CHAPTER 13

Supporting Literacy Learning in Families for Whom English Is an Additional Language

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This chapter will:

1. Examine and interpret evidence of best practices when supporting literacy development within families for whom English is an additional language.

2. Review theory and research that informs planning and implementation of programs and practices intended to bring parents, children, and teachers together in literacy learning.

3. Describe a program that grew out of such evidence, and share lessons learned as we planned, implemented, and evaluated these efforts.

4. Describe an example of a new model for working with families.

The importance of involving families in children's learning is supported by decades of research (e.g., Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; Meidel & Reynolds, 1999); and the particular claim that parents make an important contribution to children's success in literacy learning has also received substantial research support (e.g., Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein, & Serpell, 2001; Clark, 1976; de Jong & Leseman, 2001; Durkin, 1966; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Evidence consistently supports a relationship between parents'
own reading and interest in books, parent–child storybook reading, and parents’ general interactions with their children around print and children’s success in early reading. Moreover, the importance of and inclination toward parent involvement in children’s learning does not vary in relation to first language, culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; González-Dehass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Weiss et al., 2003).

In response to such evidence, policymakers, administrators, and teachers often turn to home–school partnerships as a solution to the learning problems experienced by children who are acquiring English as an additional language. These initiatives are often categorized as “family literacy interventions,” and despite frequently being implemented in urban settings with a high incidence of immigrant families, there is often little attention to the influence language and culture may have on family literacy traditions and practices. As a result, attempts to engage parents in the types of literacy practices that are likely to support children’s school success often fall far short of expectations (e.g., Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994).

Rationale

Our work with families is grounded in sociocultural theory that posits that literacy development and use cannot be separated from social and cultural contexts. Within this perspective, literacy is defined as more than the ability to read and write. Rather, as explained by Pérez (1998), theoreticians working within a sociocultural perspective strive “to understand the cultural context within which [individual people] have grown and developed” (p. 4) and “to understand how [people] interpret who they are in relation to others, and how [they] have learned to process, interpret, and encode their world” (p. 4). Furthermore, according to Pérez, sociocultural theoreticians hold that “there are multiple literacies and reading, writing, and language are embedded in and inextricable from discourses” (p. 23). In other words, a person’s ability to demonstrate literacy depends on the specific purposes and contexts for literacy use (e.g., Pérez, 1998; Rogers, 2003).

In our work as family literacy researchers and practitioners, these ideas have been fundamental as we have sought to understand the ways that family routines and experiences contribute to the development and practice of literacy. In the remainder of this section, we summarize related research within two areas of focus: (1) studies of the ways parents and children use literacy in home and community settings; (2) studies that explore the outcomes of family literacy intervention programs.
What Do We Know about How Families Use Reading and Writing?

A common perception described in the literature on family literacy is that all families incorporate some form of literacy in their family and community routines (e.g., Street, 1995). Despite the apparent clarity of this claim, making sense of it in terms of the types of literacy experiences that prepare children for success in school often causes a good deal of tension among literacy researchers and practitioners. As noted by Taylor (1997):

There are many kinds of literacy and many kinds of families, and the use of reading and writing within family contexts does not necessarily reflect the teaching of reading and writing in classroom settings. In many societies, children are enculturated into the most common and evident forms of literacy in their homes and communities before they even begin school. The accumulated ways of knowing and funds of knowledge of family members—their local literacies—are complexly structured and are intricately woven into their daily lives. (p. 3)

Nonetheless, however rich and varied these “local literacies,” there is ample evidence that not all literacy experiences and practices effectively or easily align with the literacy demands of early childhood classrooms and curricula (e.g., Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995, 1996). We know, for example, that children who experience early success in American schools typically have many preschool experiences with storybook reading (e.g., Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995); opportunities to develop phonological awareness through the recitation of rhymes and songs, playing with and learning to name alphabet letters, and being encouraged to spell and write (e.g., Baker, Fernandez-Fein, Scher, & Williams, 1998; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002); exposure to sophisticated vocabulary and complex language structures (e.g., De Temple & Beals, 1991; Weizman & Snow, 2001; Wells, 1985); and opportunities to develop “world” knowledge through books and experiences about complex and interesting topics (e.g., Neuman, 2006; Tabor, Beals, & Weizman, 2001; Weizman & Snow, 2001).

Many researchers have examined the extent to which these types of experiences occur in various home contexts. In a study of the relations between home background and preschool children’s literacy development, Teale (1986) described the extent and nature of children’s print literacy experiences across different participant structures and domains of activity. He found substantial variation in the frequency of children’s print literacy experiences: Children participated in reading and writing from five to 53 times a day and spent an average of 40 minutes to 7.5
hours a day in such activities. However, Teale also found that frequency of children’s print literacy experiences could not be reliably linked to common explanations:

Our analysis indicated that the answer does not lie in explanations which make use of variables like ethnicity, sex of the child, level of education, or family size. . . . Rather, in order to understand why there is considerable literacy activity in some homes and little in others and why the functions and uses of literacy vary across families, we must “unpack” terms such as SES [socioeconomic scale] and ethnicity and keep at the forefront of our considerations that literacy is a social process and a cultural practice. (p. 193)

Teale’s findings of differences in frequency and type of print literacy interactions are supported by numerous other studies (e.g., Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Some researchers have suggested that, in immigrant families, this variation is at least in part associated with differences in parents’ beliefs about their role in educating their children, often citing a disconnect between what goes on in nonmainstream homes and what goes on in school. For example, in a case study of 10 Latino families, Valdés (1996) found that parents consistently attended to children’s behavior, monitoring children’s activities in and out of the home setting and modeling “good” behavior. They did not, however, “engage in ritualistic activities involving reading and writing, and they did not teach their children school concepts and ideas” (p. 192). Valdés explained that these parents did not “see themselves as their children’s adjunct schoolteachers or responsible for their children’s cognitive development” (p. 193).

