Handbook of Family Literacy

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The Role of Family Literacy in Society

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Part I
Overview of Family Literacy

The introductory chapter in this handbook provides a conceptual and empirical foundation for the sections that follow, beginning with information on how the concept of literacy has evolved over time from a focus only on reading and writing to a more plural view that takes into account the functions of literacy and the interactions between culture and literacy. The authors, Barbara Hanna Wasik and Barbara Van Horn, build on their collective experiences in family literacy, early childhood, parent education, and adult education to examine family literacy, both as a phenomenon of family life and as a framework for literacy services. Several major variables with a direct bearing on family literacy in the United States and globally are discussed, including (a) demographic data on the literacy levels of adults, (b) children's literacy levels, (c) the influence of parents on children's literacy, and (d) the impact of immigration on child and adult literacy education. Literacy levels of parents are highly predictive of child outcomes and for this reason they become a significant factor when considering children's literacy development. Also, parent interactions with children are well documented as significant factors in children's language and literacy development. Children's early literacy levels, in turn, are also highly predictive of school outcomes; without intervention children who begin preschool or elementary school with low literacy skills are likely to maintain their relatively low status throughout their schooling. This empirical evidence, expanded upon in later chapters, provides the strongest rationale for involving parents in literacy interventions with their children.

This overview chapter also includes statistics on current immigration status in a sampling of countries to illustrate the need for basic literacy skills on the part of many adult immigrants. The children of adult immigrants are often at risk of low school performance and experience added challenges when entering the formal educational system. By providing both parent and child services, family literacy programs are uniquely positioned to assist these families. The statistics documenting large numbers of both immigrant and nonimmigrant adults and children without basic literacy skills add to the empirical research of parent influences on child development that supports the role for family literacy programs. The statistics also provide urgency to learning how best to help parents and children gain the literacy skills important for accessing educational and work opportunities, as well as opening doors for other life opportunities.

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The Role of Family Literacy in Society

Barbara Hanna Wasik and Barbara Van Horn

The intergenerational transfer of literacy has intrigued educators, researchers, and policy makers, and served as a fundamental rationale of family literacy programs. Children who come into the world without language learn one of thousands of languages, depending upon the family into which they are born. Not only does the family determine the child's early language, but a family's culture, beliefs, and traditions also influence the way children use words for discourse (Heath, 1983). Their family's literacy levels also influence whether children develop strong language skills as well as reading and writing skills. Some parents provide a strong foundation for language and literacy at home, having many print materials available and modeling the use of reading, writing, and math in daily life. Other families communicate primarily through oral language, with storytelling being an important way to share family or cultural history. Regardless of a family's desires for their children's success, some parents, especially those with limited literacy skills or formal education, do not have the knowledge or skills needed to adequately support their children's early language and literacy development. As a result, these children often struggle with and do not master school-related literacy skills, putting them at a lifelong disadvantage related to educational outcomes, future employability, and social and health status.

Internationally, the impact of literacy on economic and social indicators is of increasing interest. The relationship between educational attainment and income has been well-documented in the United States and other countries (Blanden & Gregg, 2004; Day & Newburger, 2002; Hertz et al., 2007). Further, business and industry leaders continue to stress the need for more highly educated adults to fill positions, many of which require at least some postsecondary education or training. These positions require more advanced academic skills (e.g., reading and writing, mathematics and numeracy, technology, problem-solving) and are more likely to pay family-sustaining wages than positions that do not requires these skills. This global need for better skilled workers has raised awareness and increased commitments to adult literacy. Studies on literacy and health outcomes have also highlighted the importance of literacy for understanding medical information (Moon, Cheng, Patel, Baumhaft, & Scheidt, 1998), for compliance with medical procedures and for patient safety (Immink, & Payongayong, 1999; Moon et al., 1998; Williams, Baker, Honig, Lee, & Nowlan, 1998), and for more positive child health outcomes (DeWalt, & Hink, 2009; Sanders, Federico, Klass, Adrams, & Dreyer, 2009; Sandiford, Cassel, Montenegro, & Sanchez, 1995), underscoring the broad implications for literacy far beyond schooling and employment.

One of the compelling global issues of literacy education is whether we can reach the goal of having all young children become literate before they reach adulthood, able to function at their

full potential in society. To reach this goal, we need to know the best way to reach out to families to collaborate in this process as well as the best services to provide to families for assisting their children. We also need to examine the most advantageous combination of services.

