Indispensable Allies:
Understanding family members’ unique contributions to children’s early literacy and what we can do to support them

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PD For All
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Plan for the Session

I. Points to Ponder – Exploring what we believe about families’ roles in early language and literacy learning

II. Strategies that impact family engagement in early literacy activities: What the research says

BREAKOUTS

III. The power of the mirror: Representing our families in our collections and curricula

IV. Restrictions in access to texts: Why it matters and what we can do about it

V. Collaborative Action Planning & Review of Resources
Wi-Fi

Select Scott Conference Center
Pass: bestofomaha
Introduce your yourselves to one or two colleagues nearby...
Points to Ponder (p. 2)

• Take a couple of minutes to read the 4 statements on p. 2.

• Think about the extent to which you agree or disagree, and why.
  (there are no “right” answers – all are debatable)

• Choose one or two to discuss with colleagues.
What are you wondering?
What questions do you have?
How families can support early literacy learning—what the research says

• Increase conversation
• Engage in interactive book reading
• Provide access to texts/ build home library
• Integrate language and literacy into regular routines
Strategies for Increasing Family Engagement in Language and Literacy Activities

Rule #1: Keep it simple! (p. 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talk!</th>
<th>Sing!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read!</td>
<td>Play!</td>
</tr>
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Parent as first “teacher”

- Young parent
- Parent who feels undereducated
- Parent whose first language is not English
- Parent with low literacy
- Parent working two or three jobs
- Primary caregiver to a large extended family
- Parent whose home culture holds teachers in very high regard
Parent as first “teacher”

Talk!  
Sing!  
Read!  
Play!
What does talk have to do with early literacy?
Language Makes Readers

Oral language ↔ Literacy

Listening & Speaking → oral retellings → relating speech to print
Build comprehension through conversation


PD FOR ALL: INDISPENSABLE ALLIES
Talk, talk, talk: Increasing conversation

Number of Words Heard by Children Differs Across Income Groups

- Professional
- Working-class
- Welfare

Age of child in months

Estimated cumulative words addressed to child

The 30 Million Word Gap

Hart & Risley, 1995
Introducing new words

Continual exposure to lots of different words in lots of different contexts.
What do you notice?

What kind of words might Mom use to describe what she is noticing?
Strategies for Increasing Family Engagement in Language and Literacy Activities

Rule #1: Keep it simple! (p. 3)

- Talk!
- Sing!
- Read!
- Play!
Getting past common misconceptions about second language learning

1. Learning two languages in early childhood will delay acquisition of English.

2. Code-switching is a sign of confusion

3. Immersing young children in English-only programs in school is the best and fastest way to develop proficiency in English
Bilingualism and Common Underlying Language Proficiency

Dual language learning and code-switching ability have numerous distinct advantages

- Increases flexibility of thinking
- Improves ability to hold onto and work with information
- Develops strong working memory
- Inhibits distractions
- Supports self-regulation
- Builds unique pathways in the brain
- Increases metacognitive skills

**Adding a second language between 3-8 years old is ideal.**
SING!

What does singing have to do with early literacy?
SING!

• Builds vocabulary and background knowledge

• Patterns, rhythms, and rhymes support development of phonemic awareness

• Language “play” associated with songs develops metacognition and flexibility of thinking

“Sing what makes you happy!”
~ M. Glusman in I Love You Like Sunshine
READ!

What do you notice? What does it tell you?
Interactive book reading

• physically sharing a book in close proximity,
• engaging in active questioning and responding
• explaining and elaborating on children’s responses
• relating information to children’s life experiences
• has most positive effects with multiple re-readings

Family-friendly tips on p. 5

E-books vs. “real” books?
PLAY!

(and talk)

Dramatic/pretend play (restaurant server, mechanic, doctor) has strong connections to language development and literacy learning

• Experiment with new words and phrases
• Practice” narratives
• Take perspective of others
• Make inferences
• Problem-solve
• Nurture imagination
Engaging parents as indispensable allies in early literacy

Talk!  Sing!

Read!  Play!
Raffle Giveaways

I Love You Like Sunshine
How everyday play and bedtime stories grow love, connections, and understanding
A book for babies and parents

BOOK FIESTA!
A BILINGUAL PICTURE BOOK TO SHARE STORY BY STORY

Lottie Paris and the First Place

HOW TO READ A STORY

PD FOR ALL: INDISPENSABLE ALLIES
Using cultural knowledge and community experiences as resources for literacy learning

How many of us live in the same neighborhood where you work?
What are some ways that you have gotten to know the community your school, center, or program serves?
Turn and Talk

What are some ways that you have gotten to know your center/school community?