Likewise, in their study of 11 Latino families, Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) reported that parents were deeply interested in their children’s school success but did not see themselves as qualified or capable of supporting their academic learning. Thus, they emphasized appropriate behavior and respect for teachers and adults. They rewarded school achievement (i.e., good grades) as a way to “seal a common understanding between the children and their parents that doing well in school was important” (p. 134).

However, findings such as these are not universal. Other studies have found that Latino parents take an active educational role in supporting the academic learning of their children. For example, Gillanders and Jiménez (2004) reported that parents demonstrated this responsibility formally through writing, completing workbooks, taking dictation, writing numbers, and writing names of family members; as well as informally through playing with words while skipping rope,
finding the first letter of a word, inventing stories before going to bed, reading advertisements, playing school, and writing letters to family members in Mexico. Likewise, Vasquez et al. (1994) argued that the “discontinuity perspective” represents an oversimplification of the complex array of factors (e.g., school climate, teaching styles, individual learning rates) that influence the school success of minority youngsters, and by so doing, “draws attention away from accurate descriptions” (p. 9) of the ways minority parents support their children’s school success. In their analysis of data from three separate studies of Mexican immigrants who had lived in the United States for fewer than 20 years, they found the families deeply involved in their children’s learning:

Parents see themselves as responsible and deliberate participants in their children’s language learning process. Like middle-class Anglo parents, some follow their children’s lead and accommodate their speech to their children. Many claim to involve their children in language teaching exchanges that focus on a particular skill and that are reminiscent of the kind of direct instruction that goes on in schools. Most also recounted how they had provided experiences and obtained materials that they felt would lead to or enhance their children’s language and literacy development (e.g., providing trips to the library, purchasing crayons and paper, reading aloud to their children, engaging a third party to tutor their children). (p. 77)

Smith (2006), too, found that common home activities among Latino immigrant families were diverse: Parents supported their children’s learning by offering emotional support; participating in both culture-based activities and school-like activities, and monitoring homework and written communications from school. Activities included playing games (in Spanish and English) and watching television together (often about the native country in an effort to establish/maintain some connection or familiarity with the native culture); also, parents created activities to supplement what children were doing in school or to resemble activities that parents had done as students.

Yet other researchers caution that the types of academic support parents give is not always consistent with the school’s ideas about what is most effective. In a study aimed at determining the school’s effects on children’s home literacy experiences, Goldenberg, Reese, and Gallimore (1992) found that “repetition and lack of attention to print-meaning characterized children’s [home] literacy experiences with school materials” (p. 514). The authors speculated that the reason for this behavior is that many Latino parents’ knowledge of how children learn to read, often based on their own school experiences, suggests that repetition of sounds is most effective. Accordingly, in this study, if parents perceived
activities as being school-related, they focused on copying and repetition. But if they perceived activities as fun for kids, they focused on content and meaning making (p. 518).

In summary, available evidence suggests no single characterization of the ways that children from immigrant families experience literacy before school entry, or the ways parents attempt to support their children’s success in school. However, what does seem to be nearly universal among studies of immigrant parents is parents’ belief that education is critically important, as well as parents’ willingness to support their children in the ways about which they are knowledgeable.

**What Are the Effects of Family Literacy Intervention Programs?**

Recognition that not all children share the same literacy heritage (i.e., enculturation into the types of literacy practices that prepare children for success in American schools) has led to the development of programs designed to help increase children’s exposure to school-like language and literacy, and to make this exposure more intentional. Several such programs begin by grounding the “new” literacy practices within parents’ existing knowledge, beliefs, and cultural models (Auerbach, 1989; Paratore, 2001; Pérez, 1998; Rodríguez-Brown, 2003; Roser, 2008). As Paratore (2001) noted, “We have learned that affirming and valuing the many ways in which families share literacy are just as important as introducing new uses of literacy” (p. 13). Likewise, Roser (2008) stated, “It seems essential that the literacy practices and beliefs of nonmainstream parents be well understood as a base for socially, culturally, and historically responsive schooling” (p. 11). Throughout the literature, researchers highlight the need to focus on “authentic” activities that occur naturally as parents and children go about their daily lives (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002). These may include direct child-parent interactions around literacy tasks or reading with or listening to children read. They may also include parents reading and writing independently, using literacy to address family and community problems, addressing child-rearing concerns through family literacy class, supporting the development of the home language and culture, and interacting with the school system (Auerbach, 1989; Paratore, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Rodríguez-Brown, 2003). In the next section, we examine research related to the outcomes of such family intervention efforts.