Family literacy is a term with multiple definitions used to refer to both the type of discourse within families as well as to services that are provided to enhance the literacy skills of family members. In this chapter, we first consider definitions of literacy and how these have broadened over time, then we review several influences on the development of family literacy interventions, namely theoretical positions related to child and adult development; data on adult and child literacy levels; the relation between parent and child literacy skills; and immigration.

Definitions of Literacy and Family Literacy

Literacy Definitions

In the early part of the 20th century, the term "literacy" was defined by the terms "reading" and "writing" and was seen primarily as a set of skills gained through schooling. This conceptualization of literacy as a set of skills has been described by Baron as "One of the most powerful metaphors for literacy in public discussions of reading and writing" (2007, p. 161). Elaborating on the metaphor of skills, Barton noted that "It underpins the way politicians and the media discuss literacy issues" and it is also "[b]ehind discussions and headlines on falling standards, the need to improve the teaching of reading and the 'problem' of adult literacy …" (2007, p. 161). Through his examination of the role of schools, Barton observed that though school literacy is only one of the ways literacy is defined, it is a prevalent and pervasive concept of literacy.

This emphasis upon literacy as a collection of skills, moving from a simpler set to a more sophisticated and complex set, has roots in the early part of the twentieth century when psychologists became interested in studying skills such as cognition and intelligence. This concept of literacy has continued to influence the research on literacy and has been a dominant force in the study of both child and adult literacy, as we will examine in more detail later. Although literacy is still conventionally defined as the ability to read and write, the meaning of literacy has expanded to encompass a set of complex, multidimensional skills that begin at birth and develop over a person's lifetime.

A second factor influencing definitions of literacy is a focus on the functions of literacy. This emphasis on functions began to appear as early as World War II, when the United States Army used the term "functional literacy" to indicate "the capability to understand written instructions necessary for conducting basic military functions … at a fifth grade reading level" (Sharon, 1973, p. 148). Further examples of the focus on the functions of literacy were seen in 1991, when the National Literacy Act of the United States federal government defined literacy as "… an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential." This definition was later expanded to include a person's ability to function in his or her family (The Workforce Investment Act of 1998). These legislative definitions call attention to the adult learner not only as worker, citizen, and community member, but also as parent and family member, and they are consistent with the expanded concept of literacy in the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) project. EFF identified four categories of skills adults need to conduct the primary roles in their lives: communication skills, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and lifelong learning skills. Examples of these four areas illustrate that literacy can be described as a formal skill within an educational setting as well as skills necessary for informal everyday situations, such as problem solving and decision making (Stein, 2000).

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) sponsored the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) and the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993; Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007). Both studies defined literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Kutner et al., 2007, p. 2). Literacy was tested directly in each survey by having adults apply reading and math skills as they would in common daily tasks. In 2004, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proposed plural operational definition of literacy:

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.
>
> *(UNESCO, 2004, p. 13)*

This change in conceptualization of literacy over time, moving from a more restricted definition of literacy encompassing reading, writing, and calculating skills, to a plural conceptualization that takes into consideration the meanings and dimensions of these competencies has been traced in a UNESCO report (2004). Though this broader view has been promoted by the United National General Assembly as part of the global effort towards Education for All and is endorsed by many theorists, it has not yet permeated actual literacy efforts in many nations (UNESCO, 2004).

In the following section we examine the concept of family literacy, followed by a discussion of family literacy interventions. We then examine four factors that influence policies and practices related to family literacy, both in the United States and internationally: theoretical concepts, demographic data on adult and child literacy proficiency; parent influences on child literacy interactions; and immigration.

Family Literacy Definition

The term "family literacy" was first used almost 30 years ago to describe discourse within the family (Taylor, 1983). Research findings have informed our understanding of how discourse and dialogue within the family influence children's language and literacy learning as well as how distinctive family patterns can be, even among families living in similar circumstances or locations. In her detailed ethnological study of families in North Carolina, Heath (1983) showed how family values and communication patterns contributed to differences among children in two very small communities just a few miles apart, and how children in both these small communities differed from children who grew up in the nearby town. Her observations about the use of oral language and print among all three groups of children and their communities provided one of the most nuanced documentations of cultural differences related to language and literacy and how these differences influenced children's performance in school.

