

the study were bad parents, or that they did not know how to parent well, or that they did it poorly. The 10 mothers loved and cared for their children and were intensely concerned about their rearing and their future. The nine fathers worked hard to earn a living, sometimes under difficult and painful circumstances. Both fathers and mothers wanted their children to have more and to suffer less than they themselves had suffered as both adults and children. (p. 200)

In helping their children to achieve better lives, Valdés explained that the mothers “were guided by beliefs about child rearing that emphasized respect and obedience. They did not understand the mother’s role to include teaching school lessons to her children” (p. 201). Based on her knowledge of the families she studied, Valdés concluded, “It is difficult for me to imagine a family intervention program that would not seriously damage the delicate balance they maintained” (p. 200).

Purcell-Gates (1995) also reported profound misunderstandings regarding what parents know and understand about literacy and schooling. Her 2-year study of one family in a midwestern Appalachian community and her observations of a child’s struggle with literacy learning and his mother’s failed attempts to work effectively with her child’s teachers led Purcell-Gates to draw the following conclusion:

Operationally, in terms of literacy learning, social and moral judgments based on ignorance of a cultural group most often result in pedagogical decisions and moves that are uninformed, inappropriate, and hence ineffective. From the school’s cultural perspective, Donny’s problems stemmed from the fact that he was one of those “hillbillies,” not from the different schema he had about written language and its purposes and possibilities. His mother’s concerns about his progress were not perceived (in the sense of being accorded legitimacy and acted upon) because, according to the prevailing stereotype, she was an “ignorant river rat,” did not know or care about education, and was a dysfunctional parent in any case. (p. 189)

Gallimore and Goldenberg (1993) used the concept of activity setting to examine the literacy experiences of children in low-income Spanish-speaking homes. They explained that “everyday activities embed opportunities to learn and develop through modeling, joint production, apprenticeship, and other forms of mediated social learning that are embedded in goal-directed interactions” (p. 315). As part of their analysis, they observed the people present during each activity and the salient

cultural values, operations, and task demands of the participants. Their analysis led to several important findings. First, as others before them had reported, they observed that despite generally low educational levels among the parents, the parents valued their children's education, were available to assist the children, and were interested in and capable of supporting the children's literacy learning. However, despite the parents' interest in and capacity for supporting their children, Gallimore and Goldenberg found relatively few experiences that would likely lead the children to success in school.

Given this evidence, Gallimore and Goldenberg then asked what would happen if teachers sent storybooks home? Would a teacher-prompted literacy event increase the kinds of interactions believed to be optimal for literacy development? To answer their questions, they collected data on parents of children in two groups of classrooms. In one group, teachers sent home little books, *libritos*, for the children to read at home; in the other group, teachers followed the district curriculum, which emphasized instruction in sound-letter associations. The researchers found that the type of material sent home by teachers influenced the scripts parents followed. Parents used more language in book reading than in the conventional copying and letter-learning activities. Gallimore and Goldenberg observed that few interactions focused on the meaning of text; rather, parents directed children's attention to word-level features. They concluded that parents' conceptions of how children learn to read, rather than the materials themselves, may be more influential in framing their literacy interactions with their children.

In summary, when we widen the lens and look beyond mainstream literacies, we find Moll and his colleagues are right—across different families, different cultures, and different contexts, researchers have observed a rich tradition of literacy behaviors and other funds of knowledge that, although different from mainstream literacies, if understood, acknowledged, and appropriately built upon by teachers, might lead linguistically and culturally different children to more successful school experiences than many of them now have.

Making Sense of What We Knew Then and What We Know Now

So, what have we learned about parents and their role in children's literacy learning that we did not know or understand 10 or 20 years ago? How might the collection of aforementioned studies help us to better

understand the role parents play (or *could* play) in their children's school success?

It seems that there are three critical conclusions to be drawn from existing studies. First, the importance of storybook reading in early literacy success is undisputed. In studies old and new, children who have had many and diverse experiences in storybook reading do well on school-based measures of literacy. However, the assumption that the absence of storybook reading, and any associated poor performance on tests of emergent reading, is indicative of "low-literate" home environments is not supported by research. Instead, the evidence leads us to a second conclusion: Although mainstream literacy practices may be absent in many homes, there are other rich and varied literacy and language practices that are embedded in the fabric of children's daily lives. Such practices go largely unnoticed, and therefore are not built upon by classroom teachers. Third, issues of language, culture, and class influence the ways parents and children use literacy and the ways they understand schooling. Family traditions and routines do not necessarily allow the practice of literacy and other educational events in the ways mainstream teachers expect. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that parents from all cultural, linguistic, and class groups perceive education to be of critical importance in their children's lives.

