Maximizing Family Involvement in Early Literacy

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Literacy activities at home are as unique as each child and his or her family, and many studies dealing with some aspect of early literacy acknowledge this fact (e.g., Hammer, Miccio & Wagstaff, 2003; Metsala et al., 1996). Some families may have a child who loves to interact with books—a child who moves instantly to the bookshelf and grabs three or four books whenever reading is mentioned. These youngsters are usually eager participants in any literacy activity. Other families may have a child who is resistant to most book sharing activities. Children like this are often described as “active.” They may prefer running and climbing and other mischief that appear designed to attract their parent’s attention as opposed to sitting and reading a book. In actuality, a majority of families have children who fall somewhere between these two stereotypes. Nonetheless, all families, regardless of variables such as socioeconomic status, hold a common desire for their children to learn and succeed in the world, but not all families know how to accomplish this goal (Metsala et al., 1996).

This article seeks to inform speech-language pathologists (SLPs) about the essentialness of family involvement in literacy-building experiences. A closer look will be taken at family literacy activities in order to learn why family involvement is crucial to the successful acquisition of reading and writing abilities. SLPs will also gain an understanding of how to maximize a family’s involvement in literacy development through the explanation of general principles of learning and intervention and specific guidelines related to early literacy.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING

Successful learning may be seen as consisting of at least three governing principles. The first of these principles maintains that learning is a process, not a product (Bruner, 1966). In this regard, whether it is reading an e-mail or calculating a math fact, knowledge building is not focused on the end result, but on the means to that result. Using the math fact example, the importance lies in understanding the mathematical principles of multiplication, not just the rote memorization of $2 \times 3 = 6$. Understanding the principles behind multiplication allows one to calculate novel math problems. In the same way, understanding and using the principles and strategies for reading allows someone to read new and interesting material, including e-mails. When learning is viewed as a process of coming to know, then knowledge building is the process of creating meaning in the world (Wells, 1998).
This leads us to the second principle of learning—that learning is meaning driven. Learning is a purposeful activity that occurs best during meaning-filled experiences in which the child is actively engaged (Damico, 1991). Learning entails immersing the child in experiences where he or she can pursue knowledge for a purpose; that purpose being the construction of meaning (Wells, 1986). An example of this can be seen in learning to ride a bike. A child learns to ride a bike for a specific, but individual, purpose. This is accomplished through numerous attempts, with parent mediation, at riding. That is, the child must get on the bike, balance, pedal, brake, and do all the other complex actions that make up the process of riding a bike. By being actively engaged in bike riding experiences, the child is able to create meaning for him- or herself. Likewise, the child reads the text in a book to construct meaning. He or she is not reading just to sound out words, but to come to learn something, perhaps a story (Wells, 1986). The point here is that learning occurs in meaning-filled situations from which a child is able to construct meaning.

Finally, learning is a collaborative activity that occurs in meaningful contexts (Bruner, 1983). During a child’s preschool years, the child’s home serves as the primary, natural environment for learning to occur (Hamilton, Roach, & Riley, 2003). However, learning, or meaning making, cannot be accomplished either independently by the child or through structured, decontextualized lessons. It takes a collaborative effort. In this way, more knowledgeable family and community members assist the child in meaning making. Duckworth (1987, 1991) refers to this active and engaging process as the “having of wonderful ideas.” In short, she describes a teachable moment; a unique point in time where a child is ready to learn something new. At this special time, a teacher, parent, therapist, or other competent community member can move the child to a new level of understanding. This does not mean giving the child the answer, but guiding the child to answer his or her own question. This collaborative and active discovery is the very foundation of meaningful learning. However, collaboration must occur within a context. To summarize, learning is a process that is meaning driven and that requires active engagement through collaboration in a context.

