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Current Areas of Interest in Family Literacy

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Vivian L. Gadsden

Family literacy has developed over the past decade into an increasingly significant-and often contested-area of research, practice, and policymaking in the fields of literacy and family studies as well as in the broader arenas of education and schooling. The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a better understanding of the general state of family literacy today-a snapshot-with an

eye toward strengthening the relationship between family literacy and adult literacy and learning. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief background of, or context for, the research, practice, and policy that have led to current efforts. The second presents areas that have emerged as critical domains of interest to the field: parent-child interactions, including emergent literacy; intergenerational literacy; ESOL and language differences; assessment and evaluation; and culture and context. The third section summarizes persistent challenges to the field as well as possibilities for implementing meaningful linkages between research and practice. Following this chapter is an annotated bibliography recommending a number of resources readers can turn to for more information about each of these areas.

Definitions of family literacy are rarely

clear-cut. Arguably, no one definition can capture the full range of issues or the complexity of the field. However, most definitions tend to describe family literacy in relation to the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community (Morrow, Paratore, & Tracey, 1994). Within these definitions, family literacy may include parents' and children's relationships around reading, writing, and problem solving prior to and during school years as well as children's acquisition of knowledge about the conventions and purposes of print and the uses of language in culturally organized activities (Wasik, 2001). Such definitions reflect the thrust of most family literacy programs, which typically address one or more of the following:

- reduction of children's difficulties and subsequent failure in school;
- involvement of parents and families in programs for young children;
- improvement of parents' reading and

literacy when parents have low levels of literacy and schooling; and the relationship between parents' literacy levels and schooling and their children's school achievement. In federal legislation such as the Reading Excellence Act of 1998, these definitions are collapsed into a single description of "family literacy services" and are described as integrating "(a) interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, (b) training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children, (c) parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, and (d) an age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences." Expansive definitions of family literacy focus not only on children's literacy development in families but also on adult literacy and learning in the home as well as on the intersections of child and adult literacy,

communication patterns in the family, and family practices that enhance the literacy knowledge and skills of family members. This chapter has been developed with these expansive definitions in mind.

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE FIELD

Before looking at the field of family literacy as it exists today, it is useful to look back briefly to see how it arrived at this juncture. Current conceptions of family literacy are drawn from two primary sources. One is the variety of studies in reading and literacy undertaken as early as the 1960s and 1970s, an example being Durkin's (1966) work with low-income African American children and parents in inner-city Chicago. Many of these studies focused on the influence of verbal language-that is, nonstandard dialects such as black or African American Vernacular English (AAVE)-on the

reading development of children, specifically the reading of poor, urban minority children. In many of these studies, reading failure was attributed to "deficits" in the linguistic and literacy experiences of children resulting from their "disadvantaged" families and low-income communities (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Deutsch, 1965). Other studies (for example, Baratz, 1969; Labov, 1965, 1972; Ruddell, 1965) challenged these theories by proposing "difference" theory, in which AAVE was viewed simply as one dialect among many spoken dialects and was examined to determine the degree to which it interfered-if at all-with reading development. Still others (for example, Goodman & Buck, 1973) argued that the reading failure of African American children was largely due to their teachers' problematic attitudes toward the dialect.

All these debates centered on the origins

of reading problems and the barriers to reading development. They were part of the growing emphasis on understanding how reading is learned and what are the most effective approaches to teaching it, with some advocating phonics or skills-based approaches and others advocating sight and word recognition approaches. These debates also sowed the seeds for greater attention paid during the early 1980s to the sociolinguistic, cultural, and contextual factors that influence children's literacy, including home and school, and the specific role of parents' literacy in shaping home environments that lead to children's literacy success and school achievement.

By the mid to late 1980s, reading research was beginning to acknowledge a range of social and cultural factors that influence both children's early literacy productions and parents' involvement, opening up the way for a serious discussion of families as an important

context for understanding literacy development and of family literacy as a potentially viable field (Strickland, 1979; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). This shift was most evident in research such as William Teale and Elizabeth Sulzby's (1986) study of emergent literacy and the effects of parent involvement and home environment on children's early reading. Denny Taylor's volume *Family Literacy* (1983) made the connections between classroom, home, and literacy that had surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s more explicit by identifying some of the functions of literacy for both children and adults in diverse families. The combination of this increasing interest by researchers in the role of parents and families in reading development and school achievement with emerging activities in practice led to a second source of current conceptions of family literacy-the formalization of applied family literacy efforts and programs. Sharon Darling's work in Kentucky's

Parent and Child Education Program, supported by the William R. Kenan Charitable Trusts, is an example of leading efforts through the 1980s. By 1989, she had established the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), which helped to increase the visibility of family literacy nationally and contributed to the integration of family literacy into federal initiatives in education (such as Even Start) and social services (such as Head Start).