As discourse, family literacy is inclusive of the oral and written communications within the family and it encompasses the family's efforts to support the language and literacy development of their children. Indeed, it is this definition that often puts some professionals at odds with others, as some wish to keep a focus on interactions that are unique to the family, while others see the need for skill development essential for success in educational and work place settings. This bind is noted by Faircloth and Thompson in this handbook as they discuss the tension between the traditional literacy practices in Native American families in contrast to literacy skills needed

for education and economic success. Similarly, Scott, Brown, Jean-Baptiste, and Barbarin stress the need to be inclusive of family beliefs and values when considering services to families. Furthermore, using the oral traditions and cultural heritage of families can provide a creative and empowering means of helping families develop reading and writing skills important for many everyday functions, and can potentially serve as a foundation for more advanced literacy development (e.g., Adra, 2004).

On a broader level, the literacy skills of families are central to the literacy proficiency of neighborhoods and communities; viewed collectively, they determine the literacy levels of individual countries around the world. That the family is instrumental in these highly significant international phenomena is no surprise, given the extensive documentation of the correspondence between parental literacy levels and children's literacy skills. Other social organizations, especially schools, certainly carry a significant responsibility for producing a literate society, but they can accomplish their mission better when families are able to provide children with a firm foundation in language and early literacy prior to school entrance. Because some families may lack the skills or knowledge to help their children succeed in school and later employment, many societies have provided services to help ensure that not only children but also the adults have opportunities to gain these skills (UNESCO, 2008).

Family Literacy Interventions

Family literacy intervention has been broadly defined as almost any two-generation program focused on direct or indirect services to children and adults, even if the adults are not the children's parents. A more specific definition for intervention purposes began to characterize family literacy in the 1980s in the United States, and by the early 1990s, the term "family literacy" came to be associated with a specific set of services provided to families. This conceptualization of family literacy included direct services to both parents and children in an integrated program that not only offered early childhood education and adult education, but also provided parents with experiences to enhance their children's literacy skills.

For family literacy interventions in the United States, considerable attention has focused on literacy skills because these literacy skills are highly associated with either the desired or expected outcomes for children and adults. Family literacy services often include an early childhood education component and an adult education component, both of which are associated with schooling where assessment of literacy attainment periodically occurs to determine mastery of skills. A review of the assessments used in family literacy interventions shows a strong focus on children's early language and literacy (Lonigan, McDowell, & Phillips, 2004) and adult reading and math skills (Van Horn & Forlizzi, 2004). In the first edition of this *Handbook on Family Literacy*, the history of family literacy in the United States was traced (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). In brief, these services have their roots in programs implemented in Kentucky, first in the PACE program and then in programs initiated and supported by the National Center for Family Literacy. The federal government funded its first family literacy program in 1989 under the title of the Even Start Family Literacy Program. These initiatives all shared an intervention structure that called for four program components: early childhood education, parent education, parent and child literacy interactions, and adult education. During the next two decades, the federal government provided funding to local programs through state governments to implement these programs.

The prevailing definition of family literacy services in the United States is in Section 9101(20) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (P.L 89-10), most recently reauthorized under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 106-554). This legislation describes family literacy services as services provided on a voluntary basis. Services are to be of sufficient

intensity and duration to make sustainable changes in a family. Furthermore, the services are to integrate all of the following:

A. Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children
B. Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children
C. Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency
D. An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

The initial legislative guidance required local agencies to use existing services when possible. Thus, if there were an existing community service, such as an early childhood program serving the targeted population, the program was to collaborate with this local service in developing its overall program. Over time, this guideline of requiring the use of existing community services was modified, allowing programs to set up their own specific components when needed to help ensure that quality components were being used.

Each of the first three major cycles of funding was associated with a call for program evaluation and each renewed funding included modifications based on evaluation outcomes (St.Pierre, Ricciuti, & Tao, 2004). For example, based on results of the first national evaluation, programs were required to serve at least a 3-year age range of children, to target the neediest families, and to expand services to young teen parents. The second national evaluation provided evidence of a positive correlation between the amount of participation with child and adult outcomes, leading to a recommendation that projects provide intensive services. All the major evaluations resulted in limited evidence of program effectiveness and led to questions about the continuing government support of family literacy through the Even Start program.

