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Effective ECD Programs that can be scaled up

**Parallel Session C-1
Getting Schools Ready
for the Child**

**Exploring the Links Between Adult Education and
Children's Literacy
A Case Study of the Family Literacy Project,
Kwazulu Natal, South Africa**

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ADEA Biennale 2006 – Exploring the Links Between Adult Education and Children’s Literacy

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CV	Curriculum Vitae
FLP	Family Literacy Project
IMCI	Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
NGO	Non government organization
SANLI	South African National Literacy Initiative

1. ABSTRACT

The Family Literacy Project is a small non government organization (NGO) from rural KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. This case study is entitled “Exploring the links between adult education and children’s literacy” and was conducted in the groups that make up the Family Literacy Project. In most societies children grow up with their parents or a close family member, a grandparent or aunt. These adults, along with older siblings are the child’s first teachers. Children learn from the people around them, they find out about the world by experimenting and by observing what others do. They make sense of the world by watching others and by asking questions and being answered. They notice what others value and strive for. The education and learning link between children and their adult carers is clear. Children learn from those around them.

There is another side to this relationship and this raises the question of if, and how, children influence their adult carers. If adults see how important they are as the first teachers of their children, will this encourage them to improve their own skills? Will the adults seek educational opportunities that will help them to be more effective parents?

This case study looked at both the adult-child link in education and learning, as well as the child’s influence on the adult to seek further educational opportunities. It demonstrates the importance of family literacy practices in rural families and the benefits of this approach to both adults and children.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While it is clear that adults – parents, close family members and older siblings – are the child’s first teachers by their example, their response to questions, and perhaps in more formal ways, it is possible that children in turn may influence the adults. If adults see how important they are as their children’s first teachers, will this encourage them to improve their own skills?

This case study will look at both the adult-child link in education and learning as well as the potential influence of the child on the adult.

2.2 Adult literacy education

Estimates of the number of functionally illiterate adults in South Africa range from 7.4 to 8.5 million and of those who are totally illiterate from 2.9 to 4.2 million. What is beyond doubt, however, is that the majority of these millions of people are black and that there are slightly more – and an increasing number of - women than men. (Aitcheson and Harley, 2004)

The right to basic adult education enshrined in the South African Constitution provides the legislative framework for such education and training but, without sufficient implementation programs, this is almost meaningless. Government and civil society have tried various ways of addressing the need for such programs, which have to reach 3 million adults if we are to achieve the Education for All target of halving adult illiteracy by 2015.

2.3 Early childhood education

The national Department of Education has indicated its commitment to implementing the Constitutional rights of children, particularly in its Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development. It acknowledges the need for working with the primary educators of children, the parents, and proposes a holistic approach that provides a caring and protective family environment, from which they move out to crèches, pre-schools, and formal education.

Improvement in access to early childhood development provision, however, has been slow: from 9-11% in 1996 to 16% in 2001. (Wilderman and Nomdo, 2004:2)

2.4 Family literacy

Family literacy is one way of simultaneously addressing the needs of both children and adults. While several organizations incorporate this approach, only the Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa focuses solely on it. And there is currently no government funding for such programs.

The term “family literacy” was first used in 1983 and has since come to be widely used to indicate:

“(1) interest in the ways literacy is used within families, (2) the study of the relationships between literacy use in families and children’s academic achievement, and (3) the design,

implementation and evaluation of programs to facilitate the literacy development of family members". (Morrow and Paratore 1993 in Tracey 1995:280)

Family literacy programs, many of them well funded by government, are common in the United States and the United Kingdom. There are a number of models, including: school-based programs for parents to help their children who are experiencing difficulties; joint activities for parents and children both in the school and at home; helping parent to develop strategies to encourage their children to enjoy reading.

Research has shown the "family literacy participants persist in family literacy programs longer than they persist in traditional adult literacy projects (Paratore 1993; St Pierre et al 1993)" and that "home based literacy interactions between parents and children are positively affected by attendance in family literacy programs" (Paratore 1993).

The approach of the Family Literacy Project is to look not only at how parents support early literacy development in young children but also how this involvement may lead to the improvement in parents' literacy.

2.5 Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu-Natal

The project was started in March 2000 in response to the findings of a nationwide research project (Khulisa Management Services 2000) that showed that, despite training provided to pre-school teachers, the literacy scores of the pupils did not improve. The aim of the Family Literacy Project was to target the parents and to reach the children through them. The FLP facilitates seven groups in deeply rural, under-resourced communities, with group sessions for adults being held at least twice a week during school terms.

Running through all the group sessions is the belief that reading together as a family is important. The project slogan *Masifunde Njengomndeni* translates as "Families reading together". Reading is always promoted as a way to enjoy time with children and a way of relaxing with one another.

2.6 Case study

To gather data for this case study the FLP ran group sessions, conducted interviews, and administered questionnaires. In the group sessions each member was encouraged to compile a 'family book', in which they described themselves and discussed: differences in schooling between parents and children (availability of money and being closer to schools being the main factors); roles within the family (women being overburdened the main concern); interaction between parents and children (books and education had facilitated this); and community activities. Two thirds (64) of the members completed this family book activity. Thirty six of a possible 97 books were handed in to the project on time. A further 28 were not handed in due to a misunderstanding about the due date and as a result these were not translated into English and so not included in the findings. However the facilitator from this group had done a piece of research of her own and the findings are included in this case study in the section on how the project has helped mothers interact with their children

Fifteen questionnaires were completed: all 15 homes had books, all from the FLP and 12 said they read to their children.

Only 7 of the 12 questionnaires for teachers were completed. The responses were positive and teachers said they noticed a difference between those who attended FLP sessions and those who didn’t: they showed more interest in reading and had improved concentration.

The family books gave a picture of FLP group members’ attitudes to education and how they see themselves in relation to their children and their schooling. The books provided a privileged glimpse into the homes and daily round of the group members of the project. The family books also gave indications of the importance given to adult education and gave an indication of how parents are influenced to further their own education.

Whatever else has been achieved within the Family Literacy Project, it does seem clear that the slogan “Masifunde Njengomndeni” (Families reading together) captures what is happening and what is a shared pleasure that benefits both adults and children.