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

If we apply the general principles of learning to language development, then language learning should be meaningful, embedded, constructive, recursive, and achieved through active engagement (Damico, 1991). This process is most easily observed in a child’s acquisition of oral language, as demonstrated by Brown (1973) and Bruner (1983). Parents naturally talk around, with, and to children from birth. Oral communication is embedded in the child’s daily life. Words and phrases are repeated in diverse but meaningful contexts that enable the child to hear comprehensible but varied language for real purposes. All of this interaction engages the child and motivates him to construct meaning, not only of the world around him, but also of the spoken communication he hears. When children grow up immersed in oral language, it is not surprising that they will become an oral language user.

Similarly, this process is paralleled in written language. If a child grows up immersed in written language, he or she will learn to read and write. That is, the same foundational principles for learning an oral language apply to learning written language. Readers learn to read through repeated and guided experiences that allow them to create meaning from text. Reading development also occurs within a holistic event, and the focus for children is on understanding and reconstructing the information gained through book reading (Strømme & Mates, 1997). In short, reading development is a process that occurs over time and is best developed through meaningful, holistic activities. Further, through exploration of the printed word, children will discover the three major principles of literacy.

- Literacy is relational; that is, reading and writing are meaning-based activities.
- Literacy is functional (i.e., the written word serves a variety of functions).
- Literacy is linguistic, which means that written language has a form and structure that is organized and conventional (Goodman, 1984).

These principles of learning guide the development of understanding and using written language in children. Literacy researchers have not only looked at reading development; there is also a great amount of research supporting these ideas in writing acquisition (e.g., Olson, 1996; Smith & Elley, 1997). Writing development must also occur in meaningful, naturalistic events that are encouraged and guided by more competent community members. Generally, writing development moves from random scribbling to letter formation to meaning construction using invented spelling and finally, conventional written communication (Hall & Ruptic, 1994). This developmental progression shows a child’s ability to create meaning through written language, as well as how a child conventionalizes his written language over time.

Although reading and writing development can be divided into stages or phases, one cannot forget that literacy development is a process that occurs over time. Children learn through multiple interactions with the world and with others. With support and guidance from more experienced oral and written language users, children become more proficient meaning makers. Again, the same principles for any type of learning apply to language learning, whether it is oral or written.

IMPORTANT OF EARLY LITERACY ACTIVITIES

Because the general principles of learning apply to literacy development in the same manner as oral language acquisition, the importance of early literacy activities cannot be
routines to incorporate literacy-building teachable moments are crucial for children's literacy development. Using daily consciousness all the time, and these situations and experiences to read and write. Adults model literacy behaviors unconsciously. However, in this discussion, early literacy also refers to the more incidental way that a child acquires the dawning awareness of the three principles of literacy; namely, that the printed word is relational, functional, and linguistic.

Two other terms are also used in this article: literacy-building experiences and literacy activities. Literacy-building experiences refer to more general events and situations where literacy development can occur. Literacy activities, on the other hand, refer to specific interactions between a child and more literate community members that serve to specifically foster a child’s developing literacy. Exposure to literacy activities is a crucial factor in early and later literacy development. Children must have multiple meaningful, naturalistic encounters with reading and writing in order to become literate (Wells, 1986). Literacy-building experiences encompass a broad scope of activities. The most often cited activity among researchers is reading to children (e.g., Justice, Weber, Ezell, & Bakeman, 2002; Senechal & LeFevre, 2001). However, even book reading includes a wide range of activities. For example, adults can read a book verbatim to a child, adults can read and discuss a book with a child, or adults can merely use the book to foster a discussion about a related topic. All of these are literacy activities. However, even mundane, daily events such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping can be literacy-building experiences. For example, the activity of shopping can serve as a model for reading and writing. Creating a grocery list and then following it, comparing similar items at the store, looking at the aisle descriptions, and writing a check—all of these events require the ability to read and write. Adults model literacy behaviors unconsciously all the time, and these situations and experiences are crucial for children’s literacy development. Using daily routines to incorporate literacy-building teachable moments is the cornerstone for early literacy development.