Rather than conduct a fourth national evaluation, a decision was made at the national level for a randomized experimental study to evaluate two main research questions on the federal Even Start program. This national experimental study, the Even Start Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes (CLIO) Study, was implemented in 2003 with 120 Even Start Family Literacy Programs assigned to one of four interventions or to a control group. Two key questions were addressed: "Is the combination of research-based, literacy-focused preschool and parenting curricula more effective than existing Even Start services?" and "Do research-based parenting curricula that focus on child literacy add value to the CLIO preschool curricula?" Several significant outcomes were obtained, including two measures of preschool instruction: support for print knowledge and literacy resources in the classroom; one of three measures of parenting education, namely the amount of time during the parent education session spent on child literacy; two measures of parenting outcomes, namely parent interactive reading skill and parent responsiveness to their child; and child social competence. Results did not show statistically significant effects for child language development or early literacy outcomes (Judkins et al., 2008).

Though federal Even Start funding has ended, interest at the national level in family literacy interventions has continued with funding from private sources and local governments. Other organizations and agencies have made modifications in the earlier four component model. Some, for example, focus on early childhood education and parenting, without an emphasis on the parent's own literacy skills and education. Internationally, the definition of family literacy services is also more varied. Though many international interventions are intergenerational, their objectives range from ones more inclusive of both child and parent literacy, as described for Great Britain (see Brooks, Hannon, and Bird in this volume), to ones that are more circumscribed, addressing immediate everyday literacy needs of families and helping parents develop strategies to promote their children's literacy learning, as described for South Africa (see Desmond in this volume). UNESCO (2008) has promoted adult literacy internationally for many years, and a

significant number of these programs are intergenerational in focus. Others, at the minimum, recognize the needs of parents in supporting their own children's learning.

Efforts in the United States and internationally are often driven by data on adult and child literacy levels as well as by research on the relations between parent literacy and child literacy. In many countries, the United States, Germany, and Turkey being examples, immigrant and dual language learners are also driving concerns with adult and child literacy. Before turning to these data-driven influences, the views of two theorists who have influenced work in family literacy interventions will be described.

Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky's Concepts

In the first volume of this handbook, Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1989) well-known model regarding child development provided the organizing framework as well as the theoretical foundation for many chapters (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). His ecological theory continues to provide an organizing framework for this second edition, because its depiction of the child as nested within the family, and the family as nested with increasingly more complex social organizations, including community, religious organizations, health organizations, and educational organizations, is highly germane for the content and interactions addressed in family literacy programs. Furthermore, his ecological theory is equally relevant for adult learners, whose own development is influenced by the complex environments in which they reside. His model helped draw attention to both proximal and distal influences on children's development, and on the interactions and connections of the individuals within the settings where the child resides. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the nested settings begin with the microsystem where the family resides and includes the neighborhood and community. The next level is the exosystem, environments where the parents participate, but the child rarely enters. In the macrosystem are the social and cultural beliefs. In explaining the macrosystem's importance, Bronfenbrenner observed that the "patterns of belief and behavior characterizing the macrosystem are passed on from one generation to the next through processes of socialization, carried by various institutions of the culture, such as family, school, church, workplace, and structures of government" (1989, p. 229).

As Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory evolved over time, he expanded his emphasis upon the child's environment to a more bioecological model that helped ensure the developing person was kept central. He added four elements to his model: process, person, context, and time (PPCT) and developed several propositions to help elucidate his ideas.

As one of these propositions, Bronfenbrenner noted that children require participation in progressively more complex reciprocal activity with one or more persons with whom the child develops a strong, mutual, irrational, emotional attachment and who is committed to the child's well-being and development. In elaborating on his model, Bronfenbrenner wrote:

> Especially in its early phases, and to a great extent throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the person, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment.
>
> *(1995, p. 620)*

Vygotsky's understanding of learning as taking place within a social setting has also provided an extremely valuable foundation for understanding the role of adults in the literacy and language development of children. The concept of "social constructivism" provides us with a useful description of how Vygotsky's developmental model takes place (Stone, 2004). Stone notes that it is through guided participation in desired activities that children gain knowledge of the cultural

tools in a particular society (2004, p. 8). Such "tools" include language devices, literacy practices and social rituals. Van Kleeck, in her description of scaffolding, noted that it is this scaffolding or mediation process that helps the child succeed as the adult continually challenges the child to gain more advanced skills (van Kleeck, 2004). During Bronfenbrenner's career, he became familiar with the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986), noticing the relevance of his theories for children's development; it is possible to see Vygotsky's influence in Bronfenbrenner's writings. From this brief consideration of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky, we note in both an appreciation for the role and responsibility of the adult in moving the child to increasingly more complex behaviors—an attentive, observant, responsive adult who not only scaffolds but does so within a positive encouraging interaction.