At the same time, publications such as *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) argued that reading aloud to children was the most significant factor in preparing them to read and to learn in school, while *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) raised awareness about the persistence of children's poor literacy performance, particularly in impoverished, isolated, and vulnerable

communities. Simultaneously, adult literacy was gaining increased momentum, and programmatic efforts in family literacy were expanding-attaching problems of low literacy to a range of negative life outcomes and focusing on improving the literacy of children subject to the intergenerational problems of low literacy in poor and often minority families.

Research

In the 1990s, family literacy both prospered and struggled as a field. It began to develop an identity within early childhood education, K-12 education, and adult literacy efforts, coming to be associated with four conceptual themes: children's acquisition of basic cognitive and linguistic skills within the context of the family; the occurrence of substantial literacy learning by children in the years prior to receiving formal literacy instruction; parental education and literacy practices in the home and their

relationship to children's school achievement and test performance; and the limitations of parents with lower-level literacy skills to help their children with literacy learning (Purcell-Gates, 1993). In addition, as a sign of its initiation into the field of literacy, family literacy became embroiled in the reading debates that divided the field on issues such as the use of "deficit models" that appeared to minimize, if not ignore, the prior knowledge of child and adult learners (Taylor, 1995).

At least two theoretical stances have dominated family literacy research. One suggests that parents in family literacy programs have little of the formal literacy knowledge to assist their children to achieve in school and that they need to be taught specific literacy skills to ensure their children's cognitive development. Because proponents of this stance often do not indicate whether and how they will use the prior knowledge

and existing skills of parents, families, and community members as a context for supporting the literacy development of children and families, and because they appear to rely heavily on school-like or skills-based models, the stance is sometimes associated with deficit approaches. The second stance is linked theoretically to a social-contextual approach that begins by seeking information from the family (typically parent-usually mother-and child) about family practices and interactions in order to better understand the functions, uses, and purposes of literacy within families-by children and adults-and to then build literacy support based on this knowledge. Because this stance is based on the idea that teachers and learners co-construct knowledge over the course of learning, proponents tend to focus on the processes of interaction and to draw from a range of approaches and assessments rather than from a single skills-based approach.

Although the two stances are associated with distinctive research camps, they do not represent all-or-nothing commitments in actual practice. In short, it is more likely that most family literacy services are developed with some combination of the two stances and use approaches that draw upon both. However, it is also possible that in articulating and promoting their individual positions, proponents of the two stances appear either to minimize the abilities and contextual strengths of the families or to stress the skills and cognitive domains of learning at the exclusion of social, cultural, or contextual factors.

Studies derived from the two stances reflect, and in some cases share, two dominant, sometimes overlapping, views on literacy learning in the home. The first suggests that parents' literacy has a significant influence on children's

motivation to acquire, develop, and use literacy. From this view, the physical environment, such as whether books and other reading materials are readily available, is considered to have a sizable impact on children's efficacy with print (Mason & Allen, 1986; Strickland, Morrow, Taylor, & Walls, 1990). A second view is that literacy can serve as a liberating and empowering force for all members of the family. Specifically, the argument is that adults who gain a sense of personal control as a result of improved literacy and who are given opportunities to accept or reject alternatives to their current practices are able to model for their children the importance of literacy to personal success and power (Auerbach, 1990; Street, 1992; Taylor, 1983; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).

Research related to both of these positions suggests that the ability of programs to foster the development of

literacy in many homes may be constrained by social distance (created as a result of misunderstanding or lack of information) between family and program. This distance may be perpetuated by literacy providers who lack knowledge of or fail to pay attention to the cultural beliefs and practices in the home and community, the literacy needs of family members, and the expectations of literacy learning on the part of children and parents. This distance may be exacerbated by a perception in families that literacy is inaccessible to them-both children and adults-because of social or cultural differences, institutional barriers in society, or learners' own past negative experiences with literacy learning and instruction (Coles, 1985; Johnston, 1985). Family members may come to see the price of literacy as being too high or may associate literacy with real or perceived tradeoffs between the demands of home and culture and the requirements of

literacy and schooling (Gadsden, 1991).