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY LITERACY

If early literacy activities are the foundation for later literacy success, then family literacy is a crucial key to beginning literacy (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2000). Children need supportive, encouraging community members to guide them in their increasing awareness and understanding of the printed word. Family members are usually the most readily available individuals in the child’s world to provide a model and scaffold for the child’s burgeoning literacy development. Literacy-building experiences can occur with mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, and other extended family members (Edwards, 1995; Ortiz, 2000; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001). In addition to the importance of family involvement in literacy development, the abundance and variety of reading and writing materials is necessary for encouraging early literacy development (Taylor, 1983). Children must be exposed to books, papers, crayons, pens, environmental print, and more in order to gain access to the meaning-making process needed to understand the printed word.

Many factors play a role in how a family can foster literacy development in children. These factors can be divided into three sets. One set deals with the physical environment of the home (Leichter, 1984). This includes the literacy-building materials that are present as well as those that are absent in the house, the arrangement and accessibility of such materials, and a family’s economic and educational resources. For example, a parent’s literacy abilities, especially those of the primary caregiver, are a key educational resource that can play a decisive role in the child’s literacy development. A parent who struggles with illiteracy may be unable to encourage literacy development in his or her child. The physical arrangement of the household in terms of literacy models and accessibility to reading and writing materials sets the stage for a child’s literacy experiences.

The second set of family literacy-building factors includes interpersonal interactions (Leichter, 1984). Here, the focus is on how a parent or other caregiver responds to a child’s early forays into literacy. These responses influence subsequent literacy development, either positively or negatively. For example, if the child is encouraged, supported, and guided through the process of becoming literate, he or she will more likely develop successful reading and writing abilities. However, if the child experiences repeated discouragement, opposition, or apathy to his or her literacy ventures, the child may eventually abandon the desire to read and write. Although he or she may eventually learn to read and write, it will be difficult to regain the motivation and joy surrounding literacy. Basically, how a family discusses, responds to, and engages in literacy activities will significantly shape a child’s early literacy development.

Finally, there is a set of family literacy-influencing factors that relates to the motivational and emotional climate in the home (Leichter, 1984). To some extent, this set overlaps with the first two sets. Indeed, all of the factors are interdependent. However, this group’s distinction lies in how the family views the idea of literacy and becoming literate. The parents’ and other family members’ experiences with literacy will affect the child’s views of literacy. If the parents had positive experiences with literacy and believe in its importance, then the child will grow up in a house where literacy development is expected and valued. On the other hand, if the child’s parents had
differences or adverse experiences with learning to read and write, then the child’s literacy development may not be valued or even expected. This focus on the affective variable is especially important because parental and other familial attitudes toward literacy can positively or negatively affect a child’s early literacy experiences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SLPs

Having established the importance of early literacy-building experiences, especially family-based literacy activities, the next step is to discuss the responsibility of SLPs in maximizing a family’s role in early literacy development. In general, SLPs need to become aware of literacy-building experiences in the home and to collaborate with family members in order to increase their effectiveness in their child’s literacy development. Often, children with communication impairments engage in fewer literacy-building experiences than normally developing peers or even children with physical impairments (Marvin & Wright, 1997). Indeed, exposure to and parental mediation with literacy activities is vital to infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers with communication impairments. Awareness of the importance of early literacy-building experiences should alert the practicing SLP to the importance of incorporating literacy activities, in addition to the more traditional oral language development activities, when intervening with children in this population.

General Principles of Intervention

Once a clinician is aware of the necessity of including family literacy activities in intervention with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, he or she must then begin to actually incorporate such activities into therapy. Intervention must follow the same governing principles, including those related to learning. Further, one must remember that oral and written language development occurs in a simultaneous and synergistic fashion (Damico, 1991). Although literacy may take longer to become fully integrated into a child’s meaning-making system, the process is similar to a child learning to speak. Also, oral and written languages are mutually supportive and interactive. The following are basic governing principles for any type of intervention, but especially for early literacy development.

