate an interest in animals, its story line and its colourful, clear and funny pictures.

A handout of recommended books and authors was given to parents. Parents were then asked to select a card and then choose a book for the child mentioned on the card, who might be an inner city child or a baby, and one for their own child.

How to get books – by joining a library, for example - the importance of making children responsible for their own library card, sharing with friends, book clubs, fetes, booksellers that cut out the middle man, and also where to find books written in their first language were all topics of discussion.

A return to the picture of the house and building a strong foundation, and the *Jungle Book* video clip concluded the three workshops.

### *Rationale*

Creating the Early Literacy Focus on Success programme was an opportunity for me to inform the community about the immersion theory, which puts literacy acquisition firmly in the home, and the changes in thinking from reading readiness starting in the school (Sulzby and Edwards 1993). The aim of ELFS was to raise parents' awareness of their role in the literacy process and the importance of reading, listening and talking, telling stories with their children to build their motivation and interest, so that, despite schooling and regardless of background,

children's learning could flourish. Through understanding their role, parents would be empowered and gain confidence to take control of their children's learning.

Part of guiding the parents to an understanding of their role was setting the scene. The room was a particularly useful tool to make parents comfortable and in the right frame of mind for learning. I had seen how the organiser of the community course had transformed the draughty hall, with its long trestle table and odd chairs and nothing else, into a more inviting area by adding to the way the room was set up to get the outcome she wanted and to create a heightened sense of learning. By appealing to the senses - much as a house-seller might - with aromas of bread baking and coffee perking, flowers everywhere, I stage-managed my market place. Flowers in the kindergarten foyer welcomed the participants of ELFS and an oil burner using essential oils such as lavender and a mixture of various oils such as rosemary, peppermint and lemon provided an aroma; refreshments were provided. The participants were able to handle the wide array of books arranged on the tables, while baroque music, to bring both sides of the brain together played quietly in the background, adding to the relaxed feel but concentrating the mind. Posters and information added to the overall visual picture and allowed parents time to chat and settle in. A folder with their name on it, filled with relevant course materials plus paper and pen, was to give them a sense of belonging.

Preparation is the key to success and parents would be inspired by the professionalism of the workshops. Tables were set up ready for each stage of the session, so that there was no break in the flow of the progression of the evening. Participants could see the range of books available and look at a children's book, with a view to perhaps borrowing, or even buying, it later. Books on reading, starting school, children's behaviour and abilities were included. Books I owned were arranged so that parents could borrow those that interested them.

Drawing them further into the course and adding to their sense of belonging was the icebreaker. Many of the parents did not know each other, so breaking the ice in a fun way was important. Parents were moved around so that they had to talk to each other. In this way quiet and confident parents were incorporated into the group. This also guided them into understanding the active nature of the course. Whether they accomplish the task was not a priority, moving them around the room, talking to each other and finding out each other's names was. Incidental learning, fun and laughter were needed to establish their comfort zone. Bringing together a cohesive group, able to express their thoughts without concern, was necessary to make the group work.

Added to this, I had watched the community groups' change of facial expression and body language as the teacher either taught them as students, or acted to facilitate these adults in their own learning. I did not want to use the 'fill the empty vessels approach' (Freire 1972:45) but to help parents learn through facilitation. I aided the facilitation process by using a flip chart, instead of a white or black board

that could be cleaned off and erase parents' thoughts. As each sheet was finished it was pinned up around the walls. This was added to each week, so that a visual dialogue of events was entered into the subconscious, a testament to the journey.

A volunteer was asked to act as a scribe each week so that I was free to guide the discussions, asking who, what, why, where, when and how questions, bringing in the quiet participants and curbing the dominant ones, thus allowing everyone a chance to air their opinions and gain a balanced perspective, while also raising the profile of parents as first teacher. The discussions were essential, as they enabled me to gain feedback on what they had seen and how it related to their change of role and to evaluate their understanding and level of awareness, so that I could add to it or change any misconceptions.

Such incidents such as a kindergarten child summoning his mother to "come see my writing" and she replying, "you can't write"; and another mother telling me that her daughter had read a book to her, "but, of course", she said, "she can't read she memorised it", became the basis of the first workshop, because they did not realise their children were copying them. I wanted to show, rather than tell, parents about their role. Hence the video clip from the *Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, which centred on the way children learn from parents by watching them and then copying them. By watching the video of Baloo the Bear who found food, handled a prickly pear without hurting himself, scratching, bathing and using general survival skills fulfilling Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Mowgli the manchild copying him, they learnt to be more aware of their role in the literacy process. Vygotsky believed that adults in the community possessed the knowledge and passed it to the children through cultural and community roles - in this case, the family to promote literacy and learning through everyday routines (cited in Berk and Winslor 1995; Galda, Cullinan and Strickland 1997; Bruner 1986) This differs from Piaget's (Hill 1997:269) theory that children explored their world and their surroundings, gathering knowledge themselves and applying it when they reached the appropriate developmental stage. The video enabled parents to see what the "bare necessities of life" were, and how the lack of literacy skills impacted on their children's eventual lifestyle. Games reinforced the adults' incidental learning and were designed to raise their 'conscious incompetence', (O'Connor and Seymour 1994:17) building on their present state rather than trying to change participants' culture and fundamental beliefs.

In the first workshop, games focused on how children learn. They allowed me to put the parent in the position of the child and experience the world from their perspective. Children learn by listening. The listening game had one parent standing, the other sitting, and forced them to find another way to hear what was being said; this made them realise why children often misheard and used their own interpretation. It was also to show how important it is to be at child height when talking with children. The unfamiliar jigsaw pieces with time restraints and general harassment, helped parents understand why they needed to show their children

the task required and allow them time to do it, rather than nagging or shouting, illustrating the doing part of learning as well as the need for prior knowledge.

Pictures of advertisements, which the parents would know without particularly learning them, illustrated how immersion takes place, showing that children do actually read and write and need to do this in order to start the literacy process. Parents could then understand how children could read logographics - for instance, the golden arches of MacDonald's and the red circles of Target - which is the beginning of literacy learning rather than a teaching experience.

Literacy is not just about reading but also talking, listening and writing with children, so the second workshop was dedicated to guiding parents' understanding of this fact. The two different styles of reading came from my own observations, partly from the community course, of how parents read to their children. So, although I exaggerated, I gave parents an insight into how some read to their children. Ignoring 'Sarah', and then emphasising all the negatives when reading to her, was to make parents see themselves and think about what the child would gain from these styles of reading. This worked, as parents often commented, "I do that" as they recognised themselves.

The third style was to show that story reading can be seen as an interaction, which suggests that reading is with, rather than solely to, the child (Cochran-Smith 1984 cited in Campbell 1999). Holdaway's (1979:178) three A's - attention, affection and approval - are the most powerful enforcers to encourage children to read. The father reading with his child, and the interaction that accompanied the reading, highlighted all of these aspects to the full. Many fathers seldom read for pleasure, which impacts on their sons later in life. Showing a father reading and having fun presented fathers with a positive picture of how literacy could enrich the lives of both father and children. The father also showed parents how to scaffold (Bruner 1986) by asking his son "what do you think comes next?" He gave the child time to sound out the word and praised his efforts, gave clues and encouraged him, eventually moving his son up the scaffolding ladder. This gave the child confidence and a sense of belonging, as well as increasing the skills, such as patience and listening, needed when at school. It also showed parents that reading is not a chore, or duty, to be undertaken with their mind on other things; otherwise it gives the message that reading is not important. Reading needs to be a pleasurable activity.

I enlisted the help of the remedial specialist to push parents into talking, listening, writing and telling stories with their children. I had watched as children, in every environment, tried to talk with their parents and the parents talked over them, told them to be quiet, and generally ignored them. Just stop and listen in a supermarket to the shouting of parents. Parents always seem to be rushing, so there is no time to listen to, or with, children. Even fewer seem to understand the value of face to face communication: for example, by including the children in buying groceries by

providing them with a list words and pictures, or by adding names to furniture in their homes, or using magnetic letters on the fridge to make a daily message. As a remedial specialist, he could draw on anecdotal evidence and provide data on the problems experienced by children in the higher levels of primary school because of their lack of vocabulary, imagination and confidence when talking with adults. Reading together, and discussing the stories, builds on this adult-child interaction that is so necessary for children to be able to express themselves. But creating this bond requires the right book to hook children into reading. As Tashma (1946: XIV cited in Saxby 1997:4) commented 'those to whom reading is fated to become important generally shake hands with books early'.

So the third workshop revolved around how to choose a book for their children. It was quite clear, after watching parents pick up a book at the supermarket counter and just give it to their child without looking through it or even glancing at the cover, or listening to a parent tell their child, who suggested a book as a birthday gift, that books are boring, and from observing the behaviour of the community group, that parents didn't realise that all children have different needs when it comes to the type of text needed to engage their interest in reading. Several parents said that they wanted to read to their sons but they weren't interested. One father was concerned about his son, as his daughters loved having books read to them but he didn't. Then I found out he was expecting his son to enjoy the same fairy stories that he read to his girls.

All forms of books, from homemade scrapbooks, which children can own and read as their story, to photograph albums in which children can see themselves and gain a sense of their world and their place in it (Winch and Poston-Anderson 1993), to pictures from magazines, so that again it is their story, to books about their interests, are essential to engage children and provide the necessary motivation. As they see the value in books and reading, so they can try on roles, can reject stereotypes, and enter the world of 'what if' (Spink 1989:25-26). Parents need to know their children, as this is the first step to choosing a book for them. In the book, the text needs to be on one side of the page and the picture relating to it needs to be opposite, so that the children can look at the picture and gain clues to the text. The pictures need to be clear, bright and colourful, with plenty of white space and on good quality paper, so that children handle the books appropriately.



After these features have been demonstrated on numerous books, and parents told to read the book first, they will be asked to demonstrate their skill by choosing a book for their children and for another child listed on a card, to reinforce the importance of this task. I found parents tended to forget the advice about reading the book first, which led to a book about a kitten, which was deemed naughty and threatened with being sent away, being chosen for an adopted daughter. Another story had a picture of an empty chair on the back



page, signifying the death of a beloved grandma, when the children's own nanna was in hospital. This reinforced the need to really think about the contents of the book and not just its title. The programme finished as it started: focusing on the need for a strong foundation, which is vital for building literacy skills to carry children through life.

The ELFS programme has been tried and tested in the marketplace, being regularly evaluated and upgraded as the need arose. The feedback has been really positive with comments such as invaluable, informative, valuable, inspirational, creative, relevant, enjoyable, worthwhile and fun. A father wrote that the programme altered the way he and his wife look at children's books and spend time with their children. What they read has opened up a whole new world and helped his reading too. A teacher wrote that she had wondered how valuable the course would be but was 'refreshed and reformed'. She concluded that 'with the knowledge and expertise imparted and the parent's willingness to listen and learn it is the child who will benefit and succeed'. Most parents commented that they had changed their reading habits or that the workshops had reinforced what they were already doing.

