



The Importance of
Family Literacy
in Public Libraries

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Background & History

The Beginning

- Family Literacy not a new concept
- Early 1900s public acknowledged a child's education begins by reading at home
- Libraries have history of literacy involvement



Background

- However, the term “family literacy” not officially coined until 1981
- First use: Denny Taylor in doctoral dissertation “Family Literacy”



Expanding on an idea

- Taylor's work used studies done in 1960's and 1970's
- Works examined role of families and parents in reading development & educational achievement of their children
- Other important publications:
 - Becoming a Nation of Readers** (1985)
 - A Nation at Risk** (1983)

Applying the Research

- During this time, more research was done
- Family literacy programs sprang up
- These were the first formal programs that sought to eradicate low literacy levels

Initial Programs Include:

- 1984: Mother's Reading Program
- 1985: PACE
- 1987: Motherread
- 1987: Parent's Reading Program
- 1989: Even Start
- 1989: Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy

PACE (1985)

- Founded by: KY legislation
- Focuses on:
 - Parents: gain basic literacy skills to function in workplace/ achieve GED
 - Parents & Children: read together
- Other states began to adopt this model
- One of the founders, Sharon Darling, became a founder of National Center for Family Literacy

Even Start

- Founded by: U.S. Department of Education
- Goal: help low income families break the cycle of poverty using family literacy

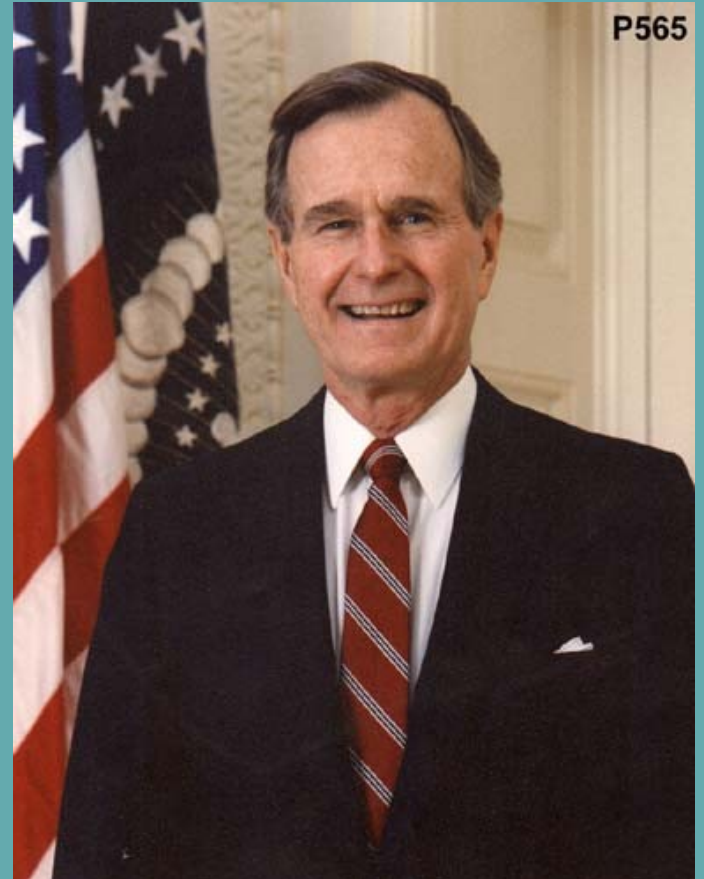
Moving forward

- Although the ball began rolling in 1980's, family literacy movement really began to boom in 1990's



Legislation

- National Literacy Act of 1991
- Signed into law by George H.W. Bush



National Literacy Act (1991)

- Focused on adult literacy & literacy needs of children
- Allowed for creation of programs through governmental funding
- Allotted more funds to support Even Start

Survey of Young Adult Literacy (1985)

- First wide-scale national literacy survey
- Surveyed ages 16-25 on literacy proficiencies
- Sought to make literacy more complex issue than basic reading/writing
- Tested abilities to process written information in a variety of situations

National Adult Literacy Survey (1993)

- Broader than the first
- Results were not good



The Results

- Illiteracy was on the rise
- Literacy *lower* than the 1985 survey
- At least 35 million adults had problems with literacy related tasks
- Supported need for more attention to family literacy
- Got people's attention

The Reaction

- Many family literacy programs developed on local, state, national levels
- Examples include:

1990: ALA/Bell Atlantic Family Literacy Project

1991: National Center for Family Literacy's Toyota Families for Learning Program

Where did they go from here?

