

A Review of Teaching and Learning About Family Literacy and Family Literacy Programs

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The term family literacy is used to describe how families engage in home literacy practices and also the intentional ways that schools and other community organizations seek to enhance adult learning along with children's literacy development. Family literacy programs, whether large-scale, federally funded initiatives or small community projects, offer documented benefits of increased parental involvement in schools, stronger school-home partnerships, and positive parent-child interactions (Brown et al., 2019).

In the book *Teaching and Learning About Family Literacy and Family Literacy Programs*, authors Lynch and Prins provide an accessible entryway into the multifaceted and ever-evolving study of family literacy. The authors build a robust argument for the importance of family literacy as both an area of study and as an impactful community practice, giving educators a historical and theoretical context of family literacy. They critically examine the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, and social class, highlighting concerns related to pervasive deficit perspectives and social and cultural tensions. We found the book to be exceptionally well-balanced and comprehensive and were hard pressed to find ways to improve upon the authors' efforts.

The book has fourteen chapters and is divided into five sections: (1) Introduction and Literacy Foundations, (2) Family Literacy and Diversity, (3) Family Literacy in Practice, (4) Family Literacy: Focused Topics, and (5) Conclusions. Within each section, the authors begin with a short synopsis and end with a conclusion, guiding questions/activities, and a list of suggested readings. These items provide a consistent roadmap that reinforces important terms and concepts. The questions at the end of each chapter ask readers to reflect and apply theoretical and conceptual knowledge to their professional context and/or

their personal everyday experiences. This section would be beneficial to teachers using this text in a professional study group or book club.

In the four chapters of section one, Introduction and Literacy Foundations, Lynch and Prins offer a list of five key terminology and definitions related to family literacy which includes a rationale for how the term is and is not used in the context of this book and a brief history of how each term has changed over time. This glossary serves as an effective jumping-off point for readers, once again centering a theme of culturally inclusive understandings of families and their literacy practices. The introduction continues with a discussion of the historical origins and significance of family literacy and family literacy programming, and the authors clearly explain how their working definition of literacy is situated within a sociocultural view. Next, the most common theoretical frameworks used in family literacy research are examined: social-constructivist, sociocognitive, and sociocultural perspectives. Ultimately, this section ends with the authors expounding on early literacy development and factors of adult literacy, each in their own chapter. A strength to this book is that this introductory section offers foundational knowledge of family literacy and its components, making the topic accessible for a variety of readers who may be reading for different purposes and end goals.

With section two, Family Literacy and Diversity, the authors thoughtfully consider how participants in family literacy programs inform the project through their race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Chapter five outlines three concepts—cultural models, funds of knowledge, and antiracist education—and discusses how their application can help those designing programs to foster a stronger understanding of families' cultures while examining their personal racial biases. Chapter six examines social class, how it shapes home literacy activities, and how it can prevent families from accessing educational resources and advantages. Like the previous chapter, the authors encourage readers to consider how personal bias might cause one to assume that a middle- or wealthy-class view on literacy and education is the only way to design a program, when that approach is not effective for all. The authors do more than define and explain in these chapters, as they also share specific examples of how these concepts have been applied in family literacy environments. Again, this makes the content relatable to the various readers of this text.

Section three delves into the practical application of family literacy as it details successful models and a selection of programs. Here, educators, administrators, community organizers, and other community members will find ideas for program design grounded in the foundational and theoretical information discussed previously. Chapter seven outlines three commonly applied models of family literacy programs: comprehensive, child-focused with parent interaction, and two-generation. More examples here highlight how these

models can influence literacy outcomes. This chapter ends with an overview of the different settings that can be used to host family literacy programs such as schools, correctional facilities, libraries, or home visiting programs. The other chapter in this section looks at program design and which program characteristics have had measurable success. Three programs with participants of diverse backgrounds and settings are used as examples to outline and discuss their positive outcomes.

Section four is dedicated to focused topics within family literacy. The first two chapters of this section examine family members' impact on literacy development. Chapter 9 specifically explores fathers' involvement in family literacy practices and programs, building on promising research that suggests boys' reading and writing motivation increases as fathers' engagement in literacy activities increase. The chapter discusses the connection between views of fatherhood and traditional gender roles as a way to understand the "predominantly female environment of family learning" (p. 144). The authors highlight the need for more research on the roles of fathers in their children's literacy learning (residential and non-residential) in order to understand, implement greater support for involvement, and help fathers feel more comfortable participating in family literacy programs.

Notable in Chapter 10 is the acknowledgement that the term parental involvement is too narrow, and a new paradigm is needed to account for the ways in which diverse families enact literacy practices that include extended family, siblings, community members, and so forth. Just as Lynch and Prins build on concepts of fatherhood in Chapter 9, they assert that notions of childrearing and family structure be examined as a prerequisite for understanding how literacy practices may emerge in a given family unit. Family literacy can be reenvisioned as a network of "literacy mediators" (p. 152) that shape children's literacy learning over time and space. The implications for family literacy programs and programming would also need to be reimagined to account for this network perspective.

In the final chapters, Lynch and Prins discuss how family-school relationships may be strengthened through a better understanding of social and institutional factors that act as barriers for family engagement and outreach. Digital literacies (in Chapter 11) are framed by the intergenerational use of and the accessibility of digital literacies, which are most impacted by social and economic factors. By framing the topic in this way, Lynch and Prins are able to lay bare a number of inequalities children face when educators and other advocates assume knowledge of and access to digital tools are a given. Lastly, the authors assert that increased accountability and other performance measures of family literacy programs create a complicated landscape for practitioners to navigate.

At the conclusion of the book, Lynch and Prins stress the need for critically reflective practices for those designing and implementing programs. They restate the importance of participant leadership and briefly discuss the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on family literacy programs. Finally, concerns and future issues are thoughtfully shared. A major strength of this text is that the content is accessible to many stakeholders; consequently, the text is a resource that has adaptability for differing needs. For the researcher, it is packed full of literature giving insight to past and current research and models of family literacy programs; for the designer, it can assist community leaders, educators, and researchers interested in beginning a family literacy program; and for the higher education instructor, it would be a solid choice of textbook for educating a graduate class on family literacy programs and their development.

References

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