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## A Canadian portrait of family literacy: Experiences from the Centre for Family Literacy in Alberta

Maureen Sanders and Ruth Hayden



### *The C.O.W. Bus*

An old school bus, painted like a Holstein cow, trundles into a housing project in northeast Edmonton –the northernmost city in Canada. It is the capital city of the province of Alberta, with a population of almost 1.1 million people.

As the bus pulls into the snow-covered parking lot, Rose and her two preschoolers wave excitedly to the driver. Janice, the Classroom on Wheels (C.O.W.) coordinator, jumps down the steps of the bus into the brisk, winter air. She smiles warmly and says, “Well, it’s nice to see you all so bright and early again!” Four-year-old Kayleigh clammers onto the bus, pulls off her jacket, hat and boots, and rushes to the cozy, carpeted area at the back shouting, “Let’s sing rhymes.” Joshua, aged two, heads straight for the basket of board books, quickly digs out *Where’s Spot* and chants, “Read, read, read.”

As Janice welcomes two more families, Rose browses the shelves of books lining the bus and takes several to share with Joshua and another child who has joined him. The family stays for about an hour participating in a rhymes and songs session, listening to *Owl Babies* read with enthusiasm by Janice, and chatting with other families about neighbourhood events and registration for kindergarten.

When Rose checks out six new books she quietly confides in Janice, “The C.O.W. bus has been the best thing ever for us. The regular library is two bus rides away but you come right to us. I never knew how much young kids could learn about books and reading.” She pauses for a moment and then adds, “I’m afraid they’ll soon be better readers than I am. How will I be able to help them then?”

Janice uses this as an opener to share information about the other literacy programmes offered by the Centre for Family Literacy; by the time Janice returns to the office the next day Rose has phoned and made an appointment to be matched with a tutor. Two weeks later, she is meeting with her new tutor and already developing enough confidence to begin talking about entering a college upgrading programme.

### *A range of programmes*

The Edmonton Literacy C.O.W. is a family literacy programme delivered by the Centre for Family Literacy, a Canadian charitable organisation and the first of its kind in Canada. The C.O.W. bus travels weekly to ten low-income communities in the city, bringing books, informal programmes and literacy support to families who lack resources and services. It is one example of innovative family literacy programmes that focus attention on the importance of family, home and community in supporting the development of literacy and positive attitudes

towards learning. The C.O.W. bus is one of ten family literacy programmes offered by the Centre, which provide a continuum of services relevant to the changing needs of families.



The majority of our programmes focus on families of pre-schoolers. For example, *Books for Babies* encourages parents of children between birth and 12 months to share books with their infants. It supports families in developing early literacy and language experiences and promotes healthy family relationships. *Rhymes That*

*Bind* is an oral language programme where parents enjoy rhymes, finger plays, songs and simple movement games with their infants and toddlers in a supportive peer group. Programmes are delivered in several different languages to meet the diverse needs of a variety of cultural groups.

Another programme, *Books Offer Our Kids Success (B.O.O.K.S.)* consists of small group workshops for parents of pre-school children focusing on reading, listening, talking and writing. Parents discuss and borrow children's books and prepare crafts to share with their children. The programme has also been adapted to work with Aboriginal and immigrant organisations. The *Storysacks* programme, created by British educator Neil Griffiths, sees parents and interested community members creating a bag that contains a



good quality story-book, props, scenery and characters, a non-fiction book linked to the story, reading tips and activity ideas for parents. When completed, the Storysack is housed in a central location and loaned to parents. This programme has been very popular in the Aboriginal community in Alberta, where it has been successfully used as a culturally-appropriate, community development tool.

*Help Your Child to Read and Write* is a programme for parents with children of elementary school age; it helps parents build their children's confidence by practising strategies for making meaning from print. Parents look at their children's strengths and abilities; they review writing skills, comprehension strategies and study skills. Parents and the school become a team in their children's learning. And our *Volunteer Tutor Programme* for adults provides an option for parents and other adults to focus more intentionally on their own learning in a one-on-one supportive setting, with resources and materials close at hand. These are examples of some of the programmes delivered by the Centre, in partnership with a wide range of community organisations.

### *Development of the Centre for Family Literacy*

The Centre for Family Literacy grew out of the volunteer tutor programme for adults, Prospects Literacy Association, that started in 1980. Over the years, it became clear that many adults came to the adult literacy programme in order to be able to support their children's learning; in the early 1990s we explored new ways of addressing adult literacy issues by working with the family as a whole. Recognising that children are socialised into literacy and that this socialisation begins with the family (Heath, 1983; Morrow, 1989; Nickse, 1989; Paratore,



2001; 2002; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Sénéchal, & Lefevre, 1998; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Taylor, 1983), we began to deliver a variety of family literacy programmes to help parents support their children's literacy development, while also assisting with adult learning. In 1998, the National Literacy Secretariat, in partnership with Success by 6®, University of Alberta, United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, and the Government of Alberta, funded the development of a provincial Centre for Family Literacy.

Following an assessment to determine family literacy needs, both in Edmonton and across the province, as well as extensive research into what such a Centre could look like, a key decision was made to dissolve Prospects as an organisation, and establish a new organisation with a broadened mandate.

The Centre for Family Literacy opened its doors early in 2001, assuming all of the Prospects programmes and services and taking on a new provincial role with respect to training, family literacy promotion and awareness, support of research, and general family literacy support to other organisations. In other words, the Centre would continue to provide a local programme base that would inform and strengthen its new training and support services role, rather than separating programmes from its other services.

The Centre's new mandate included:

- Developing and delivering family and adult literacy programmes in Edmonton;
- Providing training to family literacy professionals in Alberta and across the country;
- Serving as an information and programme resource to family literacy professionals in Alberta;
- Raising awareness about the importance of literacy and its impact on individuals, families and communities;
- Acting as a catalyst for inter-agency support for families with literacy challenges;
- Serving as the location for intensive and long-term research on the effectiveness of family literacy programmes as educational intervention;
- Being a centre for innovation in which new ideas about learning and education may be piloted and implemented.

## *Good practice*

One of our first tasks, in our new role as a provincial organisation, was to initiate the development of good practice statements for family literacy in Alberta, in consultation with practitioners from across the province. Several of these good practice statements are used here to frame the rest of this chapter.

*“Family literacy programmes are participatory, intergenerational, support diversity, and build on the strengths and goals of families and their community.”*

Family literacy is an approach to literacy development that recognises and supports the family as a “learning unit.” It builds on families’ strengths and connections in the context of the culture and community in which they live and learn. The Centre for Family Literacy works within this strengths-based, participatory model. While we use established programme models, these models are always open to adjustment through parent input and feedback. Some of the programmes are offered to both parents and children at the same time (e.g. *Rhymes That Bind, Books for Babies, Learning Together, Classroom on Wheels*, others are directly focused on parents (e.g. *B.O.O.K.S.*). Some programmes are adjusted for parents alone or parents and children together, depending on parental request (e.g. *Help Your Child to Read and Write*). Regardless of audience, each programme falls within the rubric of family literacy, because its primary goals are to enhance the oral language development of children and other family members, as well as to provide each group with greater opportunities for literacy development and use within the family and community contexts.

The Centre structures its programmes within the dimensions of the following goals:

- Adults and children will improve their literacy skills
- Babies, pre-schoolers and elementary school-age children will increase their language and literacy skills
- Relationships between parents and children will be strengthened
- Adults/parents will participate more actively in the development, growth and learning of their children
- Adults/parents and children will develop the skills to participate more actively in their communities
- Parents, adults and partnering agencies will understand the roles of adult and family literacy in the development of healthy families and communities
- Community agencies are more effective in raising awareness and delivering services.

The comments on parent evaluations show that parents appreciate the

participatory nature of the programmes; they feel listened to and involved in programme delivery. Immigrant mothers love to share rhymes and songs from their own culture – one group had “songs and rhymes in eight different languages”. A partner agency says, “Parents feel so comfortable with one another. Many offer parenting tips: this worked, or that didn’t, or where to buy great new teething biscuits etc”. Sometimes women in the groups get together during the week and do a rhymes session by themselves. “They get along so well together and...I am sure they will continue to meet and build friendships”.

The following anecdote is one example that highlights the influence of programme participation on family life. A mother felt that her daughter was not doing very well in Grade One, so she decided to speak to the child’s teacher. However, during her interview with the teacher, the latter kept insisting that the child would develop greater literacy ability when she became more mature. The mother was not willing to accept this viewpoint and, as she noted to the interviewer, “I kept asking her for specific things I could do to help Janice become a better reader. But she was not able or willing to tell me anything and even mentioned that parents do not have enough knowledge about reading and writing to teach their children. I was so surprised because I had been in the BOOKS programme and I knew a lot about helping my child. So I told her about what I knew about reading. She was not pleased at all. I would never have had the confidence to question her decision about my daughter if I had not taken that programme. Now I work with my daughter at home and things are going so much better”.

*“Family literacy programmes encourage community involvement, partnerships, support and referrals.”*

The first family literacy programme was offered in 1993, in partnership with one agency and attended by nine parents. Over the past 15 years, the number of programmes has grown considerably, as has the number of collaborating agencies. For example, in 2007, over 2,000 parents and 3,000 children attended local programmes in collaboration with more than 150 partner agencies. Even more children were impacted by programmes for adult participants who will then be involved directly in literacy tasks with their children at home. Indeed, the growth in participation for local programme involvement has exceeded all expectations, each year surpassing the previous one in the numbers of individuals taking part in programmes.

Whether designing new programmes, or delivering programmes and training, we collaborate with a broad range of community partners. These partners consist of local and provincial organisations whose own mandates are enhanced and extended by the inclusion of family literacy constructs in meeting the needs of their clients. The interrelatedness of education, health, economic and social issues means that literacy is indeed everyone’s business. We have worked hard over many years to ensure that organisations within all sectors - health centres, family



resource programmes, Head Start Programmes, libraries, schools, service organisations, the business community - are able to see the promise and potential in family literacy work.

CFL works with, rather than simply for, its partners in developing a mind-set and understanding of the power of family literacy within the local or broader community. This collaboration with other agencies is a cornerstone of our work (Hayden & Sanders, 1998). The approach provides increased and more accessible opportunities for families, ensures that families can be referred to other support programmes as appropriate, and also maximises resources and services.

*“Family literacy programmes reduce barriers to participation and retention.”*

Local programmes are delivered at a range of community sites close to where families live, and are generally established as a result of community agency requests; however, we did a great deal of promotion and advocacy work in the early days of our work to reach this level of community recognition of the value of family literacy programmes. As a result of these partnerships, we are able to provide the kind of additional supports for families necessary to encourage families to join programmes, and to stay in them.