Overall, research on the effects of family literacy interventions is limited and largely qualitative. However, in a recent review, Sénéchal and Young (2008) identified 16 experimental or quasi-experimental studies
of the effects of parent involvement in children’s acquisition of early literacy. They delimited the examined studies to those that included at least five participants and either effect sizes or data that would allow the calculation of effect sizes. Based on a combined sample of 1,340 families of children in kindergarten to grade 3 and meta-analytic procedures, they found that parent involvement had a moderately large effect ($d = 0.65$). They then analyzed the focal studies according to three types of parent interventions: read to child, listen to child read books, or tutor specific literacy skills with activities. Training parents to tutor specific literacy skills (7 studies) yielded the strongest outcomes ($d = 1.15$). Training parents to listen to their children read books (6 studies) yielded moderate positive outcomes ($d = 0.52$). Parents reading to children (3 studies) yielded an effect size of only 0.18, indicating no effect. Subsequent analyses revealed no differences in effects based on children’s grade levels and reading status (at or below grade level), or families’ SES (working class or middle–high economic class).

As Sénéchal and Young (2008) acknowledged, their finding of no effect of parents reading to children conflicts with correlational evidence of statistically significant positive effects (Bus et al., 1995). They acknowledge that the singular focus on a reading outcome measure (and no oral language measure) may have failed to capture “indirect” effects; that is, reading aloud to children may enhance oral language and improve comprehension (e.g., Morrow & Temlock-Fields, 2004; De Temple & Snow, 2003), neither of which was captured in the outcome measure; book reading likely increases children’s knowledge of literate discourses, which may facilitate reading later but may not be evident in early measures (Paris, 2005). As well, book reading in kindergarten may increase children’s motivation to read, which may in time result in more frequent reading for pleasure. More frequent reading, in turn, is likely to boost reading achievement (Stanovich, 1986).

Understanding the effects of home literacy activities is also complicated by evidence that simply participating in particular literacy activities is not necessarily associated with positive outcomes. Several additional factors, including read-aloud conditions, the talk that surrounds the text, and the types of texts read may also influence outcomes. Each of these is addressed in turn.

**Read-Aloud Conditions**

Read-aloud conditions have consequential effects on children’s language knowledge. In studies by Sénéchal and Cornell (1993), a single reading of a storybook increased children’s receptive, but not expres-
sive, vocabulary, while repeated readings and questions were more likely than a single reading to increase receptive vocabulary \((d = 1.06;\) Sénéchal, 1997). Answering questions during repeated readings (three) resulted in greater word learning than a single reading or rereadings without questioning (Sénéchal, 1997).

**Text Talk**

One of the most consistent findings in the literature on read-alouds is the idea that reading aloud includes more than just reading the words in the text (Deckner, Adamson, & Bakeman, 2006; Hindman, Connor, Jewkes, & Morrison, 2008; Karass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Morrow & Temlock-Fields, 2004; Reese, Cox, Harte, & McAnally, 2003; Snow & Ninio, 1986; van Kleeck & Vander Woude, 2003). It also includes the talk that happens before, during, and after the actual reading, and this talk shapes the effects of storybook reading. For example, a collection of studies by Whitehurst and colleagues (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Valdéz-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Whitehurst et al., 1994) provides evidence that when children take an active role in shared reading, and parents or teachers provide feedback through expansions, modeling, corrections, and praise, children learn substantially more words. These results hold across groups of children of different SES and with children scoring below average on language measures.

Weizman and Snow (2001) also studied effects of conditions of talk surrounding book reading. Specifically, parental utterances, characterized as instructive or helpful, “explained as much variance in word learning as did the density of sophisticated words” (p. 27). As explained by De Temple and Snow (2003), “Children can start to establish a lexical item in their memory after one or two exposures—fast-mapping—but full specification of the item’s phonology, meaning, and usage may require many exposures” (p. 20). Word understanding is less likely to occur from passive encounters, and word knowledge is likely to increase from opportunities to connect and link new words to other words and concepts (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Adding yet another layer to the complexity is evidence that effects of interactional styles during book reading are mediated by children’s initial vocabulary knowledge. Children who begin with higher levels of vocabulary knowledge benefit when mothers emphasize text comprehension, whereas children who begin with lower levels of vocabulary knowledge benefit when mothers emphasize word learning (e.g., labeling and describing objects and ideas; e.g., Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Reese et al., 2003). Data from studies such as these have been used to support
a conclusion that for children with larger vocabularies, conversations need not be related to the word itself, but can be more broadly related to the context in which the word appears (De Temple & Snow, 2003), whereas children with smaller vocabularies need more direct support in learning new words.

**Text Type**

Interactional styles are also affected by text types. In a study of effects of narrative and expository book sharing between middle- to upper-middle SES parents and their preschool children, Price, van Kleeck, and Huberty (2009) found that text genre affected the amount of talk (parents and children talked more when reading expository text); types of talk (i.e., parents uttered more extratextual utterances when reading expository text); and the linguistic complexity of talk (parents used significantly more varied vocabulary and significantly longer utterances when reading expository text). The type of adult talk prompted by different types of texts is important, because adults’ use of rare and sophisticated vocabulary, interesting and unfamiliar topics, and complex syntax is positively associated with children’s language development (e.g., Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2002; Tabors et al., 2001; Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005).