New
Programs
and
Partnerships

What is the illiteracy rate now?

- National Center for Literacy (2005):
approximately 23 million illiterate
 - cannot fill out job applications
 - cannot read to their children
- U.S. Census Bureau (2000):
 - 26% of some states like CA & FL born outside U.S.
 - 11% or 31 million in U.S. born outside U.S.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

- Reasons why this group is hard to reach:
 - In many cities large immigrant populations form self sufficient communities
 - May lack transportation
 - Young children may never hear English at home
 - As kids get older, become translators for parents
 - As parents realize they can't help with homework, they may ask for help
 - In some cultures, it is inappropriate to question educators

What makes up a family literacy program?

1. Literacy improvement for adults

- GED
- Job Applications
- Shopping
- Homework help

2. Emerging literacy activities for children

- pre-k through elementary school age
- reading skills
- homework help
- motor skills

What makes up a family literacy program?

(continued)

3. Interactional/intergenerational activities for the entire family

- parents read to children

- play games

- discuss books

4. Parenting skills/problem sharing

- parenting classes

- nutrition information

- how to read books to kids

Who can you partner with?

+Schools

+Day Care Centers

+Head Start

+Even Start

+Healthy Start

+Universities

+Prisons/Jails/Detention Centers

+Homeless Shelters

+Rehabilitation Programs

+Health Care Providers

Current/Past Partners

~Toyota

~Local/State/Federal Government

~Metlife

~Bank of America

~Cargill

~McDonald's

~**PrimeTime**

~Library of Congress Center for the Book

~Bell Atlantic

~Starbucks

~**ALA**

~National Center for Literacy

~**Motheread**

~Barbara Bush Foundation

~Wells Fargo

~Wallace Foundation

~Community Centers

~**Families For Literacy**

~Verizon

~**Reading Empowers All People (REAP)**

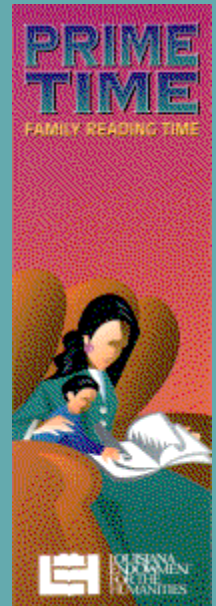
So What are Some of these Programs?

6 examples

PrimeTime (1991-today)

<http://www.leh.org/primetime/PThomepage.htm>

- Founded by: Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities
- Purpose: show families that TV is not the only fun family activity
- University professors, public libraries, families of 6-10 year olds/ pre-k 3-4 year olds





PrimeTime

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- What it does:

- 5 states give 4 programs

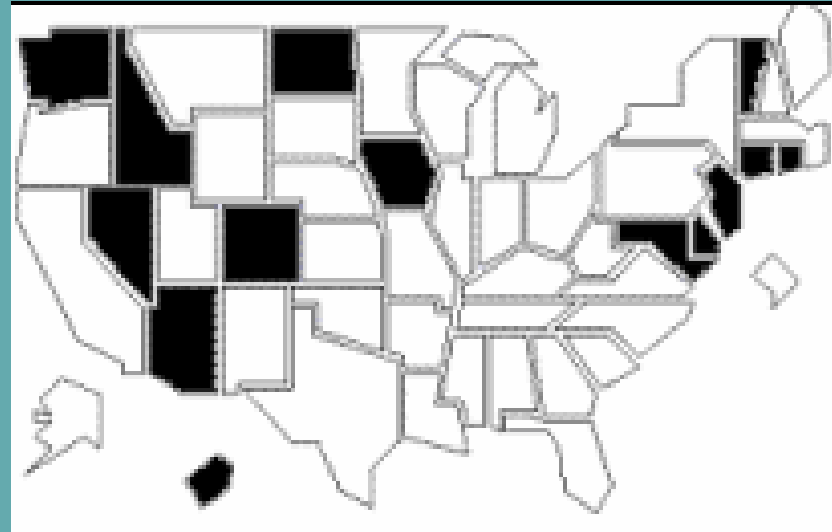
- a humanities professor, story teller, library coordinator, preschool coordinator

