

Families & Learning

A PUBLICATION OF THE CONNECTICUT STATEWIDE FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE, A PROJECT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

How would you answer this question?

Is the purpose of family literacy programs...

1. to improve the literate abilities of parents and children with the desired outcome of measurable gains on test scores;
- or
2. to understand the family as a source and user of knowledge with the desired outcome of sustained interest and participation in family literacy and lifelong learning?



Family Literacy Goals: Program Purpose Drives Practice

The Intervention Approach

Programs built on the first purpose above are based on the Intervention Approach. These programs focus on transmitting mainstream school literacy practices to the home, such as teaching parents how to read to their children, how to help them with homework, and how to support school-like literacy behaviors. The social circumstances and characteristics of the family unit may be seen as potential obstacles to overcome in order for learning to occur. The focus is on teaching parents strategies and approaches to assist their children, using school-like models.

Most agree that this is important, and that parents frequently request this type of support. However narrower scope misses important opportunities to connect with and support families, and may reduce potential impact of family literacy programs.

The Multiple Literacies Approach

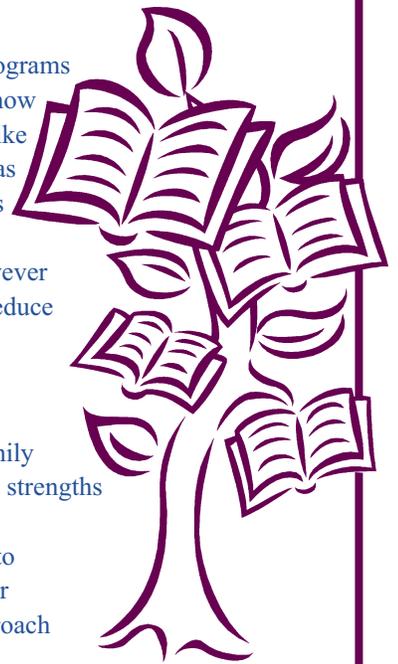
Programs with the second purpose above take the Multiple Literacies Approach, and see the family source of information and literacy learning, not a barrier to literacy. Such programs build on the strengths of families and the richness of cultural and literacy experiences that exist in their homes.

This approach broadens what counts as family literacy beyond “school” literacy practices, to often transparent uses of literacy involved in everyday tasks like cooking or shopping, or in larger negotiating housing, employment or health care. Programs based on the Multiple Literacies Approach family interests and concerns as an important resource that informs and motivates learning. approach, family literacy is done *with* families rather than *to* families so that literacy becomes a meaningful tool for addressing needs and interests of family members within the context of their homes and communities.

The Best of Both

Current research suggests that family literacy programs are most likely to succeed when they meet families where they are, and then work on building skills – skills that have a meaningful connection to families’ lives. Too often family literacy programs provide piecemeal efforts that are neither effective nor lasting. Programs are most successful when high-quality instruction, applied to content that families have a hand in designing, builds on the families’ current use of literacy – even if this does not resemble mainstream school literacy practice.

Want to learn more? See other side for the Family Literacy Training Institute.



Creating Conditions for Generations of Success: A Family Literacy Training Institute

Family Literacy is everybody's business, and this interagency training institute helps education, health, and human services professionals working with families and children sharpen their knowledge and skills. Developed by the State Department of Education, in partnership with the Capitol Region Education Council, the institute builds on principles of family empowerment. Independent evaluation showed that participation in the 3-day Institute had direct and lasting impacts on participants' work with families and children.

Institute topics provide a thorough review of the latest research and practice related to family literacy. For example:

- **The Science of Literacy and Learning** relates brain development and early language learning to parenting, teaching and literacy development.
- **Creating a Literate Home Environment** underscores the vital influences of early literacy experiences that begin at home and lays out strategies for supporting families.
- **Building Bridges between Home, School & Community** highlights the distinctive characteristics of home and school learning and develops effective strategies for partnering.

Through participation in the Family Literacy Institute, professionals create a personal portfolio. This collection of insights and actions documents the individual's understanding of key concepts and principles, and their application to the participant's work with families and children. The portfolio includes a project that enables the professional to immediately apply learning to their work. (See boxes at right for sample projects.)

My Home is a Learning Place

Family Literacy Institute participant and school readiness coach, Kathy Gavin worked with one family to illustrate key concepts of family literacy and learning evident in their daily life. A camera followed the family through their normal routine, from cooking breakfast, through using the telephone keypad to talk about numbers, and folding and hanging clothes together. Their slideshow of daily activities makes the reality of family literacy and the power of home learning come alive. This project vividly illustrates that literacy opportunities are everywhere!

For more information, please contact Kathy Gavin at Kathy_gavin@hartnet.org, or (860) 241-0411 x16.

Brain Cookies

Imagine a parent workshop on brain development and learning. Doesn't sound like much fun, does it? But at Sanchez Elementary School in Hartford, Family Literacy Institute participant and Family Literacy Coordinator, Marisol Osorio, took this complex topic and made it an evening of family fun and food. Parents and their children discussed the brain as an incredible organ tied to emotion, and how conversation and bonding promote learning. Then families baked brain cookies, decorating them with a red "blood glaze". Everyone left the workshop satisfied—an important emotion for learning—with a recipe for baking brain cookies at home—an activity that is not only literacy based, but also uses math skills like measuring and fosters conversation about science.

For more information, please contact Marisol Osorio at (860) 695-4949. For the Brain Cookies recipe, go to <http://foodtv.com>.



Connecticut Family
Literacy Initiative

For more information about the Family Literacy Institute, contact Betsy LeBoriorous, bleborious@crec.org or (860) 509-3615.