Of particular relevance to the immigrant population that is the focus of our work here, Roberts (2008) studied the influence of first-language and English-language home storybook reading on English-language vocabulary development when combined with English-language storybook reading in classroom settings. In a sample of 33 preschool children from low SES families and two different language groups, Roberts found that after a brief intervention (6 weeks), children who engaged in first-language storybook reading at home learned statistically significantly more target English vocabulary words than did their peers who read books at home in English. Of importance is her finding that home reading by itself had no discernable effect. Rather, it was home reading in the primary language in combination with classroom reading in English that yielded higher vocabulary scores. Roberts noted that “this pattern is compatible with the idea that children were developing primary-language vocabulary and concepts that became available in the second-language context of the classroom lessons and supported acquisition of the related English vocabulary” (p. 119).

Other researchers have explored the extent to which texts suggested by schools or family literacy programs are culturally relevant and culturally appropriate. For example, in a study of the ways in which
literacy program participants from immigrant cultures acquired and used literacy information and procedures offered to them by their host culture, Janes and Kermani (2001) noted:

The fact that storybooks were in Spanish and often beautifully illustrated was not sufficient to make them familiar: children's literature is far less available in Latin America, and therefore its conventions, tone, and intent may well be obscure to some new Latino immigrants. Furthermore, there can be a danger for educators who . . . seek out "culturally relevant" texts. Latin America is very diverse, and sometimes what is culturally relevant to one group of immigrants makes little sense to another.  
(p. 463)

**Summarizing What We Know**

Our review of related literature leads us to the following principles to guide planning and implementation of family literacy intervention efforts with immigrant families:

1. Parents’ interest and disposition toward supporting their children’s school success does not vary by SES, ethnicity, language, or culture.

2. Most families use literacy to get things done in the course of their daily lives. However, the particular forms of literacy may differ from those that are commonly practiced in preschool and early elementary classrooms, and these differences have consequences in children’s preparation for school-based literacy. Effective family literacy interventions explore with families the existing literacy practices, and help them to add to these the types of literacy routines and events that will help children experience success in early and later literacy.

3. The particular ways parents interact with children is not a function of language or culture, so we cannot make assumptions about home practices or routines on the basis of the dominant language or culture. Instead, getting to know families, and understanding individual circumstances and practices are most effective in determining the types of interventions that are beneficial.

4. Empirical studies of the effects of various family literacy interventions indicate that training parents to tutor specific literacy skills (e.g., letter name knowledge, phonemic awareness) has the strongest effects. However, this may be a function of the timing (preschool and early primary grades) and type (code knowledge) of evaluation measures; that is, interventions that emphasize code knowledge are likely to have an effect on early literacy evaluation tasks; while those that emphasize vocabulary and language learning in the preschool years are likely
to have their greatest influence in later elementary grades, when the texts that children read are more difficult and comprehending them demands higher levels of language and conceptual knowledge.

5. Parent–child shared book reading is more likely to have positive effects on children's literacy and language learning when parents engage children in multiple readings of a text; when parents encourage children to respond to text through questioning and elaborating; and when the texts read include both narrative and expository genres (e.g., Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Bus et al., 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994).

6. Of particular importance to the instruction of English language learners, first-language shared book reading at home provides background and conceptual knowledge that seems to “bootstrap” English-language learning. Although untested, it is reasonable to assume that encouraging families to incorporate their first language into intervention activities will also support children's concept learning, and as such, provide a resource for English-language learning.

7. Children's vocabulary and language knowledge grows in relation to parents' use of language. When parents talk more and use more sophisticated words and grammatical structures, children's language knowledge varies accordingly. As well, the types of books parents share influence the types of language children hear. Expository texts typically introduce children to more rare and content-bearing words, and they also prompt more explanatory and extratextual talk about the topic.

Research to Practice: Applying the Evidence

In this section, we describe two initiatives developed with attention to these guiding principles. The first is a family literacy program that has a long history, having just celebrated its 20th year of implementation. The second is an initiative that offers promising new directions for systematically connecting literacy development at home and at school. The programs are similar in that both focus on parent–child reading as a core activity. Given the evidence that training parents in literacy skills is likely to yield more rapid, immediate effects, one might ask why creators of these two projects chose to take this approach. The answer is simple: Our reading of the evidence of code knowledge acquisition at home and at school convinces us that focused, intensive, and explicit instruction can mediate children's lack of code knowledge reasonably quickly. However, gaps in vocabulary and world knowledge are far less easily closed (e.g., Neuman, 2006; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002) and so we chose to
focus our attention on practices that might prevent the gap from forming. We first describe the ideas and routines that frame each of the two programs, and then we articulate our shared understandings.

**The Intergenerational Literacy Program**

The Intergenerational Literacy Program (ILP) has served immigrant parents and their children for two decades. The program, housed in Chelsea, Massachusetts, is a collaboration of Boston University and the Chelsea Public Schools.

Chelsea, a geographically small, densely populated city adjacent to Boston, is among the most diverse communities in the Commonwealth. Increasingly, the community comprises families who speak a first language other than English, a demographic that has grown from 71% of the PreK–12 student population in 1999, to 84% in 2008.

The goals of the ILP are many: to help parents strengthen their own reading and writing in English; to introduce adult family members to the ways that their children learn in U.S. schools; to familiarize parents with the expectations that schools typically have of parents (e.g., monitoring homework, participating in parent–teacher conferences); to introduce parents and children to high-quality children’s literature and effective read-aloud strategies; and to reinforce parents’ efforts in reading and writing with their children at home.