- Talk regularly with children and family members
- Attend all-school events (sports, literacy nights, book swap)
- Take public transportation and walk the neighborhood
- Patronize local businesses
- Get familiar with the landscape, local establishments
- Know where people shop, worship, gather
- Read neighborhood/community newspapers
- Listen to local talk radio
Representing families in our collections or curriculum

Books as “mirrors” and “windows”

(Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990)
Dedicated to the literacy learning of children in city schools

Research • Professional Development • Advocacy

kidslikeus.org
Culturally relevant texts:
Think broadly.

INCLUDES - Race, ethnicity, SES, language, gender, religion

BUT ALSO ...
- Where children live
- What their neighborhoods are like
- Who they spend time with
- What their families are like
- Where they go to school
- What contemporary kids are up to

Artwork by E.B. Lewis.
Multicultural ≠ Culturally Relevant

The Cat Who Came Indoors in Nelson Mandela’s Favorite Folk Tales (2007)

Artwork by E.B. Lewis.
“Culturally relevant” means more “mirrors”
What’s the big deal?
Rogers Park
Imagine that you are 4 years old...
But the next day, I can't wait to go with Morrie. After all, Raymond has a new pet at his favorite park, so Maia and I have to ride the bus downtown to buy more.

Sometimes there are kittens sleeping in the pet shop window. But when we arrive this time, something even better is behind the glass.
Why might “mirrors” matter for language and literacy development?
Culturally relevant literature matters in Emergent literacy

Oral language ↔ Literacy

Listening → oral retellings → relating speech to print
Culturally relevant literature matters for Interest and Engagement

(Wigfield, Guthrie, Eccles; Rueda 2011)

interest ➔ motivation ➔ frequency
Culturally relevant literature matters for Family engagement

(Larrota & Gainer, 2008; Ortiz & Ordonex-Jasis, 2005)
Brown Bear – Dual Language
Kindergarten
Niño Wrestles the World
1st grade
“No one went home to research mice when I read Chrysanthemum.”

“With Niño [Wrestles the World], they really were fascinated by some of the characters. One little girl went home and asked mom and dad about El Cucuy and brought me an article about it, and wanted to talk [with the class] about it. It really did light a fire, like oh I've heard about this person before...I'm gonna go ask grandma about it. So then we had stories [coming from home], and they really wanted to know more, even beyond the book. No one went home to research mice when I read Chrysanthemum, but they did go home and research some of the characters that were in the Niño book, once we read that.
“It’s not the same kind of connection”

“They connect to it because they see themselves in the book. It's different than if they see a book like Knuffle Bunny, which they love as well, but they're not really in that book culturally. They can maybe connect to losing a stuffed animal, but it's not the same kind of connection that they have when their grandma talks about the book.”
South Omaha
Night at the Fair
Brownville Flea Market
North Omaha
One Hot Summer Day
Think about the families you work with...

Can they find themselves well represented in your collection or curriculum?
Think about the diversity of family structures represented in your school community

- Single parent families?
- Two parent families?
- Extended families?
- Multigenerational?
- Biracial/multiracial?
- Adoptive families?
- Blended families?
- Same gender parents?
- Young parents?
- Families experiencing separation?
Diversity of Family Structures
Great board books for babies
BabYfaCes
Hugs & Kisses

Hugging and kissing are fun to do!
Families with a single parent
Extended, multigenerational families
Single, separated, or divorced parents
Relatives as primary caregivers
Adoptive or foster families

THE WHITE SWAN EXPRESS
A Story About Adoption

BRINGING ASHA HOME

IN OUR MOTHERS’ HOUSE

PD FOR ALL: INispensable Allies
Same gender parents
Multiracial, bicultural, or blended families
Family members separated by time, distance, or circumstance
Give a child a book, she'll be happy. Give a child a library, she'll be literate.
Access to texts in the home and community

• The availability of a variety of interesting books is highly predictive of reading achievement

• There are striking differences in access to text for children from different communities.

• Children from middle-income homes have on average 13 books per child. There is only one book for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods.

• A home library with as few as 10 books can make a dramatic difference in the reading trajectory of a young child
Beyond home
What do you notice?
How much access do our families have?

• Think about the “library” or collection of books available to you and your families through your program, center, or school.

• Complete the Access to Text survey on p. 6, answering as honestly as you can.

• If a question doesn’t apply to your setting, check no.
1. Get out your cell phone, laptop, tablet, or other device

2. Internet login: ScottConferenceCenter
   Password: bestofomaha

3. Go to kahoot.it
Post-Survey Discussion

What does this mean for our sites?

What steps might we take to increase families’ access to high-quality, culturally relevant texts?
Action Planning (p. 10)

How are we doing in supporting family members as partners in early literacy?

Think back over the content of the day.
Use the guiding questions on p. 10.
Discuss with colleagues.
Explore resources (p. 5-9).
Identify some next steps.
Connections to Gap Closing Practices

Educate the Whole Child

Prioritize Expressive Language and Communication

Strong Environment of Positive Interactions

Focus on Cultural and Personal Relevance

Cultivate Intellectual Rigor

Learning Objective

Start early. Start well.