A prominent feature of the growing impetus around family literacy research is that it focuses primarily on children's literacy development in relation to their parents and the environment their parents create to enhance their literacy development. Few family literacy research discussions explore its implications for adult learning and literacy. As a result, approaches that build solid foundations for adult-related practice are missing. To understand the full range of issues in family literacy requires that researchers, while addressing children's literacy, help practitioners cast family literacy's net widely to include adult literacy and learning, highlighting the need for family and adult researchers and practitioners to become co-constructors in (re)defining the field, identifying critical questions and conducting meaningful research that recognizes the significance of both the

cognitive abilities and the social processes that are associated with developing literacy, whether in school, at home, or in community settings.

Practice

Unlike other areas of literacy research, in which theory and practice tend to develop in tandem, family literacy has traditionally been seen as practice-oriented and drawn together by a loosely connected set of activities pulled from early childhood or prekindergarten efforts to K¹² and adult literacy. While there is still a distance to go, more sophisticated information is now available to practitioners on the potential for literacy outcomes to be realized by children with parents who participate in family literacy programs such as Even Start (St. Pierre & Layzer, 1999). In addition, publications such as the National Institute for Literacy's *Equipped for the Future: A New Framework for Adult Learning* (1999)

have been essential in supporting programs and practice to create conceptual frameworks for providing, assessing, and reorganizing services that increase adults' and families' abilities to plan for their own well-being and for achieving their life goals.

The past decade's expansion of family literacy is due, in part, to the visibility the field has gained from increasingly prominent independent nonprofit organizations and programs focused on literacy, early childhood education, and parent and family involvement. The establishment of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) in 1989 with private funding contributed to a significant shift in attention to family literacy. A nonprofit educational organization, NCFL supports a four-component national family literacy program model, referred to as the Kenan model. It serves families through adult education typically focused on basic

education and life skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and workplace literacy; children's education, usually for preschool children; parent and child learning together (PACT) time, during which children and parents engage in a shared literacy activity; and parent time, during which parents are given information about children's development and an opportunity to discuss their development. Another program designed to improve children's literacy by involving parents is the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program, which began as a pilot program in Missouri in 1981. The goal of the PAT program is to foster an early partnership between home and school so that parents take a far more active role during their children's formal years of schooling. In addition, children and families in the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youth (HIPPY) are exposed to a home-based early intervention that helps parents provide their preschool children

with educational and literacy enrichment.

All of the models-PACT, PAT, HIPPY, and others-share the strengths of engaging children and adults in literacy and attending to many limitations in the literacy experiences of family learners; there is much to be learned from using them. However, each has inherent limitations when used alone. No single model can capture the full range of knowledge needs of family literacy practitioners or provide a systematic or foolproof approach. Practice based on these or any other models should reflect a rigorous investigation of the approaches and their uses within the context of what has been learned over the past twenty years from research on how children learn, how adults learn, how families function and support learning in different educational and literacy settings, and how the effects of program engagement on child and adult learning can best be assessed.

Policy

Independent efforts such as those discussed in the above section on practice have spawned numerous programs, estimated to number in the hundreds. However, it is the federally funded Even Start/Family Literacy initiative that has been most successful in institutionalizing the concept of family literacy in discussions of education and policy. With the purpose of improving the educational opportunities of low-income families by integrating early childhood education, adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program, Even Start has been developed around three interrelated goals: to help parents become full partners in the education of their children; to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners; and to provide literacy training for the parents of children (McKee & Rhett, 1995).

Despite varying degrees of government support over time, family literacy has been integrated into many federal and state policy initiatives in reading, adult literacy, and welfare reform. Goals 2000 identified parental involvement (Goal 8) and children's school readiness (Goal 1) as focal areas of a national educational agenda and noted their importance to improving children's literacy and level of achievement in school. The 1999 reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) included a focus on family literacy. National programs such as the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's Reading Excellence Program require that states receiving awards demonstrate their capacity and plans to develop and implement a family literacy component or to integrate family literacy fully into statewide reading improvement efforts. Early education programs, such as Head Start, which

were built around parental involvement, concentrate more than ever before on children's early and emergent literacy in relationship to parent-child interactions and the role of family members other than parents in young children's learning.

In the past five years, the legislation with the most potential impact on family literacy has been welfare reform. It requires family members to assume new responsibilities and practice new behaviors in relationship to work and family maintenance, and this has inadvertently limited the availability of parents and other family members who typically participate in family literacy programs. In addition, labor-related initiatives around Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other legislation, as well as the residuals of welfare reform, either mention the significance of family literacy or include a family literacy component.