In addition to adult literacy classes, the ILP offers language- and literacy-based instruction for children who are not in school while their parents are in class. Each children’s classroom is staffed by a teacher and five to six tutors. In the morning, the children’s classroom serves children ages 6 months to 5 years (children under age 6 months stay with their parents in class); the average age of participating children is 2 years old. In the evening, we offer two classes: one for children ages 6 months through kindergarten, and the other for children in first through sixth grades.

Participants are primarily parents (and mostly mothers), although grandparents and uncles and aunts also attend classes, if they can demonstrate that they are closely involved with at least one preschool- or school-age child. On average, adult learners have attended formal schooling for 8 years, although this ranges widely: At any given time, a few learners have had some university education, and others have never attended school before coming to the ILP.

Classes meet four mornings or three evenings per week throughout the year, for a total of 40 weeks. We expect daily attendance, and learners respond with an overall attendance rate of 80%. Classes are
deliberately multilevel and multilingual, allowing us to build on the wide range of experiences, educational levels, and English proficiency levels of the adults who participate. To work effectively with such diverse groups, intensive staffing is necessary. Each class of 25 adult learners is taught by a team of two teachers and supported by three or four tutors. For the most part, morning teachers are graduate students in education at Boston University, and evening instructors teach in PreK–12 classes in the Chelsea Public Schools during the day. Most tutors are Boston University undergraduate and graduate students who receive Federal College Work–Study. (This is crucial to our ability to staff our classes fully, because the tutors' salaries are fully supported through the America Reads Program.) We also employ parent tutors (adults who were formerly learners in the classroom) when funds are available.

Since the inception of the ILP, our connections to PreK–12 instruction have been strong. In addition to ILP staff who also work within the school system, the program is located in an early learning center, which houses all public school PreK and kindergarten classes. Reports, flyers, and newsletters from the school system frequently serve as instructional material in the adults' classrooms, and ILP staff work closely with administrators in each school to ensure that we are accurately portraying school policies and routines.

Adult literacy classes are both structured and responsive to families' needs. Approximately 60% of the instructional day is devoted to supporting family literacy practices, while the other 40% focuses on adult literacy interests. Typical family literacy lesson units include strategies for monitoring and supporting children's homework (whether or not parents can understand the homework themselves); storybook reading techniques; the importance of supporting first-language use at home; strengthening home–school communication; author studies (most recently, Tomie dePaola); understanding children's performance on the state assessments; and local resources (e.g., museums and library programs). Adult literacy lesson units focus on topics such as fire safety, seeking jobs, tenant rights and responsibilities, and reading children's and young adult novels with messages that resonate with adults (recent selections include *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman [1997], *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr [1993], and *My Name Is Maria Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada [1993]).

We select instructional materials that learners are likely to encounter in their daily lives, such as children's books, parent brochures and flyers, report cards, job applications, informational bulletins, and websites. Teachers develop lesson plans for a week at a time, in response
to participating parents’ questions or concerns in the community. As a result, while certain topics tend to be repeated every year (e.g., planning for parent-teacher conferences), the actual information that learners read, discuss, and write about in class changes to reflect current research, policies, and specific community issues.

Although lesson content is flexible and evolving, our instructional practices and routines are more structured. To meet the many goals we have set, each day incorporates reading, writing, discussion, and opportunities for parents to work individually, in pairs or small groups, and as a whole class. On a daily basis at the beginning of class, parents complete literacy logs, two-sided documents in which they share the previous day’s literacy activities at home, both those of personal interest and those shared with children. We explain to learners that literacy logs allow us to see how families are using literacy at home and help us focus our future lessons; they give parents a chance to reflect on ways they engage in reading and writing on a daily basis and (because a few minutes each day is devoted to sharing literacy logs) to learn about literacy activities their classmates use that they might adapt to their own families. (See Figures 13.1 and 13.2 for examples of both sides of a current learner’s literacy log.)

![Literacy Log Example]

**FIGURE 13.1.** Literacy log detailing a parent’s personal literacy activities.
### FIGURE 13.2. Literacy log detailing a parent’s literacy activities with her child.

Following the completion of literacy logs, the class reads the “book of the week,” which is done daily in the children’s classroom and helps parents to connect with the themes and stories their children are sharing. Early in the week, the two teachers introduce the day’s topic by reviewing and asking about the previous day’s lesson, presenting the title of the day’s reading, and asking learners to discuss with tutors in small groups what they think they will be reading about and what they know about the subject. After a few minutes, the class members reconvene to share their thoughts, and the teachers introduce four or five key vocabulary words. A teacher or a tutor then reads the day’s reading passage aloud, while learners follow along on their own copies. (See Figure 13.3 for a typical article read in class.) Tutors support learners who need help in tracking the print. After a short discussion comparing their predictions to what they actually read, the class members split into small, homogeneous groups to reread the passage.

How much and how closely a group works through the passage depends on the English literacy proficiency of the parents in that group; we do not expect that all learners will end up with the same knowledge at the end of the class period. A high-level literacy group may read the passage silently and reread in pairs; this is followed by a discussion of
Tips for Supporting Reading Fluency

You can help them read more quickly and accurately. Schools call this reading fluency. Your kids will call it fun!

When kids can read fluently, it's easier for them to understand what they're reading. And they read aloud easily and with expression. Needless to say, this makes reading a lot more enjoyable.