- lead a 90 minute session for 6-8 weeks on selected award-winning children's books

PrimeTime

- Partnered with ALA
- Held pilot programs at 525 locations in 35 states & Virgin Islands
- 2003 Public Library Association-Advancement of Literacy Award
- 2000 one of 10 programs to win President's Committee on Arts and Humanities
- Teaches families how to discuss humanities issues and ethical topics "as a way of fostering high academic expectations and achievements in low-literacy, low income families;...it helps parents and children learn how to select books and become active library users"

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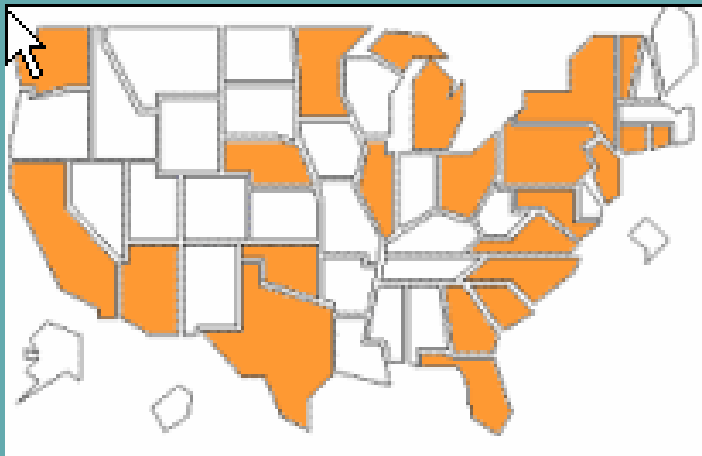


Libraries for the Future (LFF)/ Family Place Program (1992-today)



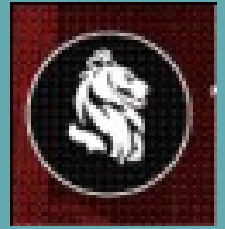
<http://www.lff.org/programs/family.html>

- Founded by: Libraries for the Future & Middle County NY libraries
- Purpose: Use technology & books for family literacy
- 5 weeks of parent/child workshops where toys, books, art supplies are handed out to kids ages 1-3
- Parents get computer lessons, parenting tips, shown resources at the library



- Currently in 200 libraries
- In 23 states

Connecting Libraries and Schools Project (CLASP) in NYC (1991-today)



<http://www.nypl.org>

- Founded by: NYPL grant from Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund
- Purpose: Support collaboration public schools/libraries
- Initially worked with 3 school districts, 23 public library branches, 107 schools

- 1994 brought to all 5 boroughs
- 1999 city funded

Connecting Libraries and Schools Project (CLASP)



(continued)

- What makes this program so special?
 - puts one person in charge of making class visits, making sure students have library cards, attending faculty/PTA meetings
 - visits school media center to collaborate
 - recognizes schedule differences and works with them
 - strategize with schools, assess community needs
 - program evaluation

Motheread® (1987-today)

<http://www.motheread.org>



- Founded by: Nancye Brown Gaj
- Purpose: reading, writing, speaking & listening to help family communication, story sharing for critical thinking & problem solving
- Lessons field tested in classrooms
- Instructors are taught curricula
- Awards:
 - International Reading Association
 - Barbara Bush Foundation
 - National Endowment for the Humanities



Raising a Reader® (1999-today)