So, how do we begin changing the ways we think about and work with parents? To start, the studies suggest the need for a new and more useful definition of literacy. In a recent article, a group of 10 scholars who called themselves The New London Group (1996) suggested that the word *multiliteracies* might help to create a different kind of pedagogy:

What we might term "mere literacy" remains centered on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, which is conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence. This is based on the assumption that we can discern and describe correct usage. Such a view of language will characteristically translate into a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy. A pedagogy of multiliteracies, in contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects. (p. 64)

With the concept of multiliteracies at the core of teaching and learning, and particularly, at the core of learning how to collaborate with

parents, we might begin to explore what parents and children do together through a broader lens, looking not only for evidence of actions and practices that we know to lead seamlessly to school-based literacy, but also looking beyond, to actions and events that extend children's literate lives in less common, but no less important, ways. In working with families to learn about literacy, we might begin with an expectation that we, as teachers, will exchange, rather than prescribe, ways of knowing. This is an idea that may not yet have caught on, but it is not new. Therefore, we can look to some promising practices to guide us. In this section, I will present some of those works.

Earlier, I cited the work of Moll and his colleagues in identifying what they referred to as "household funds of knowledge." Let us take a closer look at how these educators built on the traditional practice of home visits to develop a reciprocal relationship with parents and other household members. Although this work has been published widely (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1991; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), for the purpose of this discussion, I have drawn primarily from the report by Gonzalez et al. (1995). In this report, Gonzalez and her colleagues explained that the visits they describe are not intended to teach parents to do particular activities, to inform them of their children's school performance, or to discuss problems. Rather, these are research visits "for the express purpose of identifying and documenting knowledge that exists in students' homes" (p. 444). In essence, this work turns the traditional concept of parent-teacher partnerships on its head; instead of perceiving parents as learners, to whom important information, ideas, strategies, and practices must be transmitted, in this project, teachers view themselves as learners, visiting families to discover what they know, what they do, and how they do it. In so doing, teachers acquire information that allows them to build on students' prior knowledge. They also have opportunities to perceive families in different ways. In the words of one teacher,

As I read and reread some of the early entries I made for this project, I realize how I have changed my views of the households. As I read these entries, I realized that I had discussed my students in terms of low academics, home-life problems, alienation, and SES, and that I was oriented toward a deficit model. I no longer see the families I visited that way. Since I am looking for resources, I am finding resources, and I recognize the members of the families for who they are, and for the

talents and unique personalities. We now have a reciprocal relationship where we exchange goods, services, and information. (p. 461)

Of course, there are obstacles to carrying out work like that of Moll and his colleagues, and the greatest obstacle identified by the teachers was time. In this particular example, the teachers visited households three times and interviews lasted an average of 2 hours. Then, teachers recorded field notes and participated in study groups with their colleagues. It is not a quick fix to learning about families, but the evidence suggests it has the potential to be an effective one.

Of interest, too, are programs that have come to be called intergenerational or family literacy programs. As such, they are explicitly designed to support the literacy development of both parent and child. Although these programs risk being identified—and in fact, being implemented—as deficit-model programs that are aimed at teaching family members the literacy skills they are perceived as lacking, there are some that are founded on what Auerbach (1995) has referred to as a multiple literacies perspective, that is, an understanding that “whatever their literacy proficiency, participants bring with them culture-specific literacy practices and ways of knowing” (p. 651). It is such programs that I will describe here.