Less fluent readers read more slowly and word by word. Their attention is focused on sounding out each word; so, they pay less attention to understanding what they've read. Their comprehension and their motivation can suffer. Of course, beginning readers aren't fluent yet, but by the end of first grade, kids should be reading books at their grade level with ease and expression.

Choose the right books.

Help your child choose books that he or she can comfortably read. The "five-finger test" is a useful guideline for beginning readers. As your child reads, count the number of words he or she cannot read per page. In general, there should be five words or fewer that give him or her trouble on each page. If a book contains several pages on which you count more than five words that he or she can't read, consider reading that book to your child until he or she develops more reading skill.

Listen every day.

Once you've found a collection of books that your child can read, listen to your child read every day. Be patient—new readers often read slowly! Offer help when your child gets stuck, and always give lots of praise and encouragement.

Read it again, Sam.

Encourage your child to reread favorite books, and make it fun! Repeated readings improve children's fluency and comprehension. They also provide opportunities to practice reading with expression. Children will enjoy giving the wolf a scary growl or using a squeaky little voice for a mouse.

Read to your kids every day.

Model your own fluent reading as you read and reread books with your child. Even though your child may be able to read on his or her own, continue to find time each day to read books that are just beyond his or her reading level. The child will enjoy listening to more advanced stories, and he or she will hear a great example of fluent reading.

the material presented and the learners' written reactions or personal connections to the topic. A mid-level literacy group may complete the same passage by reading a paragraph chorally and discussing key information presented, before class members move on to the next paragraph and complete a graphic organizer when they've finished. A group of parents with limited print literacy experience may focus mostly on the bold topic headings, echo reading them, talking about what they mean, and sounding out and writing key words and paraphrasing main ideas in writing.

In the last few minutes, the whole class reconvenes and each group shares thoughts and opinions on what the members have read and discussed. This serves not only to reinforce the material read and discussed, but also to build community, because all learners have the opportunity to share what they have learned from the text and how they relate it to their own lives.

***What We Have Observed***

Since the ILP began in 1989, we have had the opportunity to see parents and children adjust to life in Chelsea, grow, and move forward. Over the years, we have documented positive outcomes of ILP instructional practices on children's literacy learning (e.g., Paratore, 1993, 2001; Paratore et al., 2008; Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, David, & Schick, 2010) and the importance of both home literacy activities and school instructional practices in children's literacy development (Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999). We have also demonstrated the positive effects on parent–child shared reading of training parents as classroom storybook readers (Krol-Sinclair, 1996) and of using home literacy portfolios to increase the incidence of print literacy at home and increase parents' awareness and understanding of classroom literacy (Krol-Sinclair, Hindin, Emig, & McClure, 2003; Paratore, Hindin, Krol-Sinclair, & Duran, 1999; Paratore et al., 1995). More informally, our observations have both affirmed and deepened our understanding of the immigrant parents with whom we work and their stance toward supporting their children's school success. In this regard, we have reached three important understandings.

First, we cannot claim an increase in motivation or interest in supporting children's school success as an outcome of our work with parents. Rather, like the parents represented in other published studies, at the outset, ILP parents are eager to participate in their children's learning. On program intake forms, we have consistently documented immigrant parents' high expectations for their children and interest in their children's academic progress. Often, though, they do not read-
ily attend school activities, such as open house or parent–teacher conferences, and are hesitant to ask questions of their children’s teachers. When they are “given the code,” that is, when we share with them what American schools expect parents’ roles to be and teach them ways to carry out those roles, most become active participants.

Second, the practice of shared storybook reading is new to most of our adult learners when they enroll in the ILP, largely because they have had little access to books in their home languages or in their home settings. Nearly all families, however, have preexisting literacy routines that support not only the completion of daily goals and routines but also their children’s academic learning. For the latter, homework support and storytelling are the most common activities, but some parents choose to provide educational activities based on their own learning as children.

Third, some types of literacy are more easily incorporated than others into families’ lives. From the beginning of the program, parents have shown interest and enthusiasm in learning about shared book reading. They enjoy learning about and practicing how to share children’s books in their adult classes, and they readily apply at least some read-aloud strategies modeled by teachers and tutors. Our parents, too, are consistent in monitoring their children’s homework and have a strong understanding of the importance placed on homework by the schools. Supporting the practice of shared writing, though, develops less readily, and requires consistent and deliberate emphasis in our adult classrooms.

In summary, over the past 20 years, the ILP’s core mission and instructional rationale have not varied, and our focus has remained steadfast on supporting parents’ and children’s literacy development. At our recent 20th anniversary celebration, this was brought home to us by visiting former staff and learners, who immediately identified with the messages presented by current learners in their speeches. As one former teacher noted, the faces may have changed, new languages and ethnicities may have been added, but the essence of the program continues unchanged. As they have since 1989, parents who attend classes report communicating more effectively with teachers; reading more with their children at home, learning strategies for supporting their children, becoming more confident in using English in their daily lives, and feeling secure in their ability both to maintain their rich home languages and cultures, and build customs that reflect their new lives.