3 INTRODUCTION

“As a Family Literacy Group member I wish that all illiterate people of South Africa who did not get the opportunity of schooling should know that it is never too late. They can still join ABET classes to develop her indigenous knowledge and revive her informal school instructions. I would be grateful if I would achieve my goal and find myself employed, earning a living and also help my community to earn its living. South African women, I hope by developing yourselves in education our youth will suckle healthy milk from you. Their future will flourish and be able to govern the country”. Mirriam Zwane, Stepmore Family Literacy Project group member

3.1 The link between adult and child education

In most societies children grow up with their parents or a close family member, a grandparent or aunt. These adults, along with older siblings are the child’s first teachers. Children learn from the people around them, they find out about the world by experimenting and by observing what others do. They make sense of the world by watching others and by asking questions and being answered. They notice what others value and strive for. The education and learning link between children and their adult carers is clear. Children learn from those around them.

There is another side to this relationship and this raises the question of if, and how, children influence their adult carers. If adults see how important they are as the first teachers of their children, will this encourage them to improve their own skills? Will the adults seek educational opportunities that will help them to be more effective parents?

This case study will look at both the adult-child link in education and learning, as well as the child’s influence on the adult which may lead to the adult seeking further educational opportunities.

3.2 Education for adults and children in South Africa

3.2.1 Adult literacy education in South Africa

Many South African adults experience difficulties reading or writing or cannot do so at all. However there is no firm agreement on the number of adult South Africans who cannot read or write or who struggle to do so. The estimates range from 7.4 to 8.5 million adults with less than grade 7 (considered to be functionally illiterate) and between 2.9 to 4.2 million people who had never attended school at all. (Aitchison and Harley 2004) Although there are differences of a million or more adults in each category (totally illiterate or functionally illiterate) there is no doubt that the majority of these millions of adults are black and there are slightly more women than men in these groups. It is alarming to note that functional illiteracy appears to be growing in the population of adult women. (Aitchison and Harley 2004)

The right to basic adult education is enshrined in the South African constitution and this provides the legislative framework for adult basic education and training. However, without sufficient programs or help to meet the needs of the adults who need it, this becomes almost meaningless.

There are many anecdotal reports of poor attendance at, and high drop out rates from adult education classes. It is important when working in adult education that the approach is appropriate but also that the content of the lessons is interesting and useful to the adults.

There have been different ways in which South Africans, from government and civil society, have tried to address the need for literacy programs of an estimated 3 million adults if we are to reach the Education for All target of halving the adult illiteracy rates by 2015. One such program is the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) which has entered into a partnership with the University of South Africa. In addition there are programs run by non government organizations and community organizations in an attempt to help those who want to improve their levels of literacy.

3.2.2 Early childhood education in South Africa

The rights of children are protected in the South African Constitution and the national Department of Education has indicated its commitment to young children in different documents in particular a White Paper. (Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development) The policies are based on the understanding that as there is rapid physical, mental, emotional, and social growth and development in children from birth to seven, the early years are critical. Young children acquire concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Important among these are the acquisition of language and the perceptual-motor skills required for learning to read and write.

If there is early and appropriate provision and care this can often reverse the effects of deprivation and in fact support the development of innate potential thus reducing the need for remedial services to address stunting, developmental lag and social problems later in life. (Education White Paper 5)

The government acknowledges that it has to work together with the primary educators of children, the parents. A holistic approach to a child's education and development will place them in the potentially caring, protective and enabling environment of the family, from which they will move out to crèches, pre-schools and on to formal education. Government support is necessary so that families have access to primary health care, adequate nutrition, safe water, basic sanitation, birth registration, protection from abuse and violence, psychosocial support and early childhood care.

In South Africa there has been a slow improvement in access to early childhood development provision from between 9 – 11% of birth - six year olds in 1996 to 16% in 2001. (Wilderman and Nomdo 2004:2). In the province of KwaZulu Natal 70% of the early childhood development provision (i.e. crèches and pre-schools) falls below the poverty line and per capita spending on public schooling in 2003/4 was 39 times higher than on early childhood development provision. (Wilderman and Nomdo 2004:5)

3.3.3 Bringing together adult and child education

It appears from the above that there are adults and young children who are in need of help to ensure that they realize their full potential, however late in life this might come for some adults. Family literacy is one way to address this need. There are several organizations in South Africa who use a family literacy approach within their programs, but few who focus solely on this approach. There is currently no government funding available for these programs although they contribute to both adult basic education and to early childhood needs and, we would argue, to the needs of older children as well.

4. WHAT IS FAMILY LITERACY?

The term “family literacy” was first used by Denny Taylor in 1983 when she described in detail the literacy activities she observed in several families she was studying. (Tracey 1995:280) Tracey (1995) noted that although Taylor used the term, she did not define it. Since then the term has been used to indicate

“(1) interest in the ways literacy is used within families, (2) the study of the relationships between literacy use in families and children’s academic achievement, and (3) the design, implementation and evaluation of programs to facilitate the literacy development of family members” (Morrow and Paratore 1993 in Tracey 1995:280)

There are many family literacy programs in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom, some well funded by these governments. There are different models and these include:

- Those that are school based for parents whose children are experiencing problems. The parents are encouraged to help in the classroom reading to children, helping out in libraries and helping with printed matter from the school such as newsletters.(Auerbach 1995; Paratore 1995)
- Those that include parents and children in joint activities where they read, talk and play together. In some programs they are encouraged to continue these activities at home and report on them in the next group session. (Neuman 1995; Harrison 1995; Baker et al 1995)
- Those where parents are helped to develop strategies to encourage their children to enjoy reading and other related activities when at home. (Graves 1995; McKee 1995; Harrison 1995)

The implementation of the programs is mainly prompted by problems the children are experiencing in school or where adult literacy levels are low and there is a concern that these parents will not be in a position to model good reading practice at home. Among others, Whitehouse (2001) urges that this deficit model of families should be avoided and there are many attempts to build on strengths within families and recognize practices that already exist.