Documentation of Literacy Needs

Adult Literacy

Adult education interventions are driven by the needs of millions of adults who do not have basic literacy skills. Data from the 2003 *National Assessment of Adult Literacy* report (Kutner et al., 2007) provide a picture of the literacy levels of adults in the United States obtained from a survey of individuals age 16 and above. In this report, *below basic skills* are defined as no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills; *basic skills* are defined as the ability to perform simple and everyday literacy activities; *intermediate skills* are defined as moderate ability to perform challenging literacy activities; and *proficient skills* are defined as the ability to perform complex and challenging literacy activities. Data showing that approximately 30 million adults in the United States lack the literacy skills essential for performing simple everyday literacy activities and another 63 million adults who can perform these simple literacy activities but find it difficult to obtain employment in a job sector that paid family-sustaining wages clearly illustrate the serious concern over adult literacy in the United States. Not only are adult employment and income negatively influenced, but their ability to support their children's learning and education are hampered (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Adult literacy is also a major concern in other countries. UNESCO has been a central figure in global literacy efforts and has engaged in numerous initiatives to promote literacy within and across countries. Even though its efforts and those of many individual countries have been extensive, UNESCO (n.d.) reports that one in five adults is still not literate, with a global adult literacy rate of 83.7%. For youth, the literacy rate is 89.3%. For adults, the percent translates into approximately 793 million individuals without minimum literacy skills, about two-thirds of whom are women. These data signify that the goal of literacy for all is far from its target. The sixth edition of the EPA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2007) noted that "illiteracy
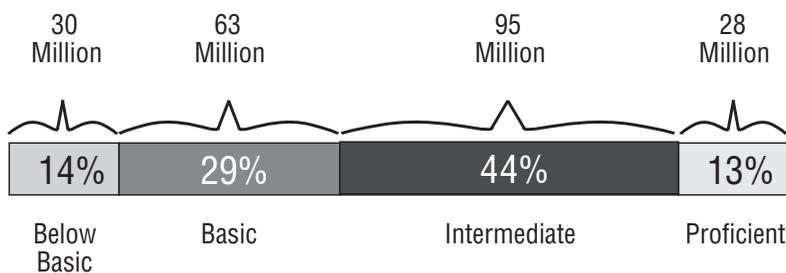

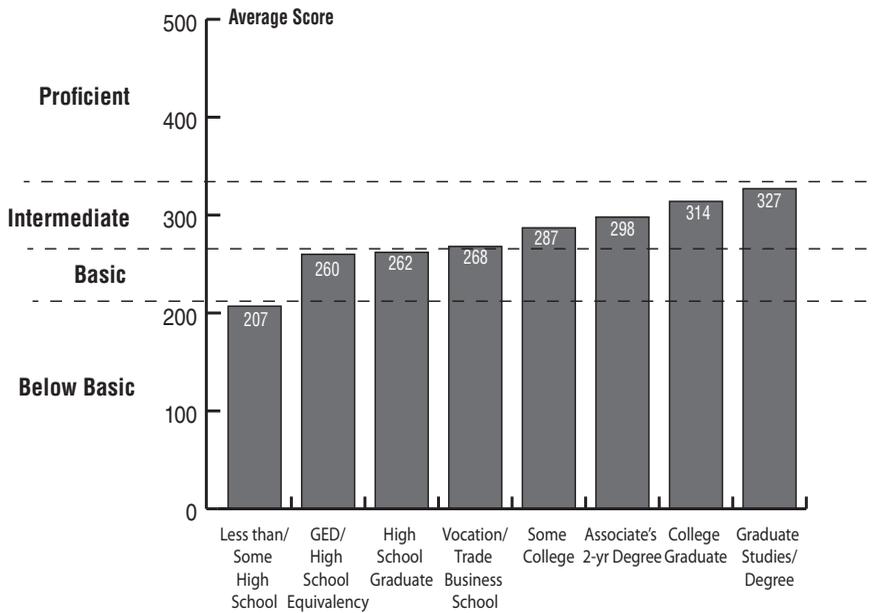*Figure 1.1*   Literacy levels of adults age 16 and above (2003)

Figure 1.2 Prose literacy by educational attainment: 2003. *Note:* Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003 and 4 percent in 1992) are excluded from this table. *Source:* U.S.Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

is receiving minimal political attention and remains a global disgrace" (p. 4). The high rates of functional illiteracy and the lack of livelihood skills makes it especially difficult for women to participate in family and community activities or to help their children.