General Principle 1: Intervention should apply the principles of learning. Intervention should be process oriented, meaning driven, and contextualized. In regard to early literacy-building experiences, activities should be incorporated into the family’s daily routine in order to maintain a contextualization for learning and provide a purpose to such activities. Literacy activities should be carried out for a meaningful purpose that allows the process of literacy development to occur. A process orientation views language and literacy from a holistic perspective instead of a conglomeration of separate skills. It follows, then, that using books, magazines, and reading material that are already present in the family’s home will preserve contextualization. Also, children will see that the books in their home are used for a meaningful purpose, such as entertainment or learning. Finally, focusing on the whole experience of reading allows the child to learn the varied strategies and skills needed to read. Early literacy-building experiences that are designed to fulfill this principle will allow the child to begin to construct meaning from print.

General Principle 2: Intervention should meet the whole family’s needs. Intervention that maintains a family-centered perspective takes into account a family’s unique set of strengths and needs (Hamilton et al., 2003). By doing so, the clinician meets the family where they are. This means that a family’s current situation is used as a springboard for all intervention activities, including early literacy-building experiences. The family literacy factors, which were mentioned above, provide a means for discovering what a family’s situation may be. It is also essential to analyze the child’s strengths and needs within the family unit to determine what literacy activities are effective and what may have to be modified. For example, a child in a large family may not get much one-on-one book sharing time with a parent. One solution to the child’s need for individual book sharing time may be to enlist the help of other family members, such as older siblings or grandparents. Understanding a family’s specific situation as well as the child’s particular strengths and needs will allow the SLP to create an intervention plan that truly is individualized.

General Principle 3: Intervention should be a collaboration between the clinician and the family. Collaboration is a process where people actively work together toward an agreed-on goal (Chermak, 1993; Polmanteer & Turbiville, 2000). In collaboration, all participants are seen as experts. Family members have expertise on how their family functions and the specific strengths and needs of the child; the SLP brings his or her knowledge and experiences regarding children with communication disorders. All participants use their knowledge and experiences to identify concerns and generate intervention ideas. Then, all participants work together to implement mutually decided activities. Further, this principle is directly relatable to the previous principle because, in order to collaborate, the clinician must acknowledge and respect a family’s unique situation. Active participation of all family members and the clinician is crucial to successful intervention.

These three intervention principles should be a guiding force in all types of intervention, especially in a child’s early years, where the family is a critical element in a child’s overall development. Literacy development is no exception. Family interactions are an integral part of a child’s environment. Creating collaborative relationships where a family’s particular situation is accepted and valued is crucial to successful intervention. This means understanding a family’s particular goals regarding their child. Further, interventions that involve families should apply a process approach that creates a meaningful context in which the child can construct meaning.

Specific Guidelines

From general principles of intervention, some basic guidelines can be discerned. These guiding directives,
which are discussed below, can be implemented to shape successful intervention. It is important to remember that these guidelines are merely components of a rudimentary framework (see Table 1), not hard and fast rules. There is no guaranteed step-by-step process for maximizing family involvement in early literacy because each child and its family are unique. That being said, these guidelines will often be used in a sequential progression in order to fulfill the second general principle: Intervention should meet the whole family’s needs.

Guideline 1: Identify literacy activities. The first step when focusing on early literacy development is to identify literacy activities that the family is already employing. By doing so, literacy development intervention remains contextualized and meaningful to the family. Although many families may believe that literacy development only involves reading books (Justice et al., 2002), numerous daily events in the home can be viewed as literacy activities. For example, following a recipe, consulting a TV guide or phone book, and paying bills all involve reading and writing. In order to identify potential literacy events in a client’s home, the clinician should engage in multiple observations and interviews. This process will begin with the initial evaluation and continue with ongoing intervention. Discussing observation findings with family members will help the SLP to determine where and how to proceed (Leichter, 1984). This process of observation and discussion will continue with subsequent visits to the home, as the importance of continual assessment is a key element in efficacious intervention (Westby, Stevens-Dominguez, & Oetter, 1994).