In a study that pre-dates the first use of the term “family literacy”, Heath (1983) draws attention to the fact that some families do not read to children or actively encourage activities to promote reading development. Heath notes that in these families the children see adults using literacy in everyday tasks and they themselves use these skills when they need them or when they see words around them and try to read them. There is no structured approach to literacy development within the family; it is something that occurs in the course of a normal day.

In an early survey of literature on family literacy, Tracey (1995:287) found that two important findings emerged from the research into family literacy. The first is that “family literacy participants persist in family literacy programs longer than they persist in traditional adult literacy projects (Paratore 1993; St Pierre et al 1993)” and secondly that home based literacy interactions between parents and children are positively affected by attendance in family literacy programs (Paratore 1993).

We need to ensure that there is another dimension to the family literacy approach and we need to look not only at how parents support early literacy development in young children but also how

this involvement may lead to the improvement in parents of their own literacy levels. As Morrow (1995:5) citing Braun says that we should be providing “environments which enable adult learners to enhance their own literacies, and at the same time provide environments which promote the literacies of their children”.

This is the approach of the Family Literacy Project and this case study attempts to explore how successful it has been in linking the education of adults and children.

4.1 Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu-Natal

This project was started in March 2000 in response to findings in a nationwide research project (Khulisa Management Services 2000) that showed that despite training provided to pre-school teachers the literacy scores of the children did not improve. The aim of the project was to target parents and through them reach their children. The basis for this was the understanding that parents are the first educators of their children and that much important learning takes place in the home. (Appendix III: Family Literacy Project)

The project facilitates seven groups in deeply rural, under-resourced communities in the southern Drakensberg area of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In 2000 the workshops focused on what parents could do to help their own children develop a love of reading and so lay a solid foundation for literacy learning. Parents engaged in activities that could be easily replicated in the home; however few materials, toys or books were available. Parents were drawn into the group because of their interest in providing a better life for their children than they themselves had had. Very soon it became apparent that the adults wanted something more and they requested literacy classes. The challenge to the Family Literacy Project was to combine the needs of both adults and children.

It appears that by drawing parents in to the field of literacy development through their interest in their children’s development, the project was also able to meet the expressed needs of the parents as a core of group members has developed.

Group sessions for adults are held at least twice a week during school terms. Seven or eight sessions form a unit of study (Appendix II: Unit) and each unit addresses an issue of interest to group members. Topics have included Child Protection, Children’s Rights and Responsibilities, HIV/Aids, Environment, Journey to Literacy, Caring for our money and Sanitation. The Reflect methodology which promotes participation, discussion and action by group members underpins all sessions. Group sessions include information gained from the participants as well as that introduced by the facilitator. Literacy learning is linked to the discussion. In every unit, i.e. once every seven or eight sessions, there is a session that focuses on children’s development. These sessions are linked to the unit topic and provide a time for discussion of how parents can help develop particular skills in their children.

Running through all the group sessions is the belief that reading together as a family is important. The project slogan *Masifunde Njengomndeni* translates as “Families reading together” and advice is given to parents on how to extend conversations with their children, how to build vocabulary and how to read books with their children in a way that encourages questioning, discussion and interest. Reading is always promoted as a way to enjoy time with children and a way of relaxing with one another.

Books for adults and children have been available to all the groups, beginning with small book boxes and in two groups extending into the establishment of two community libraries. Early on in the project, group members were discussing the books they had read and book clubs were set up. Adults are encouraged to borrow books to read to their children, as well as books written for adults.

In 2003 group members felt confident enough to visit neighboring families to read to children and discuss children's development with the adults. The visits continued through 2004 and the "home visitors" were supported with additional workshops on activities for children that would help with the development of literacy skills e.g. making puzzles and books, shape and color games and listening activities.

The project facilitators run child to child groups in local primary schools. These groups are open to the first 20 children who apply to join. There are two groups in each school. The groups meet once a week and follow a program of story telling and reading, role playing, games, drawing and writing. The emphasis is on the fun and enjoyment that reading brings.

Since 2000 there have been several independent studies and evaluations that have shown that adults and children have benefited from involvement in the project. (Desmond, A. 2001; Frow, J. 2004; Kvalsvig, J. et al, 2003; Labuschagne, S. 2000, 2001, 2002; Machet, M. and Pretorius, E. 2004)

The purpose of this case study is to look more closely at how adults have benefited from involving themselves in their children's education as well as the more common investigation of how children benefit due to parent involvement.

5. METHODOLOGY

To gather data for this case study, the Family Literacy Project engaged in the following:

5.1 Group Sessions

A unit on “Family Life” was presented to the groups by the facilitators and each group member was encouraged to complete a “family book”. (Appendix I: Sessions from Family Life Unit)

Project facilitators presented the unit “Family Life” to their group to raise and discuss roles within the family. All family members were encouraged to work on daily activity charts and discuss these. Each family was given a blank book in which to describe themselves – by writing, drawing, collecting mementos and photographs.

Work done by group members was collected, translated (from Zulu into English), and analyzed. The main points to be drawn out were the level of participation by different family members, attitudes toward reading and the ability to describe the family in different ways.

Suggestions made by the facilitators to the group members about what to include in their family books were:

- Their family tree
- The family workload chart
- The daily activity chart
- Drawings or stories from each family member about what they feel about themselves and their family
- Beadwork or other craft that shows what the family can do
- Stories from grandparents so that we can see how things have changed
- Drawings of how life was long ago
- Drawings of how life is now
- Community maps done by each family
- Hopes and dreams for the future of each family member
- CV of each family member – what they can do or what they have done in their lives
- A story of a happy family event (written by a secondary school child) illustrated by a younger child
- A list of groups they belong to and a description of what they do in the groups
- A list of their favorite books – one or two from each family member
- Anything else people want to include.