Last, federal policy over the past decade has supported family literacy through the establishment of several federally funded centers that address children's achievement and adult learning inside and outside of school and traditional learning settings. Among these centers are the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning at Harvard University, the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At-Risk at Johns Hopkins University, the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement at the University of Michigan, the Goodling Center for Family Literacy at Penn State University, the National Center on Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Center for Research in Education, Diversity, and Excellence at the University of CaliforniañSanta Cruz. Research studies in these centers typically focus on parent-child literacy, on families and literacy, or on adult literacy and have

helped to influence or shape the current areas of interest in family literacy.

CURRENT AREAS OF INTEREST

Family literacy is a variegated field of endeavor in that it focuses on both children and adults as well as on the cognitive, educational, and social factors that affect their ability to develop literacy. It also must recognize the diversity of families-ethnic background, family form (two-parent, single-parent, grandparent, guardian), income level, learning strengths and weaknesses, intergenerational history, and resources. Thus, I have tried to determine broad categories that are currently at the forefront of discussions on family literacy research and practice and have used them to organize the resources that follow this chapter. Three areas that I initially thought to include in this chapter and in the bibliography were technology; issues of class, poverty, and gender; and professional development. Ultimately, I

decided to exclude all three, in large part because of the limited work that has been done in each area. However, these issues are critical to the continued development of the field. For example, although information about the use and effects of technology in family literacy programs is limited, the implications of technology for school-age students and for adults in the workplace are severe for families who have little access to technology; the real and perceived dimensions of the "digital divide" separating the poor from the middle class attests to the significance of the problem. More research and practice in this area are needed.

The same scarcity of published information is also a problem when trying to assess the influence of class, poverty, and gender in family literacy. Most work in family literacy addresses the needs of and issues faced by low-income families, and most work attends

disproportionately to issues facing mothers and children. Few studies focus on the dynamics of poverty in relation to its role as a barrier to literacy learning or to the ways in which literacy development is constructed within economic poverty (Whitehurst, Epstein, Angell, Payne, Crone, & Fischel, 1994). In other words, several studies and most programs draw from low-income populations, but few provide a critical discussion of the meaning and impact of poverty or gender on the development of literacy. Several studies and descriptions of programs focus on the intergenerational poverty of families served and on women (mostly mothers and grandmothers); however, few studies examine how these issues are addressed or what role they play in program activities and research efforts.

Similarly, little work has been done on professional development and instructional methods in family literacy.

The dearth of empirical and programmatic work in this area can be attributed in part to ongoing efforts to develop the field and to formulate frameworks that can respond to the diversity of participants in family literacy programs. In addition, the field has relied heavily on structured or commercial models that provide program strategies but are unable to provide a systematic body of support that emanates from an organized field of study in a recognized area of research or practice.

Parent-Child Literacy

Parents' role in supporting children's literacy development and appropriate approaches to helping parents help their children learn to read and write continue to be the focus of most family literacy research and practice. A significant subset of the work on interactions between parents and children involves emergent literacy and is based on the notion that the first years of a child's life

represent a period when legitimate reading and writing development takes place and when the literacy of parents counts most. Children's engagement with literacy is seen as a continuum. Thus, at this early stage, their literacy is considered to be in the process of becoming; it is not a period of prelearning or prereading. Children build on early knowledge and experience, changing and refining their motives and strategies, developing new ones, and learning through processes of assimilation and accommodation. Work in emergent literacy assumes that growth in reading and writing originates within the child but is equally affected by environmental stimulation. Rather than representing a new area to explore, current research on emergent literacy, like that on parent-child literacy, reflects deepened analysis and effort. The area of greatest growth in research concerns the effects of early interventions on later literacy performance in school and into

adulthood (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000). Indeed, the more recent work of Kaderavek and Sulzby (1999), Edwards (1996), Wasik (2001), and others suggests that to achieve success, children must be engaged early and that parents and other adults engaged in children's lives can facilitate children's learning if they are aware of the meaning-making demonstrated in children's invented spelling and early manipulation of print.

The research on parent-child interactions also points to other potential directions that have been only modestly explored: the different ways that parents and other family members transfer literacy knowledge to children; the kinds of literacies other than reading (such as writing and math) that family members use; the relationship between children's motivations to read and their parents' beliefs about the value and utility of literacy; the nature and content of literacy in homes that are diverse in

cultural history and language; and parents' reasons for engaging in their children's literacy development.