All of the Centre’s family literacy programmes place a strong emphasis on encouraging retention of families, by providing a combination of additional services such as child-care for families with young children, food and snacks for families during each session, transportation to and from the programme, and calling families each week the night before the programme to encourage attendance.

One parent describes how they support each other in attending the programme, reporting that if a parent/family missed a session, when she saw them at the market she would say, “Where were you last night? We missed ya. You gotta come next time, it’s fun.” Facilitators often award certificates of participation at the end of the sessions, and give families books as celebratory gifts.

*“Family literacy programmes engage in ongoing assessment, evaluation and documentation strategies.”*

There has been criticism in the literature, and from the field, that research and evaluation into the efficacy of family literacy programmes has fallen behind its explosive practices (Brizius & Foster, 1993; Paratore, 2002; Hayden & Sanders, 2005). To address this concern, the Centre for Family Literacy has made concerted and consistent efforts, since its inception, to document the outcomes of its work by ensuring that all programmes and training events include an evaluation component. The purpose of this evaluation process has been: to determine how

effective programmes are within the framework of the programme goals; to identify how various programmes might be modified to meet the needs of different participant groups; and to obtain a general picture across the years of how programmes and training continue to address best practices in family literacy. The evaluation process also provides us with a wealth of documentation that serves to give funders a comprehensive view of how their financial assistance has enhanced the lives of the families involved in programmes.

The intensity of the evaluation varies depending upon the status of the programme, that is, whether the programme is new to the Centre, whether the programme has been in existence for several years or whether the programme evaluation needs to be carried out longitudinally. With respect to programmes that have been in existence for some time, a survey or questionnaire generally suffices to provide the information needed. Such documents usually consist of approximately 20-30 forced choice questions, with the addition of two or three open-ended questions at the end of the document for personal comments. Furthermore, many questions on these survey/questionnaires are common across different programmes so that cross-programme analyses may occur. In other words, the design of the evaluation tool allows for a comprehensive overview of parental satisfaction with programme content and delivery, both across different programmes and across years of delivery. The data collected from such surveys are also supplemented by cooperating agency reports and programme facilitators' notes.

When the Centre requires greater understanding of how the programme is meeting participant needs, such as when a programme is new to its repertoire, it collects more detailed information about the programme from participant and/or partnering agency perspectives. In such cases, individual or group interviews may occur at the conclusion of the programme, together with the inclusion of data surfacing from questionnaires. In addition, observations by a researcher of the programme during delivery often occur. These more intensive evaluations are designed and reported on as mini-research projects, the results of which are sometimes disseminated in educational journals.

The data from the evaluation of the above two types of programmes are tabulated by a university researcher, who has served as a consultant with the Centre for many years. In addition, this consultant analyses the personal comments on questionnaires, as well as agency and facilitator reports, in order to determine common themes across data sources. In other words, the evaluation process allows for both qualitative and quantitative results. Regardless of the structure of evaluation, results from this consistent and ongoing evaluation have demonstrated that the family literacy programmes offered by the Centre enhance parental ability to assist children develop their awareness, and knowledge, of literacy and also help parents move further along their own literacy pathways. While it is not possible to report all results here,

the following items demonstrate the positive change in literacy events within family contexts:

Parents reading more frequently themselves . . . . .	70%
Family members using more appropriate strategies when reading to children . . . . .	75%
Parents using the library more frequently . . . . .	65%
Parents interacting more positively with their children . . . . .	80%
Parents more aware of the importance of talking and playing with their children . . . . .	70%
Parents more in control of their own behaviour . . . . .	70%
Parents more aware of their children's learning needs . . . . .	70%
Parents finding reading to children has become more enjoyable . . . . .	75%
Parents more aware of how to read to their children . . . . .	80%
Parents reading more frequently with their children . . . . .	75%
Parents feeling less isolated from the community . . . . .	75%

The authors of this chapter are currently writing a comprehensive compilation of the past fifteen years' programme results, which will be available in the coming year.

An in-depth research project was conducted on the *Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child Programme*, in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Research on Literacy at the University of Alberta. This five-year study compared low-income parents and their pre-school children, who were enrolled in a 90-hour programme, divided into three sessions a week over a period of three months, with a comparison group of children and their parents. One hundred and fifty eight adults and children from five communities participated in the study. *Family Literacy Matters: A Longitudinal Parent-Child Literacy Intervention Study* (Phillips, Hayden & Norris, 2006) confirmed the powerful effects of parents' education and reading ability on their children's reading ability prior to school entry.

The results also demonstrated that the *Learning Together Programme* positively affected literacy development for those children at or below the 70th to 80th percentile. As a result of their participation in the programme, parents also showed they had a broader range of strategies to help their pre-schoolers move into literacy, and acquired and implemented more frequent and varied literacy activities in the home. Parental confidence in their own abilities to model literacy for the children had increased considerably. Parents also expressed a desire to learn more ways to improve their own literacy levels, a factor that was not satisfactorily realised by programme participation. Plans are currently under way to strengthen the adult literacy component of the programme and to extend the programme to a full year in length.

*“Family literacy programmes recruit, train, and retain high-quality staff who can meet the diverse learning needs of participating family members.”*

The need for training and professional development consistently arises as a critical issue among family literacy practitioners. When the Centre for Family Literacy adopted a provincial training and support mandate, it took on responsibility for providing professional development, not only for its own staff but also for practitioners across the province. This includes training in programme evaluation, especially outcomes' evaluation methods.

To address the need for comprehensive leadership training that addresses the wide range of skills and expertise required for effective programme delivery training and professional development, in 2001 the Centre developed a practitioner training programme in partnership with some of the most knowledgeable practitioners and academics from across the country. The intent of *Foundational Training in Family Literacy* was to provide the underpinnings of a wide range of programme delivery and to bring credibility and professionalism to this rapidly-developing field. Content of the training includes such areas as the theory of family literacy; child development and emergent literacy; adult literacy and working with families; family literacy and community development. More administrative areas, such as programme evaluation and administration, as well as considerations of good practice, are also addressed.

Since the training was developed, several provinces have delivered numerous regional training sessions. The programme is also delivered on-line to enable greater access. Further, the national francophone coalition, La fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF), in partnership with the Centre for Family Literacy, translated and adapted *Foundational Training* for a francophone minority context and is now regularly delivering the training. Practitioners who have taken this training agree that its comprehensive approach to the multi-faceted field of family literacy has had a valuable impact on their professional development and, consequently, on their programmes.

Because of the growing interest in the training, additions and revisions to the training are almost complete. New materials include modules on family literacy work across community contexts, such as Health, Schools and Libraries, and also chapters on working with immigrant and Aboriginal families. Further, a chapter on Research in Practice is part of the revised training, which is now known as *Foundations in Family Literacy*. In addition, a steering committee is exploring options for obtaining certification for this training programme at college or university level. One such pilot programme is currently being delivered at Vancouver Community College.

In addition to this training, we have developed a range of manuals and resource

booklets for training facilitators and participants respectively. Many of these resources are now in circulation across the province and nationally. Well over 5,000 individuals at local, provincial and national levels have now participated in training sessions since the Centre was established.

Furthermore, the Centre serves as a local, provincial and national resource centre for family literacy materials and information. A toll-free telephone number provides ready access to Centre staff, who are able to provide advice and support to other practitioners, and there are downloadable resources on the Centre's website ([www.famlit.ca](http://www.famlit.ca)). A Regional Family Literacy Network is currently being piloted through the Centre; this will build training and support capacity in other regions of the province so that training is more readily accessible to more practitioners.

### *The Alberta Prairie C.O.W.*

This chapter opened with an anecdote about the Edmonton Literacy Classroom on Wheels. We want to leave readers with the image of a similar bus that travels throughout Alberta – a province of 661,190 square kilometers, roughly 1,220 km from north to south and 660 km from east to west. The topography of the province is diverse, from vast prairies and grasslands, to boreal forests, foothills, and the majestic Rocky Mountains.

Building on the success of the Edmonton C.O.W., the Alberta Prairie Classroom on Wheels travels to communities all across Alberta to raise awareness about the importance of early literacy and to seed communities with related ideas and resources. Over the past five years, it has travelled through the heat of summer and the snow and cold of winter, across an ice road in the north and into the semi-arid dinosaur fossil Badlands of the south. It has rolled into Hutterite Colonies and Mennonite Communities, into Metis settlements and Aboriginal reserves. And wherever it goes, it brings the message of the importance of engaging families in literacy activities to thousands and thousands of families.

The bus provides group literacy activities such as stories, puppet plays, and songs and has individual language and literacy centres for families to explore together. Each community, working with staff from the Centre for Family Literacy, develops programmes and a theme around the bus visit that uniquely fits their needs –sometimes a rodeo, other times a teddy



bear's picnic, a family games night, or local animals. During the visit, the staff members from the Centre present a Legacy Library of new children's books that remains with the community. And, of course, there is often media attention and involvement by local dignitaries as this interesting bus rolls into town.

A recent external evaluation of this project stated that the Prairie C.O.W has had "a profound impact on increasing the awareness of the importance of family literacy activities, by virtue of its presence, the key messages and the activities on and alongside the bus". The bus has been an especially valuable resource for rural Albertans who are often many kilometers away from programmes, libraries and other resources. Future goals of the project include efforts to more closely support the establishment of family literacy programmes in communities that have not been able to set up programmes thus far.

We are fortunate in Alberta to have a provincial government and other funders that not only recognise the importance of family literacy work, but also are willing to support it. As a result, many organisations engaged in family literacy have reasonably secure, albeit limited, programme funding. There has also been strong recognition, as well as consistent funding for training, and professional development for practitioners, and for promotion and awareness of the central role of the family in literacy development. The last 15 years have seen much growth in family literacy programme development, in Alberta and across Canada. Indications, both nationally and provincially, are that the coming years will see a greater focus on training and qualifications for practitioners and an increased emphasis on the demonstration of programme outcomes and successes.

Like the COW bus that travels the breadth and length of this large province in Canada, the Centre for Family Literacy will continue its journey in attempting to meet the emerging needs of families and practitioners in this promising field of literacy practice.