5.2 Interviews

Project facilitators used questionnaires to guide discussions with group members. A section of the questionnaire was used to guide observation by the facilitators of evidence of printed material in the home. Those visited and interviewed were chosen randomly by the facilitator with no criteria for selection apart from their being members of the group. (Appendix IV: Family questionnaire)

5.3 Questionnaires

Primary school teachers were invited to complete questionnaires to find out how they felt children were benefiting from interventions by the Family Literacy Project. These primary school teachers are from the primary schools in which the FLP runs child to child groups. (Appendix V: School questionnaire)

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Unit and Family Book

The Family Literacy Project uses units to guide group sessions. The design of the units is guided by Reflect methodology that encourages active participation in topics of interest to the group. (Appendix II: Unit diagram)

Two thirds (64) of the Family Literacy Project members completed this family book activity. Thirty six of a possible 97 books were handed in to the project on time. A further 28 were not handed in due to a misunderstanding about the due date and as a result these were not translated into English and so not included in the findings. However the facilitator from this group had done a piece of research of her own and the findings are included in this case study in the section on how the project has helped mothers interact with their children.

The books were collected and the text translated from Zulu to English. Most of the books were carefully covered and included pictures from magazines as well as drawings to illustrate the different sections. Even those women whose literacy levels are low participated, writing shorter sentences or a few words in different sections. Some group members wrote many pages describing the lives of their families. The books were returned to the group members and at the end of the year event the project gave prizes for effort to one person from each of the groups.

Not all the suggestions of what to include in the family book were followed up by group members.

The findings from this exercise are divided as follows:

6.1.1 Differences in schooling between parent and children

Finances played an important part in attendance, *“children go to school because there is money unlike the old days”* (Landeleni Dlamini). This echoes the work done previously where group members wrote stories of their own childhood (Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg 2002; Stories of Strength 2003). There were many references to the inability of their families to pay school fees and the need for many young girls to stay at home to help with cattle, gardening or housework.

Women commented on the young age at which children start school now days and how this could be linked to the long distances between homes and schools in previous generations: *“When we grew up schools were far away. We walked on foot, bare foot, long distances to school. Bare foot even in winter.”* (Mirriam Zwane)

6.1.2 Daily activities

According to the project facilitators this section sparked a lot of discussion with some women realizing for the first time how heavy their work load is when compared to the men in their families. When women were asked what they were going to do with this knowledge, most replied

that they would ask their children for more help. This response seems to indicate those roles between men and women may need to be discussed at more length to promote equity.

All the entries relating to daily activities showed an early start to the day (5 – 6am) where both women and children were involved in fetching water and wood and preparing the fire to make breakfast, which seemed in most cases to be a cup of tea. Children who completed a daily activity chart or wrote about their day referred to their washing and ironing their own school uniforms. Homework, when mentioned, often seemed to be at the end of a long day once household chores were completed.

6.1.3 Parents and children

The references extracted from the family books on interactions of parents and children around books, stories and homework were many and interesting. Women wrote about the change that books and education has made in their lives from the chance to relax to a wish to use their knowledge to help others. *“I wish to learn and now more about learning..... and see myself improving.... And making workshop and giving them more knowledge.... So that they can succeed and pass their knowledge to others so that the nation will be improved”.* (Ziningi Ntshiza)

Running through the books was the wish for children to have a good education, and how important the parents saw this to be in achieving a better lifestyle. *“I wish that I can take my children to university when they finish Standard 10 so that they can get a better job”.* (Sibongile Zuma) *“More especially education make the home warm because you get a good job that gives you a good salary then you can buy whatever you like”.* (Goodness Khanyile)

Some parents referred to the importance of being a role model so that children would be encouraged to study because they saw that their parent was willing to learn as well. *“They all study. I like them to continue their studies, so am I still studying.”* (Florence Khubone) *“The mother, child and the teacher must work together. At home the parent must work with the child as well as a teacher in the school and the child must work with both of them.”* (Sindiswe Gxashi)

Also interesting was the way some children who contributed to the family book, wrote about their mothers' continued studies: *“I was happy to hear my mother saying she is receiving her education through the Family Literacy Project so that she would be able to help me with my schoolwork. I wish I would also do likewise to make her happy when I have achieved my goal.”* (Mirriam Zwane's child) *“I study with my mother and read what I didn't understand at school”.* (Landeleni Dlamini)

Some parents wrote about shared activities around books, referring to times of telling stories or reading books together. In these references there was a link between reading and education or gathering knowledge. Some of the examples were homework related but there were also references to reading together or borrowing books from the project library; *“I like to help my son doing school work”* (Mirriam Zwane) *“I like library books, book brought by mother and our own books. I like them all”.* (Goodness Khanyile's child) *“When we are finished eating we take books and read and look at the pictures and do homework.”* (Sibongile Zuma)

6.1.4 Community-wide activities

In addition to earlier references to helping other South Africans (Mirriam Zwane and Ziningi Ntshiza) adults also mentioned the home visiting that they took part in. This is where group

members visit neighbours and read to their children (Appendix III: Family Literacy Project) and from the comments; these visits are a pleasure to both the adult and the neighbour’s children. *“These are the books we read with the children in home visit. We stay with the children and enjoy ourselves.”* (Goodness Khanyile). There is enjoyment, learning and children talk to one another and the home visitor about the books she reads with them.

6.2 Interviews

Project facilitators used questionnaires to guide discussions with group members. A section of the questionnaire was used to guide observation by the facilitators of evidence of printed material in the home.

Fifteen questionnaires were distributed and returned completed. The average age of the respondents was 44, with women between 24 and 64 years of age interviewed. All but 2 of the respondents had been with the project for two or more years.

All 15 homes had books, ranging in number from 9 with between 1 and 5 books, 5 with between 6 and 10 and one home with more than 10 books evident.

	Number of homes
Books	15 of 15
Magazines	13 of 15
Newspapers	13 of 15
Calendar	15 of 15
Letters	8 of 15
Posters	4 of 15
Newsletter	1 of 15

When asked what reading they did at home 12 of the 15 women said they read to their children. 4 of the 15 women mentioned helping children with homework and 6 said they read for themselves.

Everyone interviewed said that the books they had came from the Family Literacy Project libraries and all could give the title of the last book they had read. Four women said that they bought newspapers for themselves.