Children's Early Literacy and Reading Levels

One of the ways we can gauge children's early literacy levels in the United States is to review data on the *nation's report card* on reading. These data are presented in Table 1.3. The children below basic and at or above basic encompass the total number of children, while those at or above basic are further divided into those at or above proficient and advanced. Thus, for those children at or above basic, only 33% in 2009 were proficient, a figure not different from the 2007 data and only slightly different since 2002.

These data call out for renewed energy for addressing children's literacy levels. Data documenting that between 33% and 41% of fourth grade children assessed over the past 17 years do not meet basic literacy levels should provide a driving force for multiple national efforts. This information on low literacy skills of children in the elementary grades takes on even more significance when viewed in light of longitudinal studies related to early school performance. Researchers have found that children who do poorly in the early grades also perform poorly in later elementary grades (Juel, 1988) and in high school (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Data from recent longitudinal study has shown that children's achievement in sixth grade predicts their high school graduation rates (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). Moreover, Duncan and colleagues (2007), using six large-scale data sets to create longitudinal predictions based on preschool literacy measures and measures of achievement in third and fifth grade, obtained additional evidence for the predictive value of preschool data for later school performance. These

Table 1.1 National Data on Fourth Grade Reading Levels, 1998–2009.

Year	Below Basic	At or Above Basic	At or Above Proficient	At or Above Advanced
2009	33	67	33	8
2007	33	67	33	8
2005	36	64	31	8
2003	37	63	31	8
2002	36	64	31	7
2000	41	59	29	7
2000	37	63	32	8
1998	40	60	29	7
1994	40	60	30	7
1992	38	62	29	6

[1] 1992 Accommodations were not permitted for this assessment.

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant. Analyze *results* with NAEP Data Explorer.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1992, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 Reading Assessments.

data also emphasize the need to begin with interventions early, either at the preschool level or as soon as children enter the elementary grades. In the section below the influence of the home environment and parents on child literacy provide insight for how to change the trajectory of these low literacy outcomes for children.

Parent and Home Influences on Child Literacy

Long before children enter any kind of formal educational setting, they learn their home language through interactions with their family and gain an implicit knowledge of grammar from experience, not from direct teaching. This ability to master oral language through everyday interactions provides the foundation for children to develop literacy skills—skills that will help them later decode the symbols of their social setting, especially the symbols essential for reading and writing. Support for this phenomenon has been available since the 1960s, but more recent studies have provided strong evidence for how parent and child interactions contribute to children's literacy and language development.

Several studies using national and other databases have reinforced the importance of family members' roles in developing young children's language and emergent literacy skills. In fact, Sastry and Pebley (2010) found that mothers' "reading scores and average neighborhood levels of income accounted for the largest proportion of inequality in children's achievement" (p. 777) in school. Mothers' reading scores had the largest effect on their children's reading achievement—larger than family income or assets, average neighborhood levels of income, or mother's years of formal education. Years of formal education, however, do play a role. Planty and colleagues (2009) found that kindergartners whose mothers have higher levels of formal education are more likely to score in the highest quartile in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge than all other children. O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008) found that 73% of children whose mothers have bachelor's degrees read aloud to their children every day, while only 30% of children whose mothers have not completed high school are read aloud to every day. The difference between parents with college degrees and those with less than a high school diploma are further

delineated in results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, illustrating the con-nection between parents' literacy level and interactions with their young children. For example, a higher percentage of parents with intermediate or proficient prose literacy read to their young children five or more days per week compared with parents with basic or below basic prose literacy. A higher percentage of parents at the higher literacy levels had children who knew the alphabet than did parents with lower literacy levels. The percentage of parents who never helped their children with homework or worked on homework with their children declined with each higher prose literacy level (Kutner et al., 2003).