A limitation of the work being done in parent-child literacy is the failure to address the role of adult literacy and of both parents-fathers as well as mothers. When research and practice focus on parent-child interactions, they tend to address the needs of children primarily or only, with little attention to the reciprocal nature of children's literacy and adult literacy. When research and practice do focus on parents, it is generally on mothers rather than fathers, in large part because mothers have traditionally been children's primary or sole caregivers. In some cases, fathers are unavailable because they are the family's primary breadwinner; in others, fathers live outside the home and are not considered to play an important role in their children's lives; in still other cases they may be difficult or even impossible

to reach. As a result, few fathers participate in family literacy programs, and little information is available about those who do attend (see Gadsden, Brooks, & Jackson, 1997).

Intergenerational Literacy

The term intergenerational literacy is often used interchangeably with family literacy, but it is actually a subset of family literacy—a specific strand of inquiry that focuses on the transmission of knowledge and behavior from one generation to the next. As such, parent-child literacy is actually a subset of intergenerational literacy.

Intergenerational literacy bears special consideration not only because of the profound influence that each generation has on subsequent generations but also because it attempts to examine the influences of earlier generations on the patterns, beliefs, and learning that guide family practices in literacy. Most descriptions of intergenerational literacy

focus on adult modeling of literate behaviors, through which adults demonstrate the value and importance of certain beliefs, attitudes, and practices and help the child understand the often unspoken rules of the environment in which literacy is used (Gadsden, 1998).

A less studied, but equally important, area of interest is the bidirectionality of literacy-that is, how children assist adults as well as how adults teach children.

When both parent and child are nonnative speakers of English, children may assist parents in activities such as responding to written requests and paying bills. The balance of authority between parent and child is often tested in such cases and is determined in large part by the cultural frames of reference of family and community (Weinstein, 1998). This leads to another category of interest, the development of literacy in families who are nonnative speakers of English.

ESOL and Language Differences

Efforts in ESOL have typically been attached to K-12 settings or adult literacy programs (see Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999; Quintero & Huerta-Macias, 1995). Snow and Strucker (2000) point to the need to investigate the instructional strategies that work to promote comprehension, analysis, word learning, inference, and critical thinking among children and adults. In addition to the instructional and contextual factors affecting ESOL learning are the related issues of role changes and reversals in English-learning families-the reciprocal relationship between child and parent or other adult family member, particularly when the fluent speaker is the child but the breadwinner is the parent. This relationship is most evident in Weinstein-Shr's (1991; Weinstein, 1998) research on older Southeast Asians with limited English proficiency, in which the author describes the complex

relationships, compromises, and negotiations that take place when the English-language facility of the child challenges the authority of the parent.

Most studies of ESOL learning and teaching in family literacy and most family literacy ESOL programs (both within and external to Even Start) focus on two generations of Spanish-speaking learners (see, for example, Shanahan & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). The studies highlight the complexity of attempting to separate language and cultural issues in the family literacy development of immigrant groups (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Duran, Duran, Perry-Romero, & Sanchez, 2001). More work needs to be done on the increasing numbers of non-Spanish-speaking groups, such as Asians and Eastern Europeans. Three critical issues-language, literacy, and culture-tend to be combined and to act as barriers to many immigrant groups as well as indigenous minority groups.

They are deeply intertwined and must be addressed together if researchers and practitioners are to support the social, cultural, and linguistic transitions that family literacy development requires (Duran, Duran, Perry-Romero, & Sanchez, 2001).

Assessment and Evaluation

In their summary of family literacy efforts in Michigan, Parecki, Paris, and Seidenberg (1997) called attention to the absence of a discussion of assessment and evaluation measures. The current state of assessment and evaluation is significantly improved yet still considerably lacking (Holt, 1994).

National evaluations of programs such as Even Start (St. Pierre & Swartz, 1995) provide sound evidence as to whether and how programs are working. How programs implement, assess, monitor, and revise their practices in the normal course of their daily work is more difficult to determine, however. Not even

in the national evaluation studies are there specific outcome data on changes in participants' lives. What do exist are wonderful vignettes of individual children and families that tend to focus on the result of change but offer little information on the process of change or the ways in which that process is influenced by the nature and quality of teaching and curricula. The 1998 Reading Excellence Act requires that each state receiving funds develop indicators of program quality "based on the best available research and evaluation data." Although focused on the larger state evaluation, these indicators will provide a framework on which programs can build while encouraging the development of sound assessment measures that will help the field determine specific outcomes for children and adults in a family and better understand the nature and process of family literacy learning and teaching.