http://www.pcf.org/raising_reader/program.html



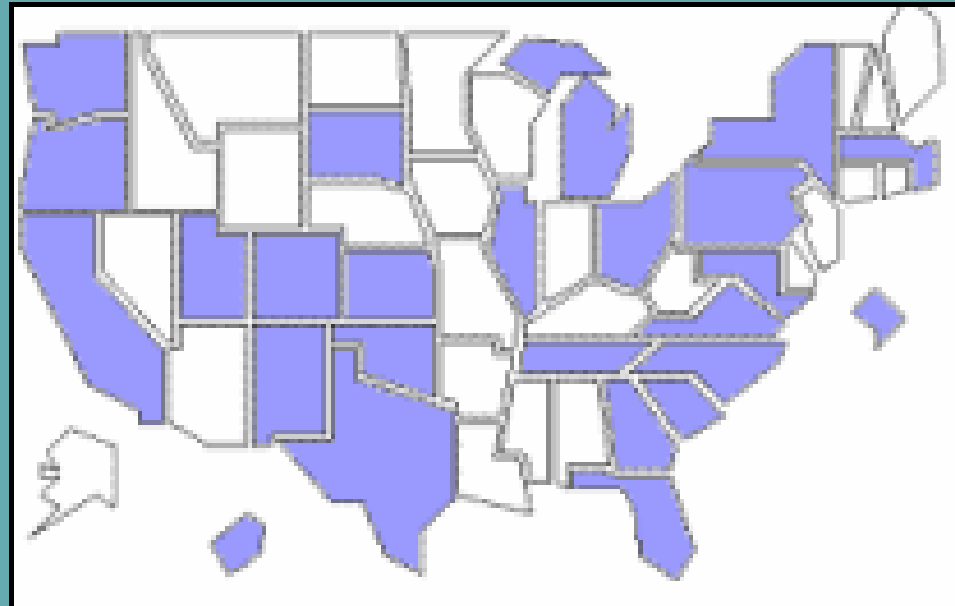
- Founded by: Peninsula Community Foundation
- Purpose: parent-child bonding pre-k kids & teaches story telling
- Gives a bag of picture books to bring home to read to kids
- Tested in Head Start, 33% increase in parent/child bonding time
- Spanish speaking families use of public services up 56%

Raising a Reader®



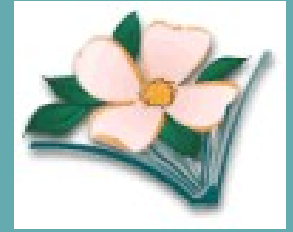
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- In 72 locations, 24 states, Mexico, Botswana, Malaysia



Reading Empowers All People (1999-today)

<http://www.dekalb.public.lib.ga.us/>



- Founded By: Dekalb County Public Library in GA from an anonymous 100,000 grant. Costs low due to partnerships.
- Purpose: to support ELL families in learning English
- GA has a 53% increase in immigrant population 1990-1999
- Children's librarians teach the kids for an hour
- Parents taught by community college instructors
- Families reunite to color, play games, talk about nutrition

**The Benefits and Critiques
of Family Literacy
Programs
and
the Public Library**

Libraries already provide many components of Family Literacy:

- Adult Literacy
- English as a Second Language Instruction
- Special Collections and Programming for Children
- Parenting Support and Programming

Organizations

American Library Association

- Supports Family Literacy Initiatives
- Doesn't Endorse a Particular Program

Association of Library Services to Children and Public Library Association

- Every Child Ready to Read

Questions about Family Literacy

- “Libraries and the American Library Association stand tall for intellectual freedom issues. Why not literacy? ALA has the Freedom to Read Foundation. Do we really mean it?”
- “A literate public demands good libraries; good libraries create a literate public. It makes sense.”

Peggy Barber

Critiques

- Of Family Literacy Programs
- Of Library Involvement
- Of Individual Programs

The Compensatory Model:

- Lack of Education
- Lack of English Fluency
- Lack of Stable Employment and Adequate Income
- Lack of Parent-Child Interaction
- Lack of “Correct” Family Morals

The One-Child, One-Mother Model

- The Most Common Family Literacy Model
- Overlooks Other Members of the Family who could also Benefit

The Lack of Adequate Adult or Interactive Literacy Practice

- No Consensus on what High-Quality Parenting Practices Involve
- Same is True for Adult Education/Job Training
- No Guarantee that Improved Literacy will lead to Better Employment
- Many Programs Shortchange Parent-Child Interaction Time

The Instability of Family Literacy Funding

- Although Passion is still high, could face cuts in future
- Programs Seen as Adjunct or Extra

Family Literacy in the Public Libraries

- 100-150 hours of instruction required to advance one grade level
- Current average is 70 hours

Changes in Student Participation and Achievement

- Average Participation was Well Short of Level Required for Advancement
- Standardized Tests Showed No Correlation between Participation and Advancement

Challenges in Implementation

- Strategies most in line with current library practice were implemented easily
- Most programs reluctant to develop social services capacity
- Emphasis on programs over social services limited the potential to improve persistence