The importance of the home environment has been documented through numerous empiri-cal studies. Hart and Risley (1995) in their now-classic study clearly documented a relation between parent interactions with their child and the child's language outcomes and later school performance. Research on the home environment has also been studied intensely by Bradley and his colleagues (1989), who found significant effects for both the materials in the home as well as parent-child interactions. Other researchers have examined the effects of interventions in child outcomes, documenting the effectiveness of interactive book reading (Landry & Smith, 2006; Landry, Smith, Swank, & Guttentag, 2008). Considerable evidence has accumulated sup-porting the ability of parents to use dialogic reading procedures for advancing their children's early literacy skills (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; see Lonigan and Shanahan, this volume). In dialogic reading, parents are provided with instructions for how to encourage the child's attending and responses. For example, a parent learns the mnemonic word PEER that calls for the parent to *prompt* the child to say something about the book, *evaluate* the child's response, *expand* on the child's response by adding information to it, and *repeat* the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansions. Justice and Ezell taught parents to reference print by making comments and asking questions about book concepts, talking about individual letters and words, and tracking print (e.g., Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice& Ezell, 2000). These activities resulted in higher scores on concepts of print for children whose parents were taught to use these scaffolding procedures. Collectively, these studies provide evidence for parent interventions to promote early literacy.

Recent national attention on home visiting for children ages birth to five in the United States has brought about a renewed focus on parent education. This new effort is being funded by the federal government under the Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Act and has as one of its main goals the promotion of school readiness and achievement, including attention to parent knowledge about child development, parent support for children's learning and devel-opment, and child communication, language, and emergent literacy skills. All home visiting services provided under this new initiative must have been evaluated as evidenced-based or have strong promising date (Gomby, this volume). Gomby has noted in her review of home visiting programs that it is difficult to meet expectations for all children through parent education alone. High quality early childhood education is often required in order to bring about significant gains on the part of some children, a situation recognized by the inclusion of early childhood educa-tion in most family literacy programs.

Immigration as a Global Concern

Immigration is a complex international phenomenon that has its roots in centuries of movement by individuals and families from one country to another, motivated by economic, religious, educational, family, or political reasons. An extensive literature exists on global immigration, documenting patterns, employment and educational attainment, outcomes for second genera-tion family members, and schooling and health needs (OECD, 2007). As a family moves from

its home country to its host country, language and literacy are almost always a consideration. Assuming the language is different, the family needs to learn a new language while deliberating about whether and how to maintain their home language. For parents, the question of whether the children will learn just the new language, or maintain proficiency in the home language while learning a new language in school, has to be addressed.

Print-related literacy is also of prime importance. Children of school age have opportunities to learn the new country's language and print-related literacy when they enter the formal educational system, but parents without print-related skills are often at a serious disadvantage. They have to manage learning a new language while also earning an income and sometimes cannot be employed or are underemployed due to language barriers. . Though each country has immigrants who may speak the host country's language and have resources to become self-supporting, productive citizens, many struggle due to language and literacy.

Many foreign-born individuals migrate with the hope of finding more desirable living and economic conditions. Prior to the economic recession of 2008, the hope of better employment was a reality for many immigrants, but it has been less so since then as many countries have experienced an economic downturn and higher unemployment rates. Nevertheless, the attraction of finding more desirable living conditions continues to influence migration patterns around the world.

Immigration has a direct influence on the host country, giving rise to educational, social, health, financial, and political issues. Many countries have worked to help immigrants gain language and literacy skills in the dominant language of the home country, but many efforts are hampered by the low literacy skills of immigrants in their own native country. Given that the literacy skills and educational attainment of many immigrants are below those of their host country, these individuals experience multiple obstacles, from difficulty communicating, finding suitable employment, and providing their children with the kinds of early experiences that can help ensure school success. Consequently, government, educational, and social agencies have frequently moved into this situation to help both adults and children become literate in the language of the new country so that they can succeed in work and in school. Because some of these individuals had low literacy levels in their own country, addressing their needs is frequently a complex endeavor that extends across generations within the family.

To illustrate two major issues with immigration, we present data from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries comparing immigrants both across countries and within countries on education levels (OECD, 2007). In reviewing data compiled for an adult population aged 25–64, data were presented on the number of foreign-born adults who had less than an upper secondary education, who had secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary schooling (high school and vocational training), and those who had tertiary schooling equivalent to schooling beyond high school, such as college and technical training. The foreign-born adult data were compared with the native born data for each category. We have selected data on nine countries from the 25 listed by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2007) to illustrate differences across countries as well as issues many countries are facing (see Table 1.2).