Culture and Context

Family literacy specialists-researchers, practitioners, and others with expertise in the field-often have limited knowledge of the experiences of minority groups as well as vastly different definitions of culture and the approaches that should be used to integrate culture with research and practice. The term culture actually has much in common with the term family in that both imply cohesiveness and solidarity-that is, traditions, expectations, and practices that ostensibly serve the common purpose of the healthy development of children and the welfare of the family (Gadsden, 1996, 2001). The terms context and culture are used widely in literacy research and practice-for instance, sociocultural and sociocontextual bases for literacy learning-with context referring to the settings or sites in which learning occurs and to the kinds of interpersonal approaches to learning, beliefs, and practices that are influenced

by, and that have influenced, an individual's literacy experiences. Context thus includes the knowledge and uses of literacy that stem from national, ethnic, and family traditions. In a field where large numbers of participants represent diverse ethnic and racial histories and experiences, it is important that practitioners both learn more about these histories and experiences and raise questions about what it would mean for a family literacy program to address issues of culture, race, and diversity.

CLOSING CONSIDERATIONS

Family literacy has expanded in meaningful ways as a field during the past decade. Connections are slowly but increasingly being made between family literacy and parent involvement and children's early literacy development and between family literacy and other areas of early childhood and family studies. Researchers and practitioners in family and social services are focusing more

directly on family literacy, and family literacy researchers and practitioners are examining more carefully issues of family health and welfare in relationship to literacy learning. As models are refined, they are attending to broad issues about how families function and the specific needs of family members as learners.

Despite these modest though notable advances, several prominent problems persist. The first is the need to deepen our understanding of how children's literacy is affected by their interactions with parents and other caregivers. A second concerns the absence of critical discussion about adult learning and literacy within the context of family literacy and reciprocity between the two areas, adult literacy and family literacy. A focus on "parent time" in which parents address only children's developmental issues may well miss the opportunity to understand what adults

learn through family literacy efforts and what implications this has for teaching and research in adult basic education.

Unlike other areas of literacy, family literacy has the potential to study and serve individuals over the life-course, from early childhood to old age, and to contribute to our understanding of the nature and quality of literacy used and developed over time and the intersections of learning by multiple family members. Some models, such as the Kenan model, attempt to address ABE and parent issues while emphasizing children's literacy. Others, such as PAT, attempt to help through specific exercises in home visiting. Still other models, such as those developed by Edwards (1996), attend to the low literacy of adults as a precursor to parents' helping children. Despite the value of these and other approaches, most of the discussion of family literacy takes place within one sphere-that is,

how one parent helps one child as opposed to how the literacy of both child and adult learner is stimulated and developed. Thus, family literacy must be primed to respond to questions about the approaches from adult literacy research and practice that can be infused into family literacy, and adult literacy research must address comparable issues from family literacy.

A second fundamental problem in family literacy is the divide between research and practice, a problem not unique to family literacy. As with other fields, family literacy continues to be guided by a philosophy in which theory and research flow to practice rather than more progressive and reflexive approaches in which practice informs research and research informs practice. In family literacy, the two worlds of researchers and practitioners rarely, if ever, meet. The only exception occurs during evaluations-the most awkward

moments for building a core of collaborative effort between these two parties. In related work on fathers and families (Gadsden, Kane, & Armor, 1996), my colleagues and I have focused exclusively on practice-derived research and research-informed practice as a point of entry for more critical, rigorous, and inclusive discourses and action. The practical issues of forging a relationship in which the voices of practitioners are not simply privileged along with those of researchers but also represent a sound body of knowledge, resources, and analyses are difficult to parse. When a nexus between the goals and work of researchers and practitioners is achieved and each group maintains an identity, entrance into and participation in the world of the other in response to problems and possibilities in the field can be realized.

As with other areas of educational research and practice, efforts in family literacy starkly remind us of the promise

that can be realized by threading together critical components of inquiry: known reading, writing, and problem-solving literacy issues of students at different points in their schooling; the potential of homes and schools as sites for learning; and the inherent complexities of goals that involve not only the improvement of children's literacy but also an improvement of the range and scope of literacy learning among their parents and other adults. While we know more about family literacy than we did a decade ago, there is much more to learn and many complexities to disentangle regarding the problems that interfere with literacy learning of children and adults.

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