It may be helpful for clinicians, especially those who are feeling overwhelmed, to begin by focusing on one particular routine, such as observing mealtime (including preparation and cleanup) or preparation for naptime. By observing and discussing a typical household event, the SLP can gain an understanding of how literacy activities are built into a particular whole experience. It is frequently necessary to observe the routine on more than one occasion as well as engage in multiple conversations about how literacy is being encouraged in that particular experience. Other family activities and routines can be added as the clinician becomes more comfortable with this method. Recognizing family literacy events is a crucial step to helping families learn to effectively facilitate a child’s literacy development.

Guideline 2: Support existing literacy activities. The next step in maximizing a family’s effectiveness in early literacy development is to support literacy activities within the home. Marvin and Wright (1997) eloquently stated, “When possible, efforts should be made to build on the literacy foundation laid at home rather than always assuming a need to rebuild or establish the foundation as the starting point” (p. 162). It is imperative to build on the family’s literacy-building experiences in order to empower and motivate the parents to become effective collaborators in the language and literacy development process. By using what the parents are already doing successfully, an SLP can build a collaborative relationship that seeks to meet the child’s communicative needs within the family structure. Returning to the mealtime example, a clinician would first engage in an observation period to determine what literacy activities are occurring. Perhaps while preparing lunch, the parent reads aloud the print on the cans, jars, or packages of food that are being used. In situations like this, the clinician can acknowledge this literacy-building experience and provide information on why it is beneficial to the child’s continued literacy development. With this guideline, it is imperative to reinforce existing literacy-building experiences and activities.

Guideline 3: Expand literacy activities. Once a clinician has identified existing literacy-building experiences in a family’s daily routine, he or she may confer with the parents for ways to expand the existing activities. Collaboration is a key component to successfully expanding a literacy activity. One must actively listen to a parent’s ideas and incorporate them as often as possible. Looking once again at literacy activities during mealtime, a brainstorm session with parents may lead to several ideas about increasing the amount of literacy activities during meals. Some ideas might include creating menus or placemats with text, reading recipes, or looking for other print in the kitchen. When an SLP works with family members to extend literacy activities, the family becomes an empowered collaborator in the literacy development process.

Guideline 4: Extend literacy activities. Finally, the SLP can engage in activities that guide the family to consider new ways to encourage the child’s literacy development. As the SLP collaborates with the family on literacy development, the family may decide to seek out new and different literacy-building experiences. Here, the clinician can use his or her expertise to guide the family in pursuing new avenues of literacy activities while remembering to keep the family needs in focus when extending a family’s repertoire of literacy activities. An easy way to accomplish this is to introduce possible activities into the family’s routine. Such activities could include providing information

Table 1. Framework for maximizing early literacy.

| Principles of learning       | Learning is a process. |
|                             | Learning is meaning driven. |
|                             | Learning is collaborative. |

| Principles of language learning | Language learning should be meaningful. |
|                                | Language learning should be embedded. |
|                                | Language learning should be constructive. |
|                                | Language learning should be recursive. |
|                                | Language learning should be actively engaging. |

| Principles of intervention    | Intervention should apply the principles of learning. |
|                              | Intervention should meet the whole family’s needs. |
|                              | Intervention should be a collaboration. |

| Guidelines for literacy intervention | Identify literacy activities. |
|                                     | Support existing literacy activities. |
|                                     | Expand literacy activities. |
|                                     | Extend literacy activities. |
about toddler storytime at the local library, modeling how to discuss a story with a preschooler, and showing parents what types of questions to ask or how long to engage in book-reading activities. Such simple suggestions could significantly enhance a family’s literacy-building experiences.