In Table 1.2, data in bold for foreign-born individuals reflect data that are higher than the same category for native born individuals. Thus, as can be seen in Table 1.2, Canada and New Zealand experience a higher percentage of foreign-born adults educated at the tertiary level and similar overall levels of education across foreign-born and native-born populations, a trend opposite to most other countries. Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States are examples of countries that have significantly higher percentages of foreign-born than native-born adults educated at less than an upper secondary level. Though these data provide a narrow lens to view

Table 1.2 Education Level of Foreign- and Native-Born Populations Aged 25 to 64 in OECD Countries 2003–2004

	Foreign-born			Native-born		
	Less than upper secondary	*Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary*	*Tertiary*	*Less than upper secondary*	*Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary*	*Tertiary*
Canada	22.1	31.8	46.1	22.9	38.3	38.8
Czech Republic	29.0	55.4	15.6	10.8	77.2	12.0
France	51.1	27.8	21.1	32.8	43.6	23.7
Germany	37.4	43.7	18.9	12.3	62.6	25.5
Netherlands	43.5	32.3	24.2	30.6	44.4	25.0
New Zealand	15.9	46.5	37.6	28.2	39.5	32.2
Switzerland	29.6	42.8	27.6	7.2	65.2	27.6
United Kingdom	22.1	43.6	34.3	15.9	54.8	29.4
United States	30.1	34.9	35.0	8.5	51.6	39.9

Based on data from Table II.1., from OECD (2007), "Matching Educational Background and Employment: A Challenge for Immigrants In Host Countries", in OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2007*, OECD Publishing, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2007-4-en

immigration in a country, they do provide evidence that family literacy services must respond to the unique considerations of the country in which they are provided. For a deeper understanding of the unique issues surrounding family literacy internationally, in Section V of this volume several of the countries listed in Table 1.2 are discussed in depth, including Canada, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Germany's immigrant population provides an illustration of the complex interaction between literacy and immigration. In 2006, Germany's second largest city, Hamburg, had a population of over 1,750,000, of whom 15% were non–Germans (i.e., citizens of foreign descent) and 26.8% were migrants. Children aged six and younger made up 48% of the migrant population. In Hamburg, the key migrant groups come from Turkey, Poland, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, and Ghana, and they represent very diverse religions. To further complicate matters, many of these adult migrants are not literate and cannot effectively provide for the educational development of their children. One way the UNESCO Institute of Education and the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development in Hamburg has worked to address these educational challenges is by developing the Family Literacy Project (FLP) in 2004.

In the United States, influences of immigration on family literacy services are illustrated by data from the federal Even Start Family Literacy Program showing changes in the immigrant population in the United States over time. Data on the number of Hispanic families enrolled in Even Start was 22% percent in 1992–93, increasing to 39% in 1996–97. More recently, Even Start reported on the percent of adults who were English language learners: 53% for 2006–2007, 58% for 2007–2008, and 59% for 2008–2009. This trend towards increasing numbers of immigrant families and English language learners is dramatic. Though we cannot make a direct comparison of these two sets of data, one on Hispanic families and one on English language learner (ELL) families, data showing 22% Hispanic in 1992–93 and 59% ELL in 2008–09 documents the changing population of Even Start Family Literacy programs over this time. More detailed information on the issues faced by migrant and immigrant populations in the United States are provided in chapters in this handbook by Castro, Mendez, Garcia, and Westerberg as well as by Barrueco.

Conclusions

Few concerns in society are as serious as the need to help ensure the literacy of its citizens; family literacy services have become an important resource in addressing these needs. In this chapter the variables influencing the development of family literacy services have been described, including not only conceptual frameworks that emphasize the role of families and society in child and adult literacy skills, but also demographic data on adult and child literacy levels, and documentation of the variables that influence child literacy levels, including the home environment, the parent literacy levels, and parent–child literacy interactions. Immigration and the needs of dual language learners have also spurred family literacy efforts in many countries.

The data on the variables that influence a child's language and literacy development are too convincing to ignore, especially parent influences as the foundation for later child literacy proficiency. Parent education levels influence decisions within the family related to children's education. We know that quality early childhood education can provide advantages for children who are at risk for school failure and that parenting programs can to make a difference. Furthermore, demographic data show that low literacy levels among adults continue to be a global issue. The social, educational, and personal price that individuals pay for low literacy skills and the adverse influence on communities when large numbers of adults have low literacy skills call for continued attention to the role of society in supporting families. Extending information on how we best meet these pervasive challenges and help break through barriers so that more children and adults will become proficient in literacy is the basic objective of this handbook. The authors take this task very seriously, bringing numerous perspectives to bear on how we can help provide effective resources to address the international needs of children and parents.

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