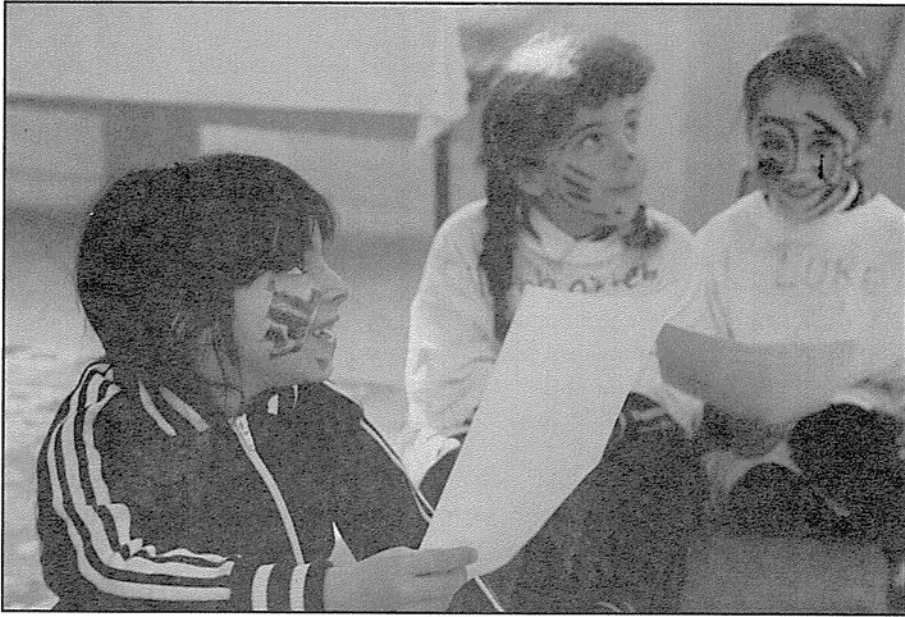
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## Family Literacy in Malta: An empowering experience for both parents and children

Sandro Spiteri



### *How family literacy started in Malta*

Family literacy is a relatively new phenomenon in Malta, with an eight-year history. It has, however, put down solid roots and is entering mainstream professional development, as well as teaching and learning. Its importance has grown in parallel with the increasing recognition of the centrality of parental involvement in education and school life. Indeed, parental involvement has been enshrined as one of the key principles of the new National Minimum Curriculum, published in 1999, which states that:

*"An effective educational system recognizes the link between the home environment and differences between children. When possible, the education of children should be linked to educational and participatory programmes for their parents or guardians. Students who are denied a support system outside the school should be given special attention."*

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Research (Basic Skills Agency, 1998; Brooks, 2002; Hannon, 2003) shows that children's attainment in school increases with their parents' increased involvement in the children's learning process, for example through family literacy programmes. At the same time, this participation, properly supported by the school, leads parents to become more involved in the educational process of the school, and eventually their own educational process as lifelong learning adults (Sultana, 1994; Hornby, 2000; Borg & Mayo, 2001).

The first experimental family literacy programme was organised by the Literacy Unit within the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta, in the wake of the National Survey of Reading Attainment, conducted in 1999 among children aged 6-7, that had highlighted literacy difficulties encountered by children from socio-economically disadvantaged areas of the island (Milton 2000).

Family literacy provision in Malta, however, only really took off with the setting up, in 2001, of the Foundation for Educational Services (FES). The FES was conceived as a mechanism to enable the Education Division, the state provider and national educational regulator, to provide a range of innovative educational initiatives in the field of literacy support and parental empowerment and lifelong learning, spearheading change within this sector. It started operations by focusing on after-school, family-oriented educational services that would complement and reinforce the teaching and learning in the day school. At the same time, it was envisaged that these after-school programmes would serve as potential catalysts that would infuse day-school provision with key good practices and attitudes, such as learning through play, differentiated learning, parental involvement in learning and parental lifelong learning through their involvement in their children's educational development.

The first type of family literacy programmes run by the FES was called *Hilti* (My Ability), and started in 2001. Six state primary schools were invited to participate, and the advantages of family literacy for both the families and the schools' teaching and learning processes were explained to school administration, staff and school councils, which include parent<sup>1</sup> representatives. The schools that were invited to attend had the following characteristics:

- geographically distributed all over Malta;
- had a pupil population with demonstrated literacy needs;
- had excellent school leadership that welcomed FES programmes;
- had the necessary physical space for the dedicated rooms required for family provision – these rooms were then upgraded as multipurpose rooms by the FES, to be used throughout the school day, as well as for family literacy provision;
- had viable school populations, with a typical pupil cohort for any one year about 60, to ensure enough applications, but not too many, as that would lead to disappointed refused applicants.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Parents' are here defined as the significant adult or adults in the life of the child in a family or cared-for environment.

In schools that agreed to participate, an introductory meeting was held for parents of a year-group, identified by the school - say, families with children in Year 2 (aged 6-7). Between 10 and 19 pupils were accepted per tutor, provided by the FES; an additional tutor worked with parents, who were actively encouraged to participate. Different numbers of pupils were tried in different sites, to compare the relative effectiveness of the different approaches.

The hosting school was also asked to identify pupils within the year group who would benefit especially through participation, either because of literacy or social development needs. These pupils were given first priority if they applied, but the mix of identified to non-identified pupils was kept at not more than 40% to 60% respectively. The school would also decide whether the focus for the particular programme would be literacy (Maltese or English) or numeracy.

A set of family literacy sessions was called a *Hilti Club*, and pupils wore special T-shirts to differentiate from school learning time. Sessions were held twice a week, straight after school, for a term; each lasted 1¼ hours, for roughly three months. In some cases, Clubs were held for as long as a semester - for example, from September to February - to gauge the relative effectiveness of the two approaches.

After the first two years of operation, experience showed us that the *Hilti* family literacy programmes needed to be fine-tuned to maximise effectiveness:

- Parents' participation needed to be obligatory, since as will be shown later, there were significant differences in attainment by participants, depending on the frequency of parental participation;
- The optimum length of a *Hilti Club* was one scholastic term, that is about three months; the optimum number of pupil participants per tutor was 8 to 12;
- The *Hilti* Programme was most effective with children up to Year 2, that is up to the age of 7;
- *Hilti* was most effective as an early intervention literacy strategy, rather than a literacy remediation one. It was also effective as a personal and social development strategy, both in early intervention and remediation modes.



### Structure of the *Hilti* Family Literacy session

The *Hilti* family literacy session has a common basic structure, as follows:

Episode	Activity
A: 2.25-2.50	Transition from end of school: personal hygiene, lunch, putting on Club T-shirt, and energiser.
B: 2.50-3.00	Circle Time for both parents and pupils in two separate rooms
C: 3.00-3.35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big Group play-to-learn activity for the children</li> <li>• Simultaneously, parents will be meeting to prepare their participation in the Small Group Activity</li> </ul>
D: 3.35-4.05	Small Group Activity
E: 4.05-4.15	Parents and pupils separate: tidying up and processing of learning experience
F: 4.15-4.45	Review and preparation by staff

Part A allows the children to make the transition from school to after-school 'club'. Part A is divided as follows:

- Participants wear a big T-shirt over, or instead of, their uniform.
- They take lunch, provided by their family, according to the FES healthy food policy, and rest and go to the bathroom.
- Afterwards, together with their *Hilti* tutor, they do some exercises or games, as energisers, for about ten minutes.

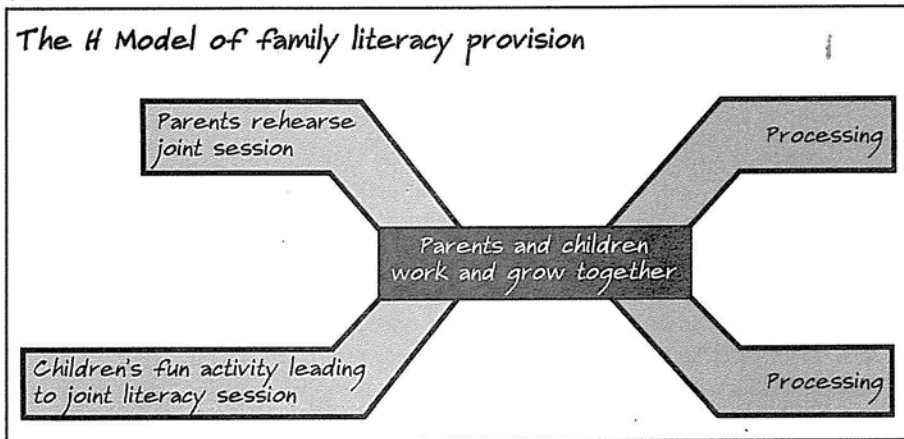
Part B allows children to express and resolve feelings, wishes and concerns. At the same time, parents are having their own Circle Time, in which they review learning that has happened at home since the previous session.

The Big Group activity in Part C provides the social, communicative and thematic context for the learning in Part D. From the children's perspective, Parts C and D are an organic whole, with one activity leading to another. The difference is that Part C is more group-based, while Part D focuses on parent-child pairs and small-group work, with academic skills-oriented tasks.

At the same time, Part C reaches wider educational objectives: knowledge of the world around us, social and communicative skills, manual dexterity, etc. During Part C the parents remain in a separate room, discussing and practising how to achieve specific learning targets from the activity that they will carry out with their children in Part D.

In Part E, parents and children go back to their respective rooms, and process the session. The children become aware of what they have learnt, while the parents discuss how they intend to replicate and expand at home the learning task just practised. Finally, in Part F, after participants have left, staff members review the session and prepare for the next one.

The development of the session can perhaps be visualised better with the following graphical representation, which we call 'The H Model'.



### *Results of the Hilti programme*

The *Hilti* family literacy programme was extensively assessed in June 2003. Four interrelated attitudinal tools were used for:

- participating parents
- participating children
- day-school teachers whose pupils participated in *Hilti* Clubs
- heads of schools hosting *Hilti* Clubs.

257 parents and 365 children took part in the parents' and children's evaluation respectively - practically the whole cohort. Both parents and children were requested to complete a questionnaire in the last separate session of their *Hilti* Club. Parents were asked 12 questions related to their perception of their children's educational development and their own lifelong learning development, while the children discussed the questionnaire items with their tutor and then filled in their responses. 104 teachers - practically the whole cohort of day-school teachers whose pupils were participating in *Hilti* - also answered a questionnaire, and all of

the 22 heads of schools answered a separate questionnaire regarding administrative and educational attainment issues. The sum of the results showed that:

- There seemed to be a strong correlation between parental presence and participation in their children's education and the children's educational progress, in terms of literacy learning, participation in classroom activities and personal and social skills. Data collected from day-school teachers showed statistically significant correlations ( $p < 0.005$ ) between children's increase in literacy development and parents' rate of participation, and also between children's participation in the programme and a corresponding increase in literacy learning and development of personal and social skills.
- Teachers tended to feel that children's and parents' participation in family literacy programmes was beneficial, and indicated a degree of value added for family literacy, over and above education progress due to day-school efforts. Teachers' relatively modest ratings need to be viewed with caution and studied further, due to known distortion effects in some schools and potential conflicts of interest for teacher respondents.
- Parents and children strongly felt that participation in family literacy programmes was very beneficial both for education and personal and social development, with approximately 90% of parents stating that they had learnt how to support their children more effectively and had become better communicators with their children. Further, having understood their own educational needs better, they had gained confidence in openly discussing school and educational issues with others. Children overwhelmingly agreed that the programme helped them to read and write better and to try harder to achieve in literacy tasks. There did not seem to be any gender distinction in these perceptions among children.
- Heads of school strongly felt that the family literacy experience in their school was a very positive one. Approximately 90% stated that programme outputs were effective in terms of children's and adults' learning experiences and actively encouraged parental participation in the school.