On a broader level, the SLP could seek ways to bring printed materials into some households. There are many programs that seek to increase the amount of appropriate books in a child’s home (e.g., Edwards, 1995; Theriot et al., 2003). Through a clinician’s active involvement in these types of programs, families can gain better access to appropriate reading materials for their child. Guiding a family to either more effective use of current literacy activities or introducing new literacy-building experiences into the home is the responsibility of SLPs working with preschoolers.

**CASE ILLUSTRATION**

The following anecdote describes the beginning 2 months of speech-language therapy between an early intervention SLP and the family of a 22-month-old male, Caleb. Caleb had been referred to early childhood intervention because of a suspected language delay. The clinician’s initial visit with the family was to conduct a speech-language evaluation. Caleb was found to be a healthy, active child who babbled often, but only had three or four words in his speaking vocabulary. He was able to follow one- and two-step directions as well as respond to simple questions. On the basis of the information obtained in the evaluation, the clinician diagnosed him with an expressive language delay.

During the evaluation, the clinician asked his mother, Lilly, about his interest in books. Lilly replied that Caleb preferred to either mouth books or throw them, so she restricted his access to books. She also expressed frustration at his lack of interest in “reading books.” The clinician took this opportunity to look for books or other printed materials in the environment. She saw three or four books on a countertop out of his reach and a set of blocks with letters and related pictures on them on the floor (e.g., a bike on the B block). His mother reported that the books were for his older sister, age 4, but that Caleb enjoyed playing with the blocks. During this initial visit, the clinician learned that Lilly has returned to vocational school to continue her education. All of this information indicated that the family valued literacy and education. Further, the parents wanted to encourage Caleb’s literacy development, but they were not sure how. This evaluation visit allowed the clinician to identify some literacy-building activities that were already occurring in the home (i.e., playing with print-rich toys, mother reading education-related materials) as well as to begin to support these activities by overtly identifying them. Further, she was able to identify an area of concern: Caleb’s limited access to books.

In the next couple of visits, the clinician completed oral language development activities as well as literacy-building ones. She continued to support the family’s existing literacy activities through identification and encouragement. This occurred mostly in short discussions with Caleb’s mother. Additionally, the clinician suggested ways to expand the current literacy activities. For example, instead of the mother taking away books when Caleb started to throw them, the clinician encouraged the mother to model how to turn the pages and then let Caleb try it with close guidance. Through these interactions and discussions, the clinician became aware that books were prized in the home because of the family’s limited income. Lilly, the mother, was worried about Caleb tearing up books that cannot be replaced easily. With the clinician’s guidance, Caleb and his family were able to increase his appropriate interaction with books. Further, through the clinician’s observation and listening, she came to understand the family’s attitudes and beliefs regarding literacy and books.

By the eighth visit, the clinician was ready to work with the family to extend Caleb’s literacy activities. At an earlier session, the mother had expressed a desire to know what kind of books to purchase for Caleb. So, for this session, the clinician brought along a variety of books. These books included small, cardboard-page books; books with flaps; and books with photos. Together, the clinician and the mother interacted with Caleb using the different types of books. Lilly indicated her belief that little books with photos are best for Caleb at this time. The clinician, then, took the time to discuss some options in the community for obtaining books. Caleb’s mother was particularly interested in a program where a parent can pick up free books from the neighborhood elementary school. Through listening, encouraging, and educating the family on literacy activities, the clinician enhanced the family’s literacy-building experiences. This example illustrates some of the things clinicians can do to maximize family involvement in literacy-building experiences. Table 2 provides other specific suggestions, although it is by no means an exhaustive list.