In answer to the request “Tell me what you think your role is in development reading skills in your children” six women spoke of their being a role model for children. There were thirteen comments about how parents can help children read books and enjoy them. *“I use the ways of reading to them, the ways that I learn in family literacy and it works because my children are happy about reading.”* Cresentia Zuma

When asked how “the Family Literacy Project helped you help your children?” the women spoke about gaining new knowledge that enabled them to help their children with their homework. Five women mentioned improved communication with their children and now understanding the importance of spending time with children.

The findings from the group where the family books were not handed in is presented here as the research conducted by the facilitator addressed the question of how the Family Literacy Project helped mothers interact with their children. She compared the responses from a group of project

members with those of mothers who are not project members. The responses from the Family Literacy Project members are given below:

“The mothers who have contact with the Family Literacy Project do a lot more than the other group. They show that they know that children do a lot if you are showing love like when we learn to read and write after that you do the games. Even if you are doing the garden work ask the children to come and help you, tell them the name of plants and ask them to show the difference and the function of it.the(y) will ask what the favorite food that we want to cook is. This makes the children to have self confidence.

“ parents are worried about children’s work. They check and assess it and also they went to school and ask about the work of the children. They attend the meeting at school to talk about the school. They also visit the library with their children to choose the book they like.

“The Family Literacy Project encourages children to like books because they see mothers reading books and the children copy them.” (Molefe 2004)

6.3 Questionnaires

Primary school teachers were invited to complete questionnaires to find out how they felt children were benefiting from interventions by the Family Literacy Project.

Family Literacy Project facilitators run child to child groups in local primary schools. The aim of the groups is to expose children to good books, enjoyable activities that stimulate an interest in reading and encourage them to re-tell and draw stories. (Appendix III: Family Literacy Project)

Twelve questionnaires were handed to teachers. In one school three forms were returned with identical responses so only findings from one will be included. Teachers at another school undertook to complete the forms and post them to the Family Literacy Project offices. They did not do this and gave no reason when this was raised with them. (They told the independent evaluator of the project that they did not want the project facilitators to make children dissatisfied with their way of teaching. (Frow 2004)) This means that the findings from 7 of a possible 12 questionnaires will be given.

The responses were positive and teachers said they noticed a difference between those children who attended project sessions and those who did not. They said the children attending the project sessions showed more interest in reading and had improved concentration. There was mention of improved communication and drawing ability.

The interest in books of the children attending the child to child group was rated as higher than those not attending the groups. Responses showed that children attending the group sessions were eager to read.

Teachers reported that children enjoy the child to child sessions:

“They like their teacher who helps them in reading and how to take care of their books. They want their teacher to be at school everyday so that they can read, they like to re-tell stories from what they read.” (Malunga Primary School)

Teachers from this school said they would like the groups to continue as it relieved them of some of their workload and that these children were able to read to others in assembly and in class and this helped teachers get on with other tasks. Some felt that it should be a daily session and all teachers said that the group should be open to all children in the school.

7 DISCUSSION

The Family Books gave a picture of FLP group members’ attitudes to education and how they see themselves in relation to their children and their schooling. The books provided a privileged glimpse into the homes and daily round of the group members of the project. The Family Books also gave indications of the importance given to adult education.

It is possible to say that books in the homes were not common before the FLP was started. Research by Desmond (2001) and Kvalsvig et al (2003) found that in this geographic area few homes had access to books, apart from school books. In the Family Books there were references to how adults and children include reading into their lives and how enjoyable this is. This enjoyment is important to note as the FLP continually stresses that literacy should be a “shared pleasure” and that reading is not only for completing forms and finding one’s way around the shops, important as these skills are. The FLP talks about enjoyment for several reasons; one of these is based on the belief that learning takes place more easily in a relaxed and happy atmosphere. The FLP believes that if children and adults approach books with a sense of excitement and anticipation of something pleasurable, this will help if children have to study with more seriousness as they progress through life. Books will not be seen as difficult or daunting if they can remember when they sat with their parents and enjoyed a quiet and happy time reading.

In addition to the books now found in homes, other printed material was also observed during the interviews with group members. It is important to note that some women are buying newspapers, this from the very small grant that most people in this area live on. (Grants include disability, pension and child grants.)

The request to give the title of the last book read was to find out if people were actually reading books or only saying they were. The ability to remember correctly the title is an indication that reading is taking place. All fifteen women gave titles of books available in the FLP libraries.

Parents noted in their books, and in other, earlier, written work that schools in their days were far from their homes and often meant a long, hard walk. For many children in this southern Drakensberg area that is still the case. However for many there are small crèches and pre-schools closer to home and this is probably the reason those adults wrote about the earlier age at which children begin school. Talking and listening to children is encouraged by the FLP and there have been many occasions in evaluations and in these Family Books where this is referred to. It is in these exchanges that adults can help children discover more about the world around them.

References to homework and how both adults and children approach this is heartening. Many adults with low levels of literacy feel they cannot help their children once they begin school. In the Family Books there is evidence that group members do feel able to support and help their children. There were many comments relating to the importance parents place on their children progressing through school and on to further education opportunities. Being in a position to help children with homework must lead to a sense of relief at being able to fulfill a perceived responsibility.

In the Family Books, the parent interviews, and the additional research (Molefe 2004) there is a clear understanding of the importance of role models within the family. Many parents who are continuing to learn are seen by both themselves and their children as positive examples of how

learning can be life-long. Parents know how they influence their children, they know what to do to encourage learning and build self confidence. These messages have been articulated in the FLP and there is reference in each unit to the importance of parental support in the lives of children.

The question of whether or not parents are influenced by their children to continue with education is not as clearly answered. However there is a sense that because parents place such a high value on their children's education, they have become interested in improving their own so that they in turn can support their children achieve parental goals of a good education leading to employment. (The link between literacy, education and employment is beyond the scope of this case study and is a long-running and unresolved issue. As Hannon (1999) reminds us when he quotes Freire 1972:25 "Merely teaching men (sic) to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them.")

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents are the child’s first teachers. Adult literacy programs are in a good position to support parents in this role. As noted earlier Tracey (1995) found that “family literacy participants persist in family literacy programs longer than they persist in traditional adult literacy projects (Paratore, 1993; St Pierre et al 1993)” Family literacy may be one way to encourage regular attendance and so counteract the many anecdotal reports of adult literacy groups that struggle to maintain numbers and consistent attendance. We would argue that building on parental hopes for their children is one way to ensure that what is offered in adult literacy groups is relevant and important enough for people to join and participate fully.