### *FES participation in international family literacy projects*

In 2001, the FES won funding for a Grundtvig 1 project for the training of family literacy tutors and the implementation of such programmes in Italy, Belgium, Romania, England, Lithuania and Malta. This was the first Grundtvig 1 project co-ordinated by a Maltese institution, and the first about family literacy. The project, called 'Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy' (P.E.Fa.L.) flexibly adapted the Maltese family literacy model to different socio-cultural contexts:

- Families in special needs inclusive environment (Lithuania)
- Women forming support group from dominant husbands (Lithuania, Malta)

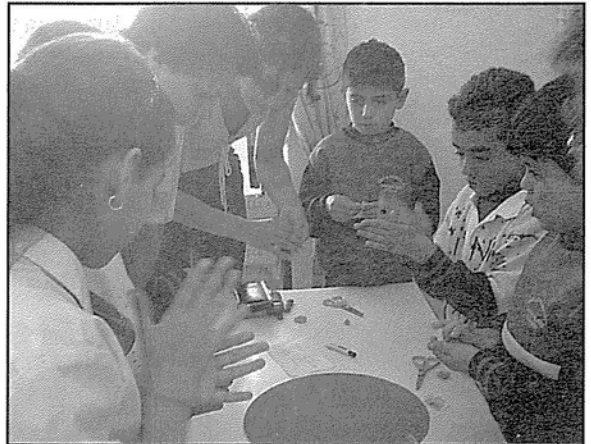
- Families from minority groups in multicultural settings (England, Belgium)
- Families in socially disadvantaged areas (Romania, Malta, Italy, Lithuania)
- Families with children at severe risk of educational failure (Malta)
- Programmes specifically targeting fathers (Malta).

P.E.Fa.L. generated a wealth of resources, which are available on the project website [www.pefalmalta.org.mt](http://www.pefalmalta.org.mt). The project also yielded the following outputs:

- 20 schools in local communities hosted family literacy programmes;
- 64 trained and experienced family literacy tutors forming core teams in six European countries;
- 30 family literacy programmes organised in the participating countries;
- 419 families participated in family literacy programmes in the six countries;
- 36 identified potential parent leaders from the six countries to support the core team of tutors in the dissemination of family literacy in their country.

Camilleri (2004) evaluated the effectiveness of family literacy provision within the P.E.Fa.L. project. The evidence of increased self-confidence of parents participating in P.E.Fa.L. confirms the findings that emerged from the study carried out on a local level and described in Section 3 of this chapter. Camilleri's research also clearly showed that:

- Parents felt encouraged to actively involve themselves in literacy activities that benefit their children, together with an increased ability to support their children in their literacy development;
- Parents reported increased self-confidence and a renewed ability to become pro-active in their own journey of lifelong learning;
- Parents learnt to value education and the literacy community was extended;
- Parents created parallel practices between home and school and enhanced their personal involvement in schools and school life;
- Parents' knowledge about parenting options and child development increased and thus created a more supportive home environment;
- Parents' social awareness and self-advocacy increased;
- Parents discovered their own learning abilities and could potentially seek new opportunities for learning, enhancing their employment status and job satisfaction;



- Attitudes towards reading improved (especially evident in children) and involvement in home literacy activities and learning as families was enhanced;
- Families were engaging in meaningful family literacy experiences with the formation of informal local parent support groups, including parents from diverse cultural backgrounds;
- There was, overall, a strong impact, and medium-term effectiveness, in all the countries involved in P.E.Fa.L., notwithstanding the cultural diversity;
- Finally, the P.E.Fa.L. programme has been proven to be culturally multivalent across all countries and brought families together within and across nations, transcending cultural, ethnic and religious barriers.

In 2005, the FES entered a Grundtvig 2 Learning Partnership, led by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, partly as a follow-up of the P.E.Fa.L. experience. Some of the key outputs of this partnership for the FES were:

- the sharing of good practice;
- access to international experts in the field and the comparative discussion of technical issues;
- the training of family literacy tutors, and
- the development of resources, such as an anthology of session plans and a DVD training session on how to make and use story bags in a family literacy context.

### *Family Literacy adaptations in Malta*

As word of the positive experience of schools hosting *Hilti* family literacy Clubs spread, more and more schools in Malta began asking the FES for this service. The initial six schools in 2002 grew to 25 in 2004; by December 2005, over 60% of state primary schools had had at least one programme. Over a four-year period 2002-2005, more than 2,700 families had participated in 224 *Hilti* Clubs. However, as always happens, experience also started highlighting the limitations of provision. These were that:

- Service was effectively not available for families where parents could not participate immediately after school, which was the case for most working parents;
- Families where pupils were at severe risk of educational failure, because their literacy attainment was significantly below expectations, needed more individual and focused attention than could be given by *Hilti* Clubs;
- Although reference is made to 'families', it is almost always the mothers who attend. Indeed, fathers' participation in *Hilti* Clubs is around 3%, which compares with similar proportions around the world. In the UK, for example, the figure is stated to be "well under 10%" (Hannon, 2003);



- The *Hilti* family literacy model was not an integral part of primary school teaching and learning, since it was held after school. Following the experience of the REAL project held among families with pre-schoolers in Sheffield between 1995 and 2002, we wanted to explore this possibility as well, but to transpose it to a school context.



The FES went for a multi-pronged response to these concerns. I shall focus here on two of these avenues:

### Service for children with severe literacy needs

A specialised family literacy programme, *Nwar* (Late Blossoms), was set up for families whose children had severe literacy needs. Participation in *Nwar* is limited to two families per tutor, and parental participation is obligatory, to ensure continued learning between sessions. Sessions are one-hour long, twice a week for a minimum of four months, though they may be extended according to the needs of the child. Each child is assessed and an individual learning programme constructed; the family actively identifies the learning targets to be achieved. *Nwar* was set up in 2002, and has seven regional centres around the country, with 49 tutors working with about 180 families at any one time. To date, *Nwar* has worked with over 400 families, 40% of which have achieved their learning targets and stopped receiving service.

An external evaluation of the *Nwar* Programme in 2004, by the late Prof. Sheila Wolfendale of the University of East London, confirmed the validity of the programme as a learning experience for both children and parents. The report indicated that:

*"The evidence-base is strong, to support the view that Nwar is a by now well-established FES programme which offers literacy support to children at risk of significant failure, and which includes parents in the 'learning partnership', on the premise that their participation will enhance pupil performance."*

(FES 2004:35)

Statistical analysis, based on pre- and post-testing, showed significant achievement in alphabet recognition, auditory-blending oracy and, to a lesser extent, decoding. More work was needed on the development of writing skills. The report made a number of recommendations that have since been integrated into the programme.



### Family literacy as part of day-school provision

In 2004, the FES ran two pilot family literacy programmes, as part of the day school in two hosting primary schools. While the classroom teacher worked with the children, the FES tutor worked with the parents, followed by a joint session and processing as in the case of the *Hilti H Model* discussed earlier. These programmes were organised with specialised literacy teachers working with identified groups of pupils in primary schools, as well as with class teachers. Results were very encouraging and, in 2005, the focus was shifted to working with kindergarten children, with family literacy and parental involvement being introduced as an integral part of the day-school programme. Up to now 19 such programmes have been delivered or are in process. The response from school administrators, educators and parents and pupils is extremely positive, with practically 100% parental participation for all sessions and consistent demand for follow-up sessions at the end of each course.

### Conclusion

Family literacy is not about changing people but rather about 'offering choices and opportunities to families' (Neuman *et al.*, 1998, p.224). As literacy researchers and practitioners, we need to learn how to develop multivalent programmes and instructional materials for different populations and configurations of families that are easily adaptable to various cultural and ethnic groups. Programmes must be able to meet the particular needs of different cultural groups and to celebrate the diversity of the various home literacy practices and discourses.

Rather than propagating school-based methods of teaching and learning literacy, family literacy programmes can offer a unique opportunity for parents and children from different cultural backgrounds to share their literacy experiences, while striving to find common learning points. This is particularly pertinent within the context of the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterises today's globalised society. Transnational and multicultural initiatives, such as P.E.Fa.L., can be powerful ways to synergise multi-cultural resources, together with the sharing of experiences and transfer of expertise.

Family literacy programmes, however, cannot rely on models that are packaged and adopted uncritically across Europe, or indeed the world. As family literacy educators, we need to attend to the pervasive and continuously changing complexity and diversity in society and individuals' lives. The strength of family literacy programmes must lie in their ability to foster empowerment and autonomy within families, schools and communities (Shanahan *et al.*, 1995).

Families from different cultures might require different pedagogies and programmes, of which *Hilti*, *Nwar* and P.E.Fa.L. family literacy experiences are

just some of the possible permutations. But all provision needs to start from a deep respect for the educational and transformational value of parenthood that leads to a co-construction of choices, options, lives and possible futures for all involved – adults, children, siblings, families, teachers and communities.

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## *The Trust of Programmes for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education: The Mother-to-Mother Training Programme*

*Farid Abu Gosh*



The sociopolitical conditions under which the Palestinian people live have negatively affected the Palestinian community in the Palestinian areas, children and families, in particular. Poverty and economic deprivation have become characteristic of this community, where more than 60% of the population live below the poverty line and, in some areas, the unemployment rate is over 70%. It is estimated that, in certain areas, close to 70% of Palestinian children suffer different degrees of post-traumatic stress symptoms. These rates are but a sample of the suffering and the needs.

Suffering from the same conditions, the social services in the areas are unable to meet the ever-increasing socio-psychological and educational needs of this community. The financial resources available to the Palestinian Authority barely cover the cost of basic services, such as education and health services. A large

proportion of basic and complementary services have been provided by NGOs and charity organisations that have relied mostly on outside resources, which have been insufficient of late.