The uniqueness of each family and their relationship with the clinician will require the clinician to collaborate with the family to create individualized literacy-building activities and experiences. In most cases, the clinician may begin a discussion on literacy during the initial assessment. Here, asking open-ended questions such as, “How does X interact with books?” and responding in a nonjudging manner can initiate a collaborative relationship between the clinician and the family. This includes verbal responses such as, “that’s not reading and writing” as well as nonverbal reactions like frowning. Next, the clinician may want to use the first sessions to identify and support existing literacy-building experiences. Although a child’s interaction with books is an important place to begin, other literacy activities should also be explored. When expanding existing literacy activities, the parent’s ideas and suggestions should be incorporated whenever possible. Even if the suggestion seems farfetched, like reading a newspaper to the child, try to incorporate some aspect of it. For example, in the newspaper reading suggestion, it might be possible to have the parent read only the comics section or the kids page. Finally, it is important to present new literacy-building experiences as possibilities, with the decision on participation resting with the family. Here, the clinician’s
Table 2. Practical suggestions for each guideline.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guideline 1: Identify literacy activities.</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Ask open-ended questions about literacy.</td>
<td>• Be nonjudgmental and remember that each family is unique.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discuss the family’s literacy values, attitudes, and beliefs.</td>
<td>• Look for the presence of books.</td>
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<td>• Look for the presence of other printed material (especially on toys).</td>
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<th>Guideline 2: Support existing literacy activities.</th>
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<td>• Point out print that is available to the child (in books, on toys, etc.).</td>
<td>• Discourage the parent’s personal literacy activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Praise the current literacy activities.</td>
<td>• Think outside the book; support all types of literacy-building experiences.</td>
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<td>• Make parents aware of the positive effects of literacy activities on their child.</td>
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<th>Guideline 3: Expand literacy activities.</th>
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<td>• Model good techniques such as read-alouds and think-alouds.</td>
<td>• Discuss the successes and failures of specific literacy activities that have been completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Brainstorm with the family on ways to improve current literacy activities.</td>
<td>• Show the family how the child is progressing in literacy development.</td>
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<th>Guideline 4: Extend literacy activities.</th>
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<td>• Provide information on library programs.</td>
<td>• Provide information on free book programs in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Give information on appropriate books.</td>
<td>• Encourage other family members to be active participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Connect parents to adult literacy programs.</td>
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role should primarily be to provide information, not give an opinion. This is especially true when broaching the subject of adult literacy programs. Care must be taken not to embarrass or belittle the adult who struggles with illiteracy. Although these principles and guidelines are effective tools, they must be applied uniquely to each individual family.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to more closely investigate the issue of family literacy and to consider how SLPs might best guide families in their child’s early literacy development. When considering both oral and written language learning, one must keep in mind the theoretical principles that are the foundation for learning. That is, learning must be process oriented, meaning driven, and context based. Further, learning occurs over time through active engagement. Therefore, children must be exposed early and often to literacy-building experiences if they are to become literate individuals. These literacy activities must also be varied and include activities beyond book reading. Because the family is the primary medium for a child’s early communicative interactions, it follows that the family plays an essential role in a child’s early literacy development. A family’s physical environment, their interpersonal interactions, and the emotional climate of the home all combine to influence a child’s early literacy development. SLPs, especially those who work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, are in an ideal position to improve a family’s literacy-building experiences. This is accomplished by following some general principles of intervention; namely, intervention should be family focused, collaborative, and based on theoretical learning principles. By incorporating a few guidelines, a clinician can maximize a family’s involvement in early literacy. The observation and discussion of a family’s literacy activities can aid a clinician’s awareness of the different literacy-building experiences occurring in the home. Subsequently, he or she can support the family by acknowledging and expanding their current literacy activities. Finally, the SLP can extend a family’s literacy-building experiences by introducing new activities. Through collaborative efforts with families, SLPs can create positive early literacy-building experiences for the whole family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge the support and direction of Dr. Jack Damico. As a superb mentor, his constructive criticism and guidance in the writing process were integral to the publication of this article.

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