At the same time, the ILP is never the same from one semester to the next. The frequent turnover of teachers, tutors, and families mandates that we constantly revisit our practices, justify our approaches, and refine how we teach literacy as we learn from each new participant.
We have learned that our parents and children, as well as our staff, 
come to the ILP with tremendous bodies of experience and knowledge 
that not only help us support their development but also add to the ways 
we use literacy in our classrooms and our lives, and allow us to view lite-
tracy through a variety of lenses.

**A Promising New Model: Lectura en Familia**

The Kindergarten Language Study (KLS), a 5-year longitudinal 
research project, comprises the design, implementation, and assess-
ment of an intervention aimed at improving the language skills of 
Spanish–English bilingual kindergarten students. The intervention 
focuses on improving vocabulary and extending discourse skills, aspects 
of children’s oral language that research has identified as areas of weak-
ness related to literacy outcomes for young bilingual students. Using a 
quasi-experimental design, the study will yield evidence of the effects 
the intervention in three conditions (home, classroom, and home and 
classroom) on children’s oral language development. The hypothesis 
for KLS is that the condition linking Spanish-language enrichment in 
the home to English development in the classroom will be the most 
effective way to develop and sustain English reading skills for students 
in kindergarten throughout second grade. Schools and classrooms with 
a high density of Spanish–English bilingual children are participating 
in this intervention.

The classroom and home interventions are parallel, and the goals 
and target vocabulary words are the same for both interventions; the 
home component was developed in Spanish and the classroom compo-
nent, in English. Vocabulary words were chosen because they are key to 
understanding the stories used, are not too difficult, can be found in 
the productive vocabulary of most second-grade children, and are high-
frequency words in the text to which children are exposed in school.

In this chapter, we focus only on the home intervention, *Lectura en 
Familia*, which was informed by Project EASE (Early Access to Success in 
Education; Jordan, Snow, & Porsche, 2000) and two family literacy pro-
grams, the Intergenerational Literacy Program (Paratore, 2001) and 
Project FLAME (Rodríguez-Brown, 2003). Although *Lectura en Familia* 
builds on many of the ideas in these programs, it differs from them in 
that, by using the same children’s books in both home and classroom 
contexts, it matches English language and literacy development in class-
rooms with Spanish language and literacy development at home. Par-
ents are informed of the program through flyers, letters, phone calls, 
and conversations with teachers and school administrators. As an incen-
tive to participate in workshop and data-collection activities, parents receive gift certificates for attending each workshop and for participating in the pre- and postintervention questionnaires (i.e., a total of $150 for participation in all project activities).

**Intervention Materials**

Both the classroom and home interventions are structured as 5-month-long units, each addressing four essential literacy domains: phonological awareness and word study, vocabulary, narrative retelling, and extended discourse. Each unit includes four or five books; three are the same titles used in the classroom, in Spanish rather than English. The additional books are culturally relevant and differ from the others in length and difficulty. The unit packet also includes (in Spanish) text summaries, prompts suggested for use with each text, and suggested activities that parents may do with their children. Each unit is introduced with a training session that explains its goals and activities. Teachers and parents attend separate sessions; teacher sessions are conducted in English and parent sessions, in Spanish.

**Intervention Training Sessions**

Sessions last approximately 1 hour and take place at the school site. Each session begins with a focus on the unit theme, and the session leader invites parents to share their personal knowledge, experiences, and questions about the topic. The leader then distributes the unit books and encourages parents to browse through them, asking questions and sharing their reactions to the text and illustrations. Next the session leader presents between three and six concepts pertaining to theme. Following explanation and modeling by the session leader, parents practice reading aloud, using the focal strategies to develop their children's conceptual knowledge and to guide comprehension. The session leader invites parents to comment on how these strategies are consistent with what they are already doing with their children. Each session closes with an opportunity for parents to discuss anything they noticed during the group work, to ask questions, or to voice concerns. After the initial meeting, each session begins with an informal reflection on the previous month's activities. The final session reviews the concepts introduced in the previous four sessions.

Data collection includes the administration of a short demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the intervention and a follow-up interview in the spring. Additionally, at the end of each week, parents are
asked to complete and return a short evaluation of the week’s activities and readings. A parent liaison calls each family every 2 weeks to offer assistance with these evaluations. In addition, following each training session, session leaders record detailed observations of parents’ conversation and engagement at each workshop.

**What We Have Observed**

We have now completed the first year of a 5-year initiative, and our observations allow us to draw three preliminary conclusions about this work and the likelihood that it will make a difference in the literacy learning of the children in these families.

First, parents eagerly seek support to use Spanish at home. Providing parents first-language resources, Spanish, in this case, allows them to draw on their rich language knowledge to continue to introduce children to complex and sophisticated language structures that are likely to transfer to and support their children’s English-language learning. Additionally, by deliberately connecting home texts and activities to classroom learning, we introduce or expand parents’ knowledge of “classroom literacy” (Corno, 1989), making it more likely that parents will initiate related and supportive activities on their own. Moreover, because parents may bring a different store of knowledge to the focal topic, children stand to learn more about the topic than they may have learned from the teacher and classroom resources alone.

Second, preliminary evidence indicates that parents have increased the frequency of parent–child shared reading. Preintervention questionnaires indicate that 75% of all participating parents read to their children at least once a week in English, and 45% read to their children at least once a week in Spanish. Data from weekly evaluations show that 100% of participants read in Spanish with their children at least once a week. Additionally, these evaluations indicate that all parents who participated in the workshops read the same books multiple times (number of readings ranges from one to seven). As noted previously, rereadings of the same book increases the likelihood that children will improve their vocabulary and language knowledge.