First, we will introduce you to our organisation, which works with the Palestinian communities through different and diversified, interlinked programmes. The Trust of Programmes for Early Childhood Family and Community Education (the Trust) was established in Jerusalem in 1984, as an indigenous developmental organisation, by a group of Palestinian educators and social workers aiming at community empowerment through a holistic and inclusive approach. The Trust works with Palestinian communities in Israel and the P.N.A. areas, where it is currently running the following programmes:

- The **Mother-to-Mother Programme** supports and strengthens the parenting skills of young mothers (and fathers) and empowers the parents individually and as a group. It empowers mothers, offering them supervision and guidance to become more effective members of society, on the family and the community levels. Two years ago, we extended the programme to reach the Arab population in Essen, Germany, where it is still implemented to improve family functioning and for better integration in a multicultural society.
- The **Young Women and the Prevention of Early Marriage Programme** give young women the opportunity to gain self-confidence and knowledge in the field of education and to raise the awareness of parents and young women of the consequences of early marriage.
- The **Women Empowerment Programme** encourages women and provides them with the skills necessary to initiate Community Development programmes and services in their communities.
- The **Teachers Training Programme** trains pre-school staff members and supports them in working with children, parents, and the community.
- The **Learn-by-Play Programme** aims at improving elementary school children's scholastic achievement in order to reduce, or eliminate, dropout among elementary school children and to enable them to compete in modern society.
- **Combating Domestic Violence Programme** aims at engaging in the fight against domestic violence. The Trust developed this programme to deal with this phenomenon and continues to develop new capabilities to equip it with the necessary skills and technical know-how to face the challenges of family violence. The need for skills is ever increasing.

We will elaborate on the Mother-to-Mother programme, which we consider to be the key to entry into our other community-based programmes, and a stepping-stone to lifelong learning for mothers and fathers in gaining life skills for family and child development. The programme, which is based on

the premise that the first five years of a child's life are very crucial to their personality development, touches the lives of approximately 10,000 people.

### *The Mother-to-Mother Programme as a lifelong learning process*

The programme was introduced in Jerusalem in response to a high-school request for a literacy programme for its pupils, who suffered from a high rate of illiteracy. While selecting the candidates for the programme, it was found that 85% of them came from neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty, where dropout from schools was high. In general, these underprivileged neighbourhoods are suffering from a lack of 30% to 60% of the basic skills of reading and writing. It was also found that there were serious gaps in expectations and communications between the parents in these neighbourhoods and the schools. While parents lacked the skills to be involved in their children's education, the schools were not equipped professionally to deal with such social alienation.



In order to solve the problem, the programme operates on three levels: the parents - mainly the mothers, the children, and the educators.

Based on the programme's vision that every child deserves to live in a healthy atmosphere and to be raised by a functional family, the programme enables mothers to act as social change agents in their families and community. Through gaining skills on child development and education, and raising their self-confidence, they become more able to contribute to decision making about their child's education.

The programme offers training for the families - mainly mothers - on child development and counselling skills to become paraprofessionals and to assist other mothers from their neighbourhood through individual home visits and other programme activities that will be mentioned below.

The Mother-to-Mother training programme was originally launched as a grassroots health and educational framework in which intensively trained, paraprofessional mothers assisted their peers. Then the programme developed a broader perspective for providing support in parenting, education and empowerment. After their self-confidence had been developed, the women in the target communities became accustomed to the idea of leaving the house for a few hours in order to participate in our various activities, such as paraprofessional training, group counselling,

parenting workshops, etc. This plan is important in every community but is crucial in communities that suffer from limited and limiting resources, taking into consideration the varying needs of each neighbourhood.

After the first assessment by the professional coordinator of the programme, the families in the specific community were functionally divided into three groups:

1. Families who lead a functional life and don't need support in their child rearing and interfamily communication. These mothers are suitable to be candidates to become paraprofessionals, after taking the proper training course.
2. Families who might lack awareness or knowledge in dealing with their children's development. These families are candidates to be among the families supervised by the paraprofessionals.
3. Non-functional or broken families that can't be served by the paraprofessionals but need professional treatment by social workers.

### *Selecting the paraprofessionals*

Those who are selected to be paraprofessionals should have: at least 10 years' education; be residents of the targeted neighbourhood; be willing to be involved; and have leadership characteristics and commitment. After the selection, they undergo a training course of 200 hours, which provides basic knowledge in nutrition and health matters, self-awareness, child development, and counselling skills.

The paraprofessionals, when they begin working, have in-service training, which includes an enrichment programme that aims at building their human capacities and supervisory skills, through study days and group and individual counselling. This creates new roles for the women in different jobs: librarian, teacher's assistant, group leader.

### *Preparation for the Mother-to-Mother Programme*

This is a new component arising from the lack of awareness in some villages, like the unrecognised villages in the Negev or in other areas where families are not yet ready for home-visit intervention. Since it has been hard to recruit mothers for the paraprofessional course, this programme will raise the mothers' awareness in the field of early childhood development, basic life issues, health, vaccination, home accidents, etc.

**Supervision:** The supervision of the targeted mothers is provided on two levels: individual and group levels.

Individual supervision includes a home visiting programme, where the paraprofessional mother visits a mother who has a child (birth to two years old). In the first visit, the paraprofessional is accompanied by the professional coordinator of the programme and together they make an assessment of the actual needs of the family. They then come to an agreement with the mother/family concerning the supervision programme. Later on, the coordinator and the paraprofessional decide on the materials that should be included in the written package that is provided to the targeted family. The individual supervision lasts two years: they meet every week in the first year, and every two weeks in the second year.

After completing two years of individual supervision, the mothers are enrolled in a group supervision provided for mothers with two to three-year-old children. This component aims at deepening the knowledge acquired in the individual supervision, and preparing the mothers to become incorporated in the paraprofessional course. The mothers attend lectures, study days and toys workshop and discuss subjects from the written package.

### *The Fathers Group*

Involving fathers was one of the programme goals from its inception but, due to difficulties of recruiting fathers, the component was overlooked for some time by the Trust's team. An evaluation of the programme highlighted the negative effect of excluding the father from the process. So we worked on finding ways to integrate the fathers and different methods were examined to involve them to the programme:

- We started by forming a fathers' committee who were ready to act as a steering committee for the programme, including discussion of the programme's components and cooperation with the schools. We thought that this would attract the fathers to be really involved in their child's life and daily education, instead of remaining only the decision maker of the family.
- Then we invited the fathers to participate with their wives in our programme's study days. These study days discussed several issues on family functioning and child-parent relations, which was very useful. Although this was effective and many fathers attended, the programme reached only a limited number of fathers.
- The most effective strategy was producing a monthly pamphlet, which presented cases of child-parent relations or behavioural problems, and the mothers were asked to discuss a case with her husband, as homework or as an assignment, and to bring it for discussion at the following meeting.
- Another way of involving fathers was in the couples' group, which was effective with the paraprofessional's families, as the mothers had become strong enough, or empowered enough, to convince their husbands to join the group and participate in the meetings.



## *Evaluation*

The evaluation of the programme is based on both formative and summative evaluation. The formative evaluation is done by periodical reporting by the professional coordinators to find out to what extent the execution of the programme meets the work-plan. As a part of the Trust's policy, the report is discussed in the periodical senior staff meeting of the Trust's different programme coordinators (once every three months) where all the Trust's programmes are discussed and each coordinator contributes to the process of formative evaluation and, as a group, we see where the programme can be integrated and help each other to meet the programme's planned objectives.

The evaluation highlights the modular nature of the programme: its different components can be implemented either as a whole unit or according to the needs of the target groups in the community.

Another form of evaluation is the summative evaluation which is done once every three to four years. This is an evaluation where an external evaluator examines the overall effect of the programme and introduces a list of recommendations to carry on with the programme successfully. The summative evaluation showed that it was the mothers mainly who had progressed along the path of self-development. Many mothers used to think that their life ended after marriage or bearing children; they were excluded from the community. After they were enrolled in the programme, however, many of them continued their education or became active in the community.

## *The operational goals of the programme*

- Improving the quality of life in the target communities and creating constructive interaction among the family members.
- Developing the mother's and child's human capacity and talents through active learning.
- Enriching the mothers with new skills as a woman, a mother and a wife.
- Giving mothers the opportunity to become an active member not only in her family but in the community as well.
- Motivating the mothers to explore new challenges in her daily life, whether at home by raising her child, or by finding a job, or continuing her education.



## *The scope of the programme*

The programme has 14 professional coordinators holding at least a B.A. degree in the field of education or social science. Each coordinator supervises up to 10 paraprofessional mothers, who work with up to six families each. So the programme has total of 14 professional coordinators, 140 paraprofessionals and 840 families.

## *Lessons learned*

There are always lessons to be learned and ways to make lifelong learning a success.

We can classify our experience on two levels: first, our cooperation with partner organisations, schools and local authorities; second, on the community or family level.

### **On the organisations' level, our approach was as follows:**

- Search for partners in the project – as opposed to exclusivity or competition
- Display of real, frank personal interest in partnership – as opposed to formal acts
- Self-criticism and flexibility in activities and methods – as opposed to stubbornness, no self-criticism, blaming others, etc.
- Listening to, and accepting, the partners, even during disagreements with them - as opposed to “giving them what they deserve”
- Clarifying positions and facts during conflicts – as opposed to cosmetically covering up differences, or folding one’s tents and surrendering
- Willingness and being open to learn from the other. In equal standing in relationships – as opposed to considering others as having less self-efficacy, without understanding and knowledge
- Neutrality in humanistic approach minimising political agenda - as opposed to prejudices and political agenda in services

### **On the community or family level:**

Our approach was to study the field in which we are working anew each time. This is what we call the “Wisdom of Ignorance“, to start working with each group as if nothing is known, and to begin to learn. Elements involved:

- Listening to others
- Openness to new things

- Create a separation in yourself between your professional identity and your personal identity. “to avoid personal value judgment”
- Learn from previous errors
- Present yourself honestly
- Learn from the people who you are serving – How do they see things?
- Be sensitive to messages and their effects on others

In an attempt to assemble the principles that are valid for all inter-cultural meetings, we identified five principles that can be critically important for professional involvement with a population from a different culture, in this case the Arab culture, in cities with mixed populations:

- We are not here to change the population; we have come to be with it
- We accept the values of the population to which we have come
- Listening to others
- Sensitivity to messages and their effects on others
- Learn from others how they see things

Here, too, symmetry in relationships is apparent: “We are not better than you, we have come to be with you, even if we are professionals. We have come to learn from you, we are willing to see things through your eyes, be sensitive to what you’re feeling. The point of departure is you and not me.” This leads to another principle, of which the others are subsets: Put the other at the centre.

## *Challenges*

The programme is a lifelong process; therefore it is flexible enough to meet the specific needs of the local community. The programme is implemented in full partnership with the community stakeholders, schools, children and families. The families take an active part in the planning, implementation and evaluation.

The major challenge we face is to clearly define the domain of operation of the programme and the role of the paraprofessionals, while at the same time responding to the emerging needs surfacing during the work by the families and our partners. Different programmes were developed as a complementary service, based on emerging needs in the families, such as the Learn-by-Play Programme, the Young Women Programme, for those who are marginalised or excluded from the community, and the Combating Domestic Violence against women and children Programme. This challenge forced the Trust team to search for new professional venues, as well as additional funding from the Trust’s overseas partners and donors.

## Achievements

- In most cases where the programme is implemented, there is significant change in the home atmosphere, from tense and limited initiatives into a more open and healthy atmosphere for child learning and development.
- The programme proved to be a vehicle to develop other family and community empowerment programmes.
- The programme has motivated many mothers to continue their education
- The children's school achievement improved after they were enrolled in the Trust's programmes.
- The programme was extended successfully to Essen-Germany in cooperation with the Büro für Interkulturelle Arbeit (RAA), a German Organisation concerned with integrating non-Germans into German society. A team from the Trust travelled to offer training to qualify mothers to do home supervision and to offer guidance to other mothers.
- The programme is subject to continuous active evaluation, and adaptation to changing family needs. We can summarise our achievements in one quote by one of the mothers, who described the programme as "*The hand that pulls us from drowning*".

## Snapshots of programmes from Bahrain, Germany, Guatemala, New Zealand, Romania, Turkey, The United States of America, Uganda and Vanuatu

### BAHRAIN

The Directorate of Adult Education at the Ministry of Education in Bahrain offers three family literacy programmes.

- The first level is the *Literacy Stage*, for those who cannot read and write. It lasts for two academic years. In addition to literacy, Islamic religion, Arabic language and mathematics are taught.
- The second level is the *Follow-Up Stage*. This is equivalent to the sixth grade of formal primary education and lasts for two academic years. It aims to develop the basic skills and to teach Arabic, Islamic religion, mathematics, English, sciences and social studies.
- The *Consolidation Stage* is equivalent to the intermediate stage.

Then there is MOCEP (Mother-Child Home Education Programme), an NGO, which provides a non-formal, home-based educational programme for pre-school children and their mothers.

The MOCEP is a two-generational programme which operates over a six-month period. It consists of two components:

1. 25 weekly discussions and lectures (including planned parenthood discussions) which are given to the mothers in their regional areas
2. 25 weeks of cognitive training materials/activities, which are given to the mothers so they can teach their own children pre-school readiness skills at home.

Mothers follow a structured day-by-day programme of activities, which they provide to their children in their homes. Teachers make weekly visits to encourage, support and guide mothers and children.

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## GERMANY/HAMBURG

In Germany – more specifically, in Hamburg – the Family Literacy Project (FLY) is part of a nation-wide programme, ‘Promotion of children and young people with migrant backgrounds’. While focusing on migrants, the programme is open to all children and parents and is located in schools in disadvantaged areas of the city. Every school is developing its own approach, responding to local needs.

The aim of the Hamburg FLY is to improve children’s language and literacy skills through involving parents, to intensify co-operation between home and school and enhance teacher training.

The work with the children and parents is based essentially on three key elements:

### *1. Active involvement of parents with children in the class*

The parents stay with the class on a particular day of the week for several weeks. It has proved beneficial to have simple rituals to open these sessions. Books are put out and may be selected by the parents to look at, or read, with their children; others may join them, so small groups are formed; there are also simple games.

### *2. Working with parents, without children in parallel sessions*

Parents generally go to another room for this, together with the language development teacher, who gives them information on particular topics and guides discussion on child rearing, and other problems. Materials are produced by the parents, which they can use for work with their children at home or in class.

### *3. Joint out-of-school activities.*

These only take place a few times in each parent’s course and are usually the highlights: excursions to museums or libraries, local outings, and joint celebrations. Parents and teachers are provided with suitable materials, many of which are produced by the parents, to promote the multilingual development of the children at home and at school.

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## GUATEMALA

The Intra-family Literacy programme, with the technical and financial backing of the National Committee on Literacy (CONALFA), is being implemented in five of Guatemala's Departments. The programme has established links with the school system by ensuring that school principals, teachers and pupils all become involved by being trained in literacy work by CONALFA. This makes it possible to train youngsters to teach literacy.

The basic idea of the programme is that one member of the family - a boy or girl pupil in the 4th-6th grade of primary school - teaches adult members, usually the mother, of the family. The object is to assist educational development without detracting from the cultural pattern of the family and to strengthen it by attributing responsibilities to all the members.

The courses last for eight months and are run during the school year. The timetable is flexible but learners are expected to attend for at least two hours a day. The programme is run and monitored by municipal coordinators and teaching experts, who pay regular visits to the school and to the home.

The curriculum covers basic skills in reading, writing and elementary mathematics. The keyword methodology for reading and writing focuses on agriculture, livestock rearing, personal health and improving the family environment, using analysis, dialogue, reflection and extension of vocabulary.

The course has three modules:

- Module 1: reading and writing preparation activities; learning Spanish vowels; learning numbers 1 to 10.
- Module II: consonants of the Spanish alphabet and basic mathematical operations.
- Module III: complex syllables, composition, simple comprehension, and solving mathematical problems.

Learners are provided with a satchel containing useful implements, such as a calculator and a writing board, exercise books, pencils and sharpeners.

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## NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand has a national adult literacy strategy and 'foundation learning' is a government priority, which includes raising 'the foundation skills of parents

with poor educational attainment who want to support their children's learning. There have been a number of family-based initiatives, the best documented of which is the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET), which has set up a number of Manukua Family Literacy Project (MFLP) sites and had developed a model that involves adults attending a tertiary programme in their children's schools, combined with studies in child development and being a participant in the reading and numeracy components of their children's schoolwork.

Each MFLP site involves three partner institutions: an early childhood centre, an elementary school (where MFLP programmes are conducted) and a university or a polytechnic, which provides the adult education component of the programme.

The early childhood centres and the elementary schools work with the child participants enrolled in the programme and join with the adults for key parts of the programme, such as Parents and Child Together (PACT). The tertiary providers employ the adult educator, who is responsible for teaching the adult participants, as well as having some involvement in other components of the programme. Both MFLP programmes are located in classrooms on elementary school premises.

The MFLP was planned on the basis of a conventional model of family literacy, with its four components of adult education, child education, parent education and parent and child together time. While the child participants follow their conventional programmes in their early childhood centres or elementary schools, they do meet with their parents during PACT for twenty minutes four times a week for topics and activities planned jointly by the family literacy teacher and the school/early childhood centres.

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## ROMANIA

Family literacy is not a common concept in Romania. But there is a "Parents Empowerment for Family Literacy" (PEFaL) programme, which grew out of a European Union family literacy project (see the chapter by Sandro Spiteri), and has been implemented in a number of schools and kindergartens.

The aim of PEFaL is to improve the literacy of primary school children through parents' participation, believing that parents are the actual educators of their children and possess a wealth of practical teaching experience. Home learning is encouraged through an extracurricular school-based programme.



The PEFaL programme is modular and includes: building group and intra-family communication; parents and children discovering books; playing with words and story telling; making family story bags etc. They also visit the neighborhood library to register as readers.

The methodology entails tutorial work with children and parents, separately and jointly, followed by time to reflect on what was done in the joint session. The approach to parents builds on their previous teaching and learning experience as parents and former learners in their own childhood.

The tutors are selected from among the primary school teaching staff, many of whom complete a three-month training course on how to work as parent and children tutors in a family literacy programme, how to develop a needs-based family literacy module, and how to do the practical class work.

The course consists of six compulsory and four optional modules. The compulsory ones consist of two modules on family learning, two on parents' empowerment and working with parents, and two on practice and reflection. The optional ones cover adult education concepts, parents' participation in the school community, child psychology and language development, and working with "difficult" children.

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## TURKEY

In Turkey, Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) has set up family literacy programmes nationwide. The Mother Child Education Program (MOCEP) is under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education and literacy training is part of a broader agenda rather than a separate programme. So, the Mother Child Education Program is both an adult education programme and a child development programme, which includes literacy.

The Programme has three main elements:

### *Fostering the cognitive development of the child*

This component aims to foster the cognitive development of the child and prepare him/her for school. Each week's materials contain various exercises to be carried out by the mother with the child each day at home. These exercises contain activities that foster eye-hand coordination, verbal development, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and problem solving skills. It is further supported by home visits conducted by teachers.

## *Reproductive health and family planning*

### *Sensitising mothers on the overall development of the child*

The aim is to sensitize mothers on subjects such as children's development, health, nutrition, care and creative play activities, discipline, mother-child interaction, communication, expressing feelings and the needs of the mother, so that the mother is better able to support the development of her child.

Groups of 20-25 mothers attend group meetings in adult education centres once a week for 25 weeks. The meetings are run by trained adult education teachers and last for about three hours. A mediated learning approach is adopted, the aim being to promote school readiness through interaction with an adult who is instructing the child. The mothers therefore become the teachers of their children. They are expected to carry out exercises especially in pre-numeracy and literacy skills with their children.

At the suggestion of the women attending the Mother-Child Education Programme, a Father Support Programme has been set up. The women realised that they were learning a lot about child development and parenting, but there were still problems at home with childrearing. The father needed to be involved.

## UGANDA

The family learning programme in Uganda was initiated and is run by Literacy and Adult Education (LAFE), a leading national NGO.

The main aims, apart from basic literacy and numeracy skills are to:

- Strengthen parental support for children's educational needs and equip parents with basic knowledge of school learning methods;
- Increase parents' inter-communication skills while interacting with children and their teachers;
- Develop parenting skills;
- Create awareness of family learning; and
- Enrich the abilities of teachers and adult educators in child-adult teaching/learning methods.

The programme works with teachers and adult educators who run adult basic literacy and numeracy sessions for parents only and joint parent-child sessions. These sessions build shared learning and promote home learning activities which complement school learning. The adult literacy sessions are based mainly on the school curriculum but structured differently for adult learners. Joint parent-child learning sessions include activities such as playing games, and telling and writing stories together. Home learning activities use stories, folklore and other activities to extend school learning to the home.

Each participating school receives a package of materials, while parents make low-cost, home-made teaching/learning materials, either on their own or in the joint parent-child sessions. The programme targets primary one and two in government aided schools. LABE has developed a teacher's guide for adult educators and teachers and introduced various participatory techniques to complement teachers' existing materials. The programme is currently covering 8 districts of Northern Uganda.

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## UNITED KINGDOM

The Basic Skills Agency (BSA, now merged into NIACE, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education) set up the first family literacy programmes in the UK in 1994. These four demonstration programmes were influenced by practice in the United States of America. The main aims were to improve children's literacy, the parents' own literacy, and the parents' ability to help their children's development. There were three elements in the programmes: parents' sessions, children's sessions, and joint sessions.

An evaluation in 1994-95 showed benefits to parents and children, and these were sustained in follow-up studies up to three years later. In 1996 the British government rolled out family literacy (and a little later family numeracy) provision on the BSA model across England and Wales, and programmes were also set up in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The BSA model remains central in England and Wales, but especially since 2001 there has been increasing diversity of approaches and programmes – see table for those funded by the government in England. A total of approx. £37,000,000 (€55,000,000) was invested in family literacy and numeracy programmes in 2006 alone, and 95,000 families took part in family programmes that year.

*Government-approved family literacy, language and numeracy courses in England, 2004/05.*

	Children's age range	Parents/ Carers only, or child also?	Taster/ Workshop 2-4 hrs	Introductory 9-13 hrs	Short 30-49 hrs	Intensive 72-96 hrs
Play and Language	0-3 years	Parent/Carer and Child	✓	✓		
Early Start: Baby Talk 0-1 yrs; Small Talk 1-2 yrs; Talk Together 2-3 year	0-3 years	Parent/Carer and Child	✓		✓	
Playing with Language	3-5 years	Parent/Carer and Child			✓	
Family Literacy	3 years +	Parent/Carer and Child	✓		✓	✓
Family Numeracy	3 years +	Parent/Carer and Child	✓		✓	✓
Combined Family Literacy and/or Language and/or Numeracy	5 years +	Parent/Carer and Child	✓		✓	
Keeping Up with the Children	School age	Parent/Carer Only	✓	✓	✓	
Skills for Families Springboard	School age	Parent/Carer Only		✓		
Family Finance	School age	Parent/Carer and Child			✓	

Source: Heathcote, V. and Brooks, G. 2005. *Evaluating Skills for Families in Autumn 2004, especially the role of local Skills for Families consultants*. A report to the Basic Skills Agency.

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States, through the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), has a comprehensive family literacy model that is used throughout the country. The NCFL is recognized in federal legislation and receives federal funding.

The components of family literacy children's – education, adult education, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between parents and children – are the essential ingredients of the comprehensive approach. Programmes are provided in center-based classes where parents and children participate in separate sessions to improve their literacy skills, and also come together at a specific time to participate in interactive literacy-building activities. Parents also meet to develop skills needed to be a parent, worker, and community member.

The majority of the family literacy programs serve children from birth to age 8, but some operate in elementary schools, where parents observe and take part in their children's classroom activities to learn strategies to support their children's academic progress at home. The most intensive programs operate for the whole of every school day, while less intensive programs operate several evenings per week or have weekly home visits.

When parents and children come together for interactive literacy activities, teachers provide some guidance to parents and then observe interactions between parents and children. The teachers then debrief parents about their experiences with their child, discussing what learning strategies were effective, what parents discovered about their child's learning styles, and how they can transfer their new knowledge about their child's development to provide learning experiences at home.

NCFL also provides programs with resources such as integrated lesson plans that link adult education, parent education, children's education, and parent-child interactive literacy activities.

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## VANUATU

The Vanuatu Literacy Education Programme (VANLEP) was developed in response to a survey that showed disappointing levels of literacy in remote rural schools. The principal objective was to educate parents on their roles as 'first teachers' of their children, being responsible for their growth; emotionally, socially, psychologically and cognitively. The parents' understanding of how they could make a difference at home spending quality time with their children was the first step to developing the programme.

The programme begins with a general introductory session for parents and teachers. The workshops and discussions are held in the VANLEP classrooms,

which helps to foster inclusiveness. It also helps to close the gap between home and school, and between parents and teachers and the child. The content of the programme is based on the theme, 'Having Time with Your Child is the Greatest Gift You Can Give Your Child'.

The parents then split into smaller manageable groups to hold discussions with teachers, using the lingua franca, Bislama, and to study the book published particularly for them in Bislama – “yu mo pikinnini belong yu”. Parents are also given story books to use at home with their children. Such Home-Based Learning activities encourage the love of reading and listening to stories and the creative languages of the rhymes/poems and songs.

## *Author details*

### *Farid Abu Gosh*

Farid Abu Gosh lives in Abu-Ghosh, a village in the Jerusalem corridor. As founder and chairperson of the NGO Trust of Programs for Early Childhood, Family and Community Education, he works to improve the quality of life for parents, children and educators through community empowerment programmes within the Palestinian society both in Palestine and Israel. For 25 years he was the director of a community centre in East Jerusalem, for seven years the director of the Community Empowerment Department, a teacher of social work at Al-Quds University and a former honorary consultant at the Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

### *Judi Aubel*

Judi Aubel is trained in adult education, anthropology, and health education. She has worked for many years in community health and development programs in Africa, Asia, Latin America and The Pacific. For more than ten years she has been interested in the role of grandmothers as untapped “resource persons” in family and community health and education projects. She is one of the founding members and President of The Grandmother Project: Strong Grandmothers, Healthy Communities; a non-profit organization established in 2003.

### *Snoeks Desmond*

Snoeks Desmond has worked in the field of early childhood education and development in her home country of South Africa as well as in England. She now works as a consultant after eight years as the founder/director of the Family Literacy Project. Prior to that, she was the director of TREE (Association of Training and Resources in Early Childhood Education) and a consultant concentrating on research and materials development.

### *Kerryn Dixon*

Kerryn Dixon is a lecturer in the Applied English Language Department in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her teaching and research are in the area of literacies particularly early childhood literacy, language policy, sociolinguistics and research methodology.

### *Maren Elfert*

Maren Elfert is Public Relations and Programme Specialist at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Her main areas of work are public relations, literacy in Germany and Europe and family literacy. She was coordinator of the EU-funded project “QualiFLY“, a partnership of several European institutions in the area of family literacy, and is author and editor of several publications and articles related to family literacy.

### *Ruth Hayden*

Ruth Hayden is a Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada where she taught for over 20 years. She has published over 80 articles on literacy and other educational issues in journals in the United States, Britain, Australia, Ireland and Canada. She has served on the editorial board of several literacy journals and on the advisory boards of many literacy organizations. She also worked with the Canadian international Development Agency in assisting in-service and pre-service teachers in Namibia develop greater understanding for the teaching of literacy. She has collaborated with the Centre for Family Literacy in its research and evaluation endeavours for the past 15 years.

### *Souleymane Kanté*

Souleymane Kanté has twenty-one years of development work experience and has been the director of World Education’s programme in Mali since 1997. He has focused on education reform in the primary school system, adult literacy and community participation, integrated with health, income generation, teacher training and curriculum development, and strengthening of civil society. He has strong working relationships with USAID, World Bank, officials of the Malian Ministry of Education, and more than 25 international development organizations.

### *Sinvula Kasokonya*

Sinvula Kasokonya worked as a teacher in secondary schools and Teacher Training Colleges in Northern Namibia before joining the Directorate Adult Education in the Ministry of Education in Windhoek where he is head of the sub division Research, Planning and Programme Development. The Family Literacy Programme is only one of the programmes implemented and monitored under his supervision. He has represented Namibia at national and international conferences.



### *Sandra Land*

Sandra Land is a lecturer in the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Much of her work involves developing reading material in English and Zulu for adults with limited literacy and second language skills. She is especially interested in ways in which a culture of reading for pleasure, as opposed to reading to be instructed, can be nurtured, and also in the extent to which education for democracy can form a part of adult basic education.

### *Kelly Lewis*

Kelly Lewis is an elementary certified teacher in New York State. She received her Associates degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences from Genesee Community College and a bachelors degree in elementary education from New York State University. Focusing her research on Parents and Educators Perceptions of Early Literacy Development, she completed her Masters in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa through a grant by the Rotary Foundation.

### *Molly Melching*

Molly Melching is dedicated to the empowerment of grassroots communities in Senegal where she has lived and worked for over 30 years.. She has created two original basic education programs for women, adolescent girls, and their communities. Molly is best known for her expertise in non-formal education, human rights training, and social transformation. Her work with Tostan, the NGO which she founded in 1991, has brought her international recognition for cross-cutting results in many areas of development—including reductions in infant and maternal mortality, school and birth registration campaigns, the emergence of female leadership, and the abandonment of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and child marriage by over 3,300 communities in Senegal and Guinea. Molly received the Humanitarian Alumni Award from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1999 and the Sargent Shriver Distinguished Award for Humanitarian Service in 2002. In 2005, Tostan was awarded Sweden's Anna Lindh Award for work in human rights and in 2007, a UNESCO literacy prize and the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize.

### *Maureen Sanders*

Maureen Sanders is Executive Director of the Centre for Family Literacy in Edmonton, Canada. She has also worked as a teacher and reading specialist and has taught English literature at university level. She introduced family literacy

programmes to the organization in the early 1990's, and these programmes grew quickly, resulting in the decision to develop a Centre that would focus on literacy development in the family context. Maureen now oversees a continuum of adult and family literacy programmes and training at the Centre, and has been instrumental in moving family literacy onto the agenda, locally, provincially and nationally.

### *Ivan Scheffers*

Ivan Scheffers taught for 24 years at primary, secondary and tertiary level and then joined the Research, Planning and Programme Development division within the Directorate Adult Education. Having been closely involved with planning and monitoring of the Family Literacy Programme, he has been able to represent Namibia at national and international levels, the most recent being the 2007 North-South Exchange on Family Literacy in Hamburg, Germany.

### *Ronald Ssentuuwa*

Ronald Ssentuuwa is a librarian by profession and is completing a MSc in Information Science at Makerere University in Kampala. He works as a Saving Newborn Lives Programme Support Coordinator with Save the Children; prior to this he was an Assistant Librarian in the same organization. Ronald is a member of Uganda Library and Information Science Professional Association (ULIA), Vice General Secretary of Reading Association of Uganda (RUA) and a member Uganda Children's Writers and Illustrators Association (UCWIA). He has experience and expertise in information services for rural communities; he is proactive in advocating for reading activities and children's literature in Uganda.

### *Sandro Spiteri*

Sandro Spiteri taught for 13 years in state and non-state schools. From 2001, as the National Co-ordinator of the Institute for Child and Parent Learning Support in the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), he led national programmes to establish and expand family literacy and parent empowerment provision, as well as to assist schools to develop in-house basic skills provision. Sandro is also the founder and Head of the Malta Writing Programme, and has led and participated in writing workshops for student teachers, teachers, school administrators and parents. He is now Senior Executive within the FES, with responsibility for training, development and international projects. Since 2006 he also chairs the National Commission for the Family.

### *Lucy Thornton*

Lucy Thornton has worked in early childhood development, and language learning and teaching all of her professional life. She has been with Woz'obona Early Childhood Development Community Service Group for 14 years working in Johannesburg South Africa and Limpopo Province, and is currently Director. Woz'obona offers a wide range of programmes for children, but Lucy's particular passion has been the "Let's Make Books" approach work.

### *Juliana Thornton*

Juliana Thornton is Head of the Research Department; Managing and Coordinating Research Projects and Monitoring and Evaluation across Noah communities nationally. She has conducted thesis research focused on an ethnographic case study of an adoptive family in South Africa, and fieldwork on models of care for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in Tanzania. She is currently involved in facilitating Child Participation activities as part of a consortium tasked with the development of an OVC Policy for Limpopo Department of Health and Social Development.