In addition approaches to family literacy, whether included in adult literacy programs or not, must not be based on a deficit model of families. We must acknowledge the activities such as talking and listening, describing, storytelling and recounting events help lay the foundation for literacy and are important early literacy skills. We must build on parental hopes for their children to achieve and be well educated. We must provide opportunities for parents to build their own skills and so support their children and model life long learning. For this to happen adult literacy projects should incorporate information on parenting and activities to build early literacy skills and how to make reading a pleasure within families.

Books must be made available to everyone taking part in a literacy program. This goes beyond the text book. Reading for pleasure must be encouraged and this has been demonstrated as an important component of the FLP and one that has resonated with participants. Choice of books is also important and where possible group members should be involved in selection or at least making suggestions for topics. In the FLP we found that parents who borrowed children’s books to read (or in the early stages of their own literacy development to look at) did not feel demeaned or patronized in any way. These were books they could cope with but they were not given them to read *for themselves*, but to read with their children. It is this difference that ensured that parents were happy to borrow these books and so give themselves valuable practice and at the same time provide for their children’s needs.

From this case study it appears that adults realize the influence they have on their children’s education and development. In turn this may help adults to seek to improve their own education so that they can be more effective role models. Whatever else has been achieved within the Family Literacy Project, it does seem clear that the slogan *Masifunde Njengomndeni* (Families reading together) captures what is happening and what is a shared pleasure that benefits both adults and children.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: Sessions from Family Life Unit

SESSION 1

The main aim of this unit is to help the groups to think about families and how to make sure they are living in harmony with one another. In this unit we will cover some things we have done before, but the focus will be on the family. If you can think of other sessions that we have done, for example on income and expenditure in the family, or family health, then remind the women about those units.

Activity	Materials
Start actively – ask everyone to draw their own family. They can colour these in or just use pencils. Make sure they write down the family members names.	Workbooks
Ask the women to work in groups of 4. Ask them to make a family that you will find in your area. Ask them to use a piece of paper for each person. You are trying to get a “typical” family. As they draw and then place the pieces of paper on the floor, ask them to place them near or far from the centre, i.e. if the father works in Pietermaritzburg then he will be placed far from the centre. If a child is at school far from home, then place that piece of paper far from the centre.	Squares of paper, pens
Now, on the board or newsprint, draw a typical family. This means the kind of family you will find in your area. There may be a lot of discussion about this family because you will be bringing together the ideas from each group. The discussion is the most important thing in this activity. Encourage people to talk.	Board, pens
Now ask the women to look at their own families and the typical family drawn on the board. Are there many differences?	
Discuss how family structure has changed from 40 or 50 years ago. Ask the older group members to talk about how families lived when they were young. Did men travel far to work? Did married couples live on their own away from their parents? Try to encourage the older women to share their experiences.	
End this session with a chart of the good things about families now, and good things about families 50 years ago.	Board, pen

SESSION 2

Please bring these calendars to the next team meeting.

Activity	Materials
In this session you are going to do two workload calendars. Start with one for men in the community. Do this as a group. Use newsprint. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 (months) Activities Eg planting	Newsprint and koki
Now do a workload calendar for women.	Newsprint
Is there a difference between the two calendars? Discuss the differences.	
Now do a daily activity chart for men and another one for women. Talk about these as well.	
Probing questions could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there times in the year or day where there is too much work? • What do you do when there is too much work? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens if the woman or the man is ill? • Do women work harder than men? • Is the work women do recognized as work? • Why is the work divided up between men and women like it is? • Has it always been like this? • Has it changed in the last twenty years? • Has it changed in the last fifty years? • Should it be changed? <p>Questions from Reflect Mother Manual</p>	
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SESSION 3

Activity	Materials
We have looked at the work done by men and women in families. Now let us look at the work done by children in a day. Make a graphic of work done by children. Make sure you show the age of the children i.e. pre-school, primary school or secondary school.	Newsprint and koki
<p>Ask the following questions about the graphic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which is the busiest time of the day for children? • What do girls learn from the work they do? • What do boys learn from the work they do? • What happens if a parent is sick or away from home? • Have there been any changes in the work done by children since you were a child? • What is the effect of this work on children’s education? • Is there a good balance of work between children and adults? • How many children are desirable in a family? What gender should they be? 	
Ask the group members to write what they found most interesting about the discussion. Share these with the rest of the group.	
Ask the group members to ask their secondary school children to write something about their daily activities and what they like best. Ask them to bring these to the group to share with others. If group members have primary school children, they can make a daily activity chart with them in their Umzali Nengane books and bring this to share with the rest of the group.	
Remind people to bring their copies of Stories of Strength and Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg because you will use them in the next session.	

