Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activity Qualitative Study

Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activities are a critical component of Family Literacy programs. Through Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activities, parents and children are provided with opportunities to learn and play together. Parents are empowered to make positive changes in their lives and the lives of their children while participating in this unique family literacy component. Family literacy researchers have emphasized the importance of Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activities and the need to understand what is involved within this component.

Although federal legislation states that Even Start programs must "use instructional programs supported by scientifically based reading research and the prevention of reading difficulties for children and adults, to the extent such research is available," (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 2). Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activities are difficult to quantify and define because each family literacy program determines how to design and implement the Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activity based on the population they serve. Because each program has local control, it is unclear what activities programs are conducting and how much the activities and/or curriculum are based on currently available research on language and literacy development of children.

The purpose of the study was to explore the question of what is happening during the parent-children interactive literacy component in family literacy programs across Pennsylvania. In particular, we were interested in answering the following questions: (1) How do programs articulate the purpose of parent-child interactive literacy? (2) What information is used to develop parent-child literacy activities? (3) What is the process of planning parent-child interactive literacy? (4) How do programs assess this component? To answer these questions we conducted a qualitative study with 24 sites from 19 of the 73 family literacy programs in Pennsylvania. These sites were selected because previous statewide assessments (Van Horn, Kassab, & Grinder, 2002) indicated that they had met the majority of the Family Literacy Performance Standards required by the state.

The findings from the Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activity research study revealed several challenges that programs encountered as they implemented this component of family literacy. Conceptually, this component should focus on language and literacy development of children through interactions with parents, but programs defined these activities as a time for parents to work on their interaction and parenting skills. . As with scientifically based reading research, programs integrated language and literacy into many of the activities, but they were not valuing their importance in the overall definition of Interactive Parent Child Literacy Activity. When designing this component, programs focused primarily on programmatic information to design and develop parent-child literacy interactions, including participant scheduling, structure and setting, participant assessments (adult and early childhood), and coordinating with the early childhood classroom

The examination of how programs planned for parent-child interactive literacy activities revealed a large variability due to how individual staff members approach and plan for this component.   Staff may meet weekly to monthly, usually depending upon how often the component is offered in the program. Finally, most assessments within parent-child interactive literacy are informal and derived from using methods such as parental journal writing, surveys, parent meetings, and general feedback.

With further study and support, family literacy administrators and staff can increase their understanding that the parent-child interactive literacy component can play a crucial role by focusing on children's language and literacy development rather than merely on play and on parenting skills.

References
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