Third, the school appreciates and supports the intervention. The principals and teachers demonstrate enthusiasm about the collaboration by encouraging children to share and talk about home reading and writing, and display the products of literacy activities done at home. Additionally, at one site, the principal attends the workshops.

In summary, early anecdotal evidence indicates that supporting parents and children in the use of Spanish at home is an effective strategy
for encouraging home literacy practices. We look forward to the examination of more formal data to test the effectiveness of these informal observations and to expand our understanding of Lectura en Familia on students’ oral language skills in English and Spanish.

Reflections and Future Directions

Taken together, both the ILP and Lectura en Familia demonstrate the importance of providing support for families where they are, rather than where we, as educators, think they should be. Both programs offer additive approaches that build on parents’ and children’s knowledge and experiences in their first language, while providing scaffolding that increases their access to specific and critical school literacies. In both settings, parents are enthusiastic in supporting their children’s learning when they have the opportunity to become familiar with effective and easily adapted strategies. The emphasis of both ILP and Lectura en Familia on reading at home allows families to adapt effective and appropriate learning tools in ways that can be easily integrated into home routines. Parents’ collaboration with the school communities legitimizes their beliefs that they can and should be active partners in their children’s education, and they are able to feel confident about their ability to facilitate their children’s literacy development at home. In short, we believe that programs such as these are not the answer to setting children who typically experience high rates of school failure on a path to success, but, combined with excellent classroom instruction, such programs may be part of the answer.

Both the ILP and Lectura en Familia are ongoing initiatives that continue to evolve. As we reflect on our actions and lessons learned to this point, we remain committed to strengthening home–school activities as two-way partnerships. Our work clearly indicates that parents have multiple ways of supporting their children’s learning, long before children enter school, and that home literacy and language can complement and strengthen school learning. Moving forward, we hope to facilitate parents’ communication with schools in ways that help teachers understand and apply lessons from children’s literate lives at home, while continuing to strengthen parents’ ability to foster children’s school learning. Identifying strategies and materials that can be adapted easily for both home and school use (e.g., books read in English at school and in the first language at home) can help build a seamless connection between home and school, and provide children with increased understanding of the roles literacy can play in their daily lives.
ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Examining parent–child storybook reading: *Lectura en Familia* emphasizes the importance of extending school reading by providing classroom books in children's first languages for reading at home. To examine the effects of such an intervention for the children you teach, start by selecting just a few children whose parents you think would be willing to participate. Obtain copies of books and stories read in class (or even stories that are similar) in the first languages of students, and invite two or three parents to meet with you. During the meeting, explain why you have chosen these books for at-home reading, and describe the ways you would like them to share the books with their youngsters. Over the course of the next 3 or 4 weeks, send home one or two books a week for at-home reading. At the end of each week, interview parents and children about their at-home reading experiences, asking them if they enjoyed it, what they learned from it, and so forth. You might also observe the children in the classroom. When they return to stories that were shared at home, do they read them with greater interest, understanding, and fluency? If you find positive outcomes, consider how you might expand this work for a longer period of time and include more families. If you find limited evidence of positive effects, try to determine what the stumbling blocks might have been: Were the books too difficult for parents to read on their own? Were the books insufficiently interesting to engage both parents and children and motivate them to read together? Were parents and children unable to establish a consistent time for at-home reading? Can you think of ways to help overcome or diminish the challenges that you observed?

2. Deepening understanding of ways to build home–school congruence: As explained in this chapter, even among parents schooled in the United States, there is sometimes a disconnection between the ways they learned in school and the classroom instruction in which their children engage. For parents who have attended school in different countries and speak languages other than English, the knowledge gap is much wider. To deepen your understanding of the ways such differences can influence parents' interactions with their children about school and learning, interview the parents of children in your classroom about their own school experiences and their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in their children's schooling. Based on what you learn, plan a series of workshops that will give parents a hands-on look at what their children are doing in school. Provide ample time during the workshop for discussion, giving parents a chance to compare their experiences to those of their children, to ask questions, and to describe the types of tasks and activities that will both “fit in” with the families' daily routines and activities and also support children's school learning.

3. Learning about home literacies: One of the principles drawn from research and theory is that in almost all families, parents and children use various forms of literacy to accomplish daily tasks and activities. However, it can be difficult for
us, as teachers, to understand precisely what parents and children do together at home. One way that you might try to gain a better understanding of the ways individual families use literacy at home is by inviting parents and children to assemble home literacy portfolios that provide examples of the ways they read and write at home. To do so, try these steps: Introduce portfolios in the classroom by giving children a pocket folder or accordion file, and encourage them to personalize it. Reinforce the value of these portfolios by encouraging parents to become co-investigators into their children's literacy learning by collecting examples of the ways their children read and write at home. Then, refer to the portfolios on a frequent basis in class and at pick-up/drop-off time, and invite parents to share their children's home portfolios at parent–teacher conferences. As you view the samples in the family literacy portfolio, consider the similarities and differences in the ways children use literacy at home and at school. Does the family literacy profile confirm what you already know, or does it suggest strengths and needs different from those that are evident in the child's reading and writing at school? How can you use the information in the family literacy portfolio to make meaningful connections between parents' family and school literacy connections?

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