SESSION 4

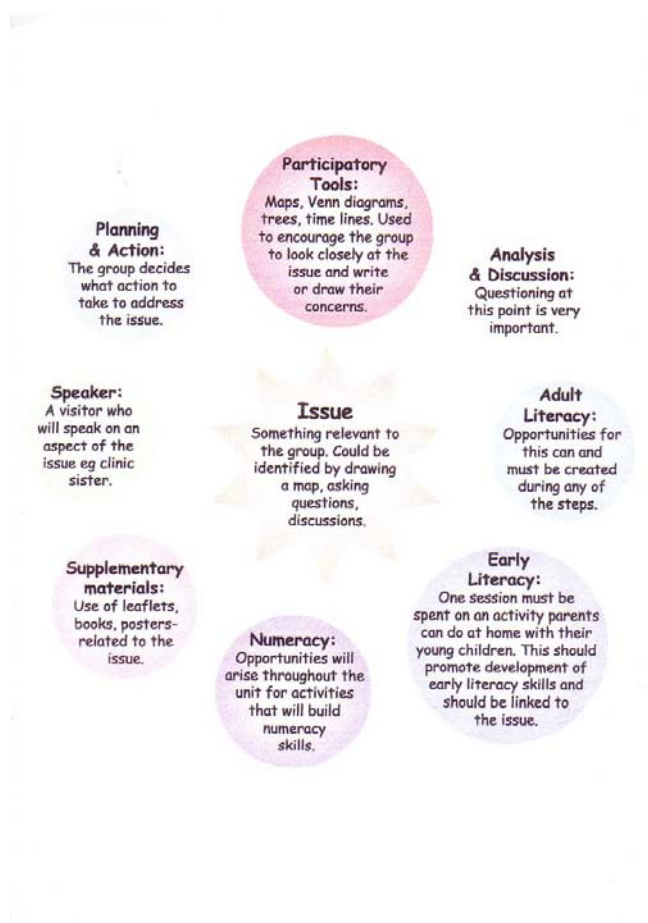
Activity	Materials
Share what group members collected from their children. What did people learn from these stories and daily activity charts. Did the information from the children change the charts the adults drew in Session 3? What were the changes? Discuss this. It is important to listen to what children are saying and this activity might give parents a lot to think about.	
Ask the group members to look at the stories in Stories of Strength and Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg. Ask each person to choose one story (not their own story) that shows how life was in a family. They can then sit in small groups and read the stories to one another and discuss what they learnt from these stories. How have things changed? What difference is there between their lives and the lives of	

their own children?	
Now ask the group to brainstorm what makes family life work well. Ask them to write these suggestions into their books.	Board and koki
If the following were not suggested, talk about them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members respect one another (including children) • Family members spend time together • Family members talk openly to one another • Children are not involved in arguments between adults. 	

SESSION 5

Activity	Materials
Give every group member an A5 book. This is for them to make a family book together with their children and other family members. These books will be collected before the end of the year and displayed at the end of the year function.	
Discuss what group members want to put into their book: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their family tree • The family workload chart • The daily activity chart • Drawings or stories from each family member about what they feel about themselves and their family • Beadwork or other craft that shows what the family can do • Stories from grandparents so that we can see how things have changed • Drawings of how life was long ago • Drawings of how life is now • Community maps done by each family • Hopes and dreams for the future of each family member • CV of each family member – what they can do or what they have done in their lives • A story of a happy family event (written by a secondary school child) illustrated by a younger child • A list of groups they belong to and a description of what they do in the groups • A list of their favorite books – one or two from each family member • Anything else people want to include. 	
Ask learners to spend some time planning their book and what they want to have in it.	
Ask them to make a checklist of important documents and put it in the back of the book: they will list the documents and tick if they have it or not i.e. birth certificates for every family member, IDs for older children and adults, wills for adults etc.	

APPENDIX II: Unit diagram



APPENDIX III: Family Literacy Project

Introduction

Research conducted by the national Department of Education over a three year period (1997 – 2000) showed that overall literacy scores of pre-school children did not improve even when pre-school teachers received training in early childhood development. The Family Literacy Project was established to pilot a different approach and work with parents to encourage them in their role of developing early literacy skills. The first five parent groups that were set up were run alongside pre-schools with parents of pre-school children as members. Sessions held with the groups covered early literacy activities that could be done at home using natural resources, conversations and where available, books and pictures. Parents were enthusiastic and eager to try out the activities even though many of them were themselves illiterate or nearly so. The women soon began to want to improve their own levels of literacy and a way of delivering family literacy was devised.

Each one of the five groups chose a woman from the community to be trained as a group facilitator. The only criteria for selection was that the woman should have completed her schooling and be fluent in Zulu and English. These women were then trained in participatory methods, adult and early literacy. The Family Literacy Project team of the co-ordinator and five Family Literacy facilitators worked with other experts on an approach that resulted in units of six or seven workshop sessions developed around topics that reflected the interests of the women, for example poverty, water, HIV/Aids, early childhood development and child protection. The approach used was participatory while at the same time leading people along a very clear developmental path towards becoming literate or more literate. Each unit included a session on early literacy and how adults prepare children for reading and writing. Group sessions were held twice a week and women attended regularly. Small libraries were provided in each group and within a year most of the women seemed to have moved from using their literacy skills in a purely functional way (completing forms, reading signs or instructions etc) and were reading or looking at books from the library with their children or when relaxing in the evenings.

A range of activities has now been introduced to make use of newly acquired literacy skills. These activities include borrowing books from the small group library, keeping a journal with their children, providing information for the community notice board, writing to women in other groups and taking part in the development of their areas.

The Family Literacy Project developed and produced a range of readers and workbooks reflecting the area where they work, as well as four books for young children. A short video and five information posters have been developed to enable the project to share its methodology and approach.

Research findings from several sources show that the project is achieving good results with both children and adults.

The project was voted runner up in the national UDV/Guinness Adult Literacy Awards 2003; Mpumlwane FLP Group voted the most outstanding in KwaZulu Natal during Adult Learners Week 2004 and third best in South Africa.

Family Literacy groups

Many of the group members have successfully completed ABET Level 3 examinations in Zulu Communication. In 2003 a part of each session was spent on acquiring English. This will continue for the next three years until the women are fluent. This is very much demand-led as the women have repeatedly requested English lessons.

The methodology developed by The Family Literacy Project will continue to direct the way the units are presented. Topics will be those requested by the group members or negotiated with them, for example:

- Women's health
- Management of childhood illnesses
- Running an income generating project
- Voting and social responsibility

Groups will continue to run book club meetings, work on journals with their children and write to pen friends. These activities are encouraged as they provide opportunities for the women to use their literacy skills often and for and with others.

The family literacy group sessions form the backbone of the project and it is from these that all other activities are generated.

Child to Child groups

These are run by the family literacy group facilitators for groups of 20 primary children of mixed ages. In 2004 240 children were reached and those still attending our target schools will be part of the programme in 2005. The groups are run in primary schools and are supported by the teachers who see the benefits of children who enjoy reading books.

The group sessions are developed by the project and focus on literacy. They are planned with the enjoyment of children in mind, with plenty of activities like drawing, quizzes, matching, playing card games and doing jigsaw puzzles.

The programme in 2004 included activities drawn from the Action Aid book "Get Global" as this introduced children to their role in society. This is particularly important as South Africa was celebrating 10 years of democracy.