Project FLAME—Family Literacy Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando (Learning, Bettering, Educating)—provides literacy training to parents not yet proficient in English so they can support their children’s literacy learning (Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995). Although Project FLAME is clearly based on teaching parents how to support their children in the acquisition of school-based literacy behaviors (including sessions on creating home literacy centers, book sharing, library visits, teaching the ABCs, and helping with homework), parents’ personal perspectives and cultural knowledge provide an essential foundation for literacy conversations. Autobiographical writing provides the content for books that they share with their children. Acknowledging the rich social networks and close affiliations of Latina women, Project FLAME’s classes are group based, intended to become extensions of the mothers’ social lives. Collaborative learning provides opportunities for participants to share the multiple literacies of their home lives. Low teacher-parent ratios allow parents who are newly literate in their first language as well as in English to receive the assistance they need to make advances in their literacy and language knowledge.

The effectiveness of Project FLAME is evident in a number of indicators: Project evaluations indicate improved English proficiency for parents and significant improvements in children's knowledge of basic concepts, letter names, and print awareness. Elementary teachers report that parents who participate in Project FLAME come to school more often, are more likely to volunteer, and seem to implement teacher suggestions more readily. Parent interviews and home observations indicate that parents are more active in their children's education and have more literacy materials in the home.

Similar to Project FLAME, parents and other caregivers who participate in the Intergenerational Literacy Project (Paratore, 1993, 1994, 1995) join together in daily classes to practice reading, writing, and speaking in English and to learn about U.S. education and ways they can support their children's literacy learning. Now in its 12th year, this project has supported more than 1,300 families primarily from Latino cultures, but also including families from Southeast Asian, Bosnian, African, and many other immigrant groups. To connect the new literacies they are learning with those they already know, learning experiences are situated within the routines of daily life. There is, therefore, no established family literacy curriculum. Rather, parents read and write in response to issues and texts that they identify as important to them on an ongoing basis. These may include health-related materials, notices from their children's schools, and newspaper and magazine stories or articles. There are, however, prescribed instructional practices for the classes: In small and large groups, adults read every day, share their responses to the reading in large and small groups, and write every day. They also keep and share a daily log of their literacy interactions with their children. Although their reading in class is always in English (a decision made because of the difficulty in obtaining texts in the multiple languages of class members), the conversations that revolve around the texts may take place in language-alike small groups.

As in Project FLAME, there are multiple indicators of the success of this project. In addition to high and consistent rates of attendance (73% over the first 10 years of the project) and a low rate of attrition (17% over the first 10 years of the project), studies indicate rapid growth in adults' English reading fluency, steady growth in oral and written English proficiency, and steady increases in the practice of reading and writing with their children at home (Paratore, 1993, 1994, 2000). An in-depth study of the home and school literacy experiences of 12 children whose

parents participated in the project found 8 of the 12 children to be experiencing high or moderate rates of success in school (Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999). The four children who were struggling in school all were found to be confronting multiple and complex problems, among them learning disability, divorce, homelessness, and drug abuse.

The Pajaro Valley experience (Ada, 1988) provided groups of Spanish-speaking parents, varying in number from 60 to 100, a monthly opportunity to meet to discuss children's literature and to read stories and poems written by the children and the parents. Of note is the previous literacy experience of the parents who participated; most had little schooling, and many had never before read a book. The meetings were held in a library and were framed as special events: Children were sent home from school with invitations (in Spanish) for their parents. At the same time, parallel meetings and activities were offered for the children, which accommodated parents' needs for child care. Finally, before the meeting, personal telephone calls were made to parents, reminding them of the invitation and offering transportation arrangements.

At a typical meeting, parents began by discussing an issue of importance to them, and then they formed small groups and read and discussed a children's book that in some way related to the issue(s) discussed. They were also provided blank books where they wrote their own stories at home. Results indicated that parents began to read aloud to their children at home, children brought more books home from the school library, and parents and children increased their visits to the public library. Parents also requested (and received) opportunities to purchase the books they were reading for their children. Anecdotally, parents reported that as a result of family storybook reading, their children were more enthusiastic about school and reading, parents and children became closer to each other, and parents discovered that there is much to learn even from simple stories. Parents also reported increased confidence in their interactions with teachers.

Krol-Sinclair (1996) also built on the research related to the importance of storybook reading, but she did so with an important difference: Her work with parents was intended to prepare them to be classroom storybook readers. By so doing, Krol-Sinclair hoped to accomplish three goals: (1) to introduce parents to effective storybook reading strategies that they could use in the classroom, as well as at home with their children; (2) to provide them access to classrooms in the schools attended by their children so that they could become familiar