Pathways to Persistence

- Offer Realistic Social Supports
- Develop a System of Referral to Social Services and other Education Providers
- Adapt and Add to Programs Aspects to Aid Persistence

Critiques of Individual Programs

Even Start:

- School-community based program
- Strict requirements on who can participate

Critiques of Individual Programs

PrimeTime Family Reading Time:

- Claims to be Public Library Program
- Doesn't Provide Intensity and Duration Necessary for Lasting Change

Critiques of Individual Programs

CLASP (Connecting Libraries and Schools)

- Good Example of what Libraries Can Do
- Involved Major Effort on Part of Library to be Successful



Call and Response:

Out Standing in the Field

Here in Monroe County: CAPE

(since 2001: “Monroe County Children Matter!”)

<http://www.monroe-county-cape.org/Initiative2/FamilyLiteracy.html>

- Family Resource Centers in schools and community centers are staffed by Family Literacy Coordinators
- No formal library involvement
- Extensive informal partnerships with various community institutions
- Success depends largely on the strengths and networking abilities (and luck) of the individual FLCs
- MCPL-Main has benefited greatly from FRC programs held at the library (“Say It in Spanish”, etc.)
- MCPL-Ellettsville has done the opposite, holding many library programs at the FRC
- Some schools were left out of CAPE; others lost their FRCs in the current phase of the program
- Keep your fingers crossed for sustaining the program once the final phase of Lilly support ends in 2008.

The Questions

- What we asked the NIFL Family Literacy discussion list:
(<http://www.nifl.gov/mailman/listinfo/Familyliteracy>)
 1. Do you partner with public libraries/librarians?
 2. If so, what is the extent of the library's involvement with your program?
 3. How do you make use of the public library with the families you serve?
 4. In your experience, what are the pros and cons (strengths and weaknesses) of working with libraries/librarians?
 5. How many of you are librarians?

Some Answers: The Good, the Bad...

Literacy Program Developer,
LIFT-Missouri (“Missouri’s Literacy Resource Center”) <http://lift-missouri.org>

- “I have seen many responses to the families in these programs. Many librarians do not want those {crinkle your nose and look over your glasses} families in their libraries.”
- “Then there are other librarians who arrange special story hours specifically for our families and collect books related to the theme that the program is working on—both for the children and for the adults.”

Some Answers: The Good, the Bad...

Civics and Technology Coordinator, Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative (RIFLI)

- “We have been working in the past year to re-focus our efforts at engaging librarians in our program (we were beginning to be seen as outsiders) as well as integrating the library resources into our curriculum.”
- “I would say that in a program like ours, we have to be very proactive in voicing our mission and needs to the librarians so that our common goals are understood.”

Some Answers: The Good, the Bad...

Literacy Program Manager,

Illinois State Library Literacy Office,
Family Literacy Grant Program

- “Libraries can offer a powerful welcome to the reading world. On the other hand, there may be a cultural disconnect between many highly educated librarians and library patrons and the socioeconomic level of family literacy participants.”
- “...the family literacy program may just be one more responsibility loaded onto an already overworked librarian.”
- “In the successful programs, the learning is a two-way street and the library staff is enthusiastic and willing.”

**What about the
unsuccessful
programs?**

Some Answers: The Ugly

Coordinator,

White Earth Even Start Program

- “We’ve had very unsuccessful results in our family literacy program’s efforts to collaborate with our local library”
- “After several negative experiences in the library, we’ve decided to boycott the library and our families began a letter writing campaign to the main branch of the library department.”
- The White Earth Even Start Program has received a grant to support its own “READmobile” on the reservation.

In Sum

Family Literacy Faculty,

Adult Basic Education Department,
Edmonds Community College (Washington)

- “I believe the local library is one of the best and least utilized resources in many communities.”
- “Librarians are not alone in their lack of preparedness to understand or address the social welfare issues related to intergenerational poverty or the challenges facing newcomers to our country. It seems to be a common condition nationwide.”
- “As a professional in the field, I heartily agree with you about the partnership barriers of both habit and territory.”

Family Literacy and Public Libraries...

“I appreciate you bringing these issues to light; perhaps just the mention of them may jiggle the status quo mind set just a bit.”

Status quo mind set:
jiggled?