Community Library

In November 2003 the first Family Literacy Project community library was opened at Stepmore. The second, at Mpumlwane, opened in 2004. Both facilities (books and structures) are donations to the project. The libraries are staffed by Family Literacy Project group members. This is a huge achievement for women who a few years ago could not read or write well or at all. It is important for their self confidence that they do run the libraries. They receive support from the project facilitators and management.

The libraries are open to the wider community, membership limited only by the number of books available. Attempts are being made to build up good reference sections as there are no libraries in the adjacent schools.

Each community library has a committee made up of Family Literacy project members, local development committee members and local school teachers. Chief Molefe – the traditional leader

in Stepmore – welcomed the library and insisted on establishing a security committee to protect the library.

The Family Literacy Project has strong links with Kwa Zulu Natal Provincial Library Services and with the provincial education department library services. This is to ensure a flow of books to the library, training and support.

To take books to the other five Family Literacy groups, block loans are made and this is referred to as a mobile library service.

Parent Home Visiting

In 2003 fifty seven Family Literacy Project group members paid monthly visits to mothers in the community and in 2004 the number increased to seventy five. They read to young children in the household and discuss early childhood development with mothers. These women have proved they are willing to share what they have learnt in the group sessions and are excited about changes they have seen in their own children as a result of introducing them to books.

The Family Literacy Project is working closely with the Department of Health in the area to develop messages of health and well being to be carried by these home visitors to other mothers. This is part of the Department's IMCI (Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses) programme where they encourage community involvement.

In addition, the FLP was chosen as a partner in the First Words in Print project and was responsible for distributing up to 500 packs of books for young children. Our home visiting programme was able to deliver the books as well as provide information on how to use them most effectively and enjoyably with young children.

Staff Development

As the facilitators move more into teaching English they need support to improve their own language skills. They are also expected to work with children in the child to child groups, providing information on a range of issues touched on in the books they read to the children.

The facilitators are enrolled on the UNISA Diploma Course in ABET and the staff development programme has been extended by ten workshops run through the year. These one day workshops include support to complete the UNISA assignments as well as opportunities to practise English and discuss topics of general interest.

Materials Development

Since the beginning of the project nineteen books have been developed and it is important that we continue to produce material that is relevant to the area and the women we work with. In 2002 and 2003 books produced were "Growing up in the Southern Drakensberg" and "Stories of Strength" written by the women themselves.

Family Literacy and Adult Literacy Groups

A four day workshop with two days of follow up was run for adult literacy facilitators working in the Greater Durban area. The workshop programme introduced family literacy and provided ideas that could be integrated into more conventional literacy programmes. Materials developed by The Family Literacy Project were provided to the adult literacy facilitators for use in their groups. It is not expected that the groups will become family literacy groups but that they will equip adult learners to support their children in the development of early literacy skills.

Management

Management of the project is strong, with team members reporting and meeting monthly. This is a support for everyone and provides regular feedback on progress and difficulties. Planning workshops are held twice a year.

The Family Literacy Project has grown since 2000 from an attempt to help prepare children for reading, to a model of good practice. The geographic area covered by the project remains the same but with each year, the impact is deeper and we hope soon to have reached a “critical mass” of readers. The range of activities is presented by the small but dedicated team who are occasionally disheartened but mostly astonished and delighted by the successes of the project.

APPENDIX IV: Family Questionnaire

Family Literacy Project
Research questionnaire and observation

1. Facilitators name
2. Family Literacy Project group
member.....
3. Her age
4. Her ABET level.....
5. When did she join your group?
6. Who else lives in the house with her? Draw a circle round anyone in the house.
Her Mother Her sister Her brother
Her husband Her Father Her niece Her nephews
Her children: how many? Ages?
7. Observation:
 - a) Can you see any books in the house? Yes / No
 - b) If yes, how many of these books are NOT school books?
All school books 1 – 5 6 – 10 more than 10
 - c) Can you see other printed materials? Tick what you see
Magazines
Newspapers
Calendar
Letters
Other (specify)
8. How do you spend your day from 4pm onwards
4pm
5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm onwards
9. If they mention reading, say “tell me about that”
10. Who is involved in the reading you mentioned? Circle any she mentions:
Other adults pre school children
primary school children high school children

11. What is the book you last read?
12. If they do not mention reading ask “I hear that you don’t read in the evenings, do you read at another time in the day?” Yes / No
13. If no, ask “Why not?” Where do you get books that you read in your home?
14. Do you ever buy books (not school books) for yourself or your family? Yes / No
15. If yes, what was the last book you bought?
.....
16. If no, why is that?
17. Tell me what you think your role is in developing reading skills in your children.
.....
18. How has the family literacy project helped you help your children?
.....
19. If they don’t mention reading, ask them to tell you about that.
.....
20. Any other comments
.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX V: School Questionnaire

FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Family Literacy Project has run child to child groups in your school over the past three years. These are groups of 20 children, from Grade R/1 to Grade 4.

We have been asked to do some research, looking at the link between adult and child literacy. Please answer the following questions and return the completed questionnaire to the Family Literacy Project facilitator as soon as possible. Thank you for your time.

1. School.....
2. Your position
3. What differences, if any, do you see between the children who attend the child to child group and those who do not?
 - a) Improved concentration YES / NO
 - b) More interest in reading YES / NO
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)
 - f)
 - g)
4. How would you rate the interest in books of the children from the child to child group? Circle one.
High Average Low
5. How would you rate the interest in books of the children who do not attend the child to child group?
High Average Low
6. What comments have the children made about the child to child group that they attend?
.....
7. How do the other children in the class feel about not being part of the child to child group?
.....
8. Do you think the child to child group should continue? YES / NO
9. What other comments would you like to make about the child to child group?

10. What other comments would you like to make about the children who attend the child to child group?
.....
11. What difference, if any, has the child to child group made to your work as a teacher?
.....
12. Do you borrow books from the Family Literacy Project library? YES / NO
13. If YES: what was the last book you read from this library?
.....
14. If NO: why do you not borrow books from this library?
.....

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