A Decade of Family Literacy: Programs, Outcomes, and Future Prospects

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by

Nancy Padak
Connie Sapin
Dianna Baycich

Ohio Literacy Resource Center
Kent State University

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions—What Is Family Literacy?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and Funding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Models</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Outcomes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Prototypical Program</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary Research</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices of the Parents</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Research Matrix</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Family Literacy Websites</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: Even Start Site Map</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) is 1 of 16 clearinghouses in a national information system that is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. This paper was developed to fulfill one of the functions of the clearinghouse—interpreting the literature in the ERIC database. This paper should be of interest to adult educators, family literacy practitioners, graduate students, and researchers.

ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Nancy Padak, Connie Sapin, and Dianna Baycich for their work in the preparation of this paper.

Nancy Padak is Professor of Education at Kent State University (Ohio), where she directs the KSU Reading and Writing Center and is the principal investigator for projects associated with the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. She has worked on a variety of issues related to family literacy since the mid-1980s: professional development, research, local Even Start evaluations, outreach projects, and curriculum development.

Connie Sapin is a Consultant in Family Literacy at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. She has been active in family literacy for 15 years as a teacher and administrator. She served on the Ohio Family Literacy Task Force and developed and published *The Family Literacy Resource Notebook* with Nancy Padak.

Dianna Baycich has a master’s degree in adult learning and development and is currently in the doctoral program for adult literacy at Kent State University. She is a literacy specialist at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center.

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Family literacy has been the focus of research and practice for at least the past 2 decades. Family literacy programs recognize the influence of parents on children’s learning and the link among literacy interactions in the home, school, and community. They bring together both early childhood and adult literacy programs in a whole-family learning effort.

This paper reviews and synthesizes reports about family literacy programs and practices, focusing on outcomes for adult learners. The emphasis is on resources available in the ERIC database from 1990 to the present.

The first section, Programs, reviews the sometimes conflicting definitions of family literacy, finding that a common thread is strengthening intergenerational literacy and preparing parents and caregivers for their role as children’s first teachers. Policy and funding issues at the federal and state levels are discussed. This section then addresses three overarching issues that are critical to the success of family literacy programs: the quality of staff, curricular assumptions and instructional practices, and collaboration within and outside programs.

The second section looks at outcomes, first describing the kinds of assessment models that have been used for participants and programs. Specific outcomes that have been documented in research are then discussed.

The third section summarizes the findings by describing a prototype of a successful family literacy program. Areas needing additional research are highlighted.

The paper contains three appendices. A research matrix in Appendix 1 presents the purpose, scope, and design of 35 studies. Appendix 2 contains an annotated list of family literacy websites. A map in Appendix 3 depicts the number and location of sites of Even Start programs in the United States.

Information on the topics in this paper may be found in the ERIC database using the following descriptors: *Adult Learning, Evaluation Methods, *Family Literacy, *Literacy Education, *Parent Child Relationship, *Parent Participation, Program Evaluation, and Student Evaluation. Asterisks indicate